

## **READINESS FOR AUTONOMOUS LEARNING OF FRESHMEN IN A BACHELOR OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMME**

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**Abstract:** This research aims at examining the extent to which first-year students in a Bachelor in English Language Programme in Vietnam are ready for autonomy learning. With the quantitative approach and the adapted Nguyen and Habok's Learner Autonomy Perception Questionnaire by Nguyen and Habok (2021), 180 freshmen in the programme were asked to make their choice against a range of statements related to beliefs about teacher's and learner's roles, students' motivation and desire in studying foreign language. After that, one-sample T-test was run and the result showed that the participants demonstrated quite a good level of readiness to be autonomous learners. Among the four investigated aspects, students' beliefs of teachers' roles can be said to potentially create restrictions to their initiative-taking in their learning. The participants appeared to have sufficient knowledge of their selves as language learners, which plays an essential role in fostering their self-study ability.

**Key words:** language learning, autonomy, teachers' roles, motivation

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Moving from high school to college may make students feel like switching between two different worlds. One of the greatest challenges faced by most freshmen would be meeting the academic requirements that they would not have ever experienced in their previous level of schooling. At Higher education level, to equip students with a repertoire of skills and knowledge that help to meet the demand of their future jobs, most colleges design programmes that give their students opportunities to encounter a number of active learning activities in and after class. These programmes also require students to spend a large amount of self-study time in order to achieve the expected learning outcomes. In the field of language learning, Horwitz (1987) argues that a large proportion of students' language learning goes on outside of the classroom and that how students regulate this aspect of learning crucially affect their success as language learners. Nunan (1988) also noted that it is impossible for a teacher to fulfill all of the learning needs from students, but it is vital that teachers help their students develop transferable and adaptive skills. Although teaching scaffolds learning, learners themselves must be the central agents of their learning process. The more involved they are in the process, the more effective learning would happen (Little, 1995; Nguyen & Habok, 2021; Teng, 2019). In Vietnam, Thai (2015) stated that until the early 2000s, most Vietnamese college students were not ready for autonomy. In support for this argument, Roe and Perkins (2020) summarized that there was strong evidence that Vietnamese students are able to engage in autonomous learning practices, yet are limited by prescriptive exams and traditional learning methods. Therefore, many Vietnamese college teachers have to struggle hard to make students more autonomous and solve the issue of helping learners move toward becoming responsible for their own learning. But where to give the supportive intervention and by what strategies and/or methods to maximize the autonomous level among students would depend much on the extent to which those students are ready for autonomous learning. The main aim of this research is to identify the readiness for autonomy in language learning of the first-year students in a Bachelor in English Language Programme by investigating their beliefs about a range of key features of autonomy in learning a foreign language.

### **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

#### **2.1. Definitions and the roles of language learning autonomy**

Considered as the father of autonomous learning, Holec (1981) defined it as "the ability to take charge of one's learning" (p. 4). Since then, learner autonomy has been a topic for debate among English language teachers and scholars (Benson, 1997; Boud, 1988; Dickinson, 1995; Krisztina, 2016; Little, 1991;

Littlewood, 1999; Lüftenegger et al., 2012; Yurdakul, 2017). For example, Boud (1988) related it to learners' ability to use a set of tactics for taking control of their learning. Little (1991) recognized autonomy as a capacity for learners to plan, monitor, evaluate learning activities, and involve in the content and process of learning. Dickinson (1995) put the concept in terms of a situation in which learners perform responsibility for all of the decisions and actions when learning. Meanwhile, Benson (1997) defined it as learner identity and divided it into three dimensions of technical, psychological, and socio-political issues. Therefore, Benson noted that autonomy consists of a variety of elements which render autonomy virtually impossible to be comprehensibly described by a single definition. Sharing this argument, Littlewood (1999) considered autonomy as a continuum that can be displayed at different levels. Sinclair (2000a, 2000b) suggested further that autonomy is an "idealistic goal", that are recognized by its various degrees and the unstable and variable nature. However, these definitions do not value the classroom element, the practical aspect of learning autonomy and teacher's part in shaping it. Meanwhile, other scholar such as Dam (1995), Little (1995) and Nunan (1997) related autonomy more closely to with classroom learning. Little (1995) argued that it is the teacher who mediate and has strong impact on the control over learners' autonomy. Nunan (1997) identified five degrees to recognise autonomous learner behaviour: namely awareness, involvement, intervention, creation, and transcendence. At the lowest level, learners are "made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the materials ... and identify their own preferred learning styles/strategies" (p. 195). At highest level, learners are required to "make links between the content of classroom learning and the world beyond" (p. 195). However, Littlewood's (1999) model of LA consists of only two levels, namely proactive autonomy and reactive autonomy. According to Littlewood (1999), at proactive level of autonomy learners are able to plan, control and evaluate their learning and establish their own "directions for learning"; The reactive level of autonomy, however, just enables learners to organize their resources autonomously in order to reach their goal. Benson (2008) and Trebbi (2008) identified a number of physical and external context and internal constraints that shape a learner's autonomy. From a psychological perspective, Oxford (2003) examined autonomy by investigating mental and emotional characteristics of autonomy when of learners work individually or in group. Lüftenegger et al. (2012) and Yurdakul (2017) asserted that autonomous learning has a positive interaction with lifelong learning which can be found voice in one's ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated learning. There are then, a number of interpretations of autonomy, including numerous lenses through which the concept can be viewed (Roe & Perkins, 2020). Benson (2013) identified a number of concepts such as "independent learning", "self-directed learning", "self-instruction", "self-access", "self-study", "self-education", "out-of-class learning" to "distance learning" to be related to learning autonomy. However, different from the others related concepts, autonomy is concerned with abilities and attitudes, decision-making process and learners' needs and interests (Benson, 2013). Moreover, learning autonomy also assumes strong interdependent relationship between teacher and learners (Esch, 1997; Krisztina, 2016; Little, 1991).

Learning autonomy received tremendous appreciation from the language teaching community despite its complicated nature. Although there have been different definitions in the literature, the attributes of learning autonomy shared among the scholars were that autonomy is a complex concept with different degrees, is unstable, contextualized, and it is an acquired ability rather than an inborn capacity. In other words, there might be students who are more autonomous and others who are less, and a learner might perform more autonomously in one particular context compared to other ones. Learners who autonomously take responsibility for their learning are more likely to achieve their academic goals and even maintain the positive attitude toward learning in the future (Little, 1995) and this "ensures success in language learning" (Ming & Alias, 2007).

Not only was the definition, but how to increase or foster learner autonomy has also been the central concern among teachers and scholars. Learner training has become a common strategy applied to raising autonomy (Ha & Lam, 2010; Humphreys & Wyatt, 2014; Nga, 2014; Nhung, 2018; Phuong & Nguyet, 2018; Tin, 2012; Quynh, 2013; Victori & Lockhart, 1995; Yang, 1998). Some other researchers, however, integrated the use of new technology into the language learning curriculum so as to enhance students' autonomy development (Luke, 2006; Yumuk, 2002). In some colleges and universities, a free, facilitative and conducive learning environment was established with a goal to improve students' autonomous learning (Barman, 2013; Gardner & Miller, 1999; Karlsson et al. 1997).

In terms of Asian learners, researchers have noted that learner autonomy, as a Western concept, may not match regional methods of education (Littlewood, 1999; Palfreyman, 2003). However, Aoki and Smith (1999) detected in Japanese students' diaries the desires for autonomy which contradict the stereotype of being passive and teacher-dependent. Benson et al. (2003) argued that the influence of Asian culture may be modified by students' ongoing engagement with target language cultures to increase their individual autonomy. In the studies of Gieve and Clark (2005), Chinese students showed great appreciation of the benefits of autonomous study and made good use of the opportunity to promote their autonomy. Chan's (2015) study examined whether university students in Hong Kong are ready for autonomous learning or not. Results show that these students are ready for autonomous learning and they welcome the idea of learning contract in motivating them and monitoring their progress. Littlewood (1999) identified five generalizations surrounding autonomous learning experiences of students in the Asian context, stating that firstly, Asian students have high levels of reactive autonomy. Secondly, when students are grouped together for learning tasks or projects, they develop both reactive and proactive autonomy. Thirdly, students do not have experienced contexts which require individual autonomy, and finally that the language classroom can be a good context to develop the capacity of autonomy (p. 88). Thai's (2015) findings with Vietnamese learners also suggested that it is perhaps not learners themselves who lack autonomy, but that other external factors may limit their ability to demonstrate it in a classroom setting, which could be related to traditional cultural learning values. The findings suggested that assessment methods which required rote learning had a strong negative influence on students' autonomous learning practices. Moreover, Roe and Perkins (2020) noted that Vietnamese learners are keen to engage in autonomous learning practices and can demonstrate the self-regulation required to do so, which disagrees with traditional conceptions of Confucian heritage culture learning approaches.

## **2.2. Components of language learning autonomy**

Researchers (Benson, 2001, 2011, 2013; Holec, 1981; Little, 1995) described learning autonomy as a construct of capacity, which refers to the behavioural and psychological perspective of learning autonomy. These elements were found to be interrelated in a way that allows learners to plan, maintain and evaluate their learning processes (Krisztina, 2016; Sinclair, 2009). According to Sinclair (2009), this capacity requires three principles: (a) a certain amount of metacognitive knowledge about the learners themselves, the context, the subject, and the learning process; (b) conscious awareness of this knowledge; and (c) conscious reflection on learning. It also requires the usage of metacognitive strategies such as planning, goal setting, monitoring, self-assessment, evaluation, and using learning resources. Therefore, autonomous learners are commonly recognised with psychological characteristics such as self-efficacy, positive attitudes, high extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and an aspiration of achievement (Benson, 2007; Krisztina, 2016). Beside capacity, scholars such as Dam (1995), Chan et al. (2002), Lin and Reinders (2019), Sinclair (2009) and Yildirim (2012) also highlighted the significance of willingness as another important construct of autonomous learning. Sinclair (2009) claimed that capacity is operationalized only when willingness is present. Dam (1995) emphasized that regardless of their capacity, a will to take responsibility is the key condition for learners to develop autonomy. Moreover, the willingness component facilitates successful implementation of autonomy-based programs by guiding curriculum development and classroom practice (Lin & Reinders, 2019). Despite more components of learning autonomy have been taken into account as time went by, the two most essential components of learning autonomy that most agreed among scholars are willingness and capacity (Holec, 1988; Hsu, 2005; Krisztina, 2016; Littlewood, 1996, 1999; Sinclair, 2000a; Nguyen & Habok, 2021). The diagram 2.2 summarizes Nguyen and Habok's (2021) review and illustrates how these two core components are constructed by their sub-components.

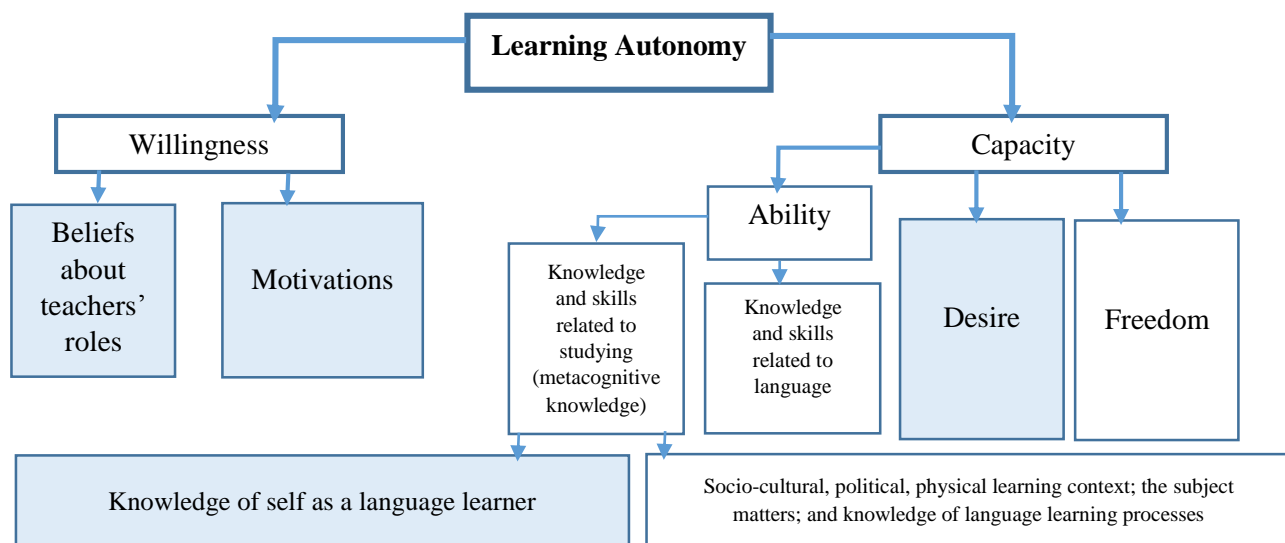


Figure 1: Components of language learning autonomy (Adapted from Nguyen & Habok, 2021)

**Willingness:** Many scholars have identified willingness as one of the “affective factors” that play an important role in the development of learning autonomy (Hsu, 2005; Lin & Reinders, 2019; Ming & Alias, 2007; Quynh, 2013; Sinclair, 2000b; Van, 2011). Sinclair (2000a) explained that students will not enhance their learning autonomy if they are not willing to take charge of their learning. According to Chan et. al. (2002), Dixon (2011), Hsu (2005), and Nguyen and Habok (2021), willingness in autonomous learning consists of two components, namely beliefs about teacher's role and motivation.

**Beliefs about teacher roles:** Learner beliefs is important in autonomy learning as that autonomous language learning behaviour is supported by a particular set of beliefs (Cotterall, 1995; Yan, 2007). The beliefs learners hold may “either contribute to or impede the development of their potential for autonomy (Cotterall, 1995, 196). This point is strongly supported by Arfae (2017), Chan et al. (2002), Dislen (2011), Hozayen (2011), Le (2013), and Tomita and Sano (2016). By reviewing the literature, Nguyen and Habok (2021) concluded that learner’s beliefs about teacher’s roles may strongly influence their exercise of responsibility in or out of class and their readiness to learn English autonomously.

**Motivation:** Motivation is believed to be best conceptualized when it is subsumed under the notion of willingness (Hsu, 2005; Hu & Zhang, 2017; Littlewood, 1996; Liu, 2015; Nguyen & Habok, 2021; Swatevacharkul, 2009) as motivation is an important tool which learners equip themselves to enter the learning context and enhance learning autonomy. If learners have motivations, they will perform their autonomy to learn the language beyond the basic requirements (Lamb, 2011; Ushioda, 2011).

**Capacity:** A learning capacity describes a potential to learn within individuals (Huang & Benson, 2013). A capacity, according to Holec (1988), Huang and Benson (2013) and Nguyen and Habok (2021), is a mix of ability, desire and freedom.

**Ability:** Ability represents knowledge and skills related to studying and language (Benson, 2013). Knowledge of studying is specified to be constructed by knowledge of self as a language learner; knowledge of the socio-cultural, political, and physical learning context; knowledge of the subject matters; and knowledge of language learning processes (Huang & Benson, 2013; Sinclair, 2000b). While skills of studying that are included in the capacity of autonomy refer to planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Huang & Benson, 2013; Le, 2009; Little, 1991, 2020; Murray, 2014), knowledge of self as a language learner, on the other hand, is related to the extent to which a learner understand his/her own learning styles, personality, strengths and weaknesses in learning English (Cotterall, 1995, 1999; Hsu, 2005). These knowledge and skills are closely related to the improvement of autonomous ability; without them, students would not have directions and ability to monitor their progress and attainment (García Magaldi, 2010; Hsu, 2005; Nguyen & Gu, 2013). To describe learner’s beliefs about their roles as learners, it has been agreed among the scholars that the learning process should not be seen as something ultimately decided and controlled by the

teacher, as learners can also define their roles to achieve their learning goals (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Barcelos, 2003; Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005; Woods, 1997). Some other researchers related this kind of beliefs as “culture of learning” (Clark & Gieve, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Riding & Rayner, 2000). From this cultural perspective, in Asia most students are generally seen as obedient to authority, passive in waiting for knowledge to be transmitted from teacher and lacking the capacity for critical thinking.

**Desire:** Huang and Benson (2013) defined desire as the intensity of the learner’s intention to learn a language or carry out a particular learning task and argued that desire is informed by specific purposes. Those purposes, as Nguyen and Habok (2021) argued, should be localized to a context where English language learning happens, and students’ desire should be expressed and performed by their specific thoughts and actions. Nguyen and Habok (2021) also exemplified this argument by describing that if English courses were not conducted at university, they would attend English lessons somewhere else. In this case, the university represents the context, and the specific purpose may be interest in English language, university’s requirements, or future job prospects. However, those students show their desire by obtaining more lessons in other places.

**Freedom:** Freedom is “the degree to which learners are “permitted” to control their learning, either by specific agents in the learning process, or more generally by the learning situations in which they find themselves” (Huang & Benson, 2013, 9). A learner will make use of his/her ability to learn only if he/she is permitted to do so by the curriculum, social and psychological constraints to which he is subjected (Holec, 1988; Lamb, 2009).

In summary, a learner’ learning autonomy level is shaped by a number of personal and contextual constructs. Although learning autonomy has been of great interest among educators and researchers, most of them have their research focus on learning strategies, difficulties or levels of autonomous learning but not on levels of students’ readiness for their self-initiated learning, especially those who have unfamiliarly started their higher education and those who major in foreign language studying. This study is, therefore, essentially carried out to bridge the gap in literature and to facilitate teaching and learning to be more productive both inside and outside the classroom. The aim of this study, as stated, is investigating how first-year students in a Bachelor in English Language Programme are ready for autonomy learning at higher education. After that, the results will be analysed and adopted in follow-up stages to help maximize the match between the teaching and the students’ autonomous level. Therefore, to answer the research question “**How ready are the freshmen for autonomy in learning English?**”, the scope of examination in this research study is limited to 4 sub-constructs of learning autonomy: learners’ beliefs about teacher’s roles, their motivation, knowledge of self as a language learner and desire when choosing English language.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD:

To investigate large samples quickly and economically and provide direct evidence and general views of the extent to which the freshmen are ready for autonomous learning at higher education level, quantitative approach to research was employed and the survey method was adopted for data collection. The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from Nguyen and Habok’s Learner Autonomy Perception Questionnaire in the year 2021. To design and validate a questionnaire to investigate students’ perceptions of learner autonomy in the context of education in Vietnam, Nguyen and Habok (2021) reviewed, evaluated and adapted from various well-established scales in the literature. The validity and reliability of the scale was also organised carefully and “the results indicated that reliability reached adequate values and the aspects of validity were mostly confirmed” (p. 1). The scholars noted that the scale was suited to exploring how students perceive learner autonomy and recommended that it would requires more validation for future use in the other contexts. For the objective of this study, as a part of the Learner Autonomy Perception Questionnaire, 36 questions were employed to ask the participants to make their choice from strongly disagree to strongly agree against a range of statements about English learning. Scopes of the chosen statements were the 4 topics related to beliefs about teacher’s and learner’s roles, students’ motivation and desire in studying foreign language.

Students participated in this study were all freshmen of a Bachelor in English Language program in a university in Vietnam. Although they come from different parts in Vietnam, to become a freshman at higher education level, they have passed a similar pathway from primary to tertiary school in Vietnamese educational system. To ensure that the participants were able to get a maximized understanding of the

statements, questions in the questionnaire were translated into Vietnamese. Due to the inconvenience during pandemic, the questionnaire was sent out to nearly 270 freshmen of the program via Google form survey and the researchers got 180 responses in the end. After that, the data was processed by SPSS software and one-sample T-test was run to check the participants' belief on the statements in the four groups of questions. Based on the results, the level to which the participants were ready for autonomy learning was inferred and discussed.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter aims to find out the freshmen's readiness for their self-study at university. As described in chapter 2, learning autonomy is composed of many sub-constructs, four of which have been identified and addressed in the questionnaire for data collection. Therefore, findings are presented and discussed in the order of the four aspects of learners' beliefs about teachers' roles, knowledge of self as language learners, motivations and desires.

##### 4.1 Learners' beliefs about teachers' roles

Teachers with the familiar position of in front of the whole class can be seen as actors who take on many different roles, ranging from explainers, tutors, mentors, observers, models, assessors, organizers, controllers, feedback providers, etc. They take on multiple responsibilities from organizing classroom lectures and coursework, prepare materials and activities, determine exam and assignment grades, keep records of students' attendance and grades to many different tasks. However, there some jobs that the freshmen did not assume to belong to a teacher, which are listed in Table 1 With the Means smaller than 3, it shows that the majority of students did not agree with the statements 2, 3, 5 and 11.

Table 1. Roles which are not considered to belong to a teacher

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
2. The teachers should decide the objectives of my English courses.	180	<b>2.23</b>	.840	.063
3. The teachers should evaluate my learning.	180	<b>2.47</b>	.835	.062
5. The teachers should decide how long to spend on each activity.	180	<b>2.92</b>	.900	.067
11. The teachers should set my learning goals.	180	<b>2.46</b>	.893	.067

As can be seen in Table 1, the students did not view teachers as those who make decisions on the course objectives. In fact, course objectives can be decided by an educational body (a school or a language center) with or without consideration of other stakeholders. This may help explain the students' choice or maybe, they may want to identify the learning objectives themselves. They seem to take on more responsibilities when considering that teachers are neither decision-makers of their own learning goals as well as time to spend on class activities, nor evaluators of the students' learning in general. The results reveal good learning attitude as students do not totally depend on their teachers in making decisions, evaluating their study or setting goals for them. If it is truly the case, i.e. they can establish their own "directions for learning", these freshmen can potentially become proactive autonomous learners (Littlewood, 1999). However, many traditional roles of teachers seem to be deep-rooted in the students' minds. Participants in the study believed teachers to be those who explain everything for them, stimulate their interests in learning English, correct all mistakes and ask them to share their views in class. Besides, teachers were also expected to ensure students' progress and make good choices of materials and activities. The key question is who is the learning for: the teacher or students? If students are still familiar with the beliefs that teachers are explainers, decision-makers, stimulators and assessors, organizers and prompters, then, fewer roles are taken by

themselves and this, according to Nguyen and Habok (2021) may strongly influence their exercise of responsibility in or out of class, which may lead to low level of readiness to learn English autonomously.

Table 2: Teachers' roles realized by EFL freshmen

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
1. The teachers should explain everything to us.	180	<b>4.13</b>	.798	.059
4. The teachers should ensure my progress in learning English.	180	<b>3.67</b>	.915	.068
6. The teachers should ask us to share our views in class.	180	<b>3.72</b>	.786	.059
7. The teachers should stimulate my interest in learning English.	180	<b>3.91</b>	<b>1.026</b>	.077
8. The teachers should correct all my mistakes.	180	<b>3.79</b>	.863	.064
9. The teachers should choose what activities to use to learn English in English class.	180	<b>3.13</b>	.887	.066
10. The teachers should choose what materials to use to learn English in English class.	180	<b>3.62</b>	.757	.056

Table 2 reveals students' beliefs on teachers' roles, especially the roles of an explainer which was largely recognized by almost the participants (mean = 4.13). This role was traditionally emphasized in previous teaching approach of grammar-translation or audio-lingual method. However, in communicative language teaching, it should no longer be prioritized, and students should be more active in their language training process. That the teacher imparts knowledge to the students as the jug-and-mug explanation-based approach defines cannot lead to their abilities to listen, speak, write and read in English if this activity dominates classroom time. In fact, students be allowed to have practical experience in doing things themselves in order to be familiar and better at doing them instead of a lot of teachers' over-helpfulness (Scrivener, 2011). In addition, participants' responses in the study are quite fluctuating among the levels of agreement, especially when talking about the role of stimulating interest for learners, which was shown in the high rates of Std. Deviation (ranging from 1.026 to .757). This may reflect a level of uncertainty and diversity in the students' responses. Then, it is necessary that these roles be clarified more for the freshmen so that they have a better understanding and take better sides for themselves.

#### 4.2 Learners' knowledge of self as a language learner

In the process of learning and teaching, responsibilities can be said to switch between teachers and learners, i.e. if tasks are done by the teacher, there will be less space for students to do things themselves and thereby, learn for themselves, and vice versa. Besides, students also need to be aware of their own responsibility, personality, ability, learning styles, strengths and weaknesses, or in other words, to be aware of themselves as language learners.

Table 3. Students' knowledge of self a language learner

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
29. I have my own opinions about learning English and can defend them.	180	<b>4.11</b>	.721	.054
30. I use my learning styles effectively.	180	<b>3.17</b>	.744	.055

READINESS FOR AUTONOMOUS LEARNING OF FRESHMEN...

31. I understand my own personality.	180	<b>3.79</b>	.844	.063
32. I'm responsible for the success of my English learning.	180	<b>4.14</b>	.710	.053
33. I believe I have the ability to learn English successfully.	180	<b>3.67</b>	.858	.064
34. I know my strengths and weaknesses in learning English.	180	<b>3.92</b>	.845	.063
35. I put great effort into learning English.	180	<b>4.13</b>	.770	.057
36. I need a lot of guidance in learning English.	180	<b>4.28</b>	.897	.067

From the data collected, it is shown that the English freshmen have good knowledge of their selves as language learners as they have their own beliefs about English language learning, understand their own personality, knows their English learning ability, strengths and weaknesses, etc. (means > 3). These results revealed a shift in learners' beliefs about their roles, from those affected by Asia culture of learning to be obedient and passive (Clark & Gieve: 2006; Kumaravadivelu: 2003; Riding & Rayner, 2000) to gen-Z students with typical characteristics of thoughtful, compassionate, open-minded, and responsible (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). However, level of agreement on their ability to use learning styles effectively was not high (mean = 3.17). This may reflect the fact that the term "learning style" has not been very familiar with the students, or these styles have not been clearly addressed by teachers in their teaching activities. However, in general, with all the knowledge about the self of language learners, English freshmen can improve their autonomous ability and thereby, have directions and ability to monitor their progress and attainment.

### 4.3 Learners' motivation

Motivation is like an engine which helps the vehicle to move forward. The more motivated learners are, the faster and farther they can go. Besides, it is also a crucial driving force that decide students' learning autonomy as it can determine "how seriously they approach the work, how much time they set aside for it, how hard they push themselves, etc." (Scrivener, 2011). Clearly, the participants in the study can be said to have both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations when learning English at university.

Table 4. Learners' motivation

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
12. I learn English because it will help me to get a good job.	180	<b>4.38</b>	.861	.064
13. I learn English because I want to pass exams.	180	<b>3.51</b>	1.044	.078
14. I learn English so that I can communicate with English speakers.	180	<b>4.41</b>	.768	.057
15. I learn English because it's a required course at my university.	180	<b>2.48</b>	1.054	.079
16. I learn English because it will help me to be successful in my studies.	180	<b>4.48</b>	.720	.054
17. I learn English because I want to be as good at English as someone I know.	180	<b>4.02</b>	1.033	.077
18. I learn English because I want to please my family.	180	<b>2.37</b>	.933	.070
19. I learn English because I find it very interesting.	180	<b>4.16</b>	.883	.066



Except for statements 15 and 18 in Table 4, all the others were responded with high rates of means from 3.51 to 4.48. Therefore, it can be concluded that the freshmen had many great sources of motivations from inside self-satisfaction to outside rewarding effects. However, they did not learn English because it was a compulsory course or to please their families (mean = 2.48 and 2.37 respectively). These extrinsic motivations can be said to hardly create passion and without passion, extrinsic motivators are not sustainable. They were good signals because it showed that students were not studying under pressure or with boredom. All in all, when learners feel motivated by both internal and external factors because English learning is rewarding or enjoyable itself, a higher level of autonomy can be achieved in learning the language beyond the basic requirements as stated by Lamb (2011) and Ushioda (2011). Motivations, actually, are important driving forces for students to learn autonomously, especially when the newcomers are being very excited and eager to join a new learning environment at university.

#### 4.4 Learners' desire when choosing English language

As mentioned in a previous study, learners' desires are identified by the intensity of the learner's intention to learn a language or carry out a particular learning task (Huang and Benson, 2013) and they are revealed in a variety of specific thoughts and actions. When these thoughts and actions were specified in the questionnaire for the freshmen, most of them were recognized by the participants, as shown in Table 5

Table 5. Students' thoughts and actions showing their desire of learning English language

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
20. When it comes to any English tasks, I work very carefully to make sure I understand everything.	180	<b>3.95</b>	.786	.059
21. If I have any opportunities to use English outside class, I'll use it most of the time and some Vietnamese, if necessary.	180	<b>3.69</b>	.872	.065
22. If my teacher wanted someone to do an extra English assignment, I'd definitely volunteer.	180	<b>3.77</b>	.748	.056
23. I'd like to have friends from English-speaking countries.	180	<b>4.19</b>	.718	.053
24. If English were not taught at my university, I'd try to take English classes somewhere else.	180	<b>4.32</b>	.672	.050
25. I'd like English to be used as much as possible in English class.	180	<b>3.64</b>	.876	.065
26. After I get my English work back, I always read it again to correct my mistakes.	180	<b>4.12</b>	.637	.047
27. If there were an English club at my university, I'd be interested in joining.	180	<b>3.84</b>	.804	.060
28. Considering how I study English, I can honestly say that I do just enough to get by.	180	<b>2.20</b>	.881	.066

The data in the table above shows that the freshmen did have a desire to learn English – their major at university. With such activities as working very carefully to make sure everything is understood for English tasks, using English outside class, volunteering to do extra English assignment, reading English work again to correct the mistakes or joining English club if available, it can be concluded that the freshmen were very autonomous because these tasks were not compulsory or assigned by their teachers. They did the activities on their own because learning English was their desire. This desire, moreover, was also revealed in their thoughts as they wanted to have friends from English-speaking countries and wished English to be used as much as possible (mean = 4.19 and 3.64 respectively). Besides, if English were not taught at school, they did have the intention to take English classes somewhere else (mean = 4.32). This thought is in accordance with that exemplified by Nguyen and Habok (2021). All these thoughts and actions demonstrated positive learning attitudes through which students take initiative and study continually for their self-improvement.

If the desire of learning can result in learning autonomy, actions taken by students during their learning process should be permanent on a regular basis. However, when students learn just enough to get by, the desire can be said just to handle a course or an exam, not the desire for the learning itself. As for the freshmen participated in the study, their choices showed that they did not learn English with this kind of short-term desire (mean = 2.2). In short, the data in the table above represent that the EFL freshmen had a positive desire for learning English, a component constructed the capacity through which students can learn automatically.

In conclusion, when examining four aspects of learning autonomy, it was found that the freshmen had strong desires, clear self-awareness as English learners and good motivations to learn English. They were newcomers at university and were eager to study for the major they chose. This may be considered a good explanation for the high levels of desire, self-awareness and motivation among the freshmen. With high rates of agreement from the participants, these components showed that students were quite ready for autonomy when learning English at university.

However, that students were too familiar with some traditional roles of teachers to take initiative and responsibilities in their study may hinder their learning autonomy. What teachers need to do is to instruct students to take ownership of their own learning to make decisions, evaluate and be more responsible for their study. In fact, students should have opportunities to do things themselves as teachers cannot learn for their students and the more the teachers do for the students, the less space there will be for learners to do things, to practice, to learn and to master the knowledge and skills of the English language.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results collected from the questionnaires, it can be concluded that although EFL freshmen did not completely fulfill the four sub-constructs of learning autonomy, most of the participants demonstrated quite a good level of readiness to be autonomous learners. Among the four investigated aspects, students' beliefs of teachers' roles can be said to potentially create restrictions to their initiative-taking in their learning because they seemed too familiar with many teachers' authoritative and controlling roles such as explainers, stimulators or feedback-providers, which can lead to a high level of students' dependency on their instructors. It is suggested that students' adaptation to new learning environment and their familiarity of passive learning attitude be worked on so that good results can be achieved. However, these gen-Z students did not totally depend on their teachers in making decisions, evaluating their study or setting goals for them. In addition, the English freshmen appeared to have sufficient knowledge of their selves as language learners, which plays an essential role in fostering their self-study ability. In terms of students' incentives, the freshmen were found to have both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations when learning English at university. This finding, in addition to that of students' positive long-term desire of learning English language, contributed to the conclusion on the students' readiness for learning autonomy. In short, results from the study on the four components of learning autonomy showed that the freshmen at Faculty of Foreign Languages (IUH) were quite ready to autonomously take on their responsibilities of English language learners.

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## MỨC ĐỘ SẴN SÀNG CỦA SINH VIÊN NĂM NHẤT MỘT CHƯƠNG TRÌNH CỬ NHÂN NGÔN NGỮ ANH VỀ HỌC TẬP TỰ CHỦ

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**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu này có mục tiêu tìm hiểu mức độ sẵn sàng về học tập tự chủ của sinh viên năm nhất chương trình cử nhân Ngôn ngữ Anh tại một trường đại học ở Việt Nam. Phương pháp nghiên cứu được sử dụng là phương pháp định lượng, công cụ khảo sát là bảng câu hỏi được điều chỉnh lại từ bảng câu hỏi Learner Autonomy Perception Questionnaire được xây dựng bởi Nguyễn và Habok năm 2021. 180 sinh viên năm nhất đã tham gia phản hồi; bảng câu hỏi khảo sát yêu cầu người trả lời đánh giá các mô tả liên quan đến việc dạy và học tiếng Anh theo các chủ đề như vai trò của người, vai trò của thầy cô giáo, động lực và những mong muốn của người học tiếng Anh. Sau đó, tác giả đã dùng one-sample T-test để kiểm tra và kết quả cho thấy nhóm đối tượng này có mức sẵn sàng khá cao đối với học tập tự chủ. Trong các vấn đề được khảo sát, có thể thấy rằng, nhận thức của sinh viên về vai trò của giảng viên có thể đang là vấn đề gây trở ngại nhất cho việc tự học của người học. Tuy nhiên, sinh viên cho thấy họ có hiểu rõ bản thân mình với những đặc điểm cần thiết của những học viên học ngôn ngữ. Ngoài ra, sinh viên còn thể hiện bản thân có những động lực và mong muốn học tiếng Anh tích cực. Đây có thể coi là những yếu tố thúc đẩy khả năng tự học của nhóm sinh viên năm thứ nhất tham gia trong nghiên cứu này.

Từ khóa: language learning, autonomy, teachers' roles, motivation

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