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Readiness for Learner Autonomy in Online Environments: The Case of Thai University Students

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***Abstract*—In Thailand, learner autonomy has been introduced to enable students to manage their learning and engage with the abundant resources available, particularly for English language learning. This study examines the extent of learner autonomy and online language learning behaviors outside the classroom among Thai university students, as well as the factors influencing their autonomy. Quantitative data was collected through a questionnaire from 378 freshmen representing eight faculties: Allied Health Sciences, Medical Science, Public Health, Sciences, Agriculture, Law, Business, and Humanities. The findings revealed a relatively high level of learner autonomy among Thai university students. They were able to establish learning goals, select learning strategies and resources, and be aware of their weaknesses. However, the overall level of online language learning outside the classroom was moderate. Listening to English music was the most popular activity reported. Additionally, gender and English proficiency were identified as significant factors influencing the level of learner autonomy. These findings underscore the effectiveness of introducing learner autonomy but also highlight the need for teacher support in scaffolding online language learning outside the classroom.**

***Index Terms*—learner autonomy, language learning, autonomous learning, out-of-class language learning**

I. Introduction

Given the current trends in English education, a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches has become essential. Language learning now emphasizes students' readiness to take an active role in the learning process (Ardi, 2017). It is expected that all students develop the skills and habits of lifelong learners, adapting to the evolving needs of today's world. Proactive learning involves individual participation, self-initiation, adaptability, and self-assessment (Ke, 2016). This means that learners acquire knowledge by dedicating themselves to studying, selecting learning strategies, managing the learning process, and taking control of their emotional and cognitive abilities. Autonomous learning is a crucial solution to meet the demand for students' comprehensive development as lifelong learners.

Autonomy refers to "the capacity to take control of one's own learning" (Benson, 2011, p. 58). The critical element in this definition is that autonomous learners assume responsibility for determining learning purposes, creating a learning plan, taking ownership of learning content, actively participating in the learning process, and regulating factors such as time, frequency, setting, learning methods, and pace. In other words, learner autonomy requires self-management competencies, proactive learning, self-knowledge, responsibility, and self-control of the learning process. It is important to emphasize that learner autonomy develops gradually and is a complex process (Benson, 2011; Blidi, 2017). The complexity of learner autonomy development is influenced by personal attitudes, beliefs, motivation, personality, and culture (Chen & Li, 2014). This implies that promoting learner autonomy may vary across countries and require different timeframes and levels of support. Numerous researchers and scholars have shown that learner autonomy contributes to success in EFL learning (Hsieh & Hsieh, 2019; Koirala, 2020; Orawiwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017; Tayjasanant & Suraratdecha, 2016; Tran, 2020). Little (1997; as cited in Sadaghian et al., 2020) stated that autonomous learners are motivated and reflective learners, leading to efficient and effective learning. Furthermore, the level of learning success depends on the degree of autonomy. Those who possess autonomy skills and habits have a greater chance of successfully acquiring English language skills. Little (2003) argues that these abilities cannot be fully developed within the confines of a classroom-only environment. Therefore, learners with high levels of autonomy are

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more likely to seek opportunities to develop their English skills through direct application outside the classroom, compared to learners with low levels of autonomy.

The emergence of recent online learning technologies has significantly contributed to the promotion of autonomy in English language learning. These technologies offer learners increased opportunities to take control of their English learning. Learners now have access to digital learning environments that allow them to engage in real-world activities and meaningful interactions with teachers or native speakers outside the classroom, regardless of distance. Tools such as video conferencing, Moodle, MOOCs, MS Team, Zoom, and Google Meet facilitate real-time communication. Discussion boards and chat rooms provide additional online resources that enable language learners to have social, collaborative, and authentic learning experiences, fostering cooperation and shared learning responsibility (Chan & Chan, 2011; Cheng et al., 2011). While technologies have the potential to facilitate autonomous learning and encourage a shift from passive content absorption to self-directed learning, learners need to be aware of their readiness to take charge of their learning in order to achieve the most beneficial learning outcomes.

In the Thai EFL setting, there is a lack of research on readiness for learner autonomy, particularly in the context of out-of-class online-supported activities that can foster lifelong learning. Most studies on learner autonomy in Thailand focus on conventional or offline classes and examine perspectives from learners and teachers regarding the success of training programs (Sangsawang, 2011; Rungwaraphong, 2012; Tayjasanant & Suraratdecha, 2016; Tapinta, 2016; Orawiwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017; Scheb-Buenner, 2019). As a result, there are limited studies that specifically address the implementation of learner autonomy in the Thai context using technology to support learning outside the classroom from the student's viewpoint. Given the rapid development of technology and the increasing opportunities for higher education, there is a pressing need for a more flexible learning model that allows students to have greater independence in managing their learning anytime and anywhere. Thus, this study aims to examine the readiness of EFL university students for autonomous learning modes and explore potential factors related to their level of autonomy. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the enhancement of technology-supported learning in Thailand, specifically by fostering the growth of student autonomy. Teachers and educators can utilize this study as a reference when designing extracurricular activities with technological support to promote the development of learner autonomy.

II. Literature Review

A. Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy has been interpreted in various ways by language educators and researchers, and it has gained popularity as a preferred teaching and learning approach in recent decades. The concept of learner autonomy emerged in the field of lifelong learning in the 1980s and has since become widely adopted in classrooms worldwide. It is generally defined as the ability to take responsibility for one's own learning. Autonomous learners are capable of identifying their learning goals, defining the content and process of learning, choosing appropriate methods and strategies, monitoring their learning progress, and evaluating their learning outcomes (Holec, 1981; as cited in Hidayati & Husna, 2020). Benson (2011) also highlighted three dimensions of autonomy enhancement. First is the management of learning administration, which refers to students' ability to determine when, where, and how to study the target language (Huang & Benson, 2013). The second aspect is the management of instructional materials, allowing learners to select resources that align with their learning goals rather than relying solely on materials provided by the teacher. The final dimension involves regulating the cognitive process for cognitive achievement, meaning learners have control over psychological factors that influence their learning performance, such as beliefs, emotions, and motivation (Benson, 2011). In essence, learner autonomy involves learners' ability to control their learning, mindset, willingness, and independence in directing their own learning process.

(a). Planning

Planning involves setting goals and selecting the resources needed to achieve them. A planning strategy called pre-planning is used before the task in the learning process. Learners set their goals and decide how they will achieve them. In contrast, planning can also occur during task performance, or what is called *planning in action*. This depends on how well learners are progressing with the task, how effective their strategies are, and how much they are learning. Goals can be changed or adjusted depending on individual progress.

(b). Monitoring

Holec (1985b; as cited in Benson 2001, p. 159) argues that “the learner needs to know at all times whether, on the one hand, his performances correspond to what he was aiming for and, on the other, whether he has made any progress towards his chosen objective.” This means that self-monitoring aims “to provide the learner with all the information he needs to control his learning process and progress” (p. 157). Self-monitoring procedures thus must be “relevant to the learner in question and to the particular learning in which he or she is engaged.” Students who act as participants and observe or monitor their learning may ask themselves, How am I doing? Am I making rapid progress on this learning task? Without any problems? After becoming aware of the problem, learners assess their knowledge and skills to look for the cause. At the same time, they use their level of knowledge to explain the situation and deploy strategies to accomplish the task.

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(c). Evaluating

Evaluating differs from monitoring because the former involves the consideration of the *outcome* of a particular attempt to learn or use a strategy, whereas monitoring results in statements of self-monitoring about students' level of proficiency *in the course* of learning. The focal point is development and success (i.e., the strategy). In the words of Wenden (1991), evaluation involves three mental steps: (1) learners examine the outcome of an attempt to learn, (2) they access the criteria they will use to judge it, and (3) they apply it.

Clearly, cognitive and metacognitive strategies are critical to the learning process in helping learners become more self-sufficient because cognitive strategies are operations performed directly on the content being learned. Metacognitive methods, on the other hand, use an understanding of cognitive processes to guide the learning process. When both strategies are combined, learners can learn independently.

B. Educational Technology and Learner Autonomy

Holec, as mentioned in Benson (2011), highlights that autonomous or self-directed learning often involves the use of technology, such as computer-assisted language learning (CALL), distance learning, and face-to-face access learning. The use of media in education extends beyond traditional classroom settings and benefits both outside the classroom and in online education. Research on learner autonomy has explored "out-of-school" online environments, including self-study centers, virtual classrooms, and hybrid learning environments (Bedoya, 2014; Shams, 2013; Zhong, 2018; Hsieh & Hsieh, 2019; Alharbi, 2022). These studies confirm the importance of self-confidence and independence in learning for students' performance in online "extracurricular" environments, where students are encouraged to be independent, responsible, cooperative, and active in their learning process. According to Benson (2011), media, especially technology, provide abundant linguistic and non-linguistic input, offering new ways to represent and learn a new language. Technology plays a significant role in enhancing language skills and fostering learner autonomy. It enables students to study languages using their computers and other devices at home, providing convenience and flexibility compared to face-to-face instruction. Nowadays, technology is widely accessible through mobile phones and tablets, giving learners the opportunity to use the internet to find additional learning resources. Moreover, students have the freedom to choose their own time, place, and pace of learning. Mobile learning technology and electronic media have proven successful in promoting learner autonomy among language learners (Sung et al., 2015).

The shift from traditional classrooms to technology-enhanced learning environments has led to increased research on how learners independently acquire knowledge outside the classroom with the aid of technology. Numerous studies have examined learners' readiness for self-directed learning from the perspective of learner autonomy across different cultures. For instance, Zhong (2018) conducted a qualitative case study using interviews to explore how learners utilized technology-mediated environments to meet their learning needs and goals, and how their autonomy developed in online settings. The findings suggested that learners became critical users of diverse online resources beyond limited materials. Additionally, the learning conditions in New Zealand fostered the development of learner autonomy. Psychological factors, environmental factors, teacher guidance, and learning conditions are likely to play crucial roles in the development of various dimensions of learner autonomy. Similarly, Honarzad and Rassaei (2019) investigated the relationship between technology-based out-of-class language learning activities and three learner characteristics: motivation, autonomy, and self-efficacy, among Iranian EFL learners. The results indicated that the learners preferred receptive activities over productive ones, and a strong correlation was found between technology-based out-of-class language learning activities and learner characteristics.

C. Related Studies

Yosintha and Yunianti (2021) conducted a mixed-methods study on learner autonomy in EFL online courses among Indonesian students from eight universities. The findings revealed that participants had positive attitudes towards learner autonomy in online learning and recognized the need for autonomy and independence in this context. To enhance learning success, the study suggests that teachers should promote autonomous learning through the use of metacognitive strategies. Another study by Saywonpia and Kongthai (2018) explored Thai university students' extracurricular English learning activities and identified the influencing factors and participants' opinions. The results indicated a preference for receptive activities over productive ones. Participants perceived extracurricular learning activities as effective for English language development and emphasized the importance of learner autonomy for lifelong learning. The latest project by Hsieh and Hsieh (2019) investigated the independent learning behaviors and utilization of learning resources by Taiwanese EFL students outside the classroom, particularly in self-access centers (SACs). The study found a strong correlation between autonomous learning behaviors and overall resource utilization in SACs. The study recommends fostering students' engagement in out-of-class learning through pedagogical activities that connect classroom learning with learning center resources. Zhang and Cui (2010) conducted a survey on the learning beliefs of distance learners of English in China, mainly using educational media in the learning process. They found that distance learners with more experience in distance education believed more strongly in the benefits of an autonomous learning approach and showed lower levels of anxiety and frustration than novice learners and that there were no gender differences in learner autonomy among Chinese students.

However, some studies indicate an unsatisfied level of autonomy. Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee (2016) investigated whether certain variables were related to Thai university students' attitudes toward autonomous language learning. The

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study found that female students were more autonomous than male students since they seemed to have more responsibility. Even though the results showed a positive attitude toward autonomy, their autonomous behaviors outside of class were within the moderate range. Regarding the correlation between English proficiency and belief in autonomous learning, students with a high belief in autonomous learning show a high level of learning behavior, while students with a low belief show a low level of learning behavior. The finding highlights the need for increasing learning environments where responsibilities are shared between teachers and students. Along these lines, Ghobain and Zughaibi (2021) explored the readiness of first-year Saudi English language learners for online instruction. Study participants were moderately autonomous, meaning that both males and females had similar levels of aptitude and readiness to take responsibility for their learning. Interestingly, however, compared to those non-English majors, participants with English majors had relatively lower levels of autonomy than students with other majors. A similar situation was found in Andrzej et al. (2019), wherein Indonesian high school learners displayed low motivation to learn English and were unwilling to act as autonomous learners. The study suggests that Indonesian students need to be trained to plan their learning process, set goals, and take a more active role in shaping the teaching-learning process.

D. The Present Study

As can be seen from the previous review, the incorporation of technology into language instruction outside the classroom can play an important role in the success of L2 development, and the individual characteristics of L2 learners, such as motivation and learner autonomy, inevitably affect their learning performance. Learners' behavior outside the classroom reflects their motivation and autonomy (Mineishi, 2010; as cited in Orawiwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017). In fact, to our knowledge, little is known about students' learning behaviors outside the classroom when equipped with technology. In addition, certain factors, such as gender, could be examined in more detail to compare the results of the present study with those of previous studies in the Thai context. Therefore, to fill this gap in previous research, this study has three important objectives. First, it examines the extent of Thai students' perceived learner autonomy in an online learning environment outside the classroom. Second, the present study examines their learning behaviors in an online learning environment outside the classroom. Finally, it aims to investigate the relationship between students' level of language learning autonomy and other factors, including gender, grade, and language learning behavior in an online environment outside the classroom. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What degree of learner autonomy do students have in online environments outside of a class?
2. What are the students' language learning behaviors in online environments outside of a class?
3. Is there any statistically significant relationship between students' learner autonomy and their English proficiency?
4. Is there any statistically significant relationship between student learner autonomy and gender differences?
5. Is there any statistically significant relationship between student learner autonomy and their language learning behaviors in online environments outside the classroom?

III. METHOD

A. Population and Samples

The population for this study comprised 6,057 undergraduate students who were enrolled in the English course "Critical Reading for Effective Communication" at Naresuan University in Thailand during the second semester of the 2022 academic year. These students were freshmen from eight faculties: Allied Health Sciences, Medical Science, Public Health, Sciences, Agriculture, Law, Business, and Humanities. It was expected that these students had prior experience with autonomous learning in high school, considering the heavy reliance on technology and online platforms for teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to an increased expectation of learning autonomy among students nationwide. The sample size was determined using the calculation formula of Yamane (1973), with a confidence level of 95% and a precision rate of ±5%. A minimum sample size of 378 was required, and therefore, the researchers decided to select 378 samples using the simple random sampling technique.

The demographic characteristics of the samples are shown in Table 1. 46.3% of the respondents were male, while 53.7% were female. Regarding the English grade point average (GPA), 6.6% of respondents received a grade lower than 2.00, 20.6% were between 2.00 and 2.49, and 26.2% were between 2.50 and 2.99. 27.5% were between 3.00 and 3.49, and 19.0% were above 3.50.

TABLE 1
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE VALUES OF THE SAMPLE

	N	*Percent (%)*
1. Gender		
- Male	175	46.3
- Female	203	53.7
2. Grade Point Average (GPA)		
- Below 2.00	25	6.6
- 2.00 - 2.49	78	20.6
- 2.50 - 2.99	99	26.2
- 3.00 - 3.49	104	27.5
- 3.50 - 4.00	72	19.0

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B. Research Instrument

A questionnaire was employed to collect data for this study. The questionnaire was prepared in both English and Thai to address potential language barriers and ensure comprehension. It focused on two essential components: (a) autonomous language learning and (b) online learning behavior outside the classroom. The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from two sources: Cirocki et al. (2019) "Readiness for Autonomous English Learning" and Hidayati and Husna (2020) "Online English Learning Outside the Classroom". The questionnaire consisted of 25 items, and their translation into Thai was validated by two bilingual experts proficient in English and Thai. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, yielding a value of .917.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Part I focused on students' demographic information, including gender and GPA. The GPA of this study represents the English proficiency of the students; therefore, it was determined from the average grade of the English courses that the students took. Part II assessed students' capacity to plan, organize, self-monitor, and self-evaluate. Part III examined students' online language learning behaviors. Except for the demographic information, all sections utilized a single-item Likert scale to rate the extent to which students engaged in autonomous learning modes (planning, monitoring, and evaluating) for each item, ranging from "least" to "most." Additionally, students' English online learning behaviors outside the classroom were evaluated with ten questions, measuring the frequency of their participation using a 5-point Likert scale: "never," "seldom," "sometimes," "often," and "usually".

C. Data Collection and Data Analysis

Participants were invited to participate in the study and complete an online questionnaire using Google Forms. The data obtained from the questionnaire survey were analyzed separately for each section using the SPSS version 22 program for Windows. Data from the demographic characteristics section were analyzed using frequency and percentage to provide an overview of the participants' backgrounds. Data from the other two sections were analyzed to assess the general level of autonomous language learning and student behavior in online language learning outside the classroom.

Descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the means and standard deviations based on the following ranges: 1.00-1.50 = very low, 1.51-2.50 = low, 2.51-3.50 = moderate, 3.51-4.50 = high, and 4.51-5.00 = very high, respectively. These criteria were employed for the level of autonomous language learning and the level of online learning behavior outside the classroom. To answer research questions two and five, Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to determine the relationship among levels of learner autonomy, English proficiency, and online language learning outside the classroom behaviors. Chi-square tests were conducted to find out the relationships between students' levels of autonomous language learning and their gender (research question 4). The acceptable statistical significance level was set at alpha < 0.05.

IV. Results

The results demonstrated in Table 2 showed that the overall mean score of students' beliefs about autonomous language learning was at a high level ($\bar{x}$ =3.78). When considering all items, it was found that almost every item was at a high level, except item 15, "Being able to evaluate my classmates' works." This item was at a moderate level and had the lowest mean score ($\bar{x}$ = 3.44). The top three items were as follows: "Being able to choose appropriate learning strategies to achieve tasks" ($\bar{x}$ = 4.05), "Being aware of my academic weaknesses and able to improve them" ($\bar{x}$ =4.00), and "Being able to find learning resources by yourself" ($\bar{x}$ = 3.93).

TABLE 2
MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF BELIEF ABOUT AUTONOMOUS LANGUAGE LEARNING

Statement	$\bar{X}$	*S.D.*	*Level*
1. Using planners/ diaries/ timetables to set learning goals.	3.50	.87	high
2. Always setting up learning goals.	3.92	.77	high
3. Being able to decide on time to achieve learning goals.	3.80	.79	high
4. Being able to select books or learning materials outside the classroom by myself.	3.83	.79	high
5. Being able to find learning resources by yourself.	3.93	.77	high
6. Being able to choose appropriate learning strategies to achieve tasks.	4.05	.72	high
7. Being able to check my understanding of the subjects being studied.	3.56	.73	high
8. Always following my learning progress.	3.78	.73	high
9. Being aware of my academic weaknesses and able to improve them.	4.00	.74	high
10. Being aware of my academic strengths.	3.73	.87	high
11. Being able to recognize my own learning mistakes.	3.85	.80	high
12. Being able to assess my learning progress and identify areas needed to develop.	3.82	.69	high
13. Having time for error-checking and correcting my mistakes in my work.	3.59	.75	high
14. Seeking feedback from teachers to correct learning mistakes.	3.75	.77	high
15. Being able to evaluate my classmates' works.	3.44	.83	moderate
Total	3.78	.53	high

The students' online outside-classroom language learning behaviors are presented in Table 3 below. The overall mean score was at a moderate level ($\bar{x}$ = 3.27). Only three items were at a high level, which were as follows: "Listening

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to English music" ($\bar{x}$ = 4.01), "Watching English soundtrack movies without subtitles" ($\bar{x}$ = 3.74), and "Playing online games in English language settings" ($\bar{x}$ =3.69). The rest were at the moderate level, and the lowest mean score was item 10, "Communicating with foreigners in English via online channels" ($\bar{x}$ = 2.78).

TABLE 3
MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF STUDENTS' ONLINE OUTSIDE-CLASSROOM LANGUAGE LEARNING BEHAVIORS

Statement	*X̄*	*S.D.*	*Level*
1. Listening to English music	4.01	.89	high
2. Playing online games in English language settings	3.69	1.02	high
3. Watching English soundtrack movies without subtitles	3.74	1.04	high
4. Reading Academic books in English	3.14	1.01	moderate
5. Reading outside class reading materials in English	3.14	1.01	moderate
6. Attending online English courses	2.92	1.05	moderate
7. Communicating with online friends in English e.g., chatting	3.10	1.06	moderate
8. Talking with online friends in English	2.80	1.08	moderate
9. Watching English online programs e.g., TV, Variety, shows	3.40	1.03	moderate
10. Communicating with foreigners in English via online channels	2.78	1.22	moderate
Total	3.27	.78	moderate

In Table 4, the data on the student's beliefs about autonomous language learning was divided into four groups. The cut-point was determined by using the mean score based on the following ranges: 1.00-1.99 = very low, 2.00-2.99 = low, 3.00-3.99 = moderate, and higher than 4.00 = high. When the students were classified into groups according to the level of their belief, there were 130 students with high levels of belief, 231 students with moderate levels of belief, and 17 students with low levels of belief. And none of them had a level of belief below 2.

TABLE 4
THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGES OF THE STUDENTS' BELIEF ABOUT AUTONOMOUS LANGUAGE LEARNING

Level	*N*	*Percent (%)*
High	130	34.4
Moderate	231	61.1
Low	17	4.5
Total	378	100.0

To answer research questions 3 and 5, Pearson correlation coefficients were used to investigate the relationships between students' English proficiency (grade), beliefs about autonomous language learning, and online outside-classroom language learning behaviors.

From Table 5, the results indicate a positive relationship between students' belief in autonomous language learning and their English proficiency (grade) ($r = .122$, $p < .05$). This suggests that as students' English proficiency increases, their belief in autonomous language learning also tends to increase. However, this relationship is at a low level. Furthermore, a moderate relationship exists between students' online outside-classroom language learning behaviors and their belief in autonomous language learning ($r = .576$, $p < .001$). This implies that as students engage in more online language learning activities outside the classroom, their belief in autonomous language learning also tends to be higher. Moreover, there was a weak relationship between English proficiency and online outside-classroom language learning behaviors ($r = .139$, $p<.05$). This means the students who got the higher English proficiency performed a higher level of online outside-classroom language learning behaviors.

TABLE 5
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENTS' ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (GRADE), BELIEF ABOUT AUTONOMOUS LANGUAGE LEARNING, AND ONLINE OUTSIDE-CLASSROOM LANGUAGE LEARNING BEHAVIORS

	Belief	Proficiency (grade)	Online outside-classroom language learning behaviors
Belief	1.000	.122*	.576**
Proficiency (grade)		1.000	.139**
Online outside-classroom language learning behaviors			1.000

**p<.001 and *p<.05

To answer research question 4, which aimed to examine the relationship between the student's gender and their belief about autonomous language learning, a Chi-Square test was employed to investigate their relationship. The result found that gender was related to the student's belief about autonomous language learning ($\chi^2 = 8.96$, $p<.05$). Male students tend to have higher levels of belief than female students, as follows: high (72), moderate (99), and low (4), whereas most female students had a moderate level of belief (132), followed by a high level (58) and a low level (13).

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TABLE 6
CHI-SQUARE RESULTS FOR STUDENT'S GENDER AND THEIR BELIEF ABOUT AUTONOMOUS LANGUAGE LEARNING

Gender	*Belief*				*Chi-Sq*
	High	Moderate	Low	Total	8.962*
Male	72	99	4	175	
	(41.14)	(56.57)	(2.29)	(100.00)	
Female	58	132	13	203	
	(28.57)	(65.03)	(6.40)	(100.00)	
Total	130	231	17	378	
	(34.39)	(61.11)	(4.50)	(100.00)	

V. DISCUSSION

This study is congruent with previous studies (Honarzar & Rassaei, 2019; Iamudom & Tangkiensirisin, 2020; Orawiwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017) in finding that students exhibited a high level of learner autonomy in learning the English language. Specifically, the activities that demonstrated the highest level of learner autonomy were the students' consistent establishment of learning goals and their ability to select learning strategies to achieve those goals. It is assumed that students use self-management or so-called metacognitive strategies (Wenden, 1991) to proactively manage and monitor their learning strategies, recognize, and correct errors, and assess and modify their learning as needed (Conttia, 2007). This may also be attributed to teachers providing clear class objectives and requirements, enabling students to plan and complete their tasks effectively. Additionally, teachers regularly updating students' scores during the course may have heightened their awareness of weaknesses, motivating them to improve. Furthermore, the availability of learning resources facilitated by technology allowed students to explore various sources and select those that aligned with their preferences.

Although this study found a high level of learner autonomy in learning the English language, the overall students' online outside-classroom language learning behaviors were rated at a moderate level. These findings are in line with the research by Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee (2017). Interestingly, while the earlier study identified watching English movies as an online outside-classroom activity performed at a high level, this study revealed that listening to English music was the most frequently reported activity. This discrepancy may be due to the abundance of open sources for English music that students can easily access in contrast to movies, which frequently have licensing restrictions.

The study findings indicated that students tended to engage in receptive skill activities, such as listening to music, watching TV programs, and reading English materials, at a higher level compared to productive skill activities like speaking or writing in English. This preference may be attributed to the student's daily life experiences, where they had more exposure to receptive skill activities and limited opportunities for productive skill activities. The English language used for communication in their real-life context was typically confined to the classroom setting. These findings are consistent with the research by Saywonpia and Kongthai (2018), suggesting that students often choose receptive skill activities outside the classroom because they feel more comfortable and find them more convenient. Receptive skill activities can serve as an easier platform for students to practice and develop learner autonomy independently, without the guidance of teachers. This study also aligns with the findings of Honarzad and Rassaei (2019), who reported that Iranian EFL learners preferred receptive skill activities such as searching English webpages, using online dictionaries, and watching English TV and movies.

In the Thai context, students have limited opportunities to engage in online communication in English outside the classroom, although they are exposed to the language through media. As a result, they mainly practice receptive skills like listening and reading, while opportunities to practice productive skills such as speaking and writing are scarce. Given this lack of opportunities for productive skill development in online environments, it is essential for teachers to take responsibility and create both in-curriculum activities and outside-class opportunities that encourage students to actively engage with productive skills, utilizing technology-enhanced activities like writing blogs or recording vlogs. These activities provide students with platforms they are familiar with or frequently visit, enabling them to use oral and written English in a natural and comfortable manner. By incorporating such activities, students can set communication goals, gain confidence, and eventually develop their proficiency in natural English communication.

Several statistically significant results in this study indicated that two factors, English proficiency, and online outside-classroom language learning behavior, were related to the level of belief about autonomous language learning. A significant relationship was found between English proficiency and learner autonomy, suggesting that students with higher English proficiency tend to take more responsibility for their learning. These students demonstrated the ability to set learning goals, choose appropriate strategies and resources, and actively address their weaknesses to improve. These findings suggest that students with high English proficiency could be considered autonomous learners to some extent.

The findings of this study confirmed a significant relationship between online outside-classroom activities and learner autonomy, which aligns with previous research. Saywonpia and Kongthai (2018) acknowledged that learner autonomy promotes students' responsibility and independence in English learning, enabling them to actively engage in online activities outside the classroom. Similarly, Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee (2017) investigated the association between these two variables and found that students with high learner autonomy demonstrated a high level of

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engagement in managing online outside classroom activities, in addition to their in-class activities. Conversely, students with low learner autonomy exhibited a lower level of involvement in online outside-classroom activities.

This study revealed an interesting relationship between gender and learner autonomy. Male students exhibited higher levels of autonomy than female students, consistent with most of the research on learner autonomy and gender (Marjuki, 2018; Büyükahıska, 2017). They claimed that their male participants utilized greater external strategies of learner autonomy, such as the capacity to investigate learning sources and engage in collaborative work. In addition, Kırmızı and Kıraç (2018) found that male students appeared to rate self-direction readiness higher than female students. In the present study, this could be explained by the fact that the majority of male participants are students from medical science faculties who are conversant with science-as-practice processes. This means that they have practiced setting goals, asking questions, locating supporting evidence, linking their interests to other sources, etc., which are the very first steps in fostering learner autonomy.

However, the result of this study contrasts with a study by Zhang and Cui (2010) that found no gender differences in Chinese students' learner autonomy. Additionally, this finding contradicts the results of Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee (2017), where female students displayed a higher level of autonomy than males. Therefore, the relationship between gender and learner autonomy remains unclear and requires further investigation to establish a more conclusive understanding of this association.

VI. Conclusion

For several years, Thai students have been introduced to the concept of learner autonomy. Educators and teachers have made efforts to foster autonomy through various curriculum approaches. Numerous studies have been conducted to manipulate autonomy levels through different activities. These studies have confirmed the effectiveness of these attempts, as university students tend to exhibit a relatively high level of learner autonomy. One significant factor affecting learner autonomy is English proficiency. Proficiency in English is also linked to outside-classroom activities, as students require adequate proficiency to explore and engage in online activities beyond the classroom. This study further revealed a relationship between outside-classroom activities and the level of learner autonomy. Therefore, promoting both English proficiency and outside-classroom activities is crucial for enhancing learner autonomy. However, in English language classrooms, students still require scaffolding from their teachers to establish a conducive learning environment that enables the development of learner autonomy. This can involve encouraging students to set their own learning goals, choose learning strategies and resources, and become aware that they can manage their own learning and address their weaknesses. Additionally, gender was found to be related to beliefs about autonomous language learning, with males in this study exhibiting a higher level of belief compared to females.

VII. Pedagogical Implication

Based on the findings of this study, teachers should continue to promote learner autonomy by providing opportunities for students to take charge of their own learning. This can be accomplished by encouraging students to establish their own learning objectives, select appropriate learning strategies and resources, and cultivate self-awareness regarding their learning process. In addition, for English language classes, teachers should prioritize the promotion of learner autonomy in English language learning both inside and outside of the classroom by improving students' English language skills through effective instructional strategies and engaging activities, such as providing students with opportunities to establish their own learning goals or designing ways to assess their learning achievement, allowing them to assess their progress, etc. In this way, students can participate more fully in the classroom, which contributes to the growth of learner autonomy. In addition to guiding and supporting students as they navigate their autonomous learning journeys, teachers should provide them with direction and assistance. This may include directing resources, facilitating discussions, providing feedback, and providing assistance when necessary.

VIII. Suggestions for Further Research

Further studies could expand on the current research by considering additional individual factors that may influence learner autonomy, beyond the three factors of English proficiency, gender, and online outside-classroom language learning behaviors examined in this study. As online learning continues to gain importance, students have the opportunity to choose from a vast array of resources, many of which are self-learning courses. Therefore, learner autonomy becomes an essential skill for managing their learning needs and available sources. Future studies could specifically focus on the online learning context to explore factors that might impact online learning autonomy. Another suggestion for future research is to delve deeper into the topic of gender, as it remains a debated factor. Previous studies, including the present one, have yielded inconsistent findings. While some studies have found no differences between male and female participants in terms of learner autonomy, others have shown that females have a higher level of autonomy. In this particular study, males were found to have a higher level. Hence, further investigation is warranted to better understand the relationship between gender and the level of autonomy.

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