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# Comparison of Vietnamese Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions of Autonomous Language Learning

**Abstract:** This study is a contrastive analysis of Vietnamese teachers' and students' perceptions of autonomous English language learning. The participants were selected from two national universities and one regional university during the first semester of the 2020-21 school year. In total, 370 teacher and 392 student participants were chosen using Slovin's formula ( $r = \pm 5\%$ ). Questionnaires were administered to these 762 participants via emails embedded with links to a Google form and also as handouts. The questionnaires were adapted from Ustunluoglu (2009); the piloted Cronbach's alpha liability range was  $0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$  and included three contrastive sections of different areas of learner autonomy: responsibilities, abilities, and activities. Descriptive frequencies and mean were employed to differentiate respondents' perceptions of learner autonomy. The results revealed that the students surrendered their responsibilities to their teachers, while the teachers considered themselves dominant figures who were responsible for their students' learner autonomy. The teachers and students mostly agreed that the students had the abilities to do well in autonomous language learning if they were given opportunities to do so. Furthermore, the findings show a mismatch: the teachers claimed that their students participated in autonomous learning activities to a moderate extent, whereas the students claimed to engage in them at a high level. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt teachers' responsibilities to students' accountability. Both curriculum and practical pedagogical approaches should be adjusted, and students should be encouraged to use authentic learning materials and communicate with native English speakers in English.

**Keywords:** contrastive analysis, learner autonomy, autonomous language learning, accountability, practical pedagogical approaches

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## Introduction

Experts in education have widely acknowledged the congruence between language teachers and students, especially in the context of autonomous language learning. This has led to a lot of research being conducted on the role of learner autonomy (LA) in language learning, particularly with regard to second language acquisition. The term »autonomy« in language learning can be considered the ability to take charge of one's own learning and be responsible for decisions concerning the goals, learning processes, and implementation of one's language learning needs. In other words, »autonomy« is one's ability to make decisions for oneself (Joshi 2011). In language learning, LA is the principle that learners should be encouraged to assume the maximum amount of responsibility for what they learn and how they learn it. This is reflected in approaches to needs analysis as well as in choices related to content, teaching materials, and learning methods (Richards and Smidt 2014). In terms of language pedagogy, a shift from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach can promote LA to the highest extent (Shreurs and Dumbraveanu 2014).

Holec (1981, p. 3), who has long been considered a pioneer in autonomous learning research, defined LA as »the ability to take charge of one's learning«. Since the emergence of this definition, the theory and practice of autonomy have been continuously evolving in response to innovative and revolutionized language pedagogical approaches. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) mention that different studies exploring the rationale for promoting LA have confirmed that LA improves the quality of language learning, promotes democratic societies, and prepares individuals for life-long learning. LA is considered to be a human right because it encourages learners to take advantage of learning opportunities both in and out of the classroom. However, autonomy is complicated, multidimensional, and variably manifested. The denotation of the phrase »manifested LA« is a form of automated language learning or learning practices that requires learner control over aspects of their learning either inside or outside of the context of formal instruction. In view of English language teaching (ELT) and learning, the emergence of digital literacies strongly promotes LA; there are more possibilities for autonomous language learning to be self-initiated and occur without the intervention or knowledge of language teachers.

Indeed, the shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred teaching is emphasized in LA. Moreover, emphasis is transitioning away from urging learners to spend more time acquiring languages outside the classroom toward trying to help them understand the complexity of the world of autonomous language learning beyond the classroom (Benson and Reinders 2011).

Compared with LA, teacher autonomy has not been paid much attention. Teacher autonomy is a multidimensional concept that is determined by examining who makes decisions regarding teachers' performance, and who controls the outcomes of the decisions that are made. Put simply, both the people within (internal control) and outside of a school (external control) who are making decisions should be considered. Teacher autonomy could be understood as a teacher's capacity to make important decisions on the content and conditions of their work. These have far-reaching consequences and are within the regulations and resources of the agency regulating education in terms of concentrating instruments of governance at the national level or decentralizing them to municipal and school levels (Silva and Molstad 2020). Teacher autonomy is further defined as a strong sense of personal responsibility for one's teaching practices through continuous reflection and analysis, maintaining the highest degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploring the freedom it consults (Little 1995).

Research concerning autonomous language learning has been conducted worldwide (Chamaipak and Sumitra 2016; Chun and Jingjing 2016; Joshi 2011; Lamb 2008; Lin and Reinders 2019; Scott et al. 2015; Szocs 2017a), and some studies (Anh 2018; Le 2009; Loi 2016; Thu 2017) have been conducted in Vietnam. However, although there have been numerous studies on teachers' and learners' beliefs of LA, few have conducted contrastive analysis of teachers' and learners' beliefs towards LA. Only one study (Van 2011) comparing teacher autonomy and learner autonomy could be found, and this mostly highlighted the voice of learner autonomy and did not contrast the correlation. Therefore, this study conducted contrastive analysis on teachers' and learners' views of LA in order to propose practical implications for LA in EL.

## **Literature Review**

Studies about LA can be classified into three categories: teachers' beliefs towards LA (Ahmadianzadeh et al. 2018; Borg and Alshumaimeri 2019; Chang 2020), learners' beliefs towards LA (Chiew and Elizabeth 2017; Qiwei et al. 2018; Silva and Molstad 2020; Tran and Duong 2018), and teachers' and learners' beliefs towards LA (Chamaipak and Sumittra 2016; Chun and Jingjing 2016; Lin and Reinders 2019; Szocs 2017a; Ustunluoglu 2009).

*Teachers' Beliefs about Learner Autonomy*

In a remarkable study, Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) examined language teachers' beliefs of autonomous language learning with respect to the autonomy-friendly techniques they used while teaching. By developing their own questionnaire to explore teachers' beliefs and by interviewing participants to elicit more information about their instructional practices of autonomy, the authors concluded that the teachers encouraged learners to be involved in the decision-making process because of the positive influence doing so had on learners' motivation and learning. Despite the interesting outcomes, their study was limited with regard to actual practices and learners' perceptions; ideally, real classroom activities and learners' reactions would have been measurably observed. In another study, Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) investigated teachers' beliefs and practices related to language learners' autonomy in a tertiary context. They employed a questionnaire to survey 359 teachers about beliefs, practices, and constraints in implementing LA. Similar to the research of Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), the results revealed that the participants endorsed LA and were eager to find effective ways of promoting it. However, the study focused on teachers' perceptions towards LA without including learners' beliefs, and it did not follow through with findings related to the constraints related to applying LA.

The research instrument designed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) has been employed in other studies (Ahmadianzadeh et al. 2018; Dogan and Mirici 2017; Duong 2014; Loi 2016). In general, teachers have been found to have highly positive views of LA, though they often claim to have difficulty applying their knowledge about LA (Duong 2014) or doubt their learners' abilities to take charge of their own learning (Asmari 2013; Loi 2016). Learners' experience with LA was found to be quite different (Ahmadianzadeh et al. 2018). Therefore, to avoid bias and provide a panoramic view of LA, incorporating learners' opinions is necessary to a certain extent.

LA has attracted a lot of attention in research on autonomous learning, with different researchers using a variety of approaches and research instruments. The study by Al-Busaidi and Al-Maamari (2014), which utilized semi-structured interviews and literature reviews, found teachers' understandings of LA to be variable, and it did not mention the effects or contributions of these understandings on either their professional development or their students. According to Szocs (2015), little is known about the nature of teachers' beliefs toward LA; despite teachers' positive attitudes toward LA, they were unwilling to empower their learners to make decisions about their own language learning approaches. However, these results were based on classroom observation, so there might be bias due to subjective perspectives. In addition, Chiew and Elizabeth (2017) conducted semi-structured interviews with five English teachers about their expectations and roles, the needed skills and teaching practices to foster LA, and the challenges in promoting LA in the classroom. They concluded that the development of autonomous language learning is very challenging and involves four components: educational policy makers, university administrators, teachers, and learners. However, the study had a small sample population, which might not reflect or convey pervasive perspectives on LA.

*Students' Beliefs about Learner Autonomy*

With regard to the role of learners in autonomous learning, researchers (Balcikanli 2010; Oraviwatnakul and Wichadee 2017; Qiwei et al. 2018; Szocs 2017a; Tran and Duong 2018) have investigated learners' beliefs in different ways. Specially, many studies have been carried out with students of English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL), and the results have shown that language learners believe strongly in autonomous language learning (Balcikanli 2010; Melor and Nur 2015; Oraviwatnakul and Wichadee 2017). Indeed, the impact of LA on English proficiency, attitudes toward English learning, and language learning behaviours was found to be positive by Oraviwatnakul and Wichadee (2017). However, the participants of the study were limited to a small number of respondents from a private university. Moreover, while the study employed Likert scales, the interpretation of the data analysis was not based thereon.

Anh (2018) investigated the beliefs of 60 EFL students, who stated that they had positive views of LA. Moreover, they thought LA was a long process that required both ongoing efforts from students and teachers' assistance. The study did not include the teachers' opinions, however, and because it was conducted using narrative interviews, the outcomes were subjective. In a mixed-methods study with 112 student teachers, Balcikanli (2010) used Camilleri's (1997) questionnaire and conducted interviews with 20 students. Although the student teachers were in favour of LA, most of them revealed that they discouraged students from participating in the decision-making process regarding the textbooks and the time and place of the course. The author concentrated on learners' beliefs, but there was no comparison with teacher autonomy.

To examine the relationship between students' beliefs and their language learning strategies, Tang and Tian (2015) conducted a study with 546 graduate students in China and found that the differences in genders, majors, age ranges, and proficiency levels led to disparity among the respondents. These results are somewhat similar to those of a quasi-experimental study conducted by Qiwei and colleagues (2018); the participants' (undergraduates) perceptions of LA were different between high- and low-level language achievers. This echoes a study from Sakai and Takagi (2009), who conducted research with 721 students, using a questionnaire to classify the respondents into independent users, independent learners, and dependent learners. The results showed that as learners became more successful, they seemed to become more autonomous. Similar to the research of Tang and Tian (2015) and Qiwei and colleagues (2018), this study failed to incorporate teachers' viewpoints on LA.

*Research Incorporating both Teachers' and Students' Beliefs about Learner Autonomy*

The inclusion of and comparison between teachers' and learners' beliefs towards autonomous language learning have been given little attention. Lin and Reinders (2019) did conduct mixed-methods research with 182 teachers and 668 students in seven Chinese universities to explore participants' readiness for psychological, technical, and behavioural autonomy. However, although the study emphasized students' and teachers' readiness for LA, the discrepancies between teachers' and students' perceptions were not contrasted. In a similar study, Chamaipak and Sumittra (2016) conducted qualitative research, interviewing 76 teachers and 116 lower-secondary students in 41 Thai schools. Their results indicated that both teachers and students had positive beliefs about LA. However, the students were not psychologically ready for LA, as they still needed mental support; this is in contrast with later findings from Lin and Reinders (2019). Due to the subjective nature of interviews, there is some doubt about the reliability of Chamaipak and Sumittra's (2016) findings.

With regard to the combination of teachers' and learners' beliefs toward LA, some researchers (Joshi 2011; Szocs 2017b; Ustunluoglu 2009; Van 2011) concluded that learners need to be supported in their English language learning and found that teachers' roles strongly influence learners' progress. Indeed, teachers were found to often take responsibility for helping their learners develop autonomy in language learning (Ustunluoglu 2009; Van 2011). Szocs (2017a) further concluded that the congruence between teachers' and learners' beliefs towards LA in the EFL context resulted in more successful student learning outcomes.

Previous studies have mainly concentrated on either teachers' or students' beliefs toward autonomous language learning, and not many studies have examined and contrasted students' and teachers' perceptions of LA with regard to responsibilities, abilities, and related activities both in and out of the classroom. Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps by addressing the following research questions:

- What are teachers' perceptions towards the three perspectives of learner autonomy?
- What are students' perceptions towards the three perspectives of learner autonomy?
- To what extent do teachers' and learners' beliefs align or differ?

The findings may contribute to the field of autonomous learning. Not many studies have attempted to determine teachers' and learners' perceptions of autonomy by investigating the differences between them; this is a unique feature of this study that could benefit school administrators, teachers, and students, as well as impact future studies.

## Methods

### *Research Design*

This study was primarily to investigate Vietnamese teachers' and learners' perceptions of autonomous language learning in English language learning. Using a stratified sampling method, 370 teachers and 392 students were chosen for the study. A descriptive approach was employed by adapting Ustunluoglu's (2009) questionnaire. Initially, contact was made with three university administrators to ask for permission to conduct the survey with EFL teachers and students. The respondents were asked to answer a questionnaire with two parts: demographic information and 42 items adapted from Ustunluoglu's (2009) questionnaire. The questionnaires, along with a letter of support from the university administrators, were shared with participants as both an email attachment with an active link to the Google Form and with assistance from the office of student affairs, who helped float paper copies of the questionnaires. The respondents were expected to return the questionnaires two weeks after the email was received. In the case of a low response rate, another email serving as a courtesy reminder would be sent to participants to politely ask them to take part in the survey. The collected data then went through data screening before being encoded with IBM SPSS for data treatment, and the researchers came to conclusions based on the results.

### *Sample Population*

Because of time and resource constraints, the sample population was selected during the first semester of the 2020-2021 school year from three universities of languages and international studies: Vietnam National University, Hanoi University, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, and Hue University. The study used the judgmental sampling technique to select the sample population because of uncertainty whether respondents would participate. The researchers employed Slovin's formula to determine a population of both teachers and students: from an estimated sample size of 20,000 students, 392 participants were chosen. For the teachers, an approximation of about 5,000 with a margin of error  $\pm 5\%$  was calculated, which yielded 370 teachers. In particular, 158 male teachers, accounting for 42,7% of the teacher population, and 212 female teachers (57,3%) took part in the study. With regard to the teachers' occupational experience, 30 teachers (8,1%) had fewer than five years teaching experience; 66 teachers (17,8%) had fewer than 10 years; 124 teachers (33,5%) had fewer than 15 years; 102 teachers fewer than 20 years (27,6%); and 48 teachers (13%) had more than 20 years teaching experience. When asked about their students' motivation, 130 teachers (8,1%) recognized that their students were highly motivated to learn English; 177 teachers (47,8%) said their students were motivated to learn English; and 63 teachers (17%) claimed that students were not motivated to learn English at all.

### *Research Instrument*

The study adapted the research instrument from Ustunluoglu (2009), piloting the study with 25 teachers and 70 students to evaluate reliability and applicability. The reliability of the questionnaire items ranged from  $0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$ , which is considered good according to Cronbach's alpha. The first part of the questionnaire discerned the respondents' demographics, while the second part had 42 items categorized into three sections. Section 1 had 10 questions about teachers' and students' perceptions of responsibilities. Section 2 had 10 questions investigating teachers' and students' beliefs about abilities related to LA, with choices of *very poor*, *poor*, *okay*, *good*, and *very good*. Section 3 included 22 questions about the frequency with which participants engaged in certain activities, with choices of *always*, *often*, *sometimes*, *rarely*, and *never*.

### *Procedure*

The researchers initially contacted three national and regional university administrators to explain the purpose of the study, gain ask for permission to conduct the study during the first semester of the 2020-2021 school year. After permission was granted, the researchers composed an email embedded with an active link to a Google Form, then the questionnaire was sent to the participants' email addresses (provided by the universities), and printouts of the questionnaire were delivered to the office of student affairs to be handed out. The questionnaire, which included the researchers' instructions, explained the objectives and relevance of the study, assured anonymity, and gave participants the option of discontinuing participation in the study. The respondents were asked to return the questionnaire within two weeks after the email was sent. An email thanking the respondents was sent as confirmation of participation.

When the raw data was received, both researchers spent a week screening it carefully, employing the stratified sampling method to get the targeted number. Finally, the expected samples were determined, and the screened data were encoded by IBM SPSS for the purpose of the data treatment.

### *Statistical Tools*

This study utilized a quantitative approach in the form of an attitudinal questionnaire. Specifically, descriptive frequencies were employed to analyse the demographic information and Section 1 of the questionnaire. Descriptive mean was used to find the mean and standard deviations for Sections 2 and 3; the Likert sales were (1–1.8) very low; (1.9–2.6) low; (2.7–3.4) moderate; (3.5–4.2) high; (4.3–5.0) very high. Paired-sample statistics were then employed to contrast the teachers' and learners' beliefs towards LA.

## Results

Most of the teachers believed they were responsible for students' progress during English lessons ( $n = 242$ ; 65,4%), though a minority thought that students should take charge of their own progress ( $n = 77$ ; 20,8%), and a few teachers ( $n = 51$ ; 13,8%) believed that teachers and students shared this responsibility. Students' opinions were similar to those of their teachers. The majority of the students also believed that students' progress during English lessons was the teachers' responsibility ( $n = 168$ ; 42,9%), though some thought it was the students' responsibility ( $n = 143$ ; 36,5%), and a few thought it was a shared duty of teachers and students ( $n = 81$ ; 20,7%).

In terms of ensuring students' progress outside of class, 234 teachers (63,2%) believed this to be the teachers' role. Another 58 teachers (15,7%) thought this was the students' responsibility, and 78 (21,1%) thought this responsibility should be shared by teachers and students. Students expressed similar viewpoints, with the majority of the students ( $n = 218$ ; 55,6%) considering this task to be the teachers' duty, while only 101 (25%) claimed that they took charge of their own progress outside of the classroom. The rest of the students ( $n = 73$ ; 18,6%) thought this responsibility belonged to both parties.

When examining students' motivation for learning English, teachers' and students' viewpoints were completely opposite from one another. Most of the teachers ( $n = 259$ ; 70%) asserted that they bore the responsibility for motivating their students to learn English, while only 53 teachers (14,3%) thought that students were responsible for motivating themselves. The remaining teachers ( $n = 58$ ; 15,7%) believed that increasing students' motivation to learn English was the responsibility of both teachers and students. In contrast, the majority of the students believed themselves to be in charge of their own motivation for learning English ( $n = 277$ ; 70,7%). Only 45 students (11,5%) believed this to be the teachers' duty, and only 70 (17,9%) expressed the opinion that this was a shared responsibility.

With regard to identifying students' weaknesses in English, many of the teachers claimed that this task was a part of their job ( $n = 257$ ; 69,5%). Only 48 (13%) assigned this duty to their students, while 65 (17,6%) thought it to be a shared responsibility between teachers and students. Similarly, a high number of students ( $n = 254$ ; 64,8%) stated that it was their teachers' responsibility to help them recognize their weaknesses in English. A more modest number ( $n = 85$ ; 21,7%) believed this to be their own responsibility, while the minority ( $n = 53$ ; 15,8%) thought this to be a mutual responsibility of teachers and students.

Furthermore, the majority of the teachers ( $n = 262$ ; 70,8%) believed that deciding the objectives of the English course was their own responsibility, whereas 34 teachers (12%) believed in letting their students decide, and 74 teachers (20%) thought this be a shared responsibility. Similarly, 261 students (66,6%) thought that their teachers should set the course objectives. Only a small number of students thought that they should be in charge of this duty ( $n = 69$ ; 17,6%), while 62 students (15,8%) believed this responsibility should be coordinated between teachers and students.

Most of the teachers ( $n = 253$ ; 68,4%) also thought they should bear the responsibility for deciding what should be learned next in English lessons; fewer ( $n = 55$ ; 14,9%) thought this was students' responsibility, while 62 (16,8%) thought this was the responsibility of both. Most of the students ( $n = 224$ ; 57,1%) also designated this as the teachers' task, though 75 (19,1%) thought they should decide on their own, and 93 (23,8%) believed this should be a cooperative decision between teachers and students.

With regard to choosing English lesson activities, 202 teachers (54,6%) believed this to be their responsibility. Surprisingly, one-third of the teachers ( $n = 124$ ; 33,5%) assumed that this task should be a negotiation between teachers and students, while 44 teachers (11,9%) thought that students should get to choose. Meanwhile, two-thirds of the students ( $n = 278$ ; 70,9%) believed that teachers were responsible for this; the numbers of students who believed it their own responsibility and who thought it a shared responsibility were the same ( $n = 57$ ; 14,5%).

The majority of the teachers ( $n = 251$ ; 67,8%) thought they were responsible for deciding on the length of time to be spent on each activity, though 52 (14,1%) said that this was the students' decision, and 67 (18,1%) believed this matter should be decided cooperatively. Most of the students ( $n = 289$ ; 73,7%) also thought that teachers should be responsible for deciding on the length of time spent on each activity, followed by the belief that it was the responsibility of both teachers and students ( $n = 62$ ; 15,8%) and the students' responsibility ( $n = 41$ ; 10,5%).

Most of the teachers ( $n = 283$ ; 76,5%) thought choosing what materials to use was their responsibility. Only 31 teachers (8,4%) thought that students should be responsible for the choice of materials, while 56 (15,1%) thought this decision should be made collaboratively. Similarly, most of the students ( $n = 276$ ; 70,4%) depended on their teachers for choosing the materials for their English lessons. A smaller number ( $n = 82$ ; 20,9%) believed it should be a joint decision, while only 34 (8,7%) thought it should be up to the students.

With regard to the evaluation of student learning, most of the teachers ( $n = 273$ ; 73,8%) ascertained that they should be responsible for assessing and evaluating the progress of students' learning; only 44 teachers (11,9%) thought this was the students' responsibility, while 53 (14,3%) thought it was a joint responsibility of students and teachers. The majority of the students also believed this activity was the teachers' responsibility ( $n = 340$ ; 86,7%), though a few ( $n = 45$ ; 11,5%) thought this was the students' responsibility. Only 7 (1,8%) thought this responsibility should be shared between teachers and students.

Table 1 presents the teachers' beliefs of students' abilities in autonomous learning. On average, the teachers believed in students' abilities to choose their own activities to a moderate extent. However, they highly believed in students' capabilities for choosing learning activities outside of class ( $M = 3.65$ ) and learning objectives in the class ( $M = 0.500$ ), as well as identifying their own weakness in English ( $M = 3.57$ ). Overall, the teachers' beliefs of students' abilities were found to be similar, as the highest standard deviation scores was 0.831 and the lowest one was 0.478.

<i>If your students had the opportunity, how good do you think they would be at...</i>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Legend</b>
11. choosing learning activities in class	370	3.39	0.488	moderate
12. choosing learning activities outside of class	370	3.65	0.478	high
13. choosing learning objectives in class	370	3.47	0.500	high
14. choosing learning objectives outside of class	370	3.31	0.680	moderate
15. choosing learning materials in class	370	2.86	0.831	moderate
16. choosing learning materials outside of class	370	2.96	0.705	moderate
17. deciding what students should learn next in English lessons	370	3.06	0.780	moderate
18. deciding how long to spend on each activity	370	2.72	0.740	moderate
19. identifying their weaknesses in English	370	3.57	0.502	high
20. evaluating their learning	370	3.25	0.638	moderate

Table 1: Teachers' opinions towards students' abilities in autonomous language learning

Students' self-assessments can be seen in Table 2. There were four items for which students had viewpoints similar to those of their teachers: they thought they were moderately able to decide on the length of time spent on each activity ( $M = 3.38$ ;  $SD = 0.486$ ), and they believed themselves highly capable of identifying their own weaknesses in English ( $M = 3.38$ ), choosing learning activities outside of class ( $M = 3.82$ ), and choosing learning objectives in class ( $M = 3.81$ ). As noted in Table 2, the students assessed some of their other abilities to be high, but the same abilities were assessed by the teachers to be moderate.

<i>If you had the opportunity, how good do you think you would be at...</i>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Legend</b>
11. choosing learning activities in class	392	3.77	0.419	high
12. choosing learning activities outside of class	392	3.82	0.386	high
13. choosing learning objectives in class	392	3.81	0.394	high
14. choosing learning objectives outside of class	392	3.76	0.428	high
15. choosing learning materials in class	392	3.89	0.319	high
16. choosing learning materials outside of class	392	3.54	0.499	high
17. deciding what you should learn next in your English lessons	392	3.51	0.501	high
18. deciding how long to spend on each activity	392	3.38	0.486	moderate
19. identifying your weaknesses in English	392	3.72	0.449	high
20. evaluating your learning	392	3.66	0.473	high

Table 2: Students' self-assessment of their abilities in their autonomous language learning abilities

Table 3 reveals teachers' perceptions of students' activities related to autonomous language learning. In particular, the results indicate that students had high levels of learner autonomy when doing voluntary assignments ( $M = 4.06$ ), collaborating on group assignments in English lessons ( $M = 3.50$ ), and working cooperatively with their friends ( $M = 3.59$ ). The teachers assessed that students had low levels of autonomy with regard to reading newspapers in English ( $M = 2.44$ ), listening to English songs ( $M = 2.68$ ), communicating with native English speakers in English ( $M = 2.53$ ), doing grammar exercises ( $M = 2.52$ ), and doing classifications or mind maps while studying ( $M = 2.65$ ). The majority of the items in Table 3 were rated as moderate. In general, the teachers had similar opinions, and the standard deviations did not fluctuate.

<i>Last year and in this academic year, how often do you think your students have...</i>	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Legend
21. done assignments which were not compulsory	370	3.56	0.701	high
22. noted down new words and their meanings	370	3.24	0.682	moderate
23. read newspapers in English	370	2.44	0.524	low
24. come to see you about their studies	370	3.40	0.543	moderate
25. read books or magazines in English	370	2.83	0.504	moderate
26. watched English TV programs	370	2.76	0.474	moderate
27. listened to English songs	370	2.68	0.518	low
28. talked to native English speakers in English	370	2.53	0.575	low
29. practiced using English with friends	370	2.94	0.841	moderate
30. done grammar exercises	370	2.52	0.599	low
31. done group assignments in English lessons	370	3.50	0.501	high
32. attended the self-study centre	370	2.86	0.633	moderate
33. asked you questions when they did not understand	370	2.90	0.755	moderate
34. made suggestions to you	370	2.69	0.582	moderate
35. planned their own lesson or studies	370	3.25	0.610	moderate
36. activated their prior knowledge while studying	370	3.01	0.635	moderate
37. made inferences about English lessons	370	2.76	0.521	moderate
38. done classifications or mind maps while studying	370	2.65	0.478	low
39. summarized their studies while studying	370	3.12	0.752	moderate
40. taken notes while studying	370	3.29	0.770	moderate
41. used resources while studying	370	2.82	0.449	moderate
42. worked cooperatively with their friends	370	3.59	0.499	high

Table 3: Teachers' perceptions towards students' autonomous language learning activities

When examining students' participation in autonomous activities, Table 4 shows that many outcomes were opposite from those of the teachers (Table 3). To be specific, students claimed to engage highly in noting down new words and their meanings, but the teachers' perceptions of this activity were moderate. Similarly, students expressed high engagement in visiting with their teachers concerning their work, whereas the teachers assessed this as moderate. A surprising fact was the contradiction between teachers and students in terms of listening to English songs: the teachers rated student engagement in this activity as low ( $M = 2.68$ ), while the students claimed to be highly engaged in listening to English songs ( $M = 3.75$ ). Such differences occurred in other areas as well, such as practicing using English with friends ( $M = 3.61$ ), asking teachers questions if they did not understand ( $M = 3.77$ ), planning their own lessons ( $M = 3.88$ ), activating their prior knowledge ( $M = 3.86$ ), summarizing their studies ( $M = 3.92$ ), taking notes ( $M = 4.29$ ), and using resources while studying ( $M = 3.88$ ). Student engagement in these items was rated as high by the students and moderate by the teachers. Moreover, the students believed that they did classifications while studying moderately ( $M = 2.90$ ), but the teachers rated students' performance in this area as low. The results of the standard deviation denote that students had similar opinions to one another, as the values were under 1,0%.

<i>Last year and in this academic year, how often have you...</i>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Legend</b>
21. done assignments which were not compulsory	392	4.06	0.743	high
22. noted down new words and their meanings	392	3.51	0.501	high
23. read newspapers in English	392	2.64	0.481	low
24. visited your teacher about your work	392	3.59	0.492	high
25. read books or magazines in English	392	3.18	0.383	moderate
26. watched English TV programs	392	3.17	0.379	moderate
27. listened to English songs	392	3.75	0.435	high
28. talked to native English speakers in English	392	2.47	0.500	low
29. practiced using English with friends	392	3.61	0.489	high
30. done grammar exercises	392	2.37	0.483	low
31. done group studies in English lessons	392	3.55	0.498	high
32. attended the self-study centre	392	3.30	0.459	moderate
33. asked the teacher questions when you didn't understand	392	3.77	0.419	high
34. made suggestions to the teacher	392	3.17	0.372	moderate
35. planned your lesson or studies	392	3.88	0.331	high
36. activated your prior knowledge while studying	392	3.86	0.350	high
37. made inferences about your lessons	392	3.15	0.361	moderate

38. done classifications while studying	392	2.90	0.306	moderate
39. summarized while studying	392	3.92	0.274	high
40. taken notes while studying	392	4.29	0.455	high
41. used resources while studying	392	3.88	0.328	high
42. worked cooperatively with your friends	392	4.23	0.421	high

Table 4: Students' frequency of involvement in autonomous language learning activities

## Discussion

Some research (Chamaipak and Sumittra 2016; Lin and Reinders 2019; Szocs 2017a; Ustunluoglu 2009; Van 2011) has investigated the contrast between teachers' and students' perceptions towards autonomous language learning. The teacher participants in this study considered themselves responsible for the improvement of teaching English classes at the tertiary level. Compared with the student respondents, the teachers' were similar in their beliefs that they should be held accountable for developing LA. As mentioned by Shreurs and Dumbraveanu (2014), LA includes life-long activities which require changes in pedagogical approaches. However, the current study's results revealed that although teachers and students understand the meaning of LA, both parties assume that teachers are responsible for developing students' autonomous language learning. This is opposite from the findings of Shreurs and Dumbraveanu (2014), though it is in line with the results of Ustunluoglu (2009) and Van (2011). However, it should be noted that the findings of Van (2011) do not clearly reflect a comparison between teachers' and students' views of responsibilities.

When presenting an overview of teachers' and students' perceptions of students' abilities, the results show that both groups thought students to be capable of choosing activities in LA, which is quite different beliefs related to responsibilities, wherein most students believed that their teachers were responsible for students' English learning progress. Unlike previous studies that investigated one-sided perceptions (i.e., either teachers or students or both factors; see, e.g., Alrabai 2017; Anh 2018; Borg and Al-Busaidi 2012; Lin and Reinder 2019; Silva and Molstad 2020), the present study combined the opinions of both teachers and students on the same items and contrasted them. This was done to shed light on any contradictions and avoid the bias of participants' tendencies to cling to their own standpoints, which is in line with Ustunluoglu (2009), who found significant differences between teachers' and students' opinions on students' abilities to choose their own autonomous language learning activities. Indeed, the teacher participants of this study expressed doubts about students' abilities to choose an English curriculum. This concern is similar to a study by Borg and Alshumaimeri (2009), who found that learners needed to consult with and receive advice from their teachers about what resources were appropriate for their English capabilities.

When considering LA, Benson (2013) confirmed that autonomy is the capacity to control important aspects of one's language learning. The discrepancies revealed in this study, however, reflect opposite perceptions of teachers and students in terms of students' involvement in activities. Previous research (e.g., Chamaipak and Sumittra 2016; Lin and Reinders 2019; Scott et al. 2015; Ustunluoglu 2009; Van 2011) has acknowledged the autonomous activities of doing homework, taking notes during lessons, or group study sessions. When learning English, reviewing one's prior knowledge is necessary because new forms of language should be revived, transforming a temporary source of information into permanent one through practice drills (Shreurs and Dumbraveanu 2014; Boyadzhieva 2016).

The findings related to autonomous activities done outside of the classroom, such as reading books, magazines, or newspapers in English, watching English TV programs, or listening to English songs, are in line with those of Ustunluoglu (2009) and Chun and Jingjing (2016), who also concluded that teachers had negative beliefs about students' involvement in LA outside of classroom activities. However, the findings contrast those of Benson (2013) and Chiew and Elizabeth (2017), whose teacher participants assessed their students' active participation in learning activities outside of class as being high. Surprisingly, the teacher participants of this study did not believe interaction between teachers and students to be high, while the students believed the opposite. The teachers' views may be due to their traditional role in Vietnamese culture as decision makers who play a crucial part in supervising students' autonomous learning activities (Anh 2018; Le 2013; Thu 2017). It is interesting to note here that the teacher participants acknowledged a high level of interaction among students during cooperative work or group studies, which was also found in other studies (e.g., Boyadzhieva 2016; Chang 2020; Gokhan and Ozgur 2018; Qiwei et al. 2018). This finding is beneficial for educators, who can change their curriculum to include more collaborative practices for learners, thereby improving their ELT. Finally, as seen in Table 3, the teachers highly appreciated the students' preparation of the lesson or studies such as doing voluntary assignments individually or with their friends, which proves that students are willing to participate in their studies (Tang and Tian 2015; Szocs 2017a; Unal 2017).

## **Conclusions**

This study investigated the contrastive analysis of university language teachers' and students' perceptions concerning responsibilities, abilities, and activities for promoting LA in English acquisition. Students may not be confident enough to claim to be sufficiently autonomous and take responsibility for their learning, so they assign almost all responsibility to their teachers (Thu 2017; Ustunluoglu 2009). Similar to students' assumptions, teachers, to a moderate extent, think that their students do not take responsibility for decisions related to learning assessment, curriculum, learning motivations, and pedagogical practices. Moreover, teachers in ELT assume that accountability is a part of their key role as a decision maker who should be responsible for their students LA. This finding is partly because

of Vietnamese educational culture; it is deeply rooted in the mind of Vietnamese educators to consider themselves dominant figures in their own right (e.g., Anh 2018; Loi 2016; Thu 2017). Traditional learning methods, in which EFL teachers play an important part, somehow influence learners' autonomous learning as well as their awareness of autonomy (Tran and Duong 2018).

With regard to the abilities needed to achieve LA, teachers and students share many opinions. Both students and teachers believe students to be capable in all facets of autonomous language learning; however, teachers believe these capabilities to be more moderate in some areas, particularly pedagogical practices and the choice of learning materials both in and outside of the classroom. These issues might account for the gradual transition from a fixed-curriculum to a credit-based system at the tertiary level in Vietnam (Van 2011). Contrary to students' expectations, most teachers felt positively about allowing their students to choose learning activities, class objectives, and what students learn in English lessons, and they are not actually sure about the student capabilities in choosing learning materials or the length of time spending each activity. These gaps highlight the need to integrate both learner independence and focused materials into language curriculum (Balcikanli 2010; Boyadzhieva 2016).

There is a mismatch of teachers' and students' perceptions about students' involvement in activities. Although the students claimed to participate at a high level in activities both in and out of the classroom, the teachers assessed that their students were involved only to a moderate extent. However, the teachers did agree that their students participated to a high level in exchanges with their peers during cooperative activities or group work. These results indicate that students are aware of LA. There should be a change in curricula, as mentioned previously, to promote students' involvement in activities which require active participation, as there is a need for providing students with more opportunities for group studies or cooperative work to encourage LA and foster self-confidence (Shahsavari 2014; Tang and Tian 2015). Developing such programs would entail more collaborative activities that classify students into groups, namely independent users, meaning those who use English in their daily lives; independent learners, meaning those who study by themselves; and dependent learners, meaning those who need their teachers' help when studying English (STEP 2006), which are essential for promoting LA. Importantly, many learners seem to feel reluctant to access authentic materials or communicate with foreigners in English, but these sources of information are important for students to improve their competence in every-day English (Sakai and Takagi 2009; Unal 2017).

## Implications

Many practical pedagogical implications can be drawn from this study. It is necessary to transfer responsibility from teachers to students by redesigning curricula and pedagogical practices in order to activate LA (Shreurs and Dumbraveanu 2014). Similarly, traditional teaching methods must be redesigned to help students

become active, independent learners (STEP 2006). Furthermore, teachers should not be considered dominant figures in ELT; they must understand that their role is that of a facilitator, coordinator, instructor, or coach, not a supervisor. It goes without saying that teachers are crucial to learners' progress in LA (Asmari 2013). However, it is time for teachers to surrender their responsibilities to their students, removing the obstacle of a long-standing teaching culture in which teachers believe they are in charge of students' success, particularly in ELT.

Students' unwillingness to access authentic English materials or engage in direct communication with native-English speakers discourages the development of LA. To address these issues, it is essential to restructure management, learning resources, teachers' professional development, and policy framework to promote LA. Contests, competitions, or talk shows in English might increase learners' interest and help them be more confident to use their English by improving their English competency. In addition, teachers are advised to engender mutual trust in students' abilities to develop LA. In fact, a classroom environment which is cooperative and respectful of learners' affective filters is necessary for students to feel secure and rely on their teachers to promote LA. By feeling unthreatened and encouraged, students will try their best to prove their abilities and enhance their skills and learning strategies (Borg and Al-Busaidi 2012; Dogan and Mirici 2017). It is hoped that providing favourable conditions in which students can express themselves will revive autonomous language learning, especially in the field of ELT.

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## Appendix 1

<i>When you are teaching English classes at the university, whose responsibility should it be to...</i>	N	Yours		Students'		Both	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1. ensure that students make progress during English lessons	370	242	65.4	77	20.8	51	13.8
2. ensure that students make progress outside of class	370	234	63.2	58	15.7	78	21.1
3. stimulate students' interest in learning English	370	259	70.0	53	14.3	58	15.7
4. identify students' weaknesses in English	370	257	69.5	48	13.0	65	17.6
5. decide on the objectives of the English course	370	262	70.8	34	9.2	74	20.0
6. decide what should be learned next in English lessons	370	253	68.4	55	14.9	62	16.8
7. choose what activities to use to learn English in English lessons	370	202	54.6	44	11.9	124	33.5
8. decide how long to spend on each activity	370	251	67.8	52	14.1	67	18.1
9. choose what materials to use to learn English in English lessons	370	283	76.5	31	8.4	56	15.1
10. evaluate students' learning	370	273	73.8	44	11.9	53	14.3

Table 1: Comparison of teachers' and students' attitudes toward teachers' responsibilities

<i>When you are taking English classes at the university, whose responsibility should it be to...</i>	N	Yours		Your Teachers'		Both	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1. ensure that you make progress during English lessons	392	143	36.5	168	42.9	81	20.7
2. ensure that you make progress outside of class	392	101	25.8	218	55.6	73	18.6
3. stimulate your interest in learning English	392	277	70.7	45	11.5	70	17.9
4. identify your weaknesses in English	392	85	21.7	254	64.8	53	13.5
5. decide on the objectives of your English course	392	69	17.6	261	66.6	62	15.8
6. decide what you should learn next in your English lessons	392	75	19.1	224	57.1	93	23.8
7. choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons	392	57	14.5	278	70.9	57	14.5
8. decide how long to spend on each activity	392	41	10.5	289	73.7	62	15.8
9. choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lessons	392	34	8.7	276	70.4	82	20.9
10. evaluate your learning	392	45	11.5	340	86.7	7	1.8

Table 2: Comparison of students' and teachers' attitudes toward students' responsibilities

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## **PRIMERJAVA POJMOVANJ VIETNAMSKIH UČITELJEV IN ŠTUDENTOV O SAMOSTOJNEM UČENJU JEZIKA**

**Povzetek:** V članku predstavljamo kontrastivno analizo pojmovanj vietnamskih učiteljev in študentov o samostojnem učenju angleškega jezika. Udeležence študije smo izbrali med učitelji in študenti dveh nacionalnih in ene regionalne univerze v prvem semestru študijskega leta 2020/21. Skladno s Slovinovo formulo ( $r = \pm 5\%$ ) smo izbrali 370 učiteljev in 392 študentov. Poslali smo jim anketne vprašalnike v elektronski in tiskani obliki, ki smo jih prilagodili po Ustunluoglu (2009). Vprašalniki so prestali test zanesljivosti (koeficient Cronbach alfa je znašal med 0,9 in 0,8). Vključevali so postavke, ki so se nanašale na tri različna področja samostojnega delovanja študentov, tj. področje odgovornosti, zmožnosti in dejavnosti. Rezultati raziskave so pokazali, da študentje svojo odgovornost prenašajo na učitelje, pri čemer tudi učitelji svojo vlogo razumejo kot dominantno in menijo, da so odgovorni za to, kako se študentje učijo jezika. Tako učitelji kot študentje so se večinoma strinjali, da bi bili slednji zmožni kakovostnega samostojnega učenja jezika, če bi imeli za to priložnosti. Ugotovitve so tudi do določene mere protislovne: učitelji so namreč trdili, da so njihovi študentje le zmerno aktivni, ko gre za samostojne učne dejavnosti, medtem ko so študentje trdili, da je bila njihova aktivnost na visoki ravni. Zdi se torej, da bi bilo potrebno uskladiti odgovornost učiteljev in študentov, čemur bi veljalo prilagoditi tudi kurikularne prakse in pristope, zlasti tako, da bi študente spodbujali k uporabi avtentičnih učnih gradiv ter h komunikaciji z naravnimi govorci angleščine.

**Ključne besede:** kontrastivna analiza, samostojnost študentov, samostojno učenje jezika, odgovornost, praktični didaktični pristopi

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