



**ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER AUTONOMY IN THE
VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT: ENABLING FACTORS
AND BARRIERS ARISING FROM ASSESSMENT PRACTICE**

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ABSTRACT

Learner autonomy has gained particular attention in Vietnamese higher education since a major education reform launched in 2005. Although a number of studies have been conducted to investigate the concept in the Vietnamese higher education context, most of them have focused on exploring teachers' and students' perceptions and beliefs around the concept of autonomy (T. V. Nguyen, 2011; Dang, 2012; Humphreys & Wyatt, 2013; T. N. Nguyen, 2014), and on the possibility of promoting it in Vietnamese universities (Trinh, 2005; L. T. C. Nguyen, 2009; Q. X. Le, 2013; Phan, 2015). There appear to be no studies on the demonstration of learner autonomy and the potential factors, including factors relating to assessment practice, that support or inhibit its demonstration in the Vietnamese higher education context.

Building on a social constructivist paradigm and sociocultural theories of learning, this qualitative case study aims to investigate the demonstration of learner autonomy in the context of assessment in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes in a university in Vietnam, and the (potential) factors in assessment that facilitate or constrain the demonstration of learner autonomy in that context. The data were collected through participant observation of teachers' and students' practices in three EFL classes at the university during a complete semester, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with three teachers and sixteen students, and post-observation interviews with the three teachers and their students. Additional data which characterised the context of the study were gathered and included documents at the researched university relating to higher education policies, assessment policies, English teaching and learning policies, EFL curriculum and syllabus, test samples, and English teaching textbooks.

The study found that students generally demonstrated a low level of autonomy in the classroom despite their positive attitude towards the concept and their awareness of its role in English learning. Primary contributing factors included negative washback of current assessment systems on teaching and learning practices, prescribed assessment practices in the class, teachers' and learners' limited and divergent understanding about the concept of learner autonomy, and their limited understanding about the role of assessment in learning in general and in learner autonomy promotion and development in particular. The study also found that students who stated that English was relevant to their personal needs were generally more autonomous outside of the classroom than inside it. Findings from this study support the view that learner autonomy reflects the relationship between learners and the learning environment, and is an emergent product of the interaction between learners and contextual factors including their teacher, their peers, the learning task, class rules and values, and university values and regulations.

The study's findings are significant, as they highlight the social dimension of learner autonomy and the importance of facilitating favourable conditions for teachers to provide learner autonomy and for learners to manifest it. The study also highlights the need to reconsider assessment practices to promote learner autonomy.

THESIS DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing as a single, slightly wavy horizontal line.

Date: 8th October 2019

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AfL	Assessment for Learning
AoL	Assessment of Learning
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
BCE	Before Common Era
CD	Compact Disc
CE	Common Era
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
FA	Formative Assessment
GPA	Grade Point Average
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
KET	Key English Test
KNLNNVN	Khung Năng Lực Ngoại Ngữ Việt Nam (Vietnam Framework of Reference for English)
LA	Learner Autonomy
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
RU	Research University
SA	Summative Assessment
UN	United Nations
VHE	Vietnamese Higher Education
WTO	World Trade Organization
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter overview

This introductory chapter presents an overview of the research inquiry. The chapter starts with the background to the research, followed by the focus of the research, research question and objectives, and the introduction of some key concepts. The chapter ends with an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.1. Background to the research

English teaching and learning in Vietnam

English has played an important role in Vietnam for many years, especially since 1986 when Vietnam opened its doors to the world, seeking integration and cooperation. The role of English in Vietnam is apparent in many fields, including international relations, employment and education. First, English is now deemed the global language and is used as a means of communication in a number of important international organisations and associations, such as the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations (UN). Therefore, English can be considered a key for Vietnam to develop and strengthen international relations and economic cooperation. Moreover, English has been recognised as the key to “research and development in all areas of scientific, technological and commercial endeavour” (Denham, 1992, p. 62), so it is believed that English will help Vietnam to make use of the world’s advances in science and technology to catch up with other countries in the region and in the world. Secondly, since opening its doors to the world, a number of foreign investors and companies have come to Vietnam, and millions of foreign tourists have travelled to

Vietnam for their holidays. These factors mean that Vietnamese job seekers need to have good English competence to gain an advantage in the job market, as English has now become the passport to any well-paid job in Vietnam (Hoang, 2010; Phan, Vu, & Bao, 2014). Thirdly, the majority of sources of information on the Internet are in English, so a good command of English allows not only students but also people from all walks of life to approach these rich and invaluable sources of information. Moreover, being competent in English can help open the door for Vietnamese students to advanced education systems and prestigious universities worldwide, because the prerequisite for an offer or scholarship to study abroad in these education systems and universities is English competency (Phan et al., 2014).

The importance of English in the VHE manifests itself in many ways. First, it has been highlighted in several documents issued by the Vietnamese Assembly, the Vietnamese Communist Party, the Vietnamese Government, and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). For example, the Government's Vietnamese Education Strategies document specifies that one of the important attributes that Vietnamese students must possess is English competency (Vietnamese Government [VG], 2005). In addition, it is stated in the Vietnamese Education Law (2005) that the foreign language taught in the national education system must be "widely used in international communication" (Vietnamese National Assembly [VNA], 2005, p. 2). In 2008, the National Foreign Language Project specified English as the foreign language to be taught at all education levels in Vietnam, and stated that Vietnamese students need to acquire a certain level of English after completing each education level in order to be able to communicate and work in a global working environment (VG, 2008). Secondly, the prioritisation of English can also be seen in the curriculum for English at tertiary level. English is compulsory in the curriculum of all higher education programs, and the

time allocated to it is greater than the time allotted to any other subject - 240 hours in total for general English, and from 60 to 90 hours in total for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (H. T. Le, 2013). English is also a prerequisite in the entrance exams to master and doctoral programs in Vietnam (Ministry of Education and Training [MOET], 2014, 2017). According to the MOET (2015), students must have English competence equivalent to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels A2, B1 and B2 to receive their university master and doctoral degree, respectively. Thirdly, the approval in 2008 of the national foreign language project entitled “Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, Period 2008 – 2020” (with a budget of up to 450 million US dollars) proved that English teaching and learning is one of the priorities in the government’s investment strategies and education policies.

Despite all the efforts made, however, the quality of English teaching and learning at tertiary level is far from adequate (Hoang, 2010; Trinh & Mai, 2018). There is evidence to suggest that the English proficiency of a large number of students is disappointingly low (H. T. Le, 2013; Tran, 2013). For example, according to a report from a conference at Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh in 2017, 85% of tertiary students at this university did not meet the required standard for English competency (Phuong Trinh, 2017). In addition, students do not seem to be confident with their English, and the majority of non-English major students cannot function properly in English despite years of studying it at school and university (Le, 2011; Tran, 2013; Vietnamese Prime Minister, 2008). As a result, graduates do not meet the English competency requirements of job recruiters. According to the Head of the Human Resources Department at Panasonic Vietnam, Vietnamese graduates’ English speaking, presentation and writing skills are inadequate (Đ. Nguyen, 2016).

Among a series of problems blamed for the poor results of English teaching and learning at higher education levels, the most prominent are the teacher-centred teaching method, the exam-directed curriculum and summative grammar-based assessment (Hoang, 2010; Tran, 2013; Viet Toan, 2013; Trinh & Mai, 2018). The immediate consequences of teacher-centredness are students' passivity in learning and their dependence on teachers for knowledge. Both of these signal a huge lack of autonomy, influencing the effectiveness of English learning. The use of an exam-directed curriculum and summative grammar-based assessment methods also lead to a rote learning style, and the neglect of communicative language skills in English teaching (Hoang, 2010; Tran, 2013), both of which also have a negative effect on Learner Autonomy (LA). Yet autonomy in language learning is vital to the success of English learning (Dafei, 2007; Pan & Chen, 2015; Faramarzi, Elekaei, & Tabrizi, 2016). These problems suggest that key potential solutions for the current ineffectiveness of English teaching and learning may include the promotion of LA and a re-evaluation of current assessment methods.

Learner autonomy and assessment in Vietnamese higher education policies

LA, and innovation in assessment (which aims to promote LA), have been made the focus in the Vietnamese Higher Education (VHE) policies. In 2008, the MOET required all universities in Vietnam to adopt a credit-based system before 2010. In this system, students have to be responsible for making autonomous decisions about their own learning consonant with their learning conditions and capabilities (MOET, 2008). This system also requires innovation in the assessment regime so that students' attendance and class participation are accounted for in the final grade, and ongoing assessment criteria and practices are decided by teachers, rather than by departments or universities (MOET, 2008). In addition, the Vietnamese Communist Party's Resolution No 29-

NQ/TW on basic and comprehensive education and training reform emphasised that assessment practices had to be reformed because assessment and testing methods were recognised as being outdated and inauthentic (Vietnamese Communist Party [VCP], 2013) instead of flexible and varied—both criteria which the Vietnamese Communist Party regards as significant attributes of assessment. The assessment of students' learning should therefore not only be tied to one final end-of term test, but be based on “spoken, written, essays, assignments or all these assessment methods” (Vietnamese Communist Party, 2013, p. 6). It was thought that the assessment focus should move from summative to formative in order to develop students' initiative, awareness, creativity, self-study and sustainability (VCP, 2013). Moreover, the National Foreign Language Project approved in 2008 emphasised the need to make English teaching more student-centred, moving from language teaching as the conveying of knowledge to learning as the active construction of knowledge. LA thus became a major goal in language teaching. English assessment practices were also substantially modified. As a consequence, a number of conferences, workshops and training sessions have been held in several universities in Vietnam, aiming to include new ideas and methods in assessment practices in VHE.

The relationship between learner autonomy and assessment

Assessment is widely recognised as having a profound impact on LA (Falchikov & Boud, 1989; Little, 2003a; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Everhard, 2015a), depending on how and why it is used. Assessment is often perceived as serving two purposes: collecting evidence of students' achievement or level of performance against the specified standards or objectives, and supporting students' learning. These two purposes are often referred to as Summative Assessment (SA), or Assessment of Learning (AoL) (Wiliam

& Black, 1996; Stiggins, 2005), and Formative Assessment (FA), or Assessment for Learning (AfL) (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Assessment Reform Group, 2002).

AoL is often viewed as not supporting, or even as inhibiting LA (Little, 2003a; Harland, McLean, Wass, Miller, & Sim, 2014; Benson, 2015; Everhard, 2015a; Wass, Harland, McLean, Miller, & Sim, 2015). This is because AoL is underpinned by a behaviourist theory of learning, which perceives knowledge as being transmitted from teachers to students, and characterises students as passive recipients of knowledge and outsiders in the assessment process (James, 2006; Everhard, 2015a).

In contrast, AfL makes LA one of its central aims (Sadler, 1989; Assessment Reform Group, 2002; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004a; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Woods, 2015). However, AfL does not automatically lead to LA. The impacts of AfL on LA can vary depending on many factors, including how AfL is used in the class (Marshall & Drummond, 2006), types of AfL used (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008; Willis, 2011b), and the teacher-student relationship in AfL, especially the teacher-student power relationship (Gipps, 2002; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008; Willis, 2011a).

According to Gipps (2002) and Marshall and Drummond (2006), the promotion of LA in the context of assessment requires the sharing of power and control with students. That is, students should be involved in making decisions about learning and assessment. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the power-dynamic that exists between teachers and learners in assessment practice in order to identify the assessment-related factors that enable or constrain LA.

1.2. Research focus

As discussed above, innovation in teaching methodology and improvement in assessment methods that would lead to increased LA, have been the focus of the

education reforms in Vietnam. However, there seems to be a misalignment between the rhetoric of documents issued by the Government and the MOET and the reality of practice. ‘Learner autonomy’ and a ‘learning society’ (VG, 2005) are far-reaching targets. In a study carried out on LA in the Vietnamese University credit-based system in 2015, A. T. Tran (2015) concludes that in reality, students have yet to take the initiative in searching for knowledge. They only do what is required by the lecturers and only study what is accounted for in the final grade. Students tend not to do tasks assigned by the lecturer if the tasks are not assessed and they are not given a mark. Additionally, although LA has been emphasised in many policy documents regarding education in general and higher education in particular, there has been no specific and systematic plan for implementing LA in Vietnamese education (Phan & Hamid, 2017). It seems that the policy goal was “dumped into local contexts” without considering how it would be enacted by other agents involved, such as academic administrators, teachers and learners (Phan & Hamid, 2017, p. 3). The term also has not been systematically and consistently described across these documents, making it challenging for the teachers (let alone learners) to grasp what these terms entail in terms of actual behaviours. This means that these policies display limited effectiveness in practice.

Moreover, assessment practices still focus more on the purposes of certification than on learning purposes (T. H. Nguyen, Warren, & Fehring, 2014; Trinh & Mai, 2018). The important functions of supporting present and future learning through assessment practices (Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2006) and supporting students’ autonomy (Sadler, 1989; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Everhard, 2015a; Woods, 2015) are often excluded. Although AfL practices have been adopted by English language teachers, they have not been as effective as expected due to the sociocultural

characteristics of Vietnamese students and classrooms (Ho, 2015; Pham & Renshaw, 2015; T. D. Tran, 2015).

In Vietnam, only a few studies have been completed which address LA and how to promote it in higher education. These include studies on the possibility of promoting LA in Vietnamese universities (Trinh, 2005; Nguyen, 2009; Q. X. Le, 2013; Phan, 2015), and studies on the perceptions and beliefs of English language teachers and students (T. V. Nguyen, 2011; Dang, 2012; Humphreys & Wyatt, 2013; T. N. Nguyen, 2014; V. L. Nguyen, 2016). However, there appear to be no studies on assessment and autonomy in the VHE context, and nothing that addresses how the one influences the other, how they are related, and how assessment can be used to promote LA. Therefore, this study was carried out in order to explore the impacts of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) assessment on the demonstration of LA and the factors in EFL assessment that promote or hinder the demonstration of LA.

1.3. Research question and research objectives

This thesis aims to investigate the following overarching research question:

What are the factors in assessment that enable or constrain the demonstration of learner autonomy in learning English as a Foreign Language in the Vietnamese Higher Education context?

In order to achieve this aim, the research addresses the following objectives:

- Explore English language teachers' and students' understandings of the concept of LA
- Examine English language teachers' and students' perspectives on assessment and the relationship between assessment and LA
- Investigate the current EFL assessment practices in the VHE context

- Investigate students' demonstration of LA in learning English in the VHE context.

1.4. Significance of the study

Although a large number of studies have been conducted on assessment and autonomy, most focus on the influences of (a) particular assessment technique(s) on promoting LA. There have been studies on self-assessment, peer-assessment and LA (e.g., Berry, 2009; Taras, 2010; Everhard, 2015b; Panadero, Jonsson, & Botella, 2017; Han & Fan, 2019); learning portfolios and LA (Kohonen, 2000; Little, 2004b, 2010; Duong, 2015; T. Q. Tran & Duong, 2018); and formative assessment and LA (Davison, 2011; Willis, 2011b). Everhard (2015a) points out that not much has been done to explore the relationship between assessment and LA in language learning, especially on how the one impacts the other. Therefore, the current research will contribute to the understanding of assessment-related factors that can support or hinder the demonstration of LA.

This study is also significant because it presents an overarching view of the characterisation of both assessment and LA in practice in the VHE context. This then provides an empirical basis for policy makers and stakeholders in Vietnam to make appropriate interventions in the current assessment regime so that it can promote learning in general and LA in particular.

1.5. Key concepts in relation to learner autonomy

This study distinguishes three concepts of LA, developed further in the literature review: *autonomy capacity*, *autonomy offered*, and *autonomy demonstrated*. *Autonomy capacity* is conceptualised as learners' ability to take control of their own learning

(Benson, 2011). This capacity is conceived as being innate, and can be inhibited or facilitated by different factors making up the learning environment. This capacity includes two components: ‘ability’ (knowledge and skills) and ‘desire’ (Benson, 2013). *Autonomy offered* is perceived as the level of freedom (e.g., the extent to which students are permitted to control their learning) or opportunities created for learners to exert control over their learning. *Autonomy demonstrated* is the extent to which students actually exercise their capacity to take control of their learning in different learning situations.

Autonomy offered was categorised into three levels: *prescribed*, *bounded* and *open*. *Prescribed* refers to a situation where teachers decide all aspects of a task. *Bounded* refers to a situation where students decide some aspects of a task. *Open* refers to a situation where students decide all aspects of a task.

Autonomy demonstrated was categorised into three levels: *compliant*, *reactive*, and *proactive*. *Compliant* describes students who closely followed the teacher’s instruction. *Reactive* describes students who initiate some actions in order to follow an other-initiated learning agenda. *Proactive* describes students who initiate an agenda for their learning and actions in order to complete their self-determined goal.

1.6. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. This chapter outlines the background of the study, the research focus, research question, research objectives, the significance of the study, and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 describes the sociocultural and historical features of the research context. It provides brief geographical, historical and cultural information about Vietnam, the characterisation of its higher education and higher education reforms, and

the history of foreign language education in general and English teaching and learning in particular in Vietnam. Chapter 2 also provides information about the research site, its practice of English teaching and learning, and its practice of assessment of English.

Chapter 3 presents an overview of sociocultural theories of learning that underpin this research, and discusses central concepts and their implications for conceptualising LA, assessment and the relationship between them. Fundamental issues relating to understanding and implementing LA in practice are also considered. Chapter 3 also discusses two forms of assessment—assessment of learning and assessment for learning—and their relationship with LA.

Chapter 4 describes social constructivism and the relevance of its ontological and epistemological principles to the current research. The chapter then outlines the research design, which uses a qualitative case study approach, and data collection methods, which involve observations, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Participant selection, data analysis methods, measures to ensure research quality, and ethical considerations are also elucidated in this chapter.

Chapter 5 reports the findings from interviews with three English language teachers and sixteen non-English major students about their understanding of LA and their perspectives on assessment and the relationship between assessment and LA. This chapter also presents the students' self-report of their English learning outside of the class under the lens of 'autonomy demonstrated'.

Chapter 6 presents the findings from observations of three English classes. It reports teachers' assessment practices and the students' responses to these practices in the light of 'autonomy offered' and 'autonomy demonstrated'.

Chapter 7 discusses the findings from Chapters 5 and 6 in relation to the different research objectives and the overarching research question.

Chapter 8 draws together the conclusions, contributions, limitations, and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Chapter overview

This case study adopted a sociocultural perspective of learning to investigate the demonstration of LA in the context of assessment practices in EFL classes in VHE. Therefore, understanding the sociocultural and historical features of the research context where the practices of English teaching, learning and assessment are happening is crucial. This chapter provides information about Vietnam, its history and cultural values, VHE, and education reforms in Vietnam that offer implications for assessment and LA. It also describes the history of foreign language education in Vietnam in general, and English in particular. It then describes the research site in terms of its background information, the practices of English teaching and learning, and the practices of EFL assessment at the university.

2.1. Broader research context

2.1.1. Vietnam in brief

Vietnam is located in South-eastern Asia and shares its land borders with China, Laos, and Cambodia. Vietnam has an area of 331,210 square kilometres, which makes it the fourth biggest country in this region in terms of area. According to data from the World Fact Book, in June 2018, the population of Vietnam reached approximately 97,040,334 people, making it the third most populous country in the region (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2019). Vietnam has 54 ethnic groups, among which the Kinh Group accounts for 85.7% of the population (CIA, 2019). Hanoi is the capital city, and the biggest city in the country. It is often considered the cultural, political, economic and educational centre of the country. The official language in Vietnam now is Vietnamese.

Brief history

The history of Vietnam is characterised by a millennium of Chinese domination, which began in 111 BCE and ended in 938 CE with the victory of Bach Dang. During the next millennium, from 939-1859 CE, the country became independent and was ruled by different Vietnamese feudal dynasties, although it was at times invaded by the Chinese. The country was occupied and colonised by the French from 1858 until the August Revolution of 1945, when the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was born. In 1946, the French reinvaded Vietnam and only withdrew their troops in 1954 when they were totally defeated at Dien Bien Phu. The next twenty years witnessed the North-South Vietnam war and the dividing of the country. In 1975, the war ended, resulting in the reunification of the North and the South and the proclamation of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. During the first decade after the reunification, Vietnam struggled with its centralised and subsidised mechanism of economic management in the context of war legacies and isolation, forcing the country to opt for an economic reform policy in 1986. Since 1986, Vietnam has been striving to achieve its goals through economic, political, social and educational reforms.

Cultural values

Vietnamese indigenous culture is heavily influenced by the *Three Teachings* of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism (Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA], 2016a; Q. H. Vuong et al., 2018). Confucianism and Taoism were imported into Vietnam from China during the Chinese domination from 111 BCE to 938 CE, and Buddhism was imported into Vietnam from India under the Ly dynasty in the 11th century (London, 2011; MFA, 2016b, 2016a; Q. T. N. Nguyen, 2016). These *Three Teachings* were blended and adapted into Vietnamese indigenous cultures (Le, 2011; Q. H. Vuong et al., 2018), and served as the basis for the nation's governance, education, social order and moral rules (Q. T. N. Nguyen, 2016). However, among the *Three Teachings*, Confucianism has the

most significant influence on Vietnamese thoughts and culture (He et al., 2011; London, 2011; Q. T. N. Nguyen, 2016; Q. H. Vuong et al., 2018).

Two legacies of Confucianism that have direct implications for the promotion and demonstration of LA in the VHE context are those of collectivism and respect for learning, teachers and knowledge (He et al., 2011).

Collectivist values

Vietnamese culture is a collectivist culture (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Trần, 2001; Le, 2011; N. T. Nguyen, 2016), in which the desires and needs of individuals are often considered less important than the demands and interests of groups (Wagner III, 1995), and people's actions, beliefs, and attitudes are regulated by the community they belong to (Hofstede, 1986). Collectivists prioritise well-being of the groups to which they belong, so they often respect harmony in the community and avoid confrontation among people (Hofstede, 1986; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2005).

Collectivist values have significant impacts on teaching and learning in Vietnam. Collectivist students are interdependent and reliant on groups, so they are likely to be more comfortable working in groups or with peers than working individually (Wagner III, 1995; Nguyen, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2005). Therefore, in order to promote LA among students, cooperative and collaborative learning activities should be used to maximise students' engagement and participation. Additionally, teachers should pay attention to social or group autonomy rather than individual autonomy, by creating activities or situations for this collective autonomy to be manifested.

As collectivist values promote the avoidance of conflicts and confrontations among members in the community, these values can prevent learners from displaying their initiative and expressing their opinions. For example, collectivist values can discourage students from providing feedback to their colleagues and carrying out peer-

assessment, out of a fear that such activities would create conflict with their colleagues (Pham & Gillies, 2010; Ho, 2015). As a result, collectivist values may serve to limit students' involvement in the assessment process. Additionally, due to the respect for harmony and the hierarchical orders in relationships between superiors and subordinates in a collectivist society, teachers are often considered as having authoritative power in transmitting knowledge and skills to students, making teacher-centred transmission the dominant model of teaching in Vietnamese classes (Le, 2011; Ho, 2015; Kaur & Noman, 2015). This model of teaching underestimates the active role of learners in the learning process, and hence discourages the promotion and demonstration of LA in learning (C. T. Nguyen, 2011)

Face-saving is a prominent feature of collectivist culture, and is defined as “the preserving of one's reputation, credibility, or dignity” (Lexico dictionaries online, 2019). This value manifests in people's careful choices and thoughtful decisions about what to say to protect their image and avoid hurting others' feelings (Q. V. Tran, To, Nguyen, Lam, & Tran, 1996; Merkin, 2017). Face-saving facilitates learners' passiveness and discourages their initiative in learning (Marginson, 2011) because students might not want to risk their face by volunteering their ideas or risk others' face by criticising or offering conflicting opinions (Nguyen, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2006). In the classroom context, students might avoid questioning their teachers' knowledge or showing their disagreement with teachers' opinions. As a result, students may be overly compliant with teachers' instructions and fail to participate fully (He et al., 2011; Marginson, 2011).

Respect for knowledge and teacher

Vietnamese people have great respect for knowledge and teachers thanks to Confucianist legacy (Nguyen et al., 2006; He et al., 2011; Li et al., 2011; London,

2011). Vietnamese people believe in the strength of education and knowledge. They believe that knowledge can change people's lives, and that investment in education is the most beneficial investment. These beliefs are reflected in several Vietnamese proverbs, such as *một kho vàng không bằng một nang chữ* [gold is not as precious as knowledge] and *người không học như ngọc không mài* [people without education are like unpolished gemstones]. According to Ballard and Clanchy (1991), knowledge can be conceptualised along a continuum from conserving to extending—depending on the subject's attitudes towards, and beliefs about, knowledge, authority and teaching style. The conserving end is characterised by respect for written information and authoritative texts, and the recognition of teachers as knowledge transmitters. The extending end is characterised by the encouragement of self-inquiry for knowledge and criticising, extending, and generating knowledge. Due to Confucianist legacy, Vietnamese attitudes towards knowledge fall on the conserving end (To, 2010; Le, 2011), and students often opt for rote learning, focusing on “repetition, recitation, and memorisation of factual information from the textbooks” (He et al., 2011, p. 98).

Within the Confucianist tradition, teachers are not only educationalists, but also role models of moral conducts (Wang, 2003; Shim, 2008). It is officially stated in the Vietnamese Education Law that teachers must study and improve themselves constantly, so as to set bright examples for learners (Education law 2005). Teachers are also considered as owners of knowledge and ‘gurus’ who are expected to “satisfy learners in the search for knowledge and virtues” (Nguyen et al., 2006, p. 74; Q. T. N. Nguyen, 2016). The importance of teachers is also reflected in Vietnamese proverbs, such as *một chữ cũng là thầy, nửa chữ cũng là thầy* [a person who teaches us anything, big or small, is our teacher] and *không thầy đố mày làm nên* [without teachers, we cannot grow up or be educated properly and successfully] (G. T. Vuong, 2018). Due to

the highly respected status of teachers, the teaching job is often considered the ‘noblest among the nobles’, and the teachers are often perceived as the ‘centre’ of the learning process. The respect for teachers may improve the teacher-student relationship, which is believed to be a crucial factor in the promotion of LA in the AfL context (Willis, 2011a). However, this value can make students believe that teachers own knowledge, and what teachers know is unquestionable (Q. T. N. Nguyen, 2016), hindering students’ critical and independent thinking, their initiative in learning, and, in turn, their demonstration of LA.

2.1.2. Vietnamese higher education

Higher education in Vietnam refers to “academic education at junior college and universities which award diploma, bachelor, master and doctoral degrees” (Đỗ & Đỗ, 2014, p. 46). In order to be admitted to a higher education institution in a collegiate or undergraduate program, students need to have the upper-higher secondary school graduation certificate and meet the admission requirements of that institution. Prior to 2015, students used to take the entrance exam to university and be selected on the basis of their scores (Đỗ & Đỗ, 2014). In 2015, the MOET put an end to the university entrance exam and merged it with the upper-secondary graduation exam to make one National Upper-Secondary Graduation Exam. Since then, the result from the National Upper-Secondary Graduation Exam has been used to determine admission to universities and colleges (World Education News and Reviews [WENR], 2017).

The system of higher education institutions (HEIs) is categorised into public, private and foreign-owned institutions (Đỗ & Đỗ, 2014). Thanks to the *Doi Moi* policy and the reforms in education, Vietnamese tertiary education has expanded dramatically. The number of public institutions has increased from 103 to 170, and the number of private institutions grew from one to 65 between 1992 and 2017. The number of

students enrolled in HEIs also increased more than tenfold, from 162,000 students in the academic year of 1992-1993 to 1,707,025 students in the academic year of 2017-2018 (Hayden & Lam, 2010; MOET, 2018).

Although the MOET is not the sole agency to take responsibility for the operation of HEIs, HEIs, excluding specialised institutions, universities and schools, are under the direct management of the MOET (Hayden & Lam, 2010; London, 2011). The MOET exerts control over many aspects of higher education. Its responsibilities include drafting education planning strategies for the country, proposing education laws and policies to the National Assembly for approval, administering the national Upper-Secondary Graduation Exam, controlling the national curriculum frameworks, approving curricular frameworks for all tertiary programs, supervising and managing quality assurance, and accreditation (Hayden & Lam, 2010; London, 2011; Đõ & Đõ, 2014; WENR, 2017). VHE is still undergoing a reform process. The Vietnamese government is attempting to decentralise management and grant more autonomy to HEIs. HEIs can now enjoy more autonomy in terms of “training, scientific research, organization, personnel, finance and international cooperation” (VNA, 2012, p. 14). For example, they can now determine their curricula and admission quotas (VNA, 2012). Despite some changes and achievements, the management system of higher education in Vietnam is still characterised as ‘top-down hierarchical management’ (WENR, 2017).

Reforms in higher education and implications for assessment practices and learner autonomy

The implementation of the economic reform policy in 1986 entailed reforms in education (Harman, Hayden, & Nghi, 2010; London, 2011; Pham, 2011). Since the first reforms in education, initiated in the Seventh Congress Meeting in 1991, the government has introduced many regulations and policies to improve its education system (Bui, 2018). These regulations and policies have direct implications for

assessment practices and LA at tertiary level, and include the Higher Education Reform Agenda (2005); Education Law (2005); National Language Project 2020 (2008); Regulation No. 43 (2008); Higher Education Law (2012); Vietnamese Education Development Strategies for the period 2011-2020 (2012); and the Vietnamese Communist Party's Resolution No 29-NQ/TW on education reforms.

The first thing to note is that the term *learner autonomy* is not explicitly used in education policy documents in Vietnam. Instead, it is implicitly embedded in various phrases and terms such as “self-study”, “self-consciousness”, “critical thinking”, “independent learners”, “critical thinking”, and “learner initiative”, which appear to describe different elements and indicators of learner autonomy as discussed in the literature (Phan, 2015; Phan & Hamid, 2017).

LA has been officially declared an objective and a requirement of higher education in Vietnam since 2005, in the Vietnamese Education Law (amended and passed in 2005) and the Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) for the period 2006-2020 (Vietnamese Government, 2005; Vietnamese National Assembly, 2005). It is stated in the Vietnamese Education Law that one of the objectives of higher education is to train students so that they have *capacity to work independently and creatively* (có khả năng làm việc độc lập, sáng tạo). Within the Law, higher education methods were required to promote students' *self-consciousness in study, self-study and self-researching ability, and creative thinking* (ý thức tự giác trong học tập, năng lực tự học, tự nghiên cứu cứu, phát triển tư duy sáng tạo” (VNA, 2005). Promoting *learner initiative* (tính chủ động của người học) was also endorsed as one of the tasks in the innovation of training methods in the Higher Education Reform Agenda, which aimed to substantially and comprehensively reform tertiary education in Vietnam (VG, 2005).

The credit-based system put into effect in 2008 (MOET, 2008) also encourages LA. In this system, students are required to take more initiative in their learning. They have to be responsible for making decisions about their own learning in conjunction with their learning conditions and capability. For example, they must manage their time and choose the courses and lecturers that are suitable for their personal preferences, plans, learning styles and methods. All these requirements trigger students' ability to take control of their *learning management*, described by Benson as "behaviours involved in the planning, organization and evaluation of learning" (2011, p. 92). Additionally, this system officially includes *self-study* (tự học) as a compulsory component of the curriculum. The system requires students to spend twice as much time on *self-study* (giờ chuẩn bị cá nhân) as on learning inside of the class or working in the laboratory in order to learn effectively or master a piece of knowledge (VG, 2008).

The objective and requirement of developing LA in VHE was then reinforced in three education policy documents issued during 2012 – 2013: the Vietnamese Higher Education Law, Decision No. 711 regarding the Strategic Plan for Vietnamese education development in the period of 2011 – 2020, and the Vietnamese Communist Party's Resolution No 29-NQ/TW on education reforms. For example, the Vietnamese Higher Education Law reiterated that the objective of tertiary education is to train students to work *independently and creatively* (có khả năng làm việc độc lập, sáng tạo) (VNA, 2012). Additionally, the Strategic Plan 2012 stressed the need to renovate teaching approaches and assessment methods in order to promote students' *proactivity, self-consciousness, initiative, creativity, and self-study ability* (tích cực, tự giác, chủ động, sáng tạo và năng lực tự học của người học) (VG, 2012). The Communist Party's Resolution also affirmed that teaching and learning methods have to be improved substantially to foster learners' *proactivity, initiative, and creativity* (tính tích cực, chủ

động, sáng tạo), and the one-way transmission teaching approach and rote learning need to be gradually diminished in favour of an approach that encourages *self-study* (tự học) (VCP, 2013).

In 2008, the Vietnamese Government approved the National Foreign Language Project to *comprehensively reform the teaching and learning of foreign languages in the education system of the nation* (đổi mới toàn diện việc dạy và học ngoại ngữ trong hệ thống giáo dục quốc dân) (VG, 2008). This project emphasised the need to create favourable conditions for autonomous language learning, and to reform current English teaching towards student-centredness. This entails moving from language teaching as the *conveying of knowledge* to learning as *active construction of knowledge*, meaning that autonomy is one of the goals in language teaching (Benson & Voller, 1997).

Reforms in assessment have also been emphasised in many policy documents. The implementation of a credit-based system since 2008, for example, indicates a profound change in assessment methods at tertiary education level. In the credit-based system, assessment has become more flexible than in the traditional yearly-based system, because teachers are granted more autonomy regarding assessment practices (MOET, 2008). They can decide on the criteria and format for ongoing assessment, and use formative assessment for summative purposes (i.e., grading students). In this credit-based system, the students' attendance, homework, class participation and engagement are counted in the final grade, encouraging them to take control of their learning and make an ongoing effort if they want to achieve a good result in a subject. Also, the Vietnamese Communist Party's Resolution No 29-NQ/TW on fundamental and comprehensive education and training reform emphasises that assessment practices have to be reformed because assessment and testing methods have been recognised as outdated and inauthentic. It is stated that assessment methods should be flexible and

various. The assessment of students' learning should not be tied to only one final end-of-term test, but be based on “spoken assessment, written assessment, essays, assignments or all these assessment methods” (VCP, 2013, p. 6). The Resolution proposes a movement away from summative assessment towards more formative methods of assessment in order to develop students' initiative, awareness, creativity, self-study and sustainability (VCP, 2013).

The National Foreign Language Project emphasises innovation in the assessment of English competency. For example, one of the principal aims of the project is to build up a framework for consistent assessment of English competency across the national education system (VG, 2008). This framework is similar to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which classifies English competency into six levels and determines each level with “can-do” descriptors for all language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These “can-do” descriptors are intended to help English learners to self-assess their competency and keep track of their English level, signifying that formative assessment has become a concern of the project.

2.1.3. History of foreign language education in Vietnam

Throughout its history, Vietnam has witnessed the emergence, development, ascendance and also decline of many foreign languages in the country. Among the most prominent and significant of these are Chinese, French, Russian and English (Do, 1999; Phạm, 2014). Vietnamese foreign language policy is therefore closely associated with the socio-political history of the country. The changes in foreign language education mirrored the socio-economic and political changes within the country and its strategic relations with other countries (Denham, 1992; Do, 1999; Phạm, 2014; Phan & Hamid, 2017; Lam & Albright, 2018).

The history of foreign languages in Vietnam can be dated back to 111 BCE, which marks the start of the country's millennium of Chinese domination and the ascendancy of the Chinese in Vietnam. During the Chinese occupation from 111 BCE to 938 CE, Chinese language became the official language in Vietnam (Nguyễn, 2006). In 938, Ngo Quyen defeated the Tong invaders in the battle of Bach Dang River and proclaimed the independence of the country from China. Although Vietnam was then ruled by different Vietnamese dynasties, Chinese remained the official language in Vietnamese education, examinations and administration until the thirteenth century (Nguyễn, 2006; Phạm, 2014). The thirteenth century marked a milestone in the development of language in Vietnam with the introduction of *Nom*—a Vietnamese version of Chinese calligraphy (London, 2011). *Nom* and Chinese were concurrently used in Vietnam during that time. However, the former was mainly used for Vietnamese culture, while the latter appeared to be the language of the government and law (Lam & Albright, 2018). The development of *Nom* signified the desire for political and cultural independence from China and for the consolidation of a national Vietnamese identity (Lam & Albright, 2018). Another milestone in the development of language in Vietnam was marked in the seventeenth century by the invention of *Quoc Ngu*—“a simple Romanised Vietnamese script” (Wright, 2002, cited in Phan et al., 2014; Lam & Albright, 2018). The development of *Quoc Ngu* was often accredited to Alexandre de Rhodes—a French missionary who came to Vietnam to promote Christianity (Do, 2006).

In 1858, the French invaded and colonised Vietnam. There were then two dominant foreign languages in Vietnam: Chinese and French (Lam & Albright, 2018). When the French came, they banned Chinese calligraphy and replaced it with French or *Quoc Ngu* (Denham, 1992). However, the French did not intend to promote *Quoc Ngu*

as they only allowed it to be taught in the first grade of school (Denham, 1992; Nguyễn, 2006; Phạm, 2014). Instead, they made French the official language in education and administration (Do, 2006; Nguyễn, 2006). In 1945, Vietnam gained independence from France. The newly-established government made *Quoc Ngu* the national language of the country and the official language of instructions at all school levels (Do, 2006; Nguyễn, 2006). French became the second language during this short period, and it soon gained official status when the French returned to invade Vietnam again in 1946 (Phạm, 2014). The Dien Bien Phu victory in 1954 officially put an end to both the colonialism of France and the status of French as Vietnam's official language (Do, 2006; Phạm, 2014; Phan et al., 2014).

After 1954, there were four major foreign languages in Vietnam: Chinese, French, Russian and English. Each foreign language enjoyed its ups and downs, depending greatly on the diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the countries where these languages are spoken.

From 1954 to 1975, Vietnam was partitioned into two parts: North Vietnam and South Vietnam. The North, which followed a communist model, received a great deal of assistance from the Soviet Union and China. The South adopted a capitalist regime, and therefore received assistance from America and its allies (Denham, 1992). The separation of the country, which led North and South Vietnam in different political and diplomatic directions, had a huge impact on foreign language education in each part of the country. In the North, Russian and Chinese became the dominant foreign languages in education, while in the South, English and French dominated as foreign languages (Denham, 1992; Do, 2006; Phạm, 2014; Phan et al., 2014).

After reunification in 1975, Vietnam became a communist country. The period from 1975 to 1986 saw the dominance of Russian as a foreign language in the education

system nationwide. This reflected the demand of the country to build up and strengthen diplomatic relations with countries in the communist bloc, especially the Soviet Union (Denham, 1992). The period witnessed the decline of English and French in the education system, because these two languages were often considered to be ‘languages of the enemy’ (Phan, 2008; Phạm, 2014). Chinese later joined this ‘enemy list’ and shrank sharply after the 1979 Northern Border War with Vietnam (Phạm, 2014).

After two decades of struggling with its centralised and subsidised model of economic development under the embargo of America and its allies, the Vietnamese Communist Party decided to implement the *Doi Moi* (Economic Renovation) policy following the Sixth National Congress in 1986. This policy gave rise to significant changes in foreign language education in Vietnam (Denham, 1992; Do, 2006; Nguyễn, 2006; Phạm, 2014; Phan et al., 2014).

The *Doi Moi*, or open-door policy, emphasised the expansion of diplomatic relations with the world regardless of political differences, and the adoption of a market-oriented economy (Do, 2006). This policy “triggered the boom in English as the most important foreign language in Vietnam” (Phạm, 2014, p. 174). The post-*Doi Moi* period saw the rise of a variety of foreign languages in Vietnam thanks to the influx of foreign investment in Vietnam, the return of the Chinese and French languages, and the dramatic decline of Russian in Vietnam, especially after 1989 when the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc collapsed (Do, 2006; Phạm, 2014). Foreign language education, therefore, is now more diverse than ever before. However, the ascendancy of English has so far continued, and English is the main foreign language taught in higher education institutions.

2.2. Research site

2.2.1. Brief information about the researched university

As a matter of confidentiality, the researched university is coded 'RU'. RU is a public university founded in 1959. It is under the management of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the MOET. RU used to be a technical university which specialised in training engineers in water resources and hydropower. However, in order to meet society's increasing needs for human resources, the university has become multi-disciplinary. It is currently training students in several majors, including water resources, hydropower, mechanics, transportation, construction, water supply and sewerage, information technology, information systems, software engineering, natural resources, environment, disaster management, economics and climate change, from undergraduate to doctoral level. RU is now conducting twenty-five undergraduate programs, twenty master's programs and eleven doctoral programs. The total number of students at the university is approximately 15,000. RU has four different campuses, which cover an area of 80 hectares. The main campus is located in Hanoi. Other campuses are in Ho Chi Minh City, Ninh Thuan province and Hung Yen province. There were about 1,142 researchers, lecturers and staff working at RU at the time of this study.

2.2.2. English teaching and learning at the researched university

There have been a number of changes in the English curriculum for students at RU since 2011. The time allocated for English used to be ten credits¹, which accounted for approximately 8.3% of the total 120 credits required for a four-year undergraduate program. These ten credits were allocated to three modules of English. English modules 1 and 2 were worth four credits each and were intended to help students at RU acquire

¹ each credit equals 12.5 hours

basic grammar items, vocabulary on various topics, and basic English communication skills. The textbook used for both English module 1 and 2 was *New Headway pre-intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 2007) with English module 1 covering the first six units in the book and English module 2 covering the remaining six units. English module 3 was granted two credits and focused on ‘English for Water Resources’, which was expected to help students of varied disciplines in the university to have basic vocabulary in their professions and equip them with comprehension and translation skills for reading in their field. The English department adopted ‘self-design’ materials for this module (see table 2.1).

Table 2.1 The general curriculum for English at RU before 2011

No	Name	Number of credits	Textbook/materials
1	English module 1 (TA1)	4	Unit 1-6 <i>New Headway pre-intermediate</i>
2	English module 2 (TA2)	4	Unit 7-12 <i>New Headway pre-intermediate</i>
3	English module 3 (TA3)	2	Self-designed materials by the department

In 2011, the English department made alterations to its English curriculum because English module 3 proved to be ineffective, putting too much pressure on students who found it too difficult. In the ‘altered’ curriculum, ‘English for Water Resources’ was removed from the curriculum and replaced by a new English module 3. English modules 1 and 2 were then modified to cover five units each (one unit fewer) to save the last two units for the new English module 3 (see table 2.2).

Table 2.2 The ‘altered’ curriculum for English at RU in 2011

No	Name	Number of credits	Textbook/materials
1	English module (TA1) 1	4	Unit 1- 5 <i>New Headway pre-intermediate</i>
2	English module (TA2) 2	4	Unit 6 – 10 <i>New Headway pre-intermediate</i>
3	English module (TA3) 3	2	Unit 11 – 12 <i>New Headway pre-intermediate</i>

However, the ‘altered’ curriculum for English was not in use for long. In 2012, the university management decided to cut down the credits for English from 10 to 8. In addition, the National Foreign Language Project 2020, which put emphasis on foreign language (mostly English), teaching and learning in all education levels from primary to tertiary level, requested universities to set explicit standards for English competency for their undergraduates. It also required them to develop detailed pathways and curricula that could assist students in reaching the set standard. RU was no exception. Therefore, in response to these emerging requirements, the English department developed a new curriculum for English in 2012. This curriculum was designed to adjust to the decrease in credits allocated for English that the university proposed and the requirement for English competency for undergraduates proposed by ‘The 2020 Project’ of the Ministry of Education and Training. It was stated in the proposed curriculum that English would be taught and assessed in reference to ‘Khung Nang Luc Ngoai Ngu Viet Nam’ (KNLNNVN) (the Vietnam Framework of Reference for English)—an adapted version of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which comprises six levels from A1 to C2. The requirement for English competency for RU undergraduates is A2.

The new curriculum for English still consisted of three English modules. Two credits were granted for English module 1, and three credits each were granted to

English modules 2 and 3. English module 1 was expected to help students revise all basic grammar items needed for the A2 level, so *Grammar Spectrum 1* (Paterson, 1995) was chosen as the textbook for this module. The English department thought the content knowledge covered in this book was sufficient for a 2-credit module. It was hoped that English modules 2 and 3 would equip students with language knowledge and skills so that they could, depending on their English level, either proceed straight away with the A2 competency test or take some extra courses to reach the required level. *Objective KET* (Capel & Sharp, 2009) was selected as the textbook used for English module 2 and 3 because this book was designed for preparation for the A2 test. The department considered the choice of this textbook as ‘a stone that kills two birds’, as they thought that the textbook would serve as a normal textbook with a focus on language elements (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) and language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), besides functioning as a guide specifically for the A2 test. The curriculum for English at RU in 2012 is summarised in table 2.3.

Table 2.3 New curriculum for English at RU in 2012

Number	Name	Number of credits	Textbook/materials
1	English module 1 (TA1)	2	<i>Grammar Spectrum 1</i>
2	English module 2 (TA2)	3	<i>Objective KET unit 1- 10</i>
3	English module 3 (TA3)	3	<i>Objective KET unit 11 - 20</i>

Apart from the compulsory curriculum for English, the department also developed an optional curriculum to be used at the English centre of the university in order to help students reach the required standard for English before graduation. After learning three English modules, those who had not achieved an A2 level of English could choose to take one or more courses at the English centre. The English curriculum for the centre could be considered as the continuation of the compulsory English curriculum at the University, although students did not receive credits for attending

these classes. The curriculum for optional English at the English centre is presented in table 2.4.

Table 2.4 Curriculum for English at the English centre

No	Name	Courses	Length of the course	Time schedules	Duration
1	A2 - 1	A2 preparation – stage 1	60 hours	Twice a week two hours each class	30 classes = 3.5 months
		A2 Advanced Skills Training		Twice a week 3 hour each class	20 classes = 2.5 months
2	A2 - 2	A 2 – preparation – stage 2	60 hours	Twice a week 2 hours each class	30 classes = 3.5 months
		A2 Test Techniques Training		Twice a week 3 hours each class	20 classes = 2.5 months
3	A2 1+2	A2 Intensive Course	120 hours	4 times a week 2 hours each class	60 classes = 3,5 months

The decrease in the number of credits granted for English at the university and the requirement for a standard English competency for undergraduates proposed by the Ministry of Education and Training have, to some extent, forced students to take on more personal responsibility for their learning of English. It has become necessary for students to manage their own English learning both inside and outside the classroom so that they are able to achieve the required level of English competency.

Textbook used

The textbook used for English module 1 is *Grammar Spectrum 1* (Paterson, 1995). This book reviews English grammar rules and sentence structure. The textbook used for English modules 2 and 3 is *Objective KET* (Capel & Sharp, 2009). In English module 2, students learn from unit 1 to unit 10, and in English module 3, students learn from unit 11 to unit 20. *Objective KET* is a textbook which explicitly prepares students for the A2 test, so it is very exam-oriented in its name and original purposes. Each unit is designed

to focus on one topic, such that the whole book covers 20 different topics. There are four focuses in each unit. The first focus is on exam skills, which equips students with step by step techniques and tips for doing the test, and provides some exam-like exercises for students to practise. The second focus is on ‘Grammar’, which reviews the grammar rules and structures that students of A2 English competency are supposed to be able to use. The third focus is on ‘Vocabulary’, in which students will revise the key vocabulary on the 20 topics provided. The last focus of *Objective KET* is on ‘Pronunciation and Spelling’, which is for strengthening students’ listening and speaking skills.

The practice of English teaching and learning at RU

Similar to students in any other university in Vietnam, students at RU learn English as a compulsory subject in their undergraduate program. However, the English curriculum is not necessarily the same. At RU, students have to learn three modules of English. English modules 1 and 2 are supposed to be learnt in semester one and two of their first year, and English module 3 is supposed to be learnt in semester one of their second year.

The plan and time schedules for compulsory English teaching and learning at RU are determined by the Department of Academic Affairs at the beginning of each academic year and can vary each year. Before 2012, students had four credits² each for English modules 1 and 2, and two credits for English module 3. Therefore, they used to have two 100-minute classes a week for English module 1 and 2 for fifteen weeks, and one class of 150 minutes a week for English module 3 for ten weeks. Since 2012, due to the changes in the English curriculum, students have had only two credits for English module 1, and 3 credits each for English module 2 and 3. The time schedules for

² One credit equals 12.5 hours

English have thus been changed accordingly. In English module 1, students have had either one class of 150 minutes a week for fifteen weeks or two 100-minute classes for seven and a half weeks. In English modules 2 and 3, students have had either one class of 150 minutes for fifteen weeks or two 150-minute classes for seven and a half weeks.

Before 2012, there were around forty students in one English class. There were no classrooms specifically for English learning. Students learned English in the same classrooms as those used for other subjects, with fixed arrangements of tables and chairs, a blackboard, a projector, a computer and speakers. Since 2012, there have been fewer students in one English class—from 25 to 35 students—and classrooms have been designated exclusively to English learning. However, there is nothing special about these classrooms except for the fact that they are much smaller than other classrooms at RU, and there is no technological equipment: no computer, no projector or speaker. Teachers who use these classrooms have to bring a CD player or their own laptop (if they have one) and speakers.

There are currently 22 teachers in the English department, all of whom are well-qualified. However, only nineteen teachers are currently teaching at RU, as three are doing their PhD overseas. All teachers have achieved a GPA of at least 7.5 in their English majors from prestigious public universities in Vietnam. All of them have an IELTS score of at least 7.0. Eighteen out of twenty-two teachers have a master's degree, and two are taking master's courses. However, since they started working at the University, they have not had many opportunities for professional development, such as workshops, conferences or training sections on English teaching, learning and assessment.

To support English learning among students, the university and the department organise competitions such as 'English Olympics' and English speaking contests to

encourage and motivate students to learn and speak English. There is also an English club organised by the Student Association at the University. This club is free for all students and it organises meetings monthly.

Apart from formal compulsory English learning in the class, students are encouraged to take extra courses at the English centre at the University or elsewhere so that they can at least achieve the A2 level of English required for their graduation.

2.2.3. A2 level of English competency and A2 test

A2 level of English competency

A2 is the second level of English competence among the six levels specified in the CEFR. In the CEFR, A2 belongs to the “basic user” category. A2 language users are defined in the CEFR as those who

Can understand sentences and frequently use expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of [their] background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

(Little, 2006, p. 168)

For each language skill, a “can do” descriptor was developed in the form of a self-assessment grid, so that language instructors and learners could determine the level of their learners or themselves respectively. For more information about the CEFR A2 assessment grid, see appendix H.

Khung Nang Luc Ngoai Ngu Viet Nam (Vietnam Framework of Reference for English)

Khung Nang Luc Ngoai Ngu Viet Nam (KNLNNVN) was developed based mainly on the CEFR, with local conditions for teaching, learning and using the English language

taken into account. The framework comprises three main categories—Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced—which are subdivided into six levels equivalent to the six levels of the CEFR.

KNLNNVN uses the same illustrative descriptors for each language skill which are used in the CEFR, translated from English into Vietnamese. The difference between the CEFR and KNLNNVN is that KNLNNVN has descriptors for more specific situations in each skill. For example, apart from the general illustrative descriptors for listening, KNLNNVN also has descriptors for listening skills in situations including listening to announcements, instructions, and directions, listening to radio or TV programs (see appendix I for a sample of descriptors of the A2 level for listening in KNLNNVN).

A2 test at RU

The A2 test at RU, although it has the same name, has a number of differences from the CEFR A2 test (see table 2.5).

Table 2.5 The CEFR and the RU A2 test format

CEFR A2 test			RU A2 test		
Paper 1	Reading	Part 1: five matching sentences and notices	Paper 1	Reading	Part 1: five matching sentences and notices
		Part 2: five 3-option multiple choice questions			Part 2: ten 4-option multiple choice questions
		Part 3: ten questions - five 3-option multiple choice questions + five matching questions			Part 3: five 4-option multiple choice questions
		Part 4: five 3-option multiple choice or Right/Wrong/Doesn't Say questions			Part 4: five 4-option multiple choice cloze questions
		Part 5: eight 3-option multiple choice cloze questions			
	Writing	Part 1: five questions on identifying and spelling individual words		Writing	Part 1: five sentence transformation questions

		Part 2: ten open cloze questions			Part 2: write a short note/email/postcard of 35-40 words
		Part 3: read two input texts and complete gaps in the output text			
		Part 4: write a short note/email/postcard of 25-30 words			
Paper 2	Listening	Part 1: five 3-option multiple choice questions – choose the visual that best answers the question	Paper 2	Listening	Part 1: five 3-option multiple choice questions – choose the visual that best answers the question
		Part 2: five matching questions - listen to a dialogue for key information and match five items			Part 2: ten gap-fill questions - dictation
		Part 3: five 3-option multiple choice questions			
		Part 4: five gap-fill questions – listen to dialogue			
		Part 5: five gap-fill questions – listen to monologue			
Paper 3	Speaking	Part 1: interaction between the interlocutor and the candidate	Paper 3	Speaking	Part 1: interaction between the interlocutor and the candidate
		Part 2: candidate-candidate interaction			Part 2: talk about a topic for 3-4 minutes

2.2.4. Assessment policies and assessment framework and practices at the researched university

University’s overall assessment policies for English

The university has adopted a credit-based system since 2013 in response to decision No. 43 of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET, 2008) regarding the application of a credit-based system in higher education in Vietnam. In this system, the course grade is determined based on the assessment of different elements in the course, including ongoing assessment during the course, assessment of participation and learning attitude, attendance, mid-term test, assignment and end-of term exam. The end-of-term exam should weigh no less than 50 percent of the total course grade. It is explicitly stated in the decision that the format and weight of element assessment as well as the formula for calculating the course grade are proposed by the lecturers and approved by the rector, and will be specified in the detailed syllabus of the course.

Department’s assessment frameworks, format and guidelines

Before 2011

Table 2.6 Assessment framework for English module 1

Course grade	Course mark	Class attendance + class participation + homework	30%	30%
		2 mid-term tests	70%	
	Final exam			70%

Table 2.7 Assessment framework for English module 2

Course grade	Course mark	Class attendance + class participation + homework	30%	30%
		2 mid-term tests	70%	
	Final exam			70%

Table 2.8 Assessment framework for altered English module 3 (after 2011)

Course grade	Course mark (ongoing assessment)	Class attendance + class participation + homework	50%	30%
		Mid-term speaking test	50%	
	Final exam			70%

After 2012

Table 2.9 Assessment framework for English module 1:

Course grade	Course mark (ongoing assessment)	Class participation + class attendance + homework	20 %
	End-of-term exam		80%

Table 2.10 Assessment framework for English module 2

Course grade	Course mark (ongoing assessment)	Attendance	33%	40%
		Participation		
		Homework and lesson preparation		
	Mid-term test	Listening	33%	
		Speaking	33%	
	End-of-term test	Writing		
Reading				

Table 2.11 Assessment framework for English module 3

Course grade	Ongoing assessment	Attendance	33%	40%
		Participation		
		Homework and lesson preparation		
	Mid-term test	Listening	33%	
		Speaking	33%	
	End-of-term test	Writing		
Reading				

Enclosed with the syllabus for every English module is a revision guide, test format and guidelines for the teacher. The revision guide contains important knowledge

that students are supposed to acquire by the end of the course. It focuses on grammar items, vocabulary, and language skills that students learn in different lessons in the course. The test format is the guide for teachers when designing and carrying out mid-term tests and end-of-term tests for the module. General test guidelines are step-by-step instructions to ensure that all teachers design module tests of a similar level of difficulty and content knowledge. These guidelines will allow teachers to know exactly what will be tested in each question in the test, especially the questions on grammatical items which account for approximately 50% of the content in the test.

Conduct of assessment of English at the university

Before 2011, teachers were in charge of assessing students' participation, attendance and homework. Both mid-term and end-of-term tests were administered by the Department of Education Testing and Quality Assurance. Teachers of English designed the tests, invigilated the exams and marked the tests. After 2011, the same mechanism was used except that in English module 3, a mid-term test was conducted within each class, and teachers teaching this class would be responsible for assessing their students' speaking skills. The topics for the mid-term speaking test were provided for students to prepare in advance and were the same for all classes.

After 2012, the Department of Education Testing and Quality Assurance only administered the end-of-term test. Teachers would carry out mid-term tests and other forms of assessment in class, meaning they have more freedom in their assessment after 2012.

Apart from assessment of different English modules, assessment of A2 language competency is also crucial at RU (the format of A2 test at RU is presented in table 2.5). This assessment is administered by both the Department of Academic Affairs and the Department of Education Testing and Quality Assurance. Students take reading and

listening tests, as well as multiple-choice questions for the writing test (on a computer). Their tests are marked automatically by the MCQ Marking software written by the Institute of Mathematics in Vietnam. English teachers only interview students in the speaking test and mark their notes or postcard writing.

Chapter summary

This chapter has provided some brief information about Vietnam—its geography, history and culture— and its education— the characterisation of VHE, the reforms in education, and the history and development of the country’s foreign language education. Information about the wider context of Vietnam and VNE indicates that, due to geographical and historical characteristics, the country is deeply influenced by Confucianism, which has strong influence on its education system. The Confucianist legacies appear to make Vietnamese students become passive and compliant, inhibiting their demonstration of LA in learning. Additionally, the country’s *Doi Moi* policy brought about the reforms in education, which put a lot of emphasis on LA and innovation in assessment methods. Foreign language education policies in Vietnam appeared to correspond to changes in the country’s history and politics. Historical changes have so far made English the dominant foreign language in Vietnam, significantly influencing the teaching and learning of this language.

The chapter has also presented information about the RU, its practice of English teaching and learning, and its assessment of English. LA is not an objective in the curriculum for English at RU; the teaching and learning of English appear mainly to serve the purpose of assessment, i.e., a summative purpose concerned with certification. The choice of textbook for English, the policy for EFL assessment, and the

administration of different kinds of assessment at RU do not support the purpose of learning or promote the demonstration of LA.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter overview

This chapter reviews current theories and practice of learner autonomy (LA) and assessment (in relation to LA) in second language learning in higher education. The first section introduces the theoretical framework for this study, presenting an overview of sociocultural theories of learning, as well as a discussion of the central concepts and their implications for conceptualising LA, assessment and their relationship in this study. The second section deals with fundamental issues relating to understanding and implementing LA in practice, including definitions, versions, levels, and perceptions of the concept. The third section presents two forms of assessment—Assessment of Learning (AoL) and Assessment for Learning (AfL), and their relationship with LA, with the focus on AfL strategies and their applications for LA.

3.1. Theoretical framework

3.1.1. Sociocultural theories in brief

Sociocultural perspectives originate in cultural-historical theory, which was developed and systemised by the Russian psychologist Vygotsky and his colleagues during the 1920s and 1930s (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). These perspectives were further developed in a series of seminal papers, including those by John-Steiner and Mahn (1996, 2013), Lantolf (2000b, 2000c, 2000a, 2003, 2006, 2009), Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001), Lantolf and Poehner (2011), Lantolf and Thorne (2007), Lave (1991), Lave and Wenger (1991), Rogoff (1990, 1995, 2003), Wenger (1999, 2000), Wertsch (1991), and Wertsch, Rio, and Alvarez (1995). Sociocultural theory is underpinned by a constructivist paradigm

which holds that knowledge is construed through social interaction (Wang, Bruce, & Hughes, 2011); in other words, social interaction is the foundation for learning.

Sociocultural theory emphasises the dialectical relationship between human learning and development and the social context in which these two aspects are embedded and take place (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wertsch, 1991; Rogoff, 1995).

The central tenet of Vygotsky's theory is that human cognitive development is a socially mediated process in which language use, organisation and structure are the primary mediators (Lantolf, 2000a; Gibbons, 2003; Lantolf, 2006; Walqui, 2006; Lantolf, 2007; Turuk, 2008; Feryok, 2013; Marginson & Dang, 2017; Eun, 2019).

Vygotsky argues that learning is an interactive process between the learner and other people and artefacts in the social world, and cognitive development is the appropriation and internalisation process of these interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural perspectives do not neglect the significance of human biological inheritance in cognitive development. Instead, they argue for the mediation of both the human brain and socially constructed artefacts in the human psychological process (Wells, 2000; Lantolf, 2006; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Marginson & Dang, 2017). Mediation can be perceived as the link between action and sociocultural contexts (Kalaja, Barcelos, Aro, & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2016). Mediation emphasises the agency of the learner within the learning process because mediation involves the tension between means provided by the sociocultural setting and the unique use of these means by individuals in particular situations (Kalaja et al., 2016). From a sociocultural perspective, learners are active constructors of their knowledge, so the role of mediators such as teachers and peers is to assist learners to develop necessary skills and abilities, and eventually help them to become self-directed learners (Kao, 2010). This viewpoint suggests that autonomy is a

learner attribute, and helping the learner to become autonomous is an ultimate goal for learning.

Another important principle in sociocultural theory is the notion of *situated learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). From a sociocultural perspective, human mental functioning is embedded in social activities in which individuals interact with other people, objects, and events. Therefore, human learning and development are attached to the social, cultural and historical contexts in which they occur, and sociocultural factors making up a learning context can, in return, facilitate or inhibit human learning and development (Wenger & Lave, 1991; Jaramillo, 1996; Lantolf, 2000a; Wells, 2000). This perspective suggests that individual learning and cognitive development need to and can be understood by investigating the sociocultural contexts in which they occur (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992; Rogoff, 2003).

3.1.2. Sociocultural theories and implications for the current study

3.1.2.1 Social interaction, learning and development

According to Vygotsky, learning happens through social interaction, and learning precedes the development of knowledge, skills, and ability. Vygotsky's argument lies in his statement that "every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 48).

The idea of two planes in the development of mental functioning, with an emphasis on social interaction as the root of cognitive development, has profound implications for this study. First, LA, like other mental processes, also develops from the social plane to the individual plane (Feryok, 2013). Therefore, the development and manifestation of LA depend not only on individual characteristics but also largely on the factors that characterise the specific context that an individual is embedded in and

interacts with. For this reason, sociocultural factors need to be investigated carefully in order to recognise the factors which both enable and constrain LA in a specific context. Secondly, because LA incorporates both individual and social dimensions (Ohara, 2013; O'Leary, 2014; Palfreyman, 2018), dependence and independence are both crucial to the concept (Hunter & Cooke, 2007; Van Lier, 2010). In other words, students may need to be dependent before they can be independent. This argument has two significant applications for understanding LA for this study: first, there are degrees of autonomy (e.g., Nunan, 1997; Sinclair, 2000); second, dependence or compliance should also be considered in any scale of autonomy demonstration (Van Lier, 2010). By autonomy demonstration, the researcher means the actual behaviours, performance, or actions of a learner that provide an indication of the capacity to take control of his or her learning.

3.1.2.2 Internalisation and learner agency

In sociocultural theory, learning and development are bridged by the process of internalisation (Vygotsky, 1978) or appropriation (Rogoff, 1990, 1995). Internalisation is “the process through which cultural artefacts, such as language, take on a psychological function” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007, p. 203). It is a transformative process (Vygotsky, 1978; Kozulin, 2018) because it involves “goal-directed cognitive activity that can result in transformations of the original model” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007, p. 203). In other words, learners do not simply copy an event or a task, but actively construct, appropriate and transform it into their own knowledge system. The transformative quality of internalisation recognises learners as active constructors of knowledge in the process of learning (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Ahn, 2016) and emphasises the crucial role of learner agency in this process (Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993; Rogoff, 1995; Van Lier, 1996). Viewing learners as active constructors of knowledge in the learning process results in a change of the teachers’

and learners' roles. Teachers are no longer the sole knowledge holders and assessment authorities in the class. Instead, they are now the creators of learning activities and an environment favourable to the students' learning and are facilitators or counsellors to help students become the owners of their learning. In a similar vein, students are no longer the receivers of knowledge or reliant on teachers for assessment. They can actively take part in this process and control their own learning by undertaking self/peer-assessment activities (Gipps, 2002).

In language education, learner agency is widely defined as “a socially-mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). The concept of learner agency is significant in research about LA from a sociocultural perspective. In sociocultural theories, LA does not appear to be the central concept (Ohara, 2013). Instead, scholars in sociocultural theory often use the concept of learner agency to denote an attribute which is closely related to the concept of LA (Wertsch et al., 1993; Benson, 2007; Van Lier, 2008). However, there is a divergence in scholars' perceptions of these two concepts. Some scholars treat LA and learner agency as two distinctive concepts (Huang, 2009; Huang & Benson, 2013), while others perceive these two concepts as being the same (Toohey & Norton, 2003; Toohey, 2007; Ohara, 2013). Some perceive LA as including and resulting in learner agency; that is, they argue that LA is a systematic capacity, while learner agency involves actual actions that indicate LA (Hughes, 2003; Huang, 2009; Huang & Benson, 2013). Others conceive learner agency as a bigger concept and LA as one of the manifestations of learner agency (Van Lier, 2008, 2010). However, there is consensus about these two concepts in that both imply that learners need to have choice and control (Hughes, 2003; Duff, 2013; Huang & Benson, 2013). In this study, the researcher supports Huang and Benson (2013)'s argument that *learner autonomy* is the systematic capacity of a learner to take control of his or her learning, while *learner*

agency denotes observable attempts or actions of a learner who takes control of his or her learning. Taking this view as a starting point, the researcher argues that learner agency is actually the *demonstration of learner autonomy* in a particular learning situation within a particular context. In this study, the researcher will use the term *demonstration of LA* instead of *learner agency* to refer to actual observable behaviours, performances or actions that indicate the capacity of a learner to take control of his/her learning.

The conceptualisation of learner agency as the demonstration of LA offers some insightful implications for the current study. Firstly, this conceptualisation allows the researcher to view LA as the relationship between an individual learner and their environment, and the demonstration of LA as the emergent product of the interaction between the learner and the contextual environment (e.g., teacher, peers, and sociocultural factors that define that context). This is because agency is often perceived in the literature as the relationship between individuals and the contextual environment (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Hughes, 2003; Hunter & Cooke, 2007; Toohey, 2007; Van Lier, 2008; Ahn, 2016; Kalaja et al., 2016; Muramatsu, 2018). For example, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001, p. 148) state that “agency is never a ‘property’ of a particular individual; rather, it is a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large”. This view supports the argument for the degrees of LA and supports the proposal for stages in the construction of the relationship between a learner and the community of practice, which develops from peripheral to full participation, and from dependence to independence (Wenger & Lave, 1991; Willis, 2009). Additionally, this view allows the researcher to investigate learning environments which might support or suppress LA and its demonstration, and the interaction between the learner and that environment. In this study, the learning

environment is the assessment context and factors relating to that context that might contribute to the demonstration of LA.

Secondly, equating learner agency with the demonstration of LA allows the researcher to look at LA with a focus on actual performance or actions—the aspect on which the concept of learner agency places greater focus (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Toohey, 2007; Van Lier, 2008; Huang & Benson, 2013). (Huang, 2011, p. 242) states that “as the ‘raw material’ for autonomy, agency is more concrete, specific and observable”. Therefore, it is more related to concepts such as “autonomous episodes” (Dickinson, 1996, p. 52) or “seeds of learner autonomy” (Allwright, 1988, p. 39), which both refer to concrete behaviours or performance in a particular situation (Allwright, 1988; Dickinson, 1996).

Thirdly, the equation of learner agency with the demonstration of LA supports the argument mentioned earlier that dependency is crucial in the ‘autonomisation’ (Little, 2003b, p. 2) process and should be seen as one level in any scale of autonomy demonstration. Van Lier (2010) supports this view when he argues that compliance is also a manifestation of learner agency, but that this manifestation is at a low level, as it happens at the behest of others. As an example, Van Lier cites cases where students required to study a foreign language at school learn it well merely in order to pass the test (Van Lier, 2010). Van Lier (2008) also proposes six levels of learner agency in the context of language learning: passive, obedient, participatory, inquisitive, autonomous and committed. According to Van Lier, the main element with which to distinguish the levels of agency is learner volition—volition is often absent in low levels of agency and evident in high levels of agency.

The fourth significant implication of equating learner agency with the demonstration of LA is that the importance of personal meanings in any action is taken

into consideration (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Huang, 2009). As agency entails actions arising from deliberation and choice (Huang, 2009; Huang & Benson, 2013), and the motives for learner agency lie in the significance and relevance of an event or a task to the learners (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001), it is essential to help learners recognise the relevance of planned tasks to their personal needs and purposes if one aims to encourage learners to demonstrate their autonomy in learning (Benson, 2013). However, many learners have little idea about their learning needs and purposes, and this greatly influences their course of action for learning (Reinders, 2010). Additionally, not all learners have the same motives for learning, and these are subject to change according to a learner's circumstances (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). For example, some learners may take an English course because it is a compulsory component of their degree, and therefore only learn in order to pass the exam, while others learn English because it is significant for their personal goals (e.g., studying abroad or working in a foreign company). These types of learners are unlikely to demonstrate the same level of autonomy in learning, even when they are doing the same learning task, and understanding learners' motives for learning can contribute to an understanding of how they demonstrate their autonomy.

Fifth and finally, as choice and control are two core ideas in the notions of learner agency and LA, it is necessary that learners be provided with opportunities to make choices or take control of their learning. It is widely agreed in the literature that creating space for learners to demonstrate their autonomy is a prerequisite for the demonstration of autonomy and its development (Holec, 1981; Boud, 1988; Hughes, 2003; Little, 2003b, 2004a; Reinders, 2010; Tatzl, 2016). More details about conceptual space for LA will be discussed in section 3.2.5.

The above arguments allow the researcher to conceptualise *autonomy offered* and *autonomy demonstrated* as two distinct but interrelated components of the concept of LA. The former denotes the conceptual space or opportunities that are offered for students to make choices and decisions regarding their learning, and the latter denotes the extent to which the students demonstrate their capacity to make such choices and decisions regarding their learning.

It is important to note that the term *autonomy offered* does not imply that autonomy can be imparted to students. Rather, it means that students need to have space and freedom to demonstrate their autonomy. A key issue to address is how much space or freedom should be permitted to students, because too much *autonomy offered* can be counterproductive (Higgs, 1988; Vermunt & Verloop, 1999; Katz & Assor, 2007; Tin, 2012). Higgs (1988), for example, argues that allowing students to work independently when they are not ready will result in disorientation and failure in learning. Vermunt and Verloop (1999) even propose the term *destructive friction* to refer to the situation where a teacher's regulation and students' self-regulation are not compatible, resulting in a decrease in learning or thinking skills. They believe that the best environment for learning to happen is one that enables a congruence between the teacher's regulation and the learner's self-regulation. That is, the teacher offers a large conceptual space when learners are ready to work with high levels of autonomy, and a tighter conceptual space when they are not. From these viewpoints, the teacher's significant role in orchestrating an environment for the manifestation of autonomy is once again highlighted.

3.1.2.3. Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding

Two concepts are central to the notion of mediated learning—the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) and scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976; Bruner, 1996).

Zone of Proximal Development

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is an influential concept in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning (Lantolf, 2000a; Verenikina, 2010; Holzman, 2018; Smagorinsky, 2018; Eun, 2019). It is defined as “the distance between the actual development level as determined through interdependent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

The ZPD is seen as the primary activity space where learning happens (Walqui, 2006), and its construction depends largely on the quality of interactions between people, typically learners and teachers (Corden, 2000). The concept also denotes assisted performance (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007), but the assistance provided should be grounded in and complementary with the learner’s existing ability, and it should only go slightly beyond the learner’s current competence (Verenikina, 2010). Therefore, from the ZPD perspective, others (i.e., teachers, peers) play a significant role in an individual’s learning and development (Jaramillo, 1996; John-Steiner & Mahn, 2013), and collaboration is the key to learning (Lantolf, 2000a). Learners can function much better when collaborating with others than when working alone (Lantolf, 2000a), but the teacher has to be very sensitive to what the students can already do and what they can potentially do with assistance from the teacher and peers in the class (Lantolf, 2006). Some scholars believe that the only fruitful collaboration is that between novices and experts, because in such situations the expert, through interaction with the novice, transmits knowledge to him/her (e.g., Wertsch, 1991). However, many scholars argue

that rather than limiting the interaction in the ZPD to that between the novice and the expert, this interaction should be viewed as being multilateral, with the involvement of multiple agents (Van Lier, 1996; Lantolf, 2000a; Verenikina, 2010). Van Lier, for example, argues that interaction is beneficial not only when it is between students and experts, but also when it is between students and equal and less capable peers (Van Lier, 1996).

ZPD, with mediation as the underpinning concept, is useful for observing and understanding how mediational means are appropriated and internalised (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Lantolf, 2000a). With this in mind, the ZPD should be viewed as a conceptual space for collaborative construction of opportunities for individuals to develop cognitive ability (Lantolf, 2000a; Verenikina, 2010). The ZPD also implies that development spans different stages, from social to individual (Vygotsky, 1978), which might not be the same for everyone, so the diversity of learners' stages of development should be recognised (Jaramillo, 1996; John-Steiner & Mahn, 2013). In order to help learners to proceed in their learning and development, assistance from others, known as scaffolding, plays a determinant role (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996).

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is another crucial concept in sociocultural theory and is closely linked to the concept of the ZPD (Wells, 2000; Van Der Stuyf, 2002; Van de Pol, Volman, Oort, & Beishuizen, 2015). The metaphor of scaffolding was developed and introduced by Bruner to refer to the structuring of an interaction between an adult and a child based on what the child already knows and the potential of what it can do with the assistance of the adult (Kao, 2010).

In the broader context of education, scaffolding refers to the assistance of teachers and colleagues offered to students so that they can do what they otherwise

could not. Scaffolding is temporary by its nature (Van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010). It is gradually withdrawn as the students' competence grows, until finally students can perform a task or master a piece of knowledge independently (Van Der Stuyf, 2002; Van de Pol et al., 2010). Therefore, the ultimate goal of scaffolding is to help students to gradually become independent in a task through the teacher's decreasing support.

Another characteristic of scaffolding is its 'contingency', which is referred to as "responsive, tailored, adjusted, differentiated, titrated, or calibrated support" (Van de Pol et al., 2010, p. 274). This means that scaffolding must be *opportune* and adapted to a student's understanding (Wood et al., 1976; Van de Pol et al., 2015). In order to provide such scaffolding, the teacher must first determine the student's current level of competence. This can be done using diagnostic strategies, including dynamic assessment (Lantolf, 2009; Lantolf & Poehner, 2011) and formative assessment (Sadler, 1989; Black, 1998; Black & Wiliam, 2009). Scaffolding also denotes the transfer of responsibility (Van de Pol et al., 2010). Via contingent and pre-planned fading, the responsibility for the performance of a task is gradually transferred to the learner, meaning that they become more independent through this task (Van de Pol et al., 2010).

Implications

The notions of the ZPD and scaffolding provide significant insights for the current study. The first insight is that LA is associated with the level of guidance that learners need and receive for effective learning (Willison, Sabir, & Thomas, 2017). That is, the level of scaffolding is inverse to the level of autonomy demonstrated—the more scaffolding the learners receive, the less autonomy they demonstrate in the learning process. This conceptualisation of LA emphasises the role of teachers in promoting and

developing LA, as they are the ones who determine how much support and how much autonomy to offer their students.

Secondly, the concept of the ZPD implies that the task designed for the students should be neither too easy nor too challenging for them; it should simply be challenging enough for the students to complete it with help from others. The term ‘contingency’ in scaffolding indicates that the teacher has to be very sensitive to the student’s current and potential levels when providing assistance in order to provide *just the right* amount of guidance (Van Der Stuyf, 2002; Van de Pol et al., 2015). In a similar vein, teachers have to be sensitive to the level of autonomy that their students can work with so that they can create situations which best support their students’ demonstration of LA. This notion also signifies that there is no optimum pre-determined level of autonomy. Instead, teachers have to be sensitive to find out which level is appropriate for their students (Willison et al., 2017).

Thirdly, the concept of the ZPD has changed the way we look at assessment. The ZPD concerns an individual’s current and potential levels of development, so assessment should not only measure students’ actual levels of development but also indicate the potential development that students can reach with assistance from others (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Lantolf & Poehner, 2011). The notion of scaffolding signifies the critical role of assessment in helping teachers orchestrate a learning situation and instructions that are the most fruitful for students’ learning and development. Assessment can provide teachers with information about students’ current levels of understanding, so that teachers can decide, for example, what kinds of instructions are appropriate, how much support is needed, and to what extent they should allow students to work independently. This assessment is inseparable from teaching and is embedded in teaching instructions (Gipps, 1999; Pryor & Crossouard,

2008; Lantolf & Poehner, 2011). This point is crucial to the current study as it enables the researcher to understand assessment and its relationship with LA by investigating the design of learning tasks and the interactions between teacher and students in the classroom.

3.1.3.4. Situated learning

The notion of situated learning suggests that a qualitative case study is the most suitable research design for the current study, which investigates the complex concepts of LA and assessment. A case study allows the researcher to undertake a thorough analysis of how LA is demonstrated in relation to assessment practices within a particular sociocultural and historical context of higher education in Vietnam, and factors in that context that facilitate or hinder the demonstration of LA. Secondly, the concept of situated learning requires the researcher to attend to characteristics of the Vietnamese social, cultural, and historical context in general, and of the researched university and classroom culture in particular. Thirdly, apart from being viewed as an embedded and inseparable component of the teaching and learning process (i.e., formative assessment, dynamic assessment) (Gipps, 1999; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008; Lantolf & Poehner, 2011), assessment practices (e.g., tests and exams) can also be viewed as some of the factors shaping the learning context, separate from teaching and learning. The investigation of both types of assessment practices in the higher education context of Vietnam is crucial to understanding the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of autonomy demonstration in assessment practices.

3.2. Learner autonomy

3.2.1. Role of learner autonomy in language learning

The rationale for promoting LA can be based on three arguments: the ideological, the psychological and the economic. Ideologically, it is an individual's right to have freedom in making his/her educational choices or decisions (Scharle & Szabó, 2000). Psychologically, if we take charge of our own learning, it will be more purposeful, meaningful and permanent, leading to better learning results, higher motivation to learn and perhaps a more successful learning outcome. Economically, a society which supported its members' needs for lifelong personal instruction in every area of learning would face considerable economic challenges. Therefore, if individuals wish to obtain particular skills and knowledge, they must be able to actively seek for resources to support their own learning needs (Crabbe, 1993; R. Smith, Kuchah, & Lamb, 2018).

In language education, autonomy has been long considered a desirable goal. "Few teachers will disagree with the importance of helping language learners to become more autonomous as learners" (Wenden, 1991, p.11 cited in Benson & Voller, 1997, p. 1). Learners who demonstrate a higher level of autonomy possess personal attributes that are likely to facilitate success in higher education (Boud, 1988). Autonomy is also thought of as a necessary condition for effective learning in the sense that when learners are able to demonstrate higher levels of autonomy in learning, it is more likely that they will become not only more proficient at learning language, but also more responsible and critical as members of the community in which they live (Benson, 2011). These ideas support the two reasons stated by Little (1997) for encouraging the development of LA in language learning: firstly, to facilitate students' ability to fully exploit their learning potential by means of critical reflection and self-evaluation; and secondly, to enable them to become adept users of the target language. In addition, learners who, at

times, demonstrate high levels of autonomy, display higher language learning achievement than those who have consistently low LA. This is possibly because students will be more committed to their learning when they can contribute to decisions regarding their language competence (Littlejohn, 1985), as a result of which they will be more determined and concentrated in their learning (Dam, 1995; Camilleri, 1997; Little, 1999c; Chan, 2003). Many researchers have reported a positive correlation between language achievement and level of LA (Dafei, 2007; Nguyen, 2008; Pan & Chen, 2015; Faramarzi et al., 2016), which indicates that successful and efficient language learners demonstrate higher levels of LA at times (Little, 1995; Benson, 2011). Having experience of working at higher levels of autonomy primes students for lifelong language learning endeavours after leaving formal education. Language learning cannot be solely restricted to schools or classes because no language institution or program can equip its learners with all the language skills and knowledge they need for their communication in the outside world. Therefore, in order to be successful, it is necessary that language learners continue their learning in out-of-school contexts, and be active in making their own plans for learning and making use of available resources for their learning (Everhard, 2015a).

3.2.2. Feasibility of learner autonomy in Asian countries

One of the issues that researchers on autonomy have to take into consideration is whether this Western-originated construct is appropriate in other cultures. In an attempt to build up a “cultural-free” definition of autonomy, Littlewood (1999) suggests a model based on two forms: *proactive* and *reactive* autonomy. Proactive autonomous learners often establish the learning direction themselves and carry out all activities, such as setting learning goals, selecting methods and strategies, and evaluating their learning on their own. In contrast, reactive autonomous learners do not set up their

direction, but once the direction has been created, they are able to arrange their resources autonomously in order to reach their goals. In Littlewood's view, *proactive* autonomy belongs to Western learners, while Asian learners possess *reactive* autonomy.

Littlewood also proposed five descriptions of East Asian students:

- Students will have a high level of reactive autonomy, both individually and in groups
- Groups of students will develop high levels of both reactive and proactive autonomy
- Many students will have experienced few learning contexts which encourage them to exercise individual proactive autonomy
- East Asian students have the same capacity for autonomy as other learners
- The language classroom can provide a favourable environment for developing the capacity for autonomy

(Littlewood, 1999, pp. 87,88)

Empirical evidence, however, shows that successful language learners share common characteristics with autonomous learners (Little, 1999c; Dafei, 2007; Nguyen, 2009) in the sense that successful learners persistently reflect on their learning content, purposes, methods and success (Little, 1999c). Little therefore argues that LA is “a universal human capacity” (p. 13) that is accessible to everyone and autonomy as a capacity for self-regulation is the target of all developmental learning (Little, 1999c). He also states that autonomy is “an appropriate pedagogical goal in all cultural settings” (p. 15). LA has certainly been promoted among students in non-Western cultures.

Littlewood (2001) carried out a survey of attitudes to classroom English learning among over two thousand students in eleven countries— eight Asian and three European. The results of his study confirm that, just like their counterparts in European countries,

Asian students “wish to participate actively in exploring knowledge and have positive attitudes towards working purposefully” (Littlewood, 2001, p. 3). Other studies also affirmed that if Asian students are provided with opportunities to get involved in their learning, and are equipped with metacognitive strategies for learning, they will not be *non-autonomous* and their autonomy will develop gradually (Chan, 2001b; Trinh, 2005; Nguyen, 2009).

It can therefore be concluded that LA is not just a Western concept. However, researchers on autonomy in non-Western countries should attend to the cultural settings where learning occurs (Little, 1999c), as the important issue is not whether LA itself is appropriate, but how negotiated versions of LA can be best enabled in all contexts (Aioki and Smith, 1996, p. 3 cited in Littlewood, 1999).

3.2.3. Autonomy is a complex concept

The concept of LA has been a theme for discussion in language education for nearly 40 years. Despite increasing interest and a huge number of research studies on the concept, various researchers still consider it to be a ‘problematic’, ‘complicated’, and ‘ambiguous’ construct (Voller, 1997; Little, 2003b; Everhard, 2015a; Lamb, 2017; Lin & Reinders, 2018). The complexity of the concept of LA can be recognised through the conflicts between academics regarding the semantic aspects of the terminology, which highlight the inconsistency in the use of the concept of LA itself and the use of various terms to denote LA (Oxford, 2003).

There has been no consistent terminology for LA in the literature so far. In fact, a number of researchers and scholars use the same terms to refer to different things. For example, both Holec (1981) and Dickinson (1987) use the terms “self-direction” and “autonomy” to refer to different constructs. For Dickinson (1987), the former refers to learners’ attitude and responsibility and the latter refers to the learning situation where

students demonstrate their self-direction. Holec (1981), on the other hand, defines self-direction as the learning situation where learners manifest their autonomy, and autonomy as the ability to take responsibility for their learning. River's (2001) distinction between autonomy and self-directed language learning also contributes to the terminological conflict, as he argues that autonomy is the precondition for self-directed language learning (Oxford, 2003).

Another reason for the term's semantic complexity is that it holds different connotations from a 'traditional' perspective and from the perspective of self-determination theory. Within self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), autonomy refers to the demonstration of volition and the self-endorsement of one's activity, while from a 'traditional' perspective (see for example, Holec, 1981; Benson, 2011), autonomy is often referred to as the self-regulatory capacity that enables learners to take control of their learning. Self-determination theory emphasises the ownership of the action and the origin of the control of a course of action, while the traditional perspective emphasises the capacity to take self-regulatory action and the cognitive aspects that allow learners to exercise this capacity (Yashima, 2014; Hu & Zhang, 2017).

Researchers tend to use a series of different terms to denote one concept of 'learner autonomy'. For example, researchers have used terms such as "self-direction" (Holec, 1981; Candy, 1991), "self-instruction" (Dickinson, 1987), "independence" (Benson & Voller, 1997), and "self-regulation" (Zimmerman & Pons, 1986). Candy (1987) identified thirty different terms which have been used in this area (Boud, 1988), and researchers in the field have still not reached a holistic definition of LA (Lin & Reinders, 2018). The lack of consensus regarding terminology testifies to the complex nature of the concept. If researchers want to distinguish between these terms, the only

way they can do so is to “delve beneath the surface to what is actually meant in any particular situation” (Candy, 1987a, p.160 cited in Boud, 1988). For example, the two concepts ‘learner autonomy’ and ‘self-regulation’ have a number of common features: they are both concerned with goal-setting, monitoring learning and control, and they both involve active engagement, goal-directed behaviour, metacognitive skills, intrinsic motivation, and learner characteristics (Murray, 2014). However, when we delve deeper into the two concepts, some differences emerge. Self-regulation is arguably a narrower concept than LA. It is especially concerned with learners’ cognitive processes (Benson, 2011; Murray, 2014), while LA involves both learners’ cognitive aspects and the design of the learning environment (Murray, 2014).

Given that LA is a complex construct (at least at a semantic level), researchers should clarify both what they mean and what they do not mean by the concept of ‘learner autonomy’. The following sections will discuss misconceptions about LA and the main themes in the literature discussing the concept.

3.2.4. Misconceptions about learner autonomy

In his oft-cited ‘negative’ definition of LA, Little (1991, pp. 3-4) specifies five misconceptions about LA that need to be taken into account by researchers:

- Autonomy is the same as self-instruction or learning without a teacher
- Autonomy entails an abandoning of teachers’ responsibility or initiative
- Autonomy is a teaching method or something that teachers do with students
- Autonomy is a single, easily described behaviour
- Autonomy is a steady state achieved by learners

The first misconception (that LA is the same as self-instruction, or learning without a teacher) might have arisen from the widespread development of self-access centres for learning in the eighties. The misconception involves an assumption that

students can carry out their learning on their own when they are provided with adequate material and equipment, and that “self-access work will automatically lead to autonomy” (Benson, 2011, p. 11). At that time, autonomous language learning was often considered the same as self-access language learning. However, this assumption has been challenged by a number of academics who claim that “autonomy is not exclusively or even primarily a matter of how learning is organized” (Little, 1991, p. 3), or a matter of physical setting for learning (Dickinson, 1994), and that learners are not automatically autonomous when they are put in situations where they have to work on their own (Nunan, 1997). Although self-instruction can help some learners obtain a high degree of autonomy, it does not inevitably lead to the development of LA. In contrast, in certain circumstances it can even impede LA (Benson, 2011). In fact, LA should involve collaboration, because education is an interactive and social process, and it should also involve interdependence, because we are social beings and “our independence is always balanced by dependence; our essential condition is one of interdependence” (Little, 1991, p. 5).

The second fallacy is the belief that LA leads to the relinquishment of teachers’ control and initiative in the classroom, making teachers redundant. Although the notion of LA does imply a level of independence from the control of others and a level of freedom (Dickinson, 1987; Candy, 1991; Macaro, 1997), this freedom should not be seen as absolute, but conditioned and constrained. LA also involves collaboration and interdependence (Little, 1999a, 2007). Therefore, teachers still play a key role in the students’ process of becoming autonomous (Dam, 2003; Benson, 2011, 2013).

The third false assumption is that autonomy is a new methodology or something teachers impose on their learners. While it is difficult for learners to become autonomous if their teachers do not actively engage in the process, the development of

LA cannot be programmed through a series of lesson plans. LA is not an innovative methodology in language education and is not automatically prompted by any program. Autonomy in learning is more of a process than a product (Candy, 1991; Dam, 2000; Paiva & Braga, 2008; Everhard, 2012). Therefore, LA cannot be taught but can only be developed through raising students' awareness (Dam, 1995; Sinclair, 2000), arranging the learning context to support LA (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Assor, 2012), and creating opportunities for the students to take control of their learning (Boud, 1988; Esch, 1996; Benson, 2013; Tatzl, 2016). Additionally, as discussed earlier in this section, autonomy can take numerous forms depending on various factors. As such, there is no single correct approach to the development of LA.

Little (1991) also cites the mistaken belief that LA is a single behaviour that can be easily described. However, in reality, LA is a far more complicated construct. Although it is possible to identify LA through learners' behaviours, LA is not easy to recognise because it can manifest itself in various forms depending on different factors including learners' age, needs, background and language proficiency (Little, 1991). The complexity of LA is also illustrated in Benson's statement that autonomy is a "multidimensional capacity that will take different forms for different individuals, and even for the same individual in different contexts or at different times" (Benson, 2011, p. 37).

Finally, there is the belief that LA is something that, once achieved by certain learners, will remain steady forever. The manifestation of LA may depend on a number of variables (Little, 1991), so learners can be highly autonomous in one situation while failing to display the same level of LA in other situations. Nunan (1997) supports this argument by claiming that "autonomy is not an all-or-nothing concept, that there are

degrees of autonomy, and that the extent to which autonomy can be developed will be constrained by the psychological and cognitive make-up of the learner as well as the culture, social and educational context in which the learning take place” (p. 192).

3.2.5. Definitions of learner autonomy

There have been various interpretations and understandings about LA during the last four decades of its development in language education. The following section will first discuss Holec’s seminal definition of LA in language education and then review the major themes relating to the definition of LA.

Autonomy in language education was first defined by Holec in a report for Europe’s Modern Language Project in 1981 as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (Holec, 1981, p. 3). Holec elucidates his definition as follows: first, the ‘ability’ in the definition is “not inborn but must be acquired” (p. 3), implying that students can be taught to be autonomous. Secondly, the concept of LA only denotes a potential capacity to act, not the actual behaviour that an individual displays in a situation. Thirdly, ‘to take charge of one’s own learning’ means “to have, and to hold responsibility for all decisions concerning all aspects of this learning, i.e., determining the objectives; defining the contents and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used; monitoring the procedures of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc); evaluating what has been acquired” (p. 3). Holec’s definition has received some criticism for not explicitly recognising the psychological aspect of LA and only describing a list of self-management skills without mentioning the cognitive abilities underpinning them (Little, 2007; Benson, 2011). In other words, this definition only describes “WHAT autonomous learners are able to do” not “HOW they are able to do it” (Benson, 2007, p. 23) [Benson’s emphasis]. Despite this criticism, Holec’s definition is still the most cited definition of LA in language education (Benson, 2007, 2011).

Additionally, it has sparked debates about the concept and triggered different interpretations and understandings of it.

LA is a capacity or ability

Holec (1981) states that LA only denotes potential capacity, not actual behaviours or performance. Therefore, the capacity to be autonomous and the behaviours indicating this capacity might be related but must be distinguished:

To say of a learner that he is autonomous is therefore to say that he is capable of taking charge of his own learning and nothing more: All the practical decisions he is going to make regarding his learning can be related to this capacity he possesses but must be distinguished from it. (p. 3)

This argument is echoed by Sinclair (1999)'s statement that autonomy refers to "a capacity or ability to make informed decisions about one's learning rather than actual behaviours" (p. 101). Viewing LA as a capacity suggests that an autonomous learner is still autonomous even when they are not displaying behaviours indicating that ability (Sinclair, 1999). However, excluding actual behaviours in the concept of LA might reduce its practicability in education, because it does not make much sense to say that a learner has autonomy but never exhibits that ability in real-life situations (Reinders, 2011; Lamb, 2017).

Many researchers have advocated Holec's perspective that LA is an ability, but have also recognised behaviours as an indispensable component of LA (Little, 1991; Macaro, 1997; Scharle & Szabó, 2000; Benson, 2001). Subsequently, researchers have often replaced 'ability' with 'capacity' and 'take charge of' with 'take responsibility' or 'take control of' in their definitions (Benson, 2007; T. T. Dang, 2012). Dang (2012) states that these replacements appear to be only a matter of linguistic expression, and the meanings of the construct stay the same. However, this is not necessarily the case,

because subsequent definitions add more nuances, elements and dimensions to the concept, and the entailments of ‘take charge of’, ‘take responsibility for’ and ‘take control of’ are not the same.

Little (1991)’s definition explicitly adds a psychological dimension which he considers as both a requirement and an entailment of autonomy development:

Essentially autonomy is a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts. (p. 4)

Little also argues for the social dimension of LA when stating that humans are “social beings” so “our independence is always balanced by dependence” (p. 5), suggesting that interdependence is an essential condition of LA. He posits that the term ‘autonomy’ itself indicates a high degree of freedom enjoyed by the learner, but also asserts that this freedom is not absolute, but conditional and constrained. Little’s later definitions (1994, 1996) appear to use Holec’s definition as their basis and expand them by incorporating behaviours and adding metacognitive and affective dimensions. For example, his 1994 definition states:

The essence of LA is the acceptance of responsibility for one’s own learning (Holec, 1981, p. 3). This entails establishing a personal agenda for learning, taking at least some of the initiatives that shape the learning process, and developing a capacity to evaluate the extent and success of one’s learning. (p. 431)

Little's 1996 definition reaffirmed the argument for the metacognitive and affective dimension of LA, saying "learner autonomy has both affective/motivational and metacognitive dimensions. It presupposes positive attitude to the purpose, content and process of learning on the one hand and well-developed metacognitive skills on the other" (1996, pp. 203-204).

Benson argues that because autonomy can take various forms and manifest itself in various ways, the issue with definitions of LA does not lie in the definitions themselves, but in the description of what autonomy in learning entails (Benson, 2011, 2013; Huang & Benson, 2013). Therefore, a feasible approach is to opt for a simple definition which can accommodate different interpretations and emphases, and then interrogate and break down the main concepts in LA in order to identify its potential components and dimensions in language learning (Benson, 2011, 2013).

Benson defines LA as "the capacity to take control of one's own learning" (2011, p 58). He posits that the construct of 'control' is more practical and open to empirical investigation than constructs like 'charge' or 'responsibility' (Benson, 2011). Benson (2013) believes that autonomy as a 'capacity' necessarily consists of three overlapping components: freedom, desire, and ability. *Freedom* refers to "the degree to which learners are permitted to control their learning" (2013, p. 4). *Desire* is "the learner's intention or 'wish' to learn a language or carry out a particular learning task" (2013, p. 4). *Ability* denotes the skills and knowledge involved in study and language. LA should be manifested in control over at least three levels, namely learning management, cognitive processes and learning content (Benson, 2013). According to Benson, control over learning management concerns behaviours relating to the planning, organising and evaluation of learning. All these involve the use of learning strategies such as metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, social strategies and

cognitive strategies. Control over cognitive processes deals with mental processes concerning attention, reflection and metacognitive knowledge building. Control over learning content concerns what to learn, why to learn, and how much to learn (Benson, 2011).

Benson deserves credit for his effort to break down the construct of ‘capacity’ into smaller units. This helps teachers understand the abstract construct of ‘capacity’ in a concrete sense in order to identify where and how to exert their influence to promote LA among their students. However, while ‘freedom’ should be included in the conceptualisation of LA, it should not be viewed as a component making up learners’ ‘capacity’. This exclusion of ‘freedom’ in the learners’ capacity is because the concept is taken in this study to be external to the learners and is determined by others rather than learners themselves. Freedom, then, is unlike ‘desire’ and ‘ability’, which remain basically internal to the learners, despite being influenced by external factors. Therefore, rather than perceiving ‘freedom’³ as an integral element of ‘capacity’, it should be conceived as the context in which capacity can manifest itself.

Apart from ‘capacity’, ‘willingness’ is also endorsed in some definitions as a significant element of LA. However, it is noteworthy that although the semantic meaning of ‘willingness’ may be not the same in all definitions, they all concern the affective aspect of LA. The Bergen definition⁴, for example, conceptualises LA as “a readiness to take charge of one’s own learning in the service of one’s own needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others as a social, responsible person” (cited in Dam, 1995, pp. 1-2). In the Bergen definition, ‘willingness’ arises from learners’ realisation of the relevance

³ This notion will be discussed again later in the section

⁴ A definition of learner autonomy agreed upon by a group of researchers in the third Nordic workshop on developing autonomous learning in EFL classroom at the University of Bergen from 11th to 14th August, 1989

of learning to their own needs and purposes. The conceptualisation of ‘willingness’ in the Bergen definition appears similar to the notion of ‘desire’ presented earlier in Benson’s definition (2013, pp. 4), which is viewed by him as somewhat simpler than the construct of ‘motivation’ (Benson, 2013).

Littlewood (1996) also includes the notion of ‘willingness’ in his definition as one of the two core components of LA, together with ability. He further elaborates ‘ability’ as consisting of the knowledge and skills necessary for learners to make and carry out choices appropriate for their learning, and ‘willingness’ as embracing motivation and confidence. Littlewood argues that these two elements are interrelated and interdependent on one another, and that LA cannot flourish without either of these components. Littlewood’s definition works for the context of learning that happens outside of the class, where students’ choices are not restricted. However, in classroom learning (where freedom of choices cannot be taken for granted, even when students do have ability and willingness), students are not always allowed to exhibit their autonomous capacity. For that reason, this definition appears to lack the crucial component of *autonomy offered* for LA. *Autonomy offered* refers to the level of freedom or opportunities created for learners to demonstrate their autonomy. This construct is explicitly recognised as the prerequisite and the condition for LA (e.g., Boud, 1988; Macaro, 1997; Scharle & Szabó, 2000; Little, 2003b; Benson, 2013).

Conceptual space for LA

Boud (1988) distinguishes “individual autonomy” (p. 18) and “practical autonomy” (p. 22). The former denotes the students’ “ability to make their own decisions about what they think and do” (p. 18) and is often conceived as the goal of education, while the latter refers to the opportunities provided for students to “exercise significant degrees of decision-making with respect to the content and organisation of courses” (p. 22), and is

perceived as the approach to education. Boud emphasises that *practical autonomy* is the requirement for *individual autonomy* in education settings, and *individual autonomy* is relative and situational in its nature because it depends upon a particular judgemental standard; it is “shaped by and related to the situations in which it is manifest” (p. 19). Boud’s idea of individual and practical autonomy and their relationship is supported by subsequent researchers (e.g., Macaro, 1997; Scharle & Szabó, 2000; Little, 2003b; Reinders, 2010; Benson, 2013). Some researchers explicitly conceptualise opportunities and freedom as one unified component in their definitions of LA. For example, Macaro (1997) perceives autonomy as “an ability that must be learnt through knowing *how* to make decisions about self as well as being *allowed* to make those decisions” (p. 168) [Macaro’s emphasis], while Scharle and Szabó (2000) define autonomy as “freedom and ability to manage one’s own affairs” (p. 4). Others recognise this aspect as an essential condition for LA. Little (2003b) states that teachers should create and maintain a learning environment where learners are given sufficient freedom and experience to control their own learning, enflame their desire and enhance their ability as autonomous learners. Reinders (2010) echoes this sentiment, saying, “learners are unable to take control of or make choices about their learning unless they are free to do so” (p. 41), indicating that *autonomy offered* is the prerequisite for the demonstration of LA.

LA as neither ability nor capacity

Many researchers do not conceptualise LA as an ability or capacity of learners (Dickinson, 1987; Breen & Mann, 1997; Paiva & Braga, 2008; Willis, 2011b).

Dickinson, for example, perceives LA as “the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions. In full autonomy, there is no involvement of a teacher or an institution. And the learner is also independent of specific prepared materials” (Dickinson, 1987, p.

11). In Dickinson's definition, LA is seen as a mode of learning equating to self-instruction or teacherless learning (Thanasoulas, 2000). This perspective was considered by Little (1991) to be a misconception, as discussed in section 3.2.4.

Additionally, Breen and Mann (1997) explicitly state in their definition that LA is not an ability that needs to be acquired. Rather, it is "a way of being in the world, a position from which to engage with the world" and this "way of being" must be "discovered or rediscovered" (p. 134). Breen and Mann's perspective suggests that LA concerns the relationship between learners and the learning environment, and the way they adapt to or control that environment. This perspective appears to resonate with a social constructivist perspective on autonomy, which conceives of it as the relationship between learners and the learning environment (Toohey & Norton, 2003; Toohey, 2007; Van Lier, 2008). From this perspective, autonomy is seen as an innate capacity that is facilitated or suppressed by the environment (Candy, 1991; Little, 1999b, 2007). Candy (1991), for example, argues that learners in constructivist perspectives are "self-constructing" agents (p. 259), suggesting that they have the inclination to be autonomous. However, learners are not always able to demonstrate this innate ability in every learning situation because of constraints that might arise. Therefore, autonomy can be perceived as the product of the interaction between learners and different agents and factors in a learning environment. Little (2007) supports this view, saying:

Learner autonomy is the product of an interactive process in which the teacher gradually enlarges the scope of her learners' autonomy by gradually allowing them more control of the process and content of their learning. In classroom as well as in naturalistic contexts communicative proficiency in a second or foreign language is also the product of an interactive process." (p. 26)

In order to facilitate LA, teachers should make allowances for students to get involved in decisions relating to aspects of learning and assessment and create situations in which learners can “assert their innate drive toward acting independently” (Candy, p. 259).

Viewing LA as an inborn ability suggests that it is a “universal human capacity” (Little, 1999c, p. 13) that can be developed and flourish in all educational contexts as long as teachers, administrators and institutions in these contexts pave the way for it. Additionally, this perspective takes into account situational factors and emphasises the role of teachers in the development and demonstration of LA. This perspective contrasts with the perspective of Holec and his advocates (e.g., Macaro, 1997; Sinclair, 2000) that LA is not “inborn, but must be acquired” (p. 3), leading to the development of techniques or procedures to train learners to become autonomous (Sinclair, 2000), and posing the risk of programming LA into a series of lesson plans (Little, 1991).

LA is also seen as a complex system (Paiva & Braga, 2008; Tatzl, 2016), which includes a number of different interrelated elements. Paiva, for example, uses the perspective of complexity theory to define LA as:

a complex socio-cognitive system, subject to internal and external constraints, which manifests itself in different degrees of independence and control of one’s own learning process. It involves capacities, abilities, attitudes, willingness, decision making, choices, planning, actions, and assessment either as a language learner or as a communicator inside or outside the classroom. As a complex system, it is dynamic, chaotic, unpredictable, non-linear, adaptive, open, self-organizing, and sensitive to initial conditions and feedback.

(Paiva, 2006 cited in Paiva & Braga, 2008, p. 447)

This view of LA resembles the social constructivist perspective, in that LA basically involves relationships, and can develop through interactions between learners,

and between learners and the learning environment (Tatzl, 2016). One advantage of this definition is that it shows a rather comprehensive picture of LA with the major elements that are discussed in the literature. However, this definition might be of little practical value to teachers or practitioners because they might be overwhelmed by so many elements making up the concept and get lost in these components.

In summary, the discussion about definitions of LA in language education indicates that there are divergent interpretations and understandings about LA. The variety of interpretations of LA suggests that it may be a complicated and multi-dimensional construct (Little, 1991; Benson & Voller, 1997; Nunan, 1997; Benson, 2011; Lamb, 2017; Lin & Reinders, 2018). These different interpretations and understanding can help to reveal different facets of LA from various perspectives and under multiple theoretical lenses, but they can also make researchers and practitioners feel bewildered by its complicated and multifaceted nature. Therefore, it is essential for researchers that “we know, and we are able to state, what we mean when we talk about autonomy” and “we are able to identify the form in which we choose to recognise it in the contexts of our own research and practice” (Benson, 2011, pp. 58-59).

3.2.6. Learner autonomy in this study

Since the sociocultural perspective views LA as the emergent product of the interaction between a learner and the learning environment in which he/she is embedded, this study focuses more on how students demonstrate their autonomy in different situations, rather than focussing on their capacity, which is viewed as being innate (Candy, 1991; Little, 1999b, 2007).

When talking about LA, researchers should distinguish between LA as a capacity or ability of learners, LA as a level of freedom offered to students, and LA as demonstrating actual behaviours of taking control of learning. Such distinctions may

help to streamline the interpretations and understandings of LA, and consequently help to clear up confusion around concept. In this study, these three connotations of LA are referred to as *autonomy capacity*, *autonomy offered*, and *autonomy demonstrated* respectively. *Autonomy capacity* is conceptualised as learners' ability to take control of their own learning (Benson, 2011). This capacity is conceived as being innate, and can be inhibited or facilitated by different factors making up the learning environment. This capacity includes two components: *ability* (knowledge and skills) and *desire* (Benson, 2013). *Autonomy offered* refers to the level of freedom or opportunities created for learners to exert their control over learning. *Autonomy demonstrated* is the extent to which the students actually exercise their capacity to take control of their learning in different learning situations. In this study, *autonomy demonstrated* depends on both *autonomy offered* and learners' autonomy capacity. That is, students demonstrate autonomy capacity when freedom and opportunities are provided for them and when they have the ability and desire to do so.

3.2.7. Characteristics of autonomous language learners

It is widely agreed that there are certain attributes that characterise autonomous learners. A number of researchers and scholars have made attempts to depict autonomous learners or to synthesise descriptions of autonomous learners in the literature (Holec, 1981; Boud, 1988; Candy, 1991; Dickinson, 1993; Cotterall, 1995; Littlewood, 1996; Breen & Mann, 1997; Little, 2003b; Cortés & Sánchez Lujan, 2005). Although they might look at autonomy from different perspectives, take different approaches, and use different language (i.e. terms, vocabulary), their descriptions all share some key common points.

Firstly, autonomous learners are independent learners in the sense that they are aware that learning is their responsibility and they accept that responsibility for their

learning (Candy, 1991; Little, 2003b; Cortés & Sánchez Lujan, 2005). Autonomous learners are also independent in terms of language use, learning contexts and resource management. In other words, they are self-reliant in using language in situations outside the classroom, they can organise contexts for learning, and they can use different resources for their own learning purposes (Littlewood, 1996; Breen & Mann, 1997; Cortés & Sánchez Lujan, 2005).

Secondly, autonomous learners take initiative in their learning, meaning that they are able to make decisions regarding their learning goals or objectives, and their plans or agenda for learning (Holec, 1981; Boud, 1988; Dickinson, 1993; Cotterall, 1995; Littlewood, 1996; Cortés & Sánchez Lujan, 2005). For example, Cotterall (1995), Holec (1981) and Little (2003b) all identify capacity for determining objectives/goals as one of the key indicators of an autonomous learner. Boud (1988) also recognises “identifying learning needs; setting goals; planning learning activities; finding resources needed for learning” as some of the key aspects in which learners need to take initiative in order to become autonomous (p. 23).

Thirdly, autonomous learners are cognitively and metacognitively strategic learners. They know themselves well in terms of learning styles and strategies. Therefore, they are able to identify, select and implement appropriate strategies for their learning (Candy, 1991; Dickinson, 1993; Littlewood, 1996). They collaborate with others in learning and use their teachers as resources or counsellors rather than instructors (Boud, 1988). They engage in learning in a strategic way. That is, they carry out evaluation and self-reflection about their learning both before and after the process has taken place (Candy, 1991; Breen & Mann, 1997; Little, 2003b). For example, they evaluate their purposes, preferred methods and available resources before determining the goals and steps for their learning (Breen & Mann, 1997), develop evaluation criteria

to self-assess what has been acquired, and reflect on the effectiveness of their learning after it has taken place (Little, 2003b) in order to make the right decisions for the next steps of their learning (e.g., what, how, when, where and with whom to learn).

Finally, autonomous learners have a high level of motivation (both intrinsic and instrumental) in learning (Candy, 1991; Breen & Mann, 1997; Cortés & Sánchez Lujan, 2005). They also demonstrate a positive attitude towards learning even in unfavourable learning conditions (Cortés & Sánchez Lujan, 2005), and have high self-efficacy (Breen & Mann, 1997).

It seems that all the aforementioned attributes portray an ideal autonomous learner. However, in reality, it is unlikely that students possess all these qualities, and this ideal learner hardly exists (Nunan, 1997; R. Smith, 2008). In fact, learners may display these qualities and tactics to varying degrees, which depend on a range of factors including learning situation, topic, learning task, task difficulty, learner competency and motivation. Therefore, it may be more useful to recognise the indicators of LA in learners rather than trying to picture autonomous learners in terms of their characteristics or attributes.

3.2.8. Versions of learner autonomy

Benson introduced three versions of autonomy in language education: *technical*, *psychological* and *political* (Benson, 1997, p. 19). The *technical* version conceptualises autonomy in terms of (a) situations where students have to learn independently and (b) the necessary skills students need to possess in order to do so. The *psychological* version views autonomy as a capacity including attitudes and abilities necessary for students to take charge of their learning. The *political* version portrays autonomy as control over learning processes and learning content (Benson, 1997).

Oxford argued that Benson's model of autonomy lacked sociocultural perspectives on autonomy, and she suggested two sociocultural versions: *sociocultural I* and *sociocultural II*, complementary to Benson's model (Oxford, 2003, pp. 77, 78, 79). The *sociocultural I* version defines autonomy as *self-regulation* and focuses on the interaction between students and their peers and teachers. The *sociocultural II* version depicts autonomy as a level of participation in the community of practice (Oxford, 2003). Expanding Benson's model, Oxford suggested an autonomy model that comprises four perspectives, each with a different focus: *technical (physical situation)*, *psychological (characteristics of learners)*, *sociocultural (mediated learning)* and *political-critical (ideologies, access and power structures)*. Each perspective needs to cover four themes: *context, agency, motivation, and learning strategies* (Oxford, 2003). Researchers on LA are also encouraged to integrate as many perspectives as possible (Oxford, 2003). A summary of four perspectives on autonomy and four main themes in each perspective is presented in table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Summary of perspectives on autonomy - adapted from R. L. Oxford (2003)

Perspectives on autonomy		Technical	Psychological	Sociocultural I	Sociocultural II	Political-critical
			Autonomy as skills for independent learning situations, such as in a self-access centre	Autonomy as a combination of characteristics of the individual	Autonomy as self-regulation, gained through social interaction with a more capable, mediating person in a particular setting	Autonomy as participation (at first peripheral and then more complete) in the community of practice. Mediated learning occurs through cognitive apprenticeships
Themes	Context	Is viewed as literal surrounding, self-access centre	Generalised environment (foreign vs second language environment)	Is seen as the relationship between the learner and more capable others, as well as specific social and cultural settings	Is viewed as communities of practice, as cognitive apprenticeship, and a larger social and cultural environment	Is an arrangement of ideological positions, instantiated in a specific interaction, relationship, or setting
	Agency	Is viewed as <i>total</i> by advocates of self-access, but as <i>limited</i> by critics of self-access	Is a psychological characteristic of the individual	Is viewed as the power to control one's learning through self-regulation	Is reflected in a cognitive apprenticeship and in participating actively with expert practitioners	Is power to control one's situation, be fully heard, be free from oppression, and have choices
	Motivation	Is variable, dependent upon situational	Is viewed as a relatively static characteristic of the person although	Is linked to becoming a self-regulated individual	Is linked to becoming part of a community of practice. It is investment	Is associated with becoming free to have one's own voice, ideological position,

		conditions and the response of the individual to those conditions	self-efficacy changes through strategy construction		in a 'imagined' (desired) community	choice of cultural alternatives. Motivation is also from the striving for social equalities of race, gender, class, etc.
	Learning strategies	Are viewed as tools given by the teachers to students through learner training	Are seen as psychological features of the individual that can change through practice and strategy instruction. Optimal strategy use relates to task, learning style, goals, etc.	Is not typically used. Metacognitive and social learning strategies are implicit in Vygotsky's work	Grow out of the practices of communities. In cognitive apprenticeships, learners gain strategies from expert practitioners and from their initial communities	Are hardly discussed in political-critical perspective. However, learning strategies can help to open up access within power structures and cultural alternatives for learners

3.2.9. Levels of learner autonomy

The notion of degrees of autonomy is widely accepted in the literature about LA (Nunan, 1997; Littlewood, 1999; Sinclair, 2000; Everhard, 2012; Huang & Benson, 2013), and there have been attempts to build models of LA in terms of different levels from low to high.

Nunan (1997) was the first person to attempt to classify different stages in LA development based on learners' actions regarding a learning content domain and learning process domain. In Nunan's model, there are five levels of autonomy: *awareness, involvement, intervention, creation, and transcendence* (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Nunan's model of LA (Nunan, 1997, p. 195)

level	Learning action	Content	Process
1	Awareness	Learners are made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the materials they are using	Learners identify implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own preferred learning styles and strategies
2	Involvement	Learners are involved in selecting their own goals from a range of alternatives on offer	Learners make choices among a range of options
3	Intervention	Learners are involved in modifying and adapting the goals and content of the learning programme	Learners modify/ adapt tasks
4	Creation	Learners create their own goals and objectives	Learners create their own tasks
5	Transcendence	Learners go beyond the classroom and make links between the content of classroom learning and the world beyond	Learners become teachers and researchers

It is argued by Dang (2012) that Nunan's model of LA is driven by language theory, and therefore cannot comprehensively reflect the nature of LA—a socially mediated construct. For that reason, this model cannot reflect the development of LA for all students in different contexts (Dang, 2012).

While searching for a culture-free definition of LA, Littlewood (1999) recognises that LA is an outcome of interdependence rather than independence, and LA is most effectively facilitated in an interpersonal environment in which students are provided with help and resources, personal concern, involvement from others, opportunities for making choices, and freedom from external control. He proposes a framework of autonomy based on levels of ‘self-determination’ or ‘self-regulation’, which he refers to as the experience of self to be an agent of one’s behaviour. He distinguishes two levels of autonomy: *proactive* and *reactive* autonomy. Proactive autonomy regulates both the direction of the activity and the activity itself. That is, students set up their learning agendas and direction and carry out the evaluation of their learning methods and the assessment of their learning outcomes. Reactive autonomy “regulates the activity once the direction has been set” (p. 75). That is, students do not create the direction for their learning, but when the direction has been initiated, reactive autonomy enables students to achieve their goals by autonomously organising their resources. Reactive autonomy can be thought of as the preliminary step towards proactive autonomy.

Models of autonomy for this study

This study conceptualises LA as denoting three distinct and interrelated components: *autonomy offered*, *autonomy capacity* and *autonomy demonstrated*. Among the three components, *autonomy capacity* is considered to be innate, and the main focus of the study is to investigate the demonstration of LA and its inhibiting and facilitating factors (i.e., *autonomy offered*) in assessment practice. Therefore, the study draws on two models of autonomy to analyse teachers’ and students’ practices in class. The first model is for examining the *demonstration of LA* (through students’ behaviours), and the

second model is for analysing levels of *autonomy offered* in learning tasks and assessment strategies.

The model for *autonomy demonstrated* is based on Littlewood’s model of reactive and proactive autonomy (Littlewood, 1999). Littlewood’s model was selected because it takes into consideration the interpersonal environment which fosters LA. Additionally, although it is a broad framework, it clearly indicates the relationship between teacher and students. This makes it easier to categorise students’ behaviours. *Compliant* has also been inserted as the first level in the model because, as discussed in section 3.1.2, dependency or compliance is also significant and should be included in any scale for autonomy demonstration (Van Lier, 2010).

Table 3.3 Model of autonomy demonstrated

Autonomy demonstrated	Definition
Proactive	Students initiate the agenda for their learning and initiate actions in order to complete their agenda.
Reactive	Students initiate some actions in order to follow other-imitated learning agenda.
Compliant	Students follow the teachers’ instructions.

The model for analysing *autonomy offered* is based on Willison’s Research Skill Development Framework (RSD) (Willison & O’Regan, 2006), because this framework describes the levels of autonomy as “the conceptual space that students are given or experience” (Willison et al., 2017, p. 3), which is the most aligned with *autonomy offered* in this study. The RSD describes five levels of autonomy. However, out of consideration for the compatibility of the two models of autonomy, these five levels have been condensed into three levels, as presented in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 Model for autonomy offered

Autonomy offered	Definition
Open	Students make all choices and decisions regarding their learning.
Bounded	Students make some choices and decisions regarding their learning.
Prescribed	Students make almost no choices or decisions regarding their learning.

3.2.10. Perceptions about learner autonomy

3.2.10.1. Teachers' perceptions about LA

Beliefs that teachers hold about various issues in education vary according to their sociocultural and educational backgrounds and experiences. The beliefs that teachers hold can have a great impact on their practices, and in turn on their students' learning. In a similar vein, teachers' perceptions about autonomy (e.g., its meaning, desirability and feasibility) can influence the method and extent to which autonomy is fostered in language classrooms (Borg, 2011). A significant body of research has been done to explore teachers' beliefs, perceptions and perspectives about the concept of LA (see for example, Camilleri, 1997; Chan, 2003; Joshi, 2011; T. V. Nguyen, 2011; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Al-Busaidi & Al-Maamari, 2014; T. N. Nguyen, 2014; Yasmin & Sohail, 2017).

In 1997, Camilleri wrote a report on a project consisting of six separate studies and involving 328 teachers teaching different subjects, including English, at schools in Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Belorussia, Estonia and Poland. The project aimed to explore teachers' attitudes towards LA in these contexts. The findings reveal a general "willingness of teachers to change and develop practice, in significant areas of their teaching, in the direction of LA and to try out new methods which might bring this about." (p. 28). Teachers in these countries tended to support students' involvement in activities, including "deciding on position of desks", "deciding on seatings of students",

and “selecting realia” (p. 29). However, they were reluctant to allow students to select textbooks and decide on the time and place of the lesson.

Chan (2003) carried out a large-scale study of 508 undergraduate students and 41 English teachers at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The study provided an abundant source of information in regard to four aspects: teachers’ roles and responsibilities, their students’ abilities to make decisions, autonomous learning activities, and the role of autonomy in language learning. The findings suggested that teachers in this context showed a positive disposition towards LA. However, they also had “a well-defined view of their own role and responsibilities”, and expressed “a strong preference for a relatively dominant role” (p. 49). The findings suggested that from their teachers’ perspective, students in Hong Kong tertiary education were not ready to take on more autonomy.

T. V. Nguyen (2011) conducted a study to explore the perceptions of 47 English teachers in higher education in Vietnam regarding aspects of their responsibility and their students’ ability relating to autonomous language learning. She found that LA was still a strange concept for both teachers and students in Vietnam. Teachers were not ready to let their students learn autonomously, as they still wished to assume their power over most aspects of learning. These findings were supported by another study on teachers’ beliefs about autonomy in the context of higher education in Vietnam (T. N. Nguyen, 2014). T. N. Nguyen (2014) discovered that teachers did not thoroughly understand the concept. The majority of participants in her study did not express their trust in students’ ability to take charge of their learning, and the majority of decisions regarding learning were perceived as the teachers’ responsibility.

Joshi (2011) explored teachers’ perceptions of the concept of LA in Nepal. The study involved 80 master’s level students and six teachers of English from the

Department of English Education, Tribhuvan University. The findings indicated that almost 80% of the teachers perceived themselves as being a facilitator. They thought that the factors contributing to autonomous language learning included intrinsic motivation to learn English; the prospect of a good result in the final exams; learner awareness; cultural factors; and other issues such as time and access. All the teachers believed that autonomous learning was the key to better language performance and command, and thought that autonomous learners are ‘good learners’.

Al-Busaidi and Al-Maamari (2014) conducted a study to explore 42 ELT teachers’ beliefs about LA in Oman. The study focused on how teachers in this context defined the concept and the possible sources for their definitions. The study indicated that teachers in this context defined LA in three different ways. The first category of definitions were “pragmatic conceptions” (p. 2055) which focussed on issues directly relating to teachers’ everyday teaching issues, such as curriculum, materials, assessment, teaching methodology or learning strategies. The second category were “metacognitive” definitions (p. 2055), which dealt with learning and strategies to improve learning. The third category were “dualist conceptions” of LA (p. 2055) in which teachers combined different notions such as control, freedom, content, process, result, responsibility, and right to describe various facets of LA. The study also revealed that teachers’ perceptions of LA emerged from their language teaching, their language learning and their professional development. Another study in Oman was carried out by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), but this study had a different focus. It aimed to investigate teachers’ understandings of LA in terms of psychological, technical, sociocultural and political dimensions, and their perceptions about a number of debated issues, including the role of the teacher in LA, factors hindering the development of LA and the contribution of LA to language learning. Borg and Al-Busaidi collected data using a

survey of 61 teachers and a follow-up interview of 42 volunteer teachers, and found that teachers in this context commonly perceived autonomy in terms of strategies for independent and individual learning. They expressed positive views towards the benefits of LA in language learning. They believed that autonomous learners are “more motivated, more committed, happier, more focused and benefit more from learning opportunities outside the classroom” (p. 15). The study also reported that teachers showed a more positive disposition to the *desirability* of autonomy than to the *practicability* of the concept, and they were not very positive about their own learners’ autonomy. The findings also reported a number of barriers to the development of LA. These factors concerned learners (e.g., their reliance on the teacher, their low proficiency in English, their lack of motivation, and their insufficient of knowledge and skills for independent learning), teachers (e.g., their low autonomy and their low expectations of what their students can achieve) and the institution (e.g., prescribed curricula and limited resources). However, the teachers seemed to blame learner-related factors more often for hindering the promotion and development of LA.

Following Borg and Al-Busaidi’s study in 2012, a series of studies exploring teachers’ perceptions and reported practices regarding autonomy were carried out in other contexts, mostly in Asian countries (Arshiyan and Pishkar (2015); Wichayathian and Reinders (2015); Haji-Othman and Wood (2016); Keuk and Heng (2016); Lengkanawati (2016); V. L. Nguyen (2016); Ranosa-Madrurnio, Tarrayo, Tupas, and Valdez (2016); Stroupe, Rundle, and Tomita (2016); Tapinta (2016); Wang and Wang (2016); Borg and Alshumaimeri (2017); Field and Vane (2017)). These studies all replicated methods and instruments used in Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), and revealed a number of significant themes about teachers’ beliefs and reported practices. A number of findings in Borg and Al-Busaidi’s study were also confirmed in these studies.

First, results highlighted that the concept of LA was perceived in a number of ways across the studied contexts, but the most commonly recorded notions were ‘independence’, ‘control’, ‘responsibility’ and ‘freedom’. It was also suggested that autonomy was conceived of more in terms of a psychological dimension—mental features that enable autonomy (V. L. Nguyen, 2016; Wang & Wang, 2016)—and some aspects of LA were less evident and feasible in some contexts than in others. For example, Field and Vane (2017) found that teachers in New Zealand believed it was impracticable for tertiary students to manage decision-making about learning objectives and assessment, and V. L. Nguyen (2016) reported that LA regarding making choices and decisions was not common among students in the Vietnamese higher education context.

Secondly, teachers in all these studies perceived themselves to be playing an important role in fostering learner autonomy, and they shared positive views towards the benefits of learner autonomy in language learning.

Thirdly, perceptions of the desirability and the feasibility of promoting autonomy varied. For example, there was a mismatch between teachers’ perceptions of the desirability and the feasibility of developing autonomy in Vietnam, China and Indonesia (Lengkanawati, 2016; V. L. Nguyen, 2016; Wang & Wang, 2016). Teachers seemed to be more positive about the desirability than the feasibility of the concept. However, in countries like Thailand and the Philippines, teachers showed a positive disposition towards autonomy both in theory and implementation (Duong, 2014; Ranosa-Madrurnio et al., 2016), while in Cambodia, teachers were pessimistic about both these aspects (Haji-Othman & Wood, 2016).

There seemed to be a consensus among all the teachers in these studies about factors adversely affecting the development of LA. These factors were mostly

concerned with the learner, the teacher and the institution. For example, ‘prescribed’ curricula, syllabus and materials were quoted as the most prominent institutional factors hindering autonomy (see for example Keuk & Heng, 2016; Ranosa-Madrurnio et al., 2016), and “lack of motivation” (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017, p. 17), “poor attitude” and “lack of general study skills” (Wang & Wang, 2016, p. 33) were recognised as factors which were detrimental to learner autonomy. Cultural factors were also quoted as playing a part, but only in China, where teachers thought that the stereotype about Chinese students and teachers (e.g., that students are passive and reliant) prevented the development of autonomy (Wang & Wang, 2016). Finally, in all the aforementioned countries except for the Philippines, teachers were not positive about their students’ level of autonomy. Typically, only 40 to 60 per cent of the teachers in these countries thought that their students had a ‘fair degree’ of autonomy (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017).

3.2.10.2. Learners’ perceptions of learner autonomy

It is crucial to know learner beliefs before planning for LA (Benson, 2001) because the beliefs or attitudes that students have about autonomy, language learning and autonomous language learning may have a great impact (either positive or negative) on their autonomous language learning behaviours (Cotterall, 1995; Chan, 2001a). A number of studies have explored students’ perspectives, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes about different aspects of learning. These factors (i.e., students’ perspectives, perception, etc.) can be used as indicators of students’ level of readiness for autonomous learning.

Cotterall is one of the pioneers of research on students’ beliefs about language learning and their readiness for autonomous learning. In 1995, she conducted an empirical study to explore students’ beliefs about language learning, from which she

made a judgement about students' readiness for autonomous learning. The study involved a survey questionnaire of 139 students learning English as a second language at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. The findings revealed that there existed six patterns of learners' beliefs about language learning: role of teacher, role of feedback, learner independence, learner confidence in study ability, experience of language learning, and approach to studying. These six patterns of beliefs set a foundation for later researchers' designs of questionnaire or interview questions to explore students' readiness for autonomous learning (see, for example, Cotterall, 1999; Chan, 2001a). The study also concluded that investigating learners' beliefs is crucial, and that these beliefs are likely to reflect learners' readiness for autonomy (Cotterall, 1995).

Cotterall (1995)'s study set a basis for her follow-up studies to explore students' prospects of autonomous learning. For example, in 1999, Cotterall conducted an investigation about language learning beliefs held by students in an English learning program. Data were collected from 131 English language learners from 19 countries using a survey questionnaire developed from the findings of her previous study in 1995. The findings indicated that students in her study were willing and ready for autonomous learning. They believed that they needed to share responsibility with their teacher in language learning, and recognised that the main role of the teacher was to show them how to learn. Additionally, they accepted that there was no single way to learn a language, that success in language learning depended on their own efforts, and that "making mistakes is a natural part of language learning" (p.507). In 2001, Chan carried out two studies about English language students' readiness for autonomous learning and their perspectives on it in the Hong Kong higher education context (Chan, 2001a, 2001b). Both studies explored students' perceptions of the teacher's and their own role

in learning, their views about autonomous learning, and their learning preferences. The study about students' readiness for autonomous learning indicated that students had "an initial awareness of the different role of the teacher and themselves", showed positive attitudes towards autonomous learning, and appeared to be "reasonably autonomous" (Chan, 2001b, p. 514). However, the research also showed that students in the study were still at an early stage of learning to work autonomously (Chan, 2001b). The study on students' perspectives regarding autonomous learning showed that students still perceived the teacher to be holding a dominant role in language learning, and as being a primary decision maker (Chan, 2001a). Students also preferred group work to individual work, suggesting that they conceived autonomous learning as not only independence but also interdependence (Chan, 2001a).

In 2002, Chan, Spratt and Humphreys conducted a study to investigate Hong Kong tertiary students' readiness for autonomous language learning. The study examined four different aspects, namely students' views on the responsibilities of themselves and their English teachers in the learning process; their perceptions of their decision-making abilities in English learning; their level of motivation; and the autonomous language learning activities that they carried out inside and outside the class. The study used a survey questionnaire of 508 students—356 females and 135 males—including 421 degree students and 87 higher diploma students from various academic departments and year levels. The findings showed that students in Hong Kong "[had] definite views about the teachers' roles and their own responsibilities" (p.13). They perceived their teacher as having greater responsibilities in areas such as course planning and classroom management, and they perceived themselves as being responsible for most of their outside-class activities. The findings also showed that while students held positive views regarding their own decision-making abilities and

motivation for learning English, their responses to the learning activities inside and outside class suggested a low level of autonomy. This was in opposition to the results from Cotterall's 1995 study, which found that students' beliefs about learning did indeed affect their learning behaviours.

The study by Chan, Spratt, and Humphreys (2002) triggered a number of follow-up studies that adapted or adopted similar methods and instruments to investigate learners' perspectives on autonomy and autonomous language learning (Yıldırım, 2008; Sakai, Takagi, & Chu, 2010; T. V. Nguyen, 2011; Ahmadi, 2013; Abdel Razeq, 2014; Bekleyen & Selimoglu, 2016; Okay & Balçıkanlı, 2017). These studies presented insights into students' perceptions about autonomy and autonomous learning in various research contexts. For example, T. V. Nguyen (2011) explored the perceptions of non-English major undergraduates and graduates of their responsibilities and abilities relating to autonomous learning, and in- and outside-class activities for autonomous learning. The findings highlighted that LA was still an unfamiliar concept to students in Vietnam. There was a gap between students' desire to have more voice in the decision-making process and their actual abilities and activities, and between what they believed they could do autonomously and what they actually did autonomously. The study concluded that students were still struggling with learning autonomously. Other studies in different countries—Turkey (Yıldırım, 2008; Bekleyen & Selimoglu, 2016; Okay & Balçıkanlı, 2017), Palestine (Abdel Razeq, 2014), Iran (Ahmadi, 2013), and East Asian regions (Sakai, Chu, Takagi, & Lee, 2008) revealed similar results regarding students' perspectives on their own and their teacher's responsibilities in the learning process. Students in these countries perceived their teacher as having greater responsibility for students' language learning than the students themselves. They appeared to be reluctant to take on most in-class responsibilities and preferred to share or hand over these tasks

to their teacher. They only perceived themselves as being responsible for out-of-class tasks. The findings indicated that students in these countries might not be ready for autonomous learning, and they still needed a lot of support from their teachers to carry on their learning independently.

3.3. Assessment in relation to learner autonomy

Assessment is generally referred to as “a wide range of methods for evaluating pupil performance and attainment, including formal testing and examination, practical and oral assessment and classroom-based assessment carried out by teachers” (Gipps, 2002, p. 73). It is undeniable that assessment plays an indispensable role in the process of teaching and learning. Gibbs (2006, p. 23) states that “assessment frames learning, creates learning activity and orients all aspects of learning behaviours”. Assessment conveys the intentions of a program and implications of what is considered as most important in that program, and therefore contributes to students’ perceptions of the curriculum and their engagement in the learning process (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Therefore, assessment not only determines students’ choice of learning content, learning method, learning effort and engagement in learning tasks set for them (Brown, Gibbs, & Glover, 2003; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004b; Gibbs, 2006; Gibbs & Dunbar-Goddet, 2007), but also influences students’ approach to learning (Joughin, 2010).

Given the significant role of assessment in students’ learning, it is likely that assessment also has a profound impact on LA (Falchikov & Boud, 1989; Sadler, 1989; Gipps, 2002; Little, 2003a; Everhard, 2015a). However, the effects of assessment on LA depend largely on how assessment is used and which purposes it serves (Everhard, 2015a). Assessment is widely recognised in the literature as serving two main purposes: collecting evidence of students’ achievement or level of performance against specified

standards or objectives, and supporting students' learning. These two purposes are often referred to as summative assessment, or assessment of learning (Wiliam & Black, 1996; Stiggins, 2005), and formative assessment, or assessment for learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Assessment Reform Group, 2002). The following sections will discuss the impacts of these two forms of assessment on LA.

3.3.1. Assessment of learning

AoL is “concerned with summing up or summarizing the achievement status of a student, and is geared towards reporting at the end of a course of study especially for the purpose of certification” (Sadler, 1989, p. 120). Assessment serving this purpose is often *high-stakes* and teacher-directed, and typically happens at the end of a unit, program, course, project, semester or school year (Moss & Brookhart, 2009).

LA and AoL are often viewed as being incompatible (Little, 2003a; Benson, 2015; Everhard, 2015a), since they are linked to different theories of learning with divergent epistemological assumptions about knowledge and how it is constructed. For example, LA is closely related to constructivist theories of learning (Candy, 1991; Benson, 1997; Little, 2007; Lamb, 2017), which emphasise the active role of learners in the construction of knowledge and the transaction and transformation of knowledge. LA denotes the active role of students in the process of teaching and learning in which they are the ‘centre’. This entails students’ greater involvement and participation both in the learning process itself, which includes assessment, and the decision-making around it. In contrast, AoL is often linked with behaviourist theories of learning, which arguably focus more on the product than the process of learning (James, 2006; Berry, 2009). Behaviourist perspectives of learning view knowledge as being transmitted from teachers to learners (Everhard, 2015a; Lamb, 2017). Therefore, learners are viewed as passive recipients of knowledge, and are often marginalised in the assessment process

because they are often not allowed to participate in the assessment of their learning outcomes.

AoL is often believed to inhibit the development of LA (Little, 2003a; Harland et al., 2014; Benson, 2015; Wass et al., 2015). Little (2003a) claims that public examinations are detrimental to the development of LA because they might discourage the implementation of pedagogical measures appropriate to enhance the development of LA, and encourage the view of education as transmission of knowledge to the individual. Public examinations can also produce the washback effect that, in turn, leads to test-oriented teaching and learning, and constrains LA (Bailey, 1996, p. 257; Spratt, 2005; Taylor, 2005; Papakammenou, 2018; Tseng, You, Tsai, & Chen, 2019). Benson (2015) supports this argument. He believes that the washback effect of assessment makes it inimical to LA. He states:

Once the assessment system has been put in practice, there is a natural tendency for decisions about curriculum, syllabus and lesson planning, and even day-to-day practices of teaching and learning, to be ‘reverse engineered’ so as to produce positive student outcomes within the system. Schools and teachers want their students to ‘do well’ and it is typically the assessment system that defines what ‘doing well’ means. Assessment-driven decisions often run counter to the kinds of processes that support learner autonomy. (p. viii)

Testing and examinations also give rise to “behaviour conditioning”, which has a negative effect on the development of autonomous learners (Harland et al., 2014; Wass et al., 2015, p. 1325). That is, students only learn when they have tests or exams or when they are awarded a grade or mark for their learning effort. The term ‘behaviour conditioning’ describes findings from an empirical study conducted in New Zealand. Harland et al. (2014) interviewed sixty-two students and teachers about their experience

of assessment in order to investigate the impacts of continuous, high-stakes assessment on students' learning and autonomy at a New Zealand university. They found that lecturers gave students graded assessments so frequently that students' learning became conditioned by grades. That is, if there were no grade involved in assessment, students would not study. The students' compliance to graded assessment, in turn, gave rise to an "assessment arms race" between lecturers who used grading to regulate student study behaviour (Harland et al., 2014, p. 7).

The impact of assessment, in the form of graded tests or exams, on students' learning behaviours is so great that some teachers and students believe that these types of assessment can help to promote LA, and should be used to promote it (Harland et al., 2014; Vu & Shah, 2016). For example, Harland et al. (2014)'s findings also reveal a common view among lecturers that frequent graded assessment can move students towards autonomy because the lecturers believed that these practices can challenge students to learn regularly. This finding is supported by a study about Vietnamese students' self-directed learning ability in relation to English listening skills (Vu & Shah, 2016). Vu and Shah found that both teachers and learners blamed poor assessment methods and inadequate tests and exams for the students' poor self-directed learning, and they suggested organising more regular tests or examinations in English listening skills as a method to promote self-directed learning among students. These findings can be justified in terms of the effects of summative assessment on students' motivation to learn. It is widely accepted in the literature that summative assessment, especially graded assessment, can be a source of extrinsic motivation for learning (Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2003; Roediger III, Putnam, & Smith, 2011; Stan, 2012; Vaessen et al., 2017). In response to frequent summative assessment practices, students tend to study more regularly, make more effort to learn and build up their learning habits. Therefore,

on the surface, summative assessment appears to promote learning behaviours indicating LA.

In this study, AoL is not perceived as being antagonistic to LA. Rather, it is viewed simply with regard to the extent to which assessment encourages or discourages students to exert their agency in learning.

3.3.2. Assessment for learning

AfL, as opposed to AoL, refers to a range of assessment strategies designed to improve the quality of learning (Black & Jones, 2006). There is no single precise definition of AfL (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Assessment Reform Group, 2002). For example, Black and Wiliam (1998) identify feedback as the key element of formative assessment, and emphasise the transformational function of feedback on teaching and learning. In their view, formative assessment includes “all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged” (pp. 7-8). Gipps (1999) focuses on the role of teachers in the formative assessment process. She defines formative assessment as “the process of appraising, judging, or evaluating students’ work or performance and using this to shape and improve their competence” (p. 381). The Assessment Reform Group (2002, p. 2) describes AfL as “the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are and where they need to go and how best to get there”. This definition recognises the active role of the learners in assessment, and the signposting function of assessment information in helping teachers and learners to direct their teaching and learning towards one common goal of ‘getting there’. A group of researchers at the Third International Conference on Assessment for Learning organised in New Zealand in 2009 also proposed that “Assessment for learning is part of everyday practice by

students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning” (cited in Klenowski, 2009, p. 264). This definition specifies that assessment is an everyday practice that is embedded in teaching and learning. Additionally, this definition recognises the role of students’ peers in the assessment process, and emphasises that ‘ongoing’ learning is the prime goal that AfL promotes.

In this study, the definition proposed in the Third International Conference on Assessment is adopted as the working definition for AfL. This is because such a definition resonates with a sociocultural perspective on assessment that identifies assessment as an integrated and embedded element of teaching and learning.

3.3.2.1. Relationship between AfL and learner autonomy

AfL is associated with a transactional and transformational approach to teaching and learning in which students are viewed as agents who actively negotiate different aspects of learning with their teachers and other learners (Willis, 2011b; Everhard, 2015a). Therefore, LA is a significant aim of AfL (Sadler, 1989; Assessment Reform Group, 2002; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004a; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Woods, 2015). For example, the support for LA is embedded in the ten principles for AfL developed by the Assessment Reform Group (2002), because these principles indicate the significance of students becoming the assessors of their own learning and the importance of helping students to develop their ability to carry out self-assessment. Gibbs and Simpson (2004a) propose eleven conditions under which assessment supports learning. These conditions can be understood as those under which LA can be nurtured because they emphasise the role of assessment in guiding students to “allocate sufficient time and effort to the most important aspects of the course” (p. 14), “engage in productive learning activity of an appropriate kind” (p. 14), and make use of feedback for their

learning. Black and Wiliam (2009) propose a theory of formative assessment which identifies five key strategies, among which they identify strategies number 4—*activating students as instructional resources for one another*—and 5—*activating students as the owners of their own learning*—as “particularly relevant to the development of students’ own capacity to learn how to learn and to learner autonomy” (p. 8)

The impacts of AfL on LA can vary depending on many factors, including how AfL is used in the class, types of AfL to be used, and teacher-student relationship in AfL, especially the teacher-student power relationship. AfL does not automatically lead to LA.

The application of AfL strategies can lead to different results in autonomy promotion. Marshall and Drummond (2006) distinguished between ‘spirit’ and ‘letter’ AfL lessons. Spirit AfL lessons are the ones whose underpinning principle is to promote LA. Letter AfL lessons, in contrast, only apply AfL procedures. Marshall and Drummond reported that only a fifth of the twenty-seven lessons they observed appeared to capture the ‘spirit’ of AfL, meaning that only one-fifth of the lessons promoted the goal of LA. Pryor and Crossouard (2008) proposed two types of formative assessment: convergent and divergent. The former refers to a teacher’s attempt to determine if learners know, understand or can do some predetermined thing through the tools of closed and pseudo-open questions and tasks where the idea about what constitutes a correct answer is clear at least to the teacher. The latter refers to a teacher’s attempt to establish what students know, understand and can do through the use of open questions where there is no predetermined answer. In terms of LA promotion, teachers adopting a divergent approach are more likely to achieve LA goals through

orchestrating a learning environment in which learning is mediated through partnership and interactions to assessment (Willis, 2011b).

The teacher-student relationship in AfL is significant in promoting LA (Gipps, 2002; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008; Willis, 2011a). A supportive and trustworthy relationship can encourage students to gain affiliation with the identity of an autonomous learner, which is “the precursor for autonomy” (Willis, 2011a, p. 409). Willis found in her three case studies conducted in Queensland middle school classes that teachers used various methods to help students participate and find affiliation with the identity of an autonomous learner. The methods they used were (1) connecting with students; (2) sharing stories; (3) constructing socially safe and peer-supportive learning environments; (4) sharing ownership of learning; (5) leaving space for students to be experts; (6) renegotiating resistance; and (7) understanding tacit negotiation of identity (Willis, 2011a). The supportive learning relationship created by AfL practices also encourages students to engage in assessment (Cowie, 2005). This engagement helps to promote their autonomy in learning. Picón Jácome (2012) findings from an action research study indicated that students developed metacognition, critical thinking and a sense of ownership of their learning process when they took part in a teacher-student partnership writing assessment.

As discussed earlier, the core tenet of AfL is the recognition of the learner’s active role in learning and assessment. This requires the sharing of power and control with students within the classroom so that LA can be enabled (Gipps, 2002; Marshall & Drummond, 2006). That is, students should be involved in making decisions about different aspects of learning and assessment. Understanding the power relationship between teachers and learners in the context of assessment is important in order to identify the factors in assessment that enable or constrain LA.

3.3.2.2. Assessment-embedded learning tasks in relation to autonomy

As discussed earlier, AfL is perceived in this study as an integrated, embedded element in the teaching and learning process, and hence it is inseparable from tasks or activities designed for teaching and learning. Therefore, when investigating the factors in assessment practice that inhibit or facilitate the demonstration of LA, it is necessary to take into consideration the design of learning tasks that teachers use in their class, especially the level of conceptual space for students' involvement and decision-making in these learning tasks.

Language tasks are understood in this study as incorporating any kind of language activity, including language exercises that are designed for learning (Ellis, 2003). This study will use the framework proposed by Ellis (2003) for analysing language tasks. According to this framework, a language task necessarily consists of four main elements:

- Goal: the general purpose of the task, what it aims to promote in students or what it wants the students to achieve after completing the task, e.g., to practise the ability to describe an object precisely; to provide an opportunity for the use of a relative clause.
- Input: the verbal or non-verbal information supplied by the task, e.g., a picture, a map or a written text.
- Conditions: the methodological procedures that students need to follow in doing the task, e.g., group work or pair work; planning time or no planning time.
- Predicted outcomes, including outcomes in terms of product and process. The product is the result from completing the task. The outcomes in terms of product can be closed (i.e., allow for only one correct answer) or open (i.e., allow for multiple possibilities). The outcome in terms of process refers to the linguistic and cognitive process the task is hypothesised to generate.

(Ellis, 2003, p. 21)

The outcome of a task and the power relationship between teacher and student in the task can indicate the level of autonomy in the task. In terms of learning outcomes, Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam (2004) argue that “differences between learning tasks can be understood in terms of a spectrum. At one end are ‘closed’ tasks with a single well-defined outcome; at the other are ‘open’ tasks with a wide range of acceptable outcomes” (p.18). This means that the task with closed outcomes offers less autonomy for students than the task with open outcomes. In terms of power relationships, levels of *autonomy offered* (see section 3.2.6) can also be judged on a spectrum with teachers at one end and students at the other (see Table 3.5).

Table 3.5 Spectrum of autonomy offered in language tasks

Prescribed	Bounded	Open
Teachers decide	Teacher and learners co-decide	Learners decide
Input Procedures Conditions Output (closed)	Input Procedures Conditions Output (open)	Input Procedures Conditions Output

3.3.2.3. AfL assessment techniques and implications for LA

Among the AfL strategies specified in the literature, the researcher has identified the following AfL practices as being aligned with the principles of autonomous learning:

- Questioning
- Feedback
- Self/peer-assessment

(Dickinson, 1987; Sadler, 1989; Boud, 1995; Little, 2003b; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Moss & Brookhart, 2009).

The following subsections will review these practices to illustrate how they are integrated in teaching and learning, and their implications for LA.

Questioning

In classroom settings, questioning techniques can be defined as “instructional cues or stimuli that convey to students the content elements to be learned and directions for what they are to do and how they are to do it” (Cotton, p. 1). Questioning is one of the most common formative assessment techniques to check students’ understanding (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Assessment Reform Group, 2002). Research has shown that questioning can constitute up to half the class time (Cotton, 1988; Galll, 1984 cited in Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Jiang, 2014), suggesting how influential this technique can be to the students’ learning and development. As this study focuses on the demonstration of LA in assessment practices, the main objective of this section is to evaluate the extent of autonomy offered in different types of questioning techniques.

Questioning is believed to contribute to students’ critical and creative thinking, metacognitive skills, and ability to take responsibility for their learning, if it is used in the right way (Cotton, 1988; Moss & Brookhart, 2009; Lores González, 2010; Tofade, Elsner, & Haines, 2013; Davoudi & Sadeghi, 2015). Questioning techniques can be classified into two major categories: teacher-initiated and learner-initiated, and the latter is believed to better promote LA demonstration (Moss & Brookhart, 2009). This is because allowing and encouraging students to ask questions can boost intentional and active participation and encourage students to acquire knowledge on their own (Cotton, 1988). Additionally, Moss and Brookhart believe that students’ participation in questioning can “promote learner autonomy and independence and develop students’ perceptions of themselves as producers of knowledge and generator of lines of inquiry and nurture students’ confidence to work though difficulties themselves” (p. 17).

The impact of teacher-initiated questions on students’ learning approaches and cognitive development can vary depending on the types of questions that teachers use

with their students. In the literature, there are various approaches to classifying teacher-initiated questions. Richards and Lockhart (1994) categorise questions into “procedural questions” (which deal with “classroom procedures and routines, and classroom management”) “convergent questions”, and “divergent questions” (which deal with lesson content (pp. 186-187)). What distinguishes convergent questions from divergent questions is the nature of the responses. Responses to convergent questions are often short and in the form of ‘yes’ or ‘no’. They do not always require high-level thinking, but focus on the recall of factual or previously presented information. By contrast, divergent questions require longer responses and a higher level of thinking (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Teacher-initiated questions can also be classified based on Bloom’s Taxonomy of cognitive complexity, which covers *knowledge, comprehension, application to inference, analysis, synthesis* and *evaluation* (Krathwohl & Anderson, 2001; Krathwohl, 2002; McComas & Abraham, 2004; Neal, 2011). Questions in this case are often classified into ‘lower order’ and ‘higher order’ (Cotton, 1988). Other question classifications include closed questions and open-ended questions (Wu, 1993; Moss & Brookhart, 2009), display questions and referential questions (Long and Sato, 1983 cited in Wu, 1993). Despite their differences, these approaches to classifying questions share common features in that they are based on the responses required and the level of cognition involved in answering the questions (see Table 3.6).

Table 3.6 Summary of different types of questions

Typology of questions					Author
Procedural	Convergent			Divergent	(Richards & Lockhart, 1994)
	Display			Referential	Long and Sato (1983 cited in (Wu, 1993)
	Closed			Open-ended	(Wu, 1993)

					(Moss & Brookhart, 2009)
	Lower level/lower cognitive			Higher order/higher cognitive level	(Cotton, 1988) (Krathwohl & Anderson, 2001)
	Lower convergent	Higher convergent	Lower divergent	Higher convergent	(McComas & Abraham, 2004)

It is widely agreed in the literature that higher order, open and divergent questions can facilitate students' critical thinking and metacognitive skills and promote a deep learning approach. This is because such questions often involve reasoning, elaboration, judgement and high-level cognitive skills, elicit discussion and brainstorming ideas for solutions to a problem, and afford opportunities for learners to think outside the box (Hargreaves, 1984; Roth, 1996; Neal, 2011; Lee & Kinzie, 2012; Toni & Parse, 2013; Davoudi & Sadeghi, 2015). Davoudi and Sadeghi (2015) conducted a systematic review of empirical studies from 1974 to 2014 and concluded that "asking higher level questions is absolutely necessary for the development of critical thinking ability" (p. 86). In contrast, lower level, closed and convergent questions focus on recalling factual or previously presented information and produce closed responses to questions for which the answers are predefined and known to the teacher, and therefore do not promote critical thinking, high level cognitive skills and a deep learning approach (Hargreaves, 1984; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Roth, 1996; Neal, 2011).

Asking higher order questions does not necessarily ensure that students produce higher cognitive responses (Cotton, 1988). In a similar vein, asking higher cognitive, open and divergent questions does not necessarily lead to students demonstrating higher levels of autonomy. However, it is reasonable to argue that higher cognitive, open and

divergent questions offer more space for students to exert their agency than lower cognitive, closed and convergent questions, and therefore may support students to demonstrate higher levels of autonomy. Table 3.7 summarises the levels of *autonomy offered* in different questioning techniques.

Table 3.7 Level of autonomy in questioning techniques

Prescribed	Bounded	Open
Teacher-initiated questions		Student-initiated questions
Closed questions Convergent questions Display questions Lower cognitive questions	Open questions Divergent questions Referential questions Higher cognitive questions	

Feedback

Feedback has been described as “information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81). Feedback is considered the most influential component of assessment, “the key element in formative assessment”, and “a key link between assessment and learning” (Sadler, 1989, p. 120; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gipps, 2002, p. 78; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

In relation to LA, feedback is often discussed in the literature in relation to students’ self-regulation, which refers to “an active constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behaviour, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment” (Pintrich, 2000, p. 453). This concept is akin to the concept of LA, because they are both concerned with aspects including goal-setting, monitoring learning and control, and they both involve active engagement, goal-directed behaviour, metacognitive skills, intrinsic motivation, and learner characteristics (Murray, 2014).

It is widely accepted in the literature that feedback plays a significant role in self-regulated learning, and is “an inherent catalyst” for all self-regulated activities, prompting students’ participation in self-regulated learning (Butler & Winne, 1995, p. 246; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Chung & Yuen, 2011; Clark, 2012). Feedback is argued to be an essential component in self-regulated learning models (Butler & Winne, 1995; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), suggesting that LA is an outcome of the feedback process. This is because during the learning process, learners receive external feedback from their teacher and peers, and this feedback later helps learners generate internal feedback using their knowledge, beliefs and motivation. Therefore, feedback should be positioned within a model of self-regulation because of its multiple and multifaceted roles in learning (Butler & Winne, 1995). Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006, p. 205) expanded Butler and Winne’s model by answering the question of how feedback can help to promote self-regulated learning (Chung & Yuen, 2011). They proposed seven rules of feedback that can support self-regulated learning:

- It helps to clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards)
 - It facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection in learning)
 - It delivers high quality information to students about their learning
 - It encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning
 - It encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem
 - It provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance
 - It provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching
- (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 205)

According to Hattie (2007), feedback should help students to address three questions: ‘Where am I going?’, ‘How am I going?’, and ‘Where to next?’ (p. 88). He

contends that feedback can help students to answer these questions by focusing on four levels: task level, process level, self-regulation level and self-level. At task level, feedback is often more information focused; hence, it leads to acquiring more or different information and building more surface knowledge. Feedback focusing on process often provides strategies for error detection. This level of feedback enhances deeper levels of learning, and promotes LA better than feedback at task level. Feedback focusing on the self-regulation level can enhance students' skills in self-evaluation, provide greater confidence to engage further in the task, assist students in seeking and accepting feedback, and can enhance willingness to invest in seeking and dealing with feedback. This type of feedback can therefore promote the highest level of autonomy. Feedback focusing on self involves students' ego, and often comes in the form of praise. Hattie & Timperley (2007) argue that this type of feedback does not add value because it often "directs attention away from the task, processes and self-regulation" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hattie, 2011, p. 7)

Active learner involvement in the feedback process is the key for its effectiveness because feedback can only become effective when actions are taken to improve learning (Price, Handley, Millar, & O'donovan, 2010; Boud & Molloy, 2013; Carless & Boud, 2018). This indicates that LA is not only an end, but also a means to an end. Feedback can be analysed in terms of the power relationship between teacher and learner (Gipps, 2002), and this relationship can carry implications for LA promotion and demonstration.

Feedback is generally categorised into feedback relating to a person and feedback relating to a task (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996; Hill & McNamara, 2012). Feedback relating to a person involves judgements, evaluations and affect about a learner, and is also referred to as "evaluative feedback" (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996, p.

393), or “person-referenced” feedback (Hill & McNamara, 2012, p. 406). It often takes the form of a reward or punishment, praise, approval or disapproval. Feedback strategies relating to a person are often teacher-controlled. Feedback about tasks relates to students’ performance relative to task requirements and/or qualities and standards of performance, and is also referred to as “descriptive feedback” (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996, p. 393), or “task-referenced” feedback (Hill & McNamara, 2012, p. 406). The power relationship in this type of feedback is dependent upon the feedback strategies that the teacher uses. Tunstall and Gipps (1996, p. 393) classify descriptive feedback into “specifying” feedback (i.e., specifying attainment and specifying achievement) and “constructing feedback” (i.e., constructing achievement and constructing the way forward). In specifying feedback, teachers acknowledge specific attainment, use models for work and behaviour, use specific criteria to diagnose problems, correct and check procedures, through all of which they remain in control of the feedback process. Constructing feedback relates to “teachers’ use of both sharp and contextualised ‘fuzzy’ criteria; use of teacher and child work exemplars; teacher-child assessment of work; the use of strategies for self-regulation” (p. 309). In this type of feedback, teachers share power and control with pupils. Pupils can negotiate assessment criteria and participate in the assessment process, indicating that they can enjoy and demonstrate more autonomy in constructing feedback than in other types of feedback. Hill and McNamara (2012, pp. 406-407) categorise “task-referenced” feedback into “confirmatory”, “explanatory” and “corrective” feedback. Confirmatory feedback happens when a single correct response is required. Explanatory feedback is used to emphasise or explain a successful aspect of the student’s performance. Corrective feedback is used to identify the gap between students’ performance and expected performance.

Levels of student involvement in corrective feedback can vary according to different strategies used. Ferreira, Moore, and Mellish (2007) classify corrective feedback strategies into 'giving-answer' and 'prompting-answer' strategies. Giving-answer strategies are feedback in which the teacher directly corrects the mistake in the student's answer or provides the student with location of their mistake. This type of feedback includes strategies such as "repetition", "recast", "explicit commenting", and "give answer" (p. 392). Prompting-answer strategies refer to "types of feedback moves in which the teacher pushed students to notice a language error in their response and to repair the error for themselves", and include "metalinguistic cues", "classification requests", and "elicitation" (p. 392). Prompting-answer strategies appear to offer more space for students' autonomy than giving-answer strategies. Table 3.7 synthesises common types and strategies of feedback in the literature.

Table 3.8 Summary of feedback models and strategies

Evaluation	Descriptive						(Tunstall & Gipps, 1996)
Rewarding Punishing Approving Disapproving		Specifying attainment Specifying improvement	Constructing Achievement Constructing the way forward				
Person-referenced	Task-referenced						(Hill & McNamara, 2012)
	Confirmatory	Explanatory	Corrective				
			Corrective-answer strategies (repeat, recast, explicit correction, give answer)	Prompting-answer strategies (Meta-language cue Classification requests elicitation)			(Ferreira et al., 2007)
Feedback about self (praise)			Feedback about task (error detection and correction)	Feedback about process	Feedback about self-regulation (self-evaluation)		(Hattie, 2011)

Table 3.9. represents the levels of autonomy offered in different feedback types and strategies. It is based on the power relationship between teacher and student reflected in different feedback types and strategies, and levels of space for students' involvement offered in these types and strategies.

Table 3.9 Levels of autonomy offered in feedback practices

Prescribed	Bounded	Open
Evaluative/person-referenced/feedback about self Praise Rewarding Punishing Approving Disapproving Confirmatory Explanatory Giving-answer strategies	Feedback about process Constructing feedback Prompting-answer strategies	Feedback about self-regulation

Self/peer-assessment

There are studies indicating that self-assessment can significantly improve students' ability to take control of and responsibility for their learning (Falchikov & Boud, 1989; Sadler, 1989; Boud, 1995; Gardner, 2000; Berry, 2009; Taras, 2010; Brown & Harris, 2013; Panadero, Brown, & Strijbos, 2016; Shelton-Strong, 2018). Self-assessment refers to the "involvement of students in identifying standards and/or criteria to apply to their work and making judgements about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards" (Boud, 1991, p. 5 cited in Boud, 1995, p. 12). This definition indicates two phases in self-assessment: identifying criteria or standards and making judgements based on these criteria or standards. This definition also implies the internalisation of criteria or standards in the self/peer-assessment process, because without this, students cannot move to the next phase of controlling their progress.

Self-assessment has a strong theoretical connection with LA (Holec, 1981; Dickinson, 1987; Harris, 1997; Gardner, 2000; Tholin, 2008; Panadero et al., 2017; Han & Fan, 2019). Boud (1995) argues that "if learners were to take responsibility for their

own learning, then part of this process was, inevitably, their involvement in making assessments of their own learning goals, the activities in which they were to engage and the ways in which they would judge the outcomes” (p. 5). Harris (1997) argues that self-assessment is “rightly seen as one of the pillars of learner autonomy” (p. 12) because this strategy allows students to monitor their progress and identify the meanings of learning in relation to their personal needs. Gardner (2000) contends that self-assessment is a crucial tool in the toolkit for autonomous learning because it can provide students with instant feedback on their progress and the effectiveness of their learning strategies. Tholin (2008) believes that self-assessment is a “natural element of self-directed learning” (p. 10) because it helps learners develop self-awareness of their learning in order to move forward (Boud, 1995). Little and Berry also confirm the inevitability of self- and peer-assessment in the teaching and learning process if one aims to promote LA (Little, 2004b, 2005; Berry, 2009; Little, 2009; Little & Erickson, 2015). This is because these assessment practices are central to evaluation—the “pivot of learner autonomy” (Dam, 1995; Dam & Legenhausen, 2011) and reflection—one of the underlying factors of LA development (Little, 1999a; Reinders, 2010) which Everhard (2015a, p. 30) considers the “glue” binding assessment and autonomy together.

The relationship between LA and self/peer-assessment is supported by empirical studies. Berry (2009) conducted an empirical study about the relationship between self-assessment and LA in English learning in Hong Kong tertiary education. She implemented four self-assessment techniques: “need analysis”, “concept-mapping”, “checklist”, and “final reflection” (pp. 9-10), and broke down LA into 11 attributes (p. 3) in order to measure it. The findings support the claim that self-assessment can promote LA, but on the condition that self-assessment tasks are carefully designed and

delivered. She states, “being able to do self-assessment is not innate, but has to be empowered” (Berry, 2009, pp. 13-14). This argument supports statements by Sambell, McDowell, and Sambell (2006) that self-assessment needs to be introduced to students deliberately and with sufficient support if it is to develop LA. This argument for the gradual and scaffolded introduction of self-assessment to students suggests that they can take up incremental levels of LA through self-assessment. At the initial stage, they might need a lot of support and scaffolding from the teacher in order to develop necessary skills and abilities, while in the later stage, they can demonstrate more autonomy in this respect (Sambell et al., 2006).

The positive impact of self/peer-assessment and LA is also supported by findings from subsequent empirical research and meta-analysis research (Adediwura, 2012; Gholami, 2016; Panadero et al., 2016; Panadero et al., 2017; Sierra & Frodden, 2017; Shelton-Strong, 2018). For example, Sierra and Frodden (2017) carried out an action research study that aimed to develop LA through the use of self-assessment in an English course at a Colombian university. They implemented five strategies relating to self-assessment in their research: (1) discuss with students the importance of self-assessment to raise their awareness of that aspect, (2) train students to develop their capacity to self-assess, (3) negotiate with students about assessment criteria used for self-assessment, (4) allow students to carry out self-assessment of their work periodically, and (5) ask students to reflect on their own self-assessment. The findings indicated improvement in LA in terms of affective and metacognitive aspects. The study also emphasised the crucial facilitative role of teachers in students’ self-assessment processes. Panadero et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis review of 19 studies which involved 2305 students. Their findings confirmed that self-assessment interventions have a positive impact on students’ self-regulated learning strategies. Shelton-Strong

(2018) conducted a classroom-based intervention study on about 80 students in four English classes at tertiary level in Japan. He used assessment descriptors to engage students in self/peer-assessment of speaking tasks, performance in class, and project work over a period of one semester. Results from the self-evaluation questionnaire after the semester suggested that students developed their metacognitive skills and awareness after the intervention, affording opportunities for the demonstration of LA through reflection.

There are different self/peer-assessment techniques, and there have been attempts to categorise these techniques into self-assessment typologies in the literature (e.g., Boud & Brew, 1995; Brew, 1999; Taras, 2010; Brown & Harris, 2013; Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013). For example, Boud and Brew (1995) and Brew (1999) categorise self/peer-assessment based on Habermas's notion of 'knowledge constitutive interests', which consist of three different interests: technical, communicative and emancipatory. Assessment serving technical interests often involves students checking their knowledge, skills and understanding against objective criteria or standards. Assessment serving communicative interests involves communication and interpretation of assessment elements such as criteria or standards. Assessment serving emancipatory interests involves students' critical reflection about the standards or criteria used to assess their work and maybe producing their own criteria or standards for their judgement. Taras (2010) arranges self-assessment along a continuum from "stronger" to "weaker", based on students' access to power and decision making. The weaker model of self-assessment includes "self-marking" in which students use a model answer with criteria to compare it with their work, and "sound standard" in which students are provided with descriptors of medium level work and exemplars of work for reference (p. 202). The median or "standard" model (p. 203) requires students to judge their work

using provided criteria. The stronger model is “self-assessment with integrated tutor feedback” (p. 204) which involves the integration of tutor and peer feedback before students can self-assess. The strongest model is “learning contract design” (p. 205) in which self-assessment is incorporated in a learning contract where students make all decisions regarding content, methods and evaluation of learning. Brown and Harris (2013) classify self-assessment practices into three major types based on the methods associated with these practices: *self-ratings*, *self-estimates of performance*, and *criteria or rubric-based assessments* (p. 372). “Self-ratings” involve students’ judging the quality and quantity of their work using a rating system. “Self-rating” practices can include techniques such as self-marking or grading against a marking guide or (a) model answer(s). “Self-estimates of performance” involve students’ estimations of their level of performance or ability in a test or a task. These estimations can be in the form of a test mark or score, rank or grade. “Criteria or rubric-based assessments” guide students in judging their work against a description of quality from low to high. Panadero and Alonso-Tapia (2013) categorise self-assessment practices into three groups based on the presence and form of assessment criteria: “self-grading without assessment criteria”, “self-assessment using rubrics”, and “self-assessment using scripts” (p. 567). Rubrics and scripts are different, in that the former include criteria and performance standards with examples, while the latter include criteria in the form of questions for students to answer while they are doing an assessment. Table 3.10 synthesises typologies of self-assessment in the literature.

Table 3.10 Summary of typologies of self/peer-assessment

	Typology of self/peer-assessment			Author
Technical interest Self-rating Self-making	Communicative interest Involvement in criteria determination		Emancipatory interest Critical reflection of criteria or	(Boud & Brew, 1995; Brew, 1999)

Reflective question			standards, building own criteria or standards for assessment	
Weaker Self-marking Sound standard	Median Standard model	Stronger Self-assessment with integrated tutor feedback	Strongest Learning contract design	(Taras, 2010)
Self-assessment using rubric	Self-assessment using scripts		Self-grading and self-rating without criteria	(Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013)
Self-ratings	Self-estimate of performance		Criteria or rubric-based assessment	(Brown & Harris, 2013)

As discussed earlier, the criteria for categorisation of the self-assessment typologies in Table 3.10 are not the same. However, one shared feature among these typologies involves the levels of students' involvement in different self-assessment techniques, indicating that different autonomy levels are embedded in these techniques. These differing levels suggest that not all self-assessment techniques have the same effect on LA. For example, some self-assessment practices such as self-rating, self-testing (Boud & Brew, 1995, p. 131; Brew, 1999, p. 160; Brown & Harris, 2013) and self-marking (Taras, 2010, p. 202) allow very little room for students' involvement, and, in turn, for students to demonstrate their autonomy. Students are like 'marking machines' when doing these self-assessment practices. They are not expected to engage with nor discuss the criteria or standard being used, because these are normally predefined and fixed. Other self-assessment techniques such as "learning design contract" (Taras, 2010, p. 205) and "self-grading and self-rating without criteria" (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013, p. 576) allow wider space for students to participate

in the process and demonstrate their autonomy. They can not only judge their work, but also participate in determining criteria and standards for their judgement and make decisions regarding their learning.

In this study, it is argued that self/peer-assessments allowing different levels of conceptual space for students' involvement can contribute to the demonstration of different levels of LA. Based on the earlier description of different techniques, self/peer-assessments are classified along a continuum of autonomy as illustrated in Table 3.11.

Table 3.11 Levels of autonomy in self/peer-assessment techniques

Prescribed	Bounded	Open
Self/peer marking Self/peer ratings Reflective questions	Self/peer-assessment using rubric Self/peer-assessment using scripts Self/peer-assessment using standard model Self-estimate of performance Involvement in determination of criteria	Self/peer grading and self/peer rating without criteria Learning contract Critical reflection of criteria or standards, building own criteria or standards for assessment

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a review of literature on (a) the central concepts of sociocultural theories and their implications for the conceptualisation of LA and assessment and the relationship between the two (b) the fundamental issues relating to understanding and implementing LA, and (c) the relationship of assessment with LA. The literature review indicates that LA is a complicated, multifaceted and problematic construct (Little, 1991; Benson & Voller, 1997; Oxford, 2003; Benson, 2011; Everhard, 2015a; Lamb, 2017). The majority of academics adopting a sociocultural perspective perceive LA as being an innate capacity that can be facilitated or inhibited by the sociocultural and contextual factors making up the learning environment. From this perspective, LA is more about the relationship between learners and the learning

environment than a personal attribute. The emergent product of this relationship can be understood as the students' demonstration of LA in a particular situation. Such a demonstration of LA depends not only on students' innate ability for autonomy, but also on the extent to which contextual factors make allowances for autonomy to be demonstrated. This highlights a need to investigate students' demonstration of LA in a particular context, as well as the sociocultural and contextual factors in that context which support or discourage students from demonstrating LA.

Under the lens of sociocultural theories, assessment can be conceptualised as being embedded in, integrated with, and inseparable from teaching and learning, and can therefore be viewed as the context in which students demonstrate their autonomy in learning. The literature review has also shown that assessment has a significant impact on LA, depending largely on how it is used and what purposes it serves. Therefore, understanding the characteristics of assessment in a particular context can help researchers to understand LA in that context and recognise the potential facilitative and inhibitive factors in relation to LA.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN

Chapter overview

This chapter describes how the research was designed to investigate the impacts of assessment practices on the demonstration of LA. The first section discusses the paradigms underpinning the research—the ontology and epistemology—that the researcher holds about being and knowledge. The second section deals with research methodology for the study. The third section is about the case study design—the selection of the case, the research site and participants. The fourth section describes the process of data analysis. The fifth section deals with measures to ensure the quality of the research. The last section deals with ethical issues in the study.

4.1. Research paradigm

The phenomena of ‘language’, ‘learning’, ‘autonomy’ and ‘assessment’ are not ontologically self-existent or epistemologically simple, but brought into being by human-to-human interactions. This research into English language learning, LA and assessment therefore adopts a constructivist perspective as the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

Constructivist inquirers tend to hold a relativist ontology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Scotland, 2012). That is, they believe in the existence of multiple constructed realities rather than a single true one. According to Schwandt (1994), constructivists attend to the “pluralistic and plastic character of reality” (p. 236). Reality is deemed pluralistic because it is expressed through various symbol and language systems, and it is plastic in the sense that it is “stretched and shaped to fit purposeful acts of intentional human agents” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 236). From a constructivist perspective, reality is

socially constructed (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012), subjective and determined by “the individual’s experience and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the individual and the researcher” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). Realities are alterable and judged in terms of their informedness or sophistication rather than their truthfulness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Knowledge from a constructivist perspective is relative and dependent upon how individuals construct their “unique personal meaning system on the same objective reality” (Benson, 1997, p. 21). Candy (1991) proposes that knowledge is not the replication or the reflection of reality. Instead, “individuals try to give meaning to, or construe, the perplexing maelstrom of events and ideas in which they find themselves caught up” (p. 254). Knowledge has the characteristic of being “culturally derived and historically situated” (Scotland, 2012, p. 12) and is “embedded in people’s experiences” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). Therefore, knowledge of reality involves comprehension of numerous perspectives of people in a specific situation (Petty et al., 2012).

Constructivist investigators advocate a transactional and subjectivist perspective which centres the dynamic interaction between the investigator and the object of investigation in order to capture and describe the participants’ lived experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005). Ponterotto (2005) emphasises that deeper meaning can only be uncovered through interaction, and findings of an investigation are co-constructed through interactive dialogue and interpretation by the researcher and the participants.

Among a number of constructivist perspectives, this study was explicitly informed by sociocultural theories of learning, which view learning as a social process in which students actively participate, and take into consideration all the factors involved in this process and the interactions between them (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf, 2006; John-Steiner & Mahn, 2013). From these perspectives, learning is situated and

mediated (Rogoff, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Kao, 2010; Lin, 2018). That is, learning is an internalisation process, which occurs through the social interactions of learners with other people and artefacts in a specific culture or context. In the process of interaction and internalisation, learners always play an active role, while other people (like peers and teachers) are merely the mediators who scaffold them in their development (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Rogoff, 2003; Kao, 2010; Lin, 2018).

This study's methodology was devised to fulfil its primary aim: to investigate the impact of assessment practices on the demonstration of learner autonomy in the context of EFL classrooms in the Vietnamese higher education context. The study required an in-depth analysis of EFL teachers' and students' perspectives on assessment, their interpretations and understanding of learner autonomy, and the manifestations of these perspectives and understanding in practice. The study also included analysis of the context of the researched university in order to find factors in assessment practice that constrain or facilitate learner autonomy within the context of the university.

The sociocultural perspective required the researcher to pay close attention to the sociocultural context of VHE while interpreting the impact of assessment practices on the demonstration of learner autonomy. The interaction between teacher and students in the learning process was also scrutinised under the lens of sociocultural theories. Additionally, it was necessary to investigate in-depth factors (e.g., relating to beliefs and attitudes) arising from the teachers and the students which might have significantly impacted their practices. Taking all these together, the researcher adopted a qualitative case study as the research methodology for this study. Justifications for this choice are presented in the next section.

4.2. Case study approach

4.2.1. Qualitative case study

There is no single precise definition of ‘case study’ in the literature because case studies are often used for different purposes, in different disciplines and with different underpinning theoretical stances (Simons, 2009). However, there is consensus among scholars and researchers about the purpose and focus of case studies as in-depth explorations of a phenomenon (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003; Merriam, 2009; Simons, 2009; Crowe et al., 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mills, Harrison, Franklin, & Birks, 2017). Case studies focus on the particularity (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2011), the complexity (Stake, 1995; Simons, 2009), the uniqueness (Simons, 2009) and the boundedness (Creswell, 2003; Yin, 2003; Punch, 2013; Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) of a phenomenon or a system.

A qualitative case study methodology was chosen because it offers several advantages. First, a qualitative case study can back up the description and exploration of a phenomenon within its context using diverse data resources and from multiple perspectives, which helps researchers to uncover and understand various facets of the issue (Yin, 2003; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Simons, 2009; Crowe et al., 2011; Mills et al., 2017). Denscombe (2010) states that a “case study approach works best when the researcher wants to investigate an issue in-depth and provide an explanation that can cope with the complexity and subtlety of real-life situations” (p. 55). Therefore, a case study approach is appropriate for a study on EFL learner autonomy and assessment practices because not only is autonomy complex, multifaceted and multidimensional (Dickinson, 1987; Boud, 1988; Candy, 1991; Little, 1991; Nunan, 1997; Benson, 2011), but assessment is complicated too (Berry & Adamson, 2011; Everhard, 2015a). Also, a case study facilitates in-depth explanations of social and behavioural problems and

apprehends behavioural conditions from the participant's viewpoint (Zainal, 2007). Researchers adopting a qualitative case study approach can achieve a holistic, comprehensive and rich understanding of the phenomenon under research (Merriam, 1988; Noor, 2008; Yazan, 2015; Mills et al., 2017; Lin, 2018). A case study approach also supports close cooperation between researcher and participants, which encourages participants to express their viewpoints and tell their stories, through which the researcher can discover the underpinning motives of participants' actions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The approach is also flexible (Simons, 2009; Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014), especially when using multiple data collection methods (Punch, 2013). Additionally, since both LA and assessment are complex and multifaceted concepts, the research design needs to combine multiple data sets so that insightful understanding of the research phenomenon can be obtained. Such a design is deemed to "sit comfortably with the case study approach" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 55).

Qualitative case study research has received some criticisms, mostly focusing on its lack of rigour and reliability (Noor, 2008; Merriam, 2009) and the issue of generalisation (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Zainal, 2007; Noor, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Denscombe, 2010; Yin, 2011). However, scholars in the field have attempted to respond to all of these criticisms. For example, Yin (2011) states that the issue of rigour and reliability can be addressed by adopting structured and systematic research procedures and using strategies to deal with problems relating to construct validity, internal and external validity, and reliability. These validity and reliability issues can be tackled by using techniques such as triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and having an audit trail (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Yin, 2011). These techniques involve

using multiple data sources and methods and transparent and detailed description of research procedures (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

In terms of generalisation, researchers adopting a qualitative methodology (qualitative case studies included) hold that generalisation is not the primary purpose of this type of research (Guba, 1981; Punch, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Instead, qualitative research aims to “form working hypotheses that may be transferred from one context to another depending upon the degree of ‘fit’ between the contexts” (Guba, 1981, p. 81). In fact, in qualitative research, the term ‘transferability’ has been commonly used instead of ‘generalisation’ (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986; Stake, 1995; Ryan-Nicholls & Will, 2009; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Anney, 2014). The issue of transferability can be addressed by providing sufficient details about the research context, research methods and research processes so that other researchers can make an informed decision about the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other contexts (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Denscombe, 2010; Houghton et al., 2013).

In summary, the qualitative case study approach is appropriate for the current research. This is because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of the current EFL assessment practices and the demonstration of learner autonomy within a specific university in the Vietnamese higher education context.

4.2.2 Case definition and selection

It is difficult to give a full account of what a case is because almost anything can serve as one (Punch, 2013). However, it is important that researchers define the case for their research (Simons, 2009; Thomas, 2011). The case is often referred to as an “integrated system” (Stake, 1995, p. 2) or a “bounded system” (Yin, 2011, p. 6; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 37), which is “separated out for research in terms of time, place or some

physical boundaries” (Creswell, 2012, p. 465). Using a generally-agreed definition of a case as a person, a program, a group, an institution, a community or a specific policy (Simons, 2009; Punch, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), the researcher defined the case for this study as a university. This university is a unit in the VHE system and is a micro-system by itself. The study primarily concerns the impacts of assessment practices on the demonstration of learner autonomy in an EFL classroom context, so the class is considered the embedded unit of analysis (Yin, 2003).

Selecting the case(s) for study is crucial in case study research (Crowe et al., 2011; Mills et al., 2017). According to Stake (1995), the first rule in selecting a case is to maximise what we can learn. Secondly, the case should be easily accessible and hospitable to our investigation. Stake emphasises that when selecting the case, the opportunity to learn is of primary importance because no matter how fit the case is to our study, this selection does not make any sense if we cannot gain access to this case to conduct our inquiry.

This study is a single case study with three embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2003). A single case study was chosen because single case studies are deemed to support better understanding of the subject, and they can provide a richer description of the phenomenon, and produce better theory (Gustafsson, 2017). Single case studies are also believed to be best suited to the situations where an inquirer has had access to an unknown or under-researched phenomenon (Zivkovic, 2012). Additionally, single case studies are more feasible compared to a multiple-case study design (Nock, Michel, & Photos, 2007; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Gustafsson, 2017).

The selected research site of the study was a technical university in Hanoi which included approximately 10,000 students studying nine different majors in the university: Civil Engineering, Water Resources Engineering, Hydrology and Water Resources,

Mechanical Engineering, Energy Engineering, Economics and Management, Computer Science and Engineering, Marine and Coastal Engineering, and Environmental Engineering. The university was a public university under the management of two ministries: the MOET and the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development. In the researched university, students had to study several compulsory general subjects, including English, before they learned their major subjects. Before the researcher left Vietnam to study in Australia, she worked as an English language teacher at the university, being responsible for the English curriculum, teaching and assessment. After working in the university for 5 years, she had a good understanding of the context of the study. However, she was not aware of which teaching practices each teacher was using. Therefore, she expected to see differences in the classroom assessment practices that teachers used, and that these practices would have correspondingly varying impacts on students' demonstration of LA.

4.2.3. Participant selection

This study mainly concerns EFL language teachers and students' perspectives, interpretations and practices. Therefore, participants in the study were EFL teachers and students at the selected university.

Teacher participants

Teacher participants were chosen on the following grounds. First, they were purposefully selected based on the result of a questionnaire about assessment practices and activities to promote LA (see appendix C). Those chosen had to be willing to take part in the project. Collectively, they needed to show divergence in assessment practices and activities to promote learner autonomy in their classes. Details about the development of the survey questionnaire and data collection and analysis for choosing teacher participants are presented later in this section.

In addition, the chosen teachers' timetables could not overlap, so that the researcher was able to conduct each observation separately. The teachers were then selected based on their qualifications and teaching experiences, because these two factors could have a significant impact on their teaching practices, their perception of teaching and learning, and factors relating to these two aspects. The priority was to find teachers with a bachelor's degree and teachers with a master's degree, teachers with a long teaching experience and teachers with a short teaching experience.

The survey questionnaire to select teacher participants was designed based on Borg's (2011) questionnaire about English language teachers' beliefs and practices, Ürün, Demir, and Akar (2014) questionnaire about ELT teachers' practices to foster learner autonomy, and Gonzales and Aliponga (2012) questionnaire about assessment preferences for language teachers. The adapted questionnaire (Appendix C) had 35 items, which fell into three main categories: formative assessment practices, summative assessment practices, and activities to promote autonomy. The questionnaire aimed to gather information about teachers' classroom assessment practices, their activities to promote learner autonomy in class and their availability to participate in the research project.

The researcher piloted the questionnaire by sending it to six PhD candidates and three staff in the School of Education where the researcher was studying. The results were then analysed using SPSS software to test the reliability and validity of all the items in the questionnaire. The reliability test result showed a Cronbach's alpha of .897, indicating high reliability. After being piloted, the questionnaire was entered into the online survey tool SurveyMonkey, and then the link of the questionnaire was sent via email to 15 permanent English language teachers who were teaching at the selected university. Thirteen out of fifteen teachers completed the survey. However, two teachers

did not complete all the items in the questionnaire and two did not agree to participate in the later phase of the project, so they were excluded from the list of possible subjects for the project.

Factor analysis was carried out to confirm items that were conceptually related to formative assessment practices and autonomy promoting activities. Items 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 17, 26, 35 did not fall into these two categories and were excluded from descriptive analysis. The researcher then calculated the average score of each teacher for using formative assessment practices and autonomy-promoting activities based on their responses in the survey. The result of the calculation is presented in table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Participants' average scores for use of formative assessment and autonomy-supporting activities

Participant	Average score
1	3.19
2	3.19
3	2.3
5	3.08
6	3.5
7	3.03
8	3.26
11	2.3
12	4
13	3.42

If teachers had an average score below 2.5, it meant they used a large number of formative assessment practices and activities to promote autonomy in their class (i.e., high autonomy supportive). If they had an average score between 2.5 to 3.9, this meant that their use of formative assessment activities and activities to promote learner autonomy was average compared to their counterparts in the university (i.e., medium autonomy supportive). If they had an average score between 4.0 and 5.0, this meant that they did not use many formative assessments and autonomy-supportive activities (i.e., low autonomy supportive). As can be seen from table 4.1, among nine participants eligible for the next phase of the research, there were two high autonomy supportive,

one low supportive, and six medium autonomy supportive teachers. The researcher intended to choose one teacher from each category. However, when she talked with teacher number 12, this teacher decided not to participate. Therefore, the researcher had to choose one high autonomy supportive and two medium autonomy supportive teachers for her project. After taking other factors (i.e., experience, qualification and timetables) into consideration, three teachers were chosen for the research, one from each score band (see table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Teacher participants and their classes

Teacher	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Length of teaching at the university	Average score	Number of students
Participant 3 - Teacher S	2015	Completing	1 year	2.3	25
Participant 2 - Teacher A	2004	2013	6 years	3.19	29
Participant 8 - Teacher C	2002	2007	10 years	3.26	27

Student participants

The researcher invited all students in participating teachers' classes to participate in the research by having a colleague explain the research project to them. This colleague also provided the students with a consent form and a handout containing a detailed description of the project including research purposes, research time, potential risks and benefits. With consent granted by all students in the three selected classes, the researcher could observe and record the students' practices in the class throughout the observation period.

Sixteen students studying in the three classes were also selected for interviews. The student participants were chosen on a voluntary basis. The researcher intended to interview six students in each class, but only five students in Teacher A's and Teacher

C's class agreed to participate in the interview. Therefore, the researcher ended up with sixteen students available for interviewing: six students from Teacher S's class, five students from Teacher A's class and five students from Teacher C's class (see table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Interview student participants

	Student interview participants	Gender	Years of English learning
Teacher S's class	SS1	Male	13
	SS2	Female	12
	SS3	Male	12
	SS4	Male	12
	SS5	Male	12
	SS6	Male	13
Teacher A's class	AS1	Male	12
	AS2	Female	12
	AS3	Male	10
	AS4	Female	8
	AS5	Female	13
Teacher C's class	CS1	Female	9
	CS2	Male	10
	CS3	Male	12
	CS3	Female	10
	CS5	Male	9

4.3. Research methods

Three methods of data collection were used in this study: participant observations, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. These methods were chosen to help the researcher to achieve an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the impact of current EFL assessment practice on the demonstration of LA.

4.3.1. Participant observations

This study used observation because it is deemed one of the strongest tools for understanding a phenomenon in a specific context (Simons, 2009). It is also considered the most direct way of collecting data (Gillham, 2000; Kawulich, 2005), as it permits

researchers to record information as it happens, to notice unusual features (Creswell, 2012, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and to obtain a comprehensive picture of the research site (Simons, 2009). This method also enabled the researcher to authenticate participants' information (Simons, 2009; Ary et al., 2014; Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, & Gray, 2017).

More specifically, this study employed *participant observation*. Within this type of observation, researchers interact with participants to build up a relationship, but do not become involved in the behaviours and activities of the group under study (Ary et al., 2014). Participant observation can pose the risk of observer contamination, and the researcher addressed this issue by her prolonged engagement with the observed classes (for more information, see section 4.5.1). Yin (2003) suggests that participant observation permits the researcher to understand reality from the perspective of someone internal rather than external to the case. Observation of practices and interactions in the class was a crucial method because it enabled the researcher to explore the characterisation of both EFL assessment and LA in practice—how EFL teachers carried out their assessment practices in their class and how their students responded to these practices, to what extent teachers allowed and supported student autonomy in their class, and to what extent students demonstrated their autonomy.

The researcher carried out thirteen observations in Teacher S's and Teacher C's class and eleven observations in Teacher A's class during fifteen weeks of semester 2 in 2016. In the first week, there was one 60-minute observation in each class because consent had not yet been obtained from students. Therefore, the researcher only took note of teachers' communication with students about important information such as the curriculum, the course requirements, and the assessment criteria in the first week of the

term. After the first week, all observations were 150 minutes long, and included student observation.

During the observations, the researcher adopted a running record technique to record as much as possible what was happening in the class, such as the practices carried out by the teacher and students, as well as the interactions between the teacher and students, and students and their peers. The field notes also included diagrams of the setting and movements as well as the feelings and emotions of both teacher and students and the atmosphere of the class. The researcher's initial comments and thoughts were also recorded in the field notes. The soft version of the field notes was made as soon as possible after each observation, including initial interpretations, and ideas arising.

4.3.2. Semi-structured interviews

The interview method is considered one of the most significant sources of information for case studies (Gillham, 2000; Yin, 2003; Ary et al., 2014; Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). It is used to explore individuals' perspectives, attitudes, experiences, and motivations in relation to particular concerns (Qu & Dumay, 2011). It is believed to allow researchers to understand a social phenomenon deeply (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008) because it allows researchers to obtain a large amount of in-depth data quickly and gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives, information about the site, the significance of events to those involved and information on unanticipated issues (Ary et al., 2014). Researchers can control interview data because "interviews allow immediate follow-up and clarification of participants' responses" (Ary et al., 2014, p. 467), and they can elicit information using specific questions (Creswell, 2012).

This study used semi-structured interviews, an important form of interview in case study research (Gillham, 2000; Kallio et al., 2016). Semi-structured interviews

include some key questions, which make up the structure of the interview, but still permit flexibility for the researcher to develop follow-up questions based on interviewees' responses (Ary et al., 2014). The semi-structured interview format was chosen because according to Barriball and While (1994) it is appropriate for exploring participants' perspectives and viewpoints about complex issues and for probing for information and clarifications of answers. As such, it affords opportunities for researchers to gain "varied professional, educational and personal histories of the sample group" (p. 330). In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three teachers and sixteen students. The interviews with teachers lasted for about one hour. The interviews with students lasted for around forty-five minutes. To aid interviewees' comfort and confidence in expressing their opinions, all questions were asked in the interviewees' mother tongue (Vietnamese). All interviews were recorded for later transcription and analysis.

Interviews with the teachers focused on the following key points: (1) their teaching experience, (2) their interpretations and understanding of learner autonomy, (3) their perceptions about the role of teachers and students in the learning process, (4) their perspectives on assessment – role of assessment in learning, current assessment regimes, role of students in assessment, (5) their assessment practices and factors affecting their choices of assessment practices, (6) their perception of the relationship between assessment and LA, and (7) factors which they considered to enable or constrain LA (see appendix A1).

The interviews with students concerned (1) their English learning experience, (2) their interpretations and understanding of learner autonomy, (3) their perceptions about the role of teachers and their own role in learning, (4) their perspective on assessment – the role of assessment in learning, current assessment regimes, their

perceived role in assessment, their teacher's assessment practices, (5) their perception of the relationship between assessment and LA, and (6) the factors that they thought enabled or constrained LA (see appendix A2).

Apart from semi-structured interviews, the researcher also conducted post-observation interviews with teachers and students about the issues emerging from observations. This was to gain a better understanding of the motives and rationales underpinning teachers' and students' practices. The post-observation interviews lasted about five to ten minutes, and often happened at break time at teachers' and students' convenience. The questions for these interviews were not predefined but arose from real-life situations. Most of the post-observation interviews occurred during the first five observations. After this, no new issues emerged from the observations.

4.3.3. Document analysis

Document analysis was used as one of the research methods for this study. It is arguably appropriate for qualitative case studies (Bowen, 2009) because it helps the researcher to “uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (Merriam, 1988, p. 118). Document analysis can also be used together with other methods as a means of triangulation (Bowen, 2009) and to complement other sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). Documents are stable sources of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). They are useful for understanding the context of a phenomenon and the “culture of organisations, values underlying policies, and the beliefs and attitudes of the writer” (Simons, 2009, p. 63). Therefore, document analysis can serve as a “precursor to observing and interviewing” (Simons, 2009, p. 64).

In this study, document analysis was used to help provide the researcher with a good understanding of the context for learner autonomy and assessment practices at

tertiary level in Vietnam and the contextual characteristics of the university selected for case study.

The documents collected were those concerning learner autonomy and assessment practices issued by different authoritative bodies in Vietnam. Curricula, lesson plans, assessment guidelines and sample tests from the selected university were also collected for analysis.

Table 4.4 Linking research questions and objectives with data collection methods and data sources

Research question	Research objectives	Research methods and sources of data
What are the factors in assessment that enable or hinder the development of learner autonomy in the Vietnamese higher education context?	To explore EFL teachers' and students' understandings of the concept of LA	- interviews with teachers and students
	To examine EFL teachers' and students' perspectives on assessment and the relationship between assessment and LA	- interviews with teachers and students
	To investigate the current EFL assessment practices in the VHE context	- participant observations - interviews with teachers and students - document analysis
	To investigate students' demonstration of LA in learning English in the VHE context	- participant observation - interviews with teachers

4.4. Data analysis

There are multiple ways of conducting data analysis so each researcher has to discover his/her own way of interpreting data even when using well-established strategies (Simons, 2009). The following sections will explain the method and procedures that the researcher used to analyse the data collected for this study.

4.4.1. Qualitative content analysis

This study used a qualitative content analysis approach (Mayring, 2004; Schreier, 2013) to analyse its body of data, which included interview transcripts, observation field notes and text. Qualitative content analysis is defined as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Its prime objective is to “systematically transform a large amount of text into a highly organized and concise summary of key results” (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 94). Therefore, this data analysis approach involves reducing a large volume of textual data and identifying and forming categories or themes with the aim of understanding the data collected (Schreier, 2013; Bengtsson, 2016). The process is characterised by iteration, reflexivity (i.e., the researchers constantly and repeatedly come back and forth to the data and steps of data analysis while reflecting on their analysis) and systematicity (i.e., data analysis follows a sequences of fixed and stable steps) (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009; Schreier, 2013; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Additionally, qualitative content analysis is flexible in using different approaches to data analysis (Schreier, 2013; Cho & Lee, 2014; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Researchers can adopt an inductive (i.e., data-driven) or deductive (i.e., concept-driven) approach or a combination of both in their data analysis, depending on the purposes of their studies (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Schreier, 2013). The key difference between the inductive and deductive approaches is that the former involves generating codes, categories and themes directly from the data while the latter involves analysis that is guided by predefined codes and categories grounded in prior theories, literature or research (Mayring, 2004; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Schreier, 2013). However, it is noteworthy that even when researchers opt for inductive analysis, they tend to use the theoretical frameworks to which they subscribe, philosophical assumptions and subjective

perspectives to form codes, categories, themes and patterns and interpret the meaning of the data (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Typically, an inductive approach is chosen when knowledge about the phenomenon under research is fragmented or inadequate, and a deductive approach is chosen when the study aims to test existing theory or retest existing data in a new context (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Cho & Lee, 2014). Schreier (2013) recommends that rather than relying on one approach, researchers should combine approaches by, for example, creating main categories using a deductive approach and then adding sub-categories using an inductive approach.

Qualitative content analysis appears well-suited for studies that focus more on description than seeking to develop theory (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). Additionally, according to Kohlbacher (2006), qualitative content analysis is a useful tool for analysing data in case study research because it can flexibly combine the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative principles of data analysis. It allows researchers to examine and refine large amounts of data with ease, in a systematic way (Stemler, 2001). Qualitative content analysis is also considered “extremely well-suited for analysing multifaceted sensitive phenomena” (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 114) because it has the ability to deal with complexity by combining openness to data analysis and theory-guided investigation (Kohlbacher, 2006).

There are no ready-made one-size-fits-all guidelines for researchers to follow in data analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Simons, 2009). Each researcher has to formulate or adapt his/her own ways of analysis based on his/her interpretive skills, experiences, intuition, and the core principles of data analysis (i.e., reducing the volume of data, generating codes, building categories and themes in order to seek understanding of the data) (Simons, 2009; Schreier, 2013; Bengtsson, 2016). This researcher based her data analysis on the key principles and guidelines of qualitative content analysis proposed by

scholars and researchers in the field (Renner & Taylor-Powell, 2003; Mayring, 2004; Schreier, 2013; Mayring, 2014), and the general three-phase data analysis process proposed by Elo and Kyngäs (2008), which consists of a preparation phase, an organising phase and a reporting phase. The researcher also took into consideration the nature of her data and the purposes of each data set in relation to her study. The following sections describe how different sets of data were analysed.

4.4.2. Interview data analysis process

Preparation

The researcher's first step after collecting interview data was to organise it into different folders and groups. For example, interview data was organised for each embedded unit (i.e., class), and within each embedded unit, interview data was grouped into teacher interview and student interviews. After grouping the data, the researcher transcribed interview audio recordings using Microsoft Word. The transcriptions were in Vietnamese, as all the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese for the convenience of the participants (see section 4.3.2). The researcher coded the name of both teacher and student participants to guarantee the anonymity and confidentiality of their information (see table 4.2 and 4.3).

The primary purpose behind collecting interview data was to investigate teachers' and students' understanding about the concept of LA, their perspectives on assessment and their perceptions of the relationship between assessment and LA. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, so some overarching themes were already predefined by the interview questions. After all transcriptions were completed, the student interview data was rearranged into chunks according to the questions in the semi-structured interview, in order to facilitate coding in the next phase.

Organising

Organising data involves coding and categorising it. That is, researchers try to bring meaning to the words before they can identify patterns and organise them into logical categories (Renner & Taylor-Powell, 2003).

Before coding the data, the researcher first immersed herself in the data in order to familiarise herself with it. She read and reread the data transcripts repeatedly to acquire an overall view of the data and get the gist of what the data was telling her. After discussing with her supervisors, she opted for coding in Vietnamese because this helped to reduce the risk of misinterpretation due to any possible mistranslation (Smith, Chen, & Liu, 2008; Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010). This approach was also effective in terms of time and cost.

The researcher started with three main pre-set categories, which were determined by the study's research question and research objectives: *understanding of learner autonomy*, *perspectives on assessment*, and *perceptions of the relationship between assessment and learner autonomy*.

The code-generating process was directed by theories of autonomy, theories of assessment and sociocultural theories of learning. The codes were then reviewed and grouped into sub-categories under the main pre-set categories. The codes that did not fit into pre-set categories were arranged into new categories. The sub-categories that were built after the coding process were:

- *interpretations of learner autonomy*,
- *characteristics of autonomous learners*,
- *role of learner autonomy in English learning*,
- *role of teachers and students in the learning process*,
- *role of assessment in learning*,
- *role of students in assessment process*,

- *perceptions about current assessment regimes, and*
- *perceptions about assessment feedback.*

One main category around students' demonstration of autonomy in learning English outside of the class was generated. Examples of the development of code and subcategories are presented in table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Examples of code and category development in interview data

Samples of raw data	Coding	Sub-category	Main category
<i>These people (autonomous) often have a small notebook for note-taking anything they find interesting</i>	Learning method	Characteristics of autonomous learners	Understanding of learner autonomy
<i>These people can manage their time and have learning plan and learning schedule for each subject</i>	Learning management		
<i>They are positive and open-minded but independent</i>	Personal quality		
<i>They are passionate about the subject</i>	Affective aspect		
<i>Autonomous students are successful students. They often have good learning results</i>	Learning result		

The chosen example quotes are translated into English to illustrate the findings.

Codes for identification of interview data are presented in table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Codes for interviews with teachers and students

Data source	Example	Code
Interview with teachers	Interview with Teacher S	SI
	Interview with Teacher A	AI
	Interview with Teacher C	CI
Interview with students	Interview with student 1 in Teacher S's class	SS1
	Interview with student 3 in Teacher A's class	AS3
	Interview with student 5 in Teacher C's class	CS5
Post-observation interviews with teacher	1 st post-observation interview with Teacher S	POSI1
	4 th post-observation interview with teacher A	POAI4
	5 th post-observation with Teacher C	POCI5

Post-observation interviews with students	2 nd post-observation interview with students in Teacher S's class	POSSI2
	4 th post-observation interview with students in Teacher A's class	POASI4
	1 st post-observation interview with students in Teacher C's class	POCSI1

The findings from interview data analysis are presented in Chapter 5.

4.4.3. Observation data analysis process

Preparation stage

The researcher adopted a running record technique in her observation of the teachers' and the students' practices in the class, trying to record as much as possible (e.g., what the teacher said and how the students responded). The records were in both Vietnamese and English, as the teacher and the students used both these languages in the class. After each observation, the researcher entered the field notes of each class into a Word document. While entering the field notes into Word, she translated the Vietnamese texts into English. The analysis of observation data started directly after each observation and was conducted using a recursive and iterative process. The researcher also took note of her first feelings, thoughts and understanding about the data while entering data into Word. This was carried out during the observation period, helping her become familiar with the observation data and have an initial understanding about it.

Organising stage

The researcher constantly asked herself the three reflexive questions proposed by Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) during the analysis process of observation data: 'what are the data telling me?', 'what is it I want to know?' and 'what is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know?' (p. 77). The observation data did not tell the researcher what she wanted to know, i.e., how the teachers' assessment practices influenced the demonstration of LA in the class. For example, when did they support LA, and in which cases did they inhibit LA? In order to

answer this question, the researcher needed to understand the characterisation of each teacher's assessment practices and the demonstration of LA in the class. However, the observation data appeared to present two quite separate aspects: teachers' assessment practices and students' responses.

In order to explore the dialectical relationship between what the researcher wanted to know and what the data was telling her, she decided to carry out the observation data analysis at two levels. The first analysis level enabled the researcher to characterise teachers' assessment practices, and the second level was for understanding the demonstration of LA by students and the impact of assessment practices on it.

Level 1 analysis

At this level, data analysis was completed inductively. The researcher immersed herself in the data to search for meaning units to define concepts. The process of generating code was mainly directed by the researcher's understanding about assessment theories. The codes were then reviewed, and codes of similar topics were grouped into sub-categories and then categories. Examples of code generating, the building of sub-categories and categories, and the summary of data categorisation and definition of categories are presented in tables 4.7 and 4.8 respectively.

Table 4.7 Examples of code and category development in observation data

Samples of raw data	Coding	Sub-category	Main category
<i>Teacher asked students to look at 5 pictures about 5 sports in the book on page 68 and sport equipment in exercise 2. Students had to identify what sports are these in the pictures and what equipment are needed to play these sports The teacher said that student can use dictionary to look up new words, they had 10 minutes to do the task and they could discuss with their friends. He also reminded students to note down both meaning and pronunciation of words</i>	Tasks/activities designed/used in the class	Task for in-class learning	Assessment tasks
<i>students are asked to do exercise 8 page 77</i>	Task/activity designed/used for homework	Task for out-of-class learning	
<i>Who volunteer?</i>	Encouraging students' engagement	Questioning	Assessment techniques
<i>What does "generation" mean"?</i>	Checking if students know something (convergent assessment)		
<i>Why do you choose 'yes'? What are the key words?</i>	Elaborating on the students' answers		
<i>What does "ceiling" mean?</i>	Student-initiated questioning		
	Checking what students know (divergent assessment)		
<i>The teacher went around and observed while the students were completing the task. She explained kinds of adjectives for students to be use to describe</i>	Observe, supervise and assist the students while they were doing a task	Observation	
<i>The teacher called one student to go to the board and write his answers</i>	Checking of the students' performance – force engagement	Checking of individual performance/ role play	
<i>The teacher called students to role play the situations</i>	Checking of pair performance - force engagement		

<i>The teacher collected students' work, then swap students' work, checked with the whole class and provided the students with correct answer keys so that they could mark their peer's work</i>	Create opportunity for students assess their own or their peer's work	Self/peer-assessment	
<i>T: what is the job in picture F? S: teacher T: not correct</i>	Confirming students' answer	Confirmation of students' answers	Assessment feedback
<i>That's good</i>	Giving praise		
<i>The teacher used red ball-point-pen to underline the mistakes,</i>	Identifying mistakes directly	Mistake identification and correction	
<i>T: what sport is in picture C? S: /wai surfing/ T: have you looked it up in the dictionary? S: yes T; wai? Wai? (emphasizing the students' mistakes without mentioning that it was the mistake)</i>	Identifying mistakes indirectly		
<i>S: basket ball /bôl/ T /bɔ:l/ T: to play it, what do we use? S: ball /bôl/ T: /bɔ:l/</i>	Correcting mistakes directly		
<i>The teacher asked the students about their mistakes, and how they think they can correct the mistakes</i>	Correcting mistakes indirectly		
<i>What is the problem with your speaking Hieu?</i>	Creating opportunity for students to give feedback on their own performance	Self/peer feedback	
<i>"Toan, give comments for sentences 1 and 2", "Thanh, give comments on sentences 3,4,5"</i>	Creating opportunity for students to give feedback on their peer's work		

<i>A student recognized the teacher's mistake and corrected it for him/ A student recognized and correct his own mistakes</i>	Correcting own mistakes or others' mistakes	Student-initiated feedback	
<i>The teacher gave comments on students' writing. She commented on some students' good writing and pointed out why they were good. She also commented on some not very good writing and why they were not good yet</i>	Identifying students' strengths and weaknesses	Feedback for future learning	
<i>You should know the phonetic symbols so that when you look up new words in the dictionary and look at the phonetic symbols, you will know how to pronounce it. If there are new words, you are supposed to be able to pronounce them correctly. If there are any new words you encounter, you should use the dictionary or smartphone to check the meaning and pronunciation of these words</i>	Communicating rules about independent learning	Assessment rules	Assessment communication
<i>I don't punish those didn't do homework today. But next time no homework means absence from class</i>	Communicating rules about homework - punishment		
<i>It is no problem if your answer is wrong</i>	Indicating tolerance of students' mistake	Attitude	
<i>These words are important because you might have to use them in the introduction part of the speaking test</i>	Relating a learning task to test/exam	Assessment requirements	

Table 4.8 Data categorisation and category definition

Teacher's practices			Students' responses
Main category	Definition	Sub-category	
Assessment tasks	Tasks/activities that the teacher designed or used to help her/him get information about the students' learning	- Task for in-class learning	
		- Task for out-of-class learning	
Assessment techniques	The techniques that the teacher used the class to determine the students' performance compared to a criterion or standard	- Questioning	Student-initiated questioning
		- Observation	
		- Checking of individual and pair performance	
		- Self/peer-assessment	
Assessment feedback	Information that the teacher provided the students regarding their performance or work	- Mistake identification and correction	Student-initiated feedback
		- Confirmation of answers	
		- Self/peer feedback	
		- Feedback for future improvement	
Assessment communication	General information that the teacher communicated to the students regarding the requirements, rules, regulations and the teacher's attitude relating to assessment	- Assessment rules	
		- Assessment requirement	

Level 2 analysis

The first round of analysis helped the researcher categorise teachers' practices into categories and sub-categories in order to understand the characterisation of teachers' assessment practices. The researcher applied sociocultural perspectives to interpret teachers' assessment practices in terms of the degree to which they allow LA, and students' responses in terms of the demonstration of LA. She conceptualised teachers' assessment practices and students' responses as *autonomy offered* and *autonomy demonstrated*. The former denotes the space and opportunities for students' choices and decision-making, and the latter denotes the extent to which the students demonstrate their capacity to make informed choices and decisions regarding their learning.

The researcher built two analytical frameworks for *autonomy offered* and *autonomy demonstrated* based on her thorough reviews of autonomy frameworks and theories in the literature and sociocultural perspectives on LA (Chapter 3). The frameworks are presented in tables 4.9 and 4.10.

Table 4.9 Analytical framework for teachers' practices

Teachers' practices: Autonomy offered	Definition
Open	The students make all choices and decisions regarding their learning.
Bounded	The students make some choices and decisions regarding their learning.
Prescribed	The students make almost no choices or decisions regarding their learning.

Table 4.10 Analytical framework for students' responses

Students' responses: Autonomy demonstrated	Definition
Proactive	The students initiate the agenda for their learning and initiate actions in order to complete their agenda.
Reactive	The students initiate some actions in order to follow other-imitated learning agenda.
Compliant	The students follow the teachers' instructions.

The researcher then combined the analytical frameworks for teachers' practices and students' responses, her understanding about assessment and the results of the first-level analysis to build an analytical coding framework for level 2 analysis of the data. The two coding frameworks for analysing teacher's assessment practices and students' responses are presented in table 4.11 and table 4.12 respectively.

Table 4.11 Coding frame for teachers' assessment practices

Autonomy offered	Categories	Definition
Prescribed	Assessment tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher initiates the task - Teacher decides on the goals and input of the task - The outcome of the task is closed and predefined (yes/no, right/wrong, only one correct answer) - Teacher decides on the procedures and division of input of the task
	Assessment techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher as assessor - Teacher provides the standard or criteria for students to do self-/peer testing, rating and reflection - Teacher uses closed, convergent questions to check students' answers/ to check if students know the answers. - Teacher decides on criteria for task achievement
	Assessment feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher identifies mistakes and carries out mistake correction for student - Teacher gives evaluations feedback for students (confirming/disconfirming) - Teacher involves students in evaluation feedback relating to right/wrong/ yes/no/ correct/incorrect, but students do not have to analyse criteria and work, just compare and contrast - Feedback pattern is IRE (Initiate – Response – Evaluation)
	Assessment communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher uses external regulators (rewards, punishment, incentives, directives) as an exchange for students' engagement in the task - Teacher doesn't give any rationale/justification for doing the task
Bounded	Assessment tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher initiates the task - Teacher decides on the goals and input of the task - The outcome of the task is not predefined - Students can negotiate the procedures and division of input in the task (they have flexibility and choice over procedures and division of input of the task)
	Assessment techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher – student assessors - Teacher involves students in negotiation of criteria, discussion of relationship of one element of assessment to another – what constitutes a good answer - Teacher uses open-ended/divergent questions to investigate what students know about the task
	Assessment feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher involves students in mistake identification - Teacher identifies mistakes and provides students with suggestions and/or directions for self-correction

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher involves students in specifying feedback – students use the teacher’s criteria and identify the attainment, participate in analysing the work and criteria in order to judge others’ work - Feedback pattern is IRF (initiate – response – feedback) – involve elaboration, explanation,
	Assessment communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher uses grade rewards for students’ achievement and performance in the task - Teachers emphasise the relevance of the task to a set goal/direction/requirements to engage students in the task - Teacher provides some justification/rationale for doing the task
Open	Assessment tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create opportunities for learners to initiate the task
	Assessment techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher creates opportunities for students to be assessors - Teacher allows students to set up their own or group standard or criteria to assess their own or their peers’ work
	Assessment feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher lets students identify their mistakes - Teacher identifies the mistakes for students, but students have to figure out why they make the mistakes and how to fix them - Teacher involves students in discussion about what constitutes achievement and how to improve their work - Teacher involves students in specifying feedback; students have to use their own criteria to make judgements about others’ work. - Teacher provides feedback for autonomous learning
	Assessment communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers prompt students to be self-aware of their own set goal - Teacher prompt students to internalise value of task - Teacher nurtures students’ confidence

Table 4.12 Coding frame for students' responses

Autonomy demonstrated	categories	Definition
Compliant	Assessment tasks	- Follow teacher's instructions closely to complete teacher-initiated task
	Assessment techniques	- Carry out self/peer-testing, reflection, rating using teacher-provided answer keys - Answer teacher's closed/divergent question - Perform the task when requested
	Assessment feedback	- Confirming/disconfirming their own or others' answers basing on teachers' criteria and standard
	Task communication	- Do not see the value of the task but engage in the task to avoid punishment or win rewards for compliance
Reactive	Task design	- Initiate some actions to complete teacher-initiated task more effectively and easily
	Task assessment	- Discussion assessment criteria, element of task achievement etc with teacher - Answering teacher's open-ended divergent question using their own thoughts
	Task Feedback	- Self-correct their mistakes when teacher identifies them - Give feedback to fellow students using/based on teachers' criteria and standard - Cooperate with teachers in mistake identification and correction
	Task engagement	- Engage in the task because of its relevance to the teacher-initiated learning agenda - Engage in the task to win awards for good performance/achievement
Proactive	Task design	- Initiate the tasks and actions to complete their initiated tasks
	Task assessment	- Set up own criteria and standard for self-assessment - Internalise teachers' assessment criteria for assessment of future tasks
	Task feedback	- Initiate feedback using own criteria - Cooperate with teacher in determining elements of task achievement and ways of improvement - Identify and correct own mistakes - Use teachers' feedback information in self-regulated learning - Analyse teachers' criteria and provide feedback for their fellow students
	Task engagement	- Engage in the task because of its relevance to own learning agenda - Engage in the task to win awards for good performance/achievement

After developing the analytical frameworks, the researcher applied them in order to categorise observation data again. The coding was completed manually using Microsoft Excel. After all the coding was completed, the researcher used the filter function in Excel to filter codes and calculate the frequencies of sub-categories and categories for reporting. Patterns of autonomy offered and demonstrated were also revealed, which allowed the researcher to understand the impact of teachers' assessment practices on the demonstration of learner autonomy in the class.

Codes for identification of observation data are presented in table 4.13.

Table 4.13 Codes for observations

Data source	Example	Code
Observation	1 st observation in Teacher S's class	SOB1
	5 th observation in Teacher C's class	COB5
	7 th observation in Teacher A's class	AOB7

Findings from observation data analysis are presented in 'findings', Chapter 6.

4.4.4. Document analysis process

Documents in this study are considered the secondary source of data to triangulate the observation and interview data analysis results. Additionally, document analysis helped the researcher develop a clear understanding of the context for LA and assessment practices at tertiary level in Vietnam, as well as the contextual characteristics of the university selected for study. The researcher examined the selected documents (e.g., Vietnamese Education laws, documents about the Projects 2020, documents about the credit-based system, and documents about Vietnamese education development strategies) to search for content that matched categories in the interview and observation analysis concerning LA and assessment. She also searched for content that depicted the context of VHE in general and EFL teaching and learning in VHE in particular. The findings from the document analysis are presented in Chapter 2 and Chapter 8, which concern the context of the study and discussion of major findings respectively.

4.5. Ensuring research quality

This research adopted a qualitative case study as its research design. The biggest concern with this type of research design is its potential lack of research rigour and reliability (Yin, 2003; Zainal, 2007; Noor, 2008; Simons, 2009; Yin, 2011). There have been various approaches to assess and ensure research rigour in the literature (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Tracy, 2010) however, the most commonly and widely used approach for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research is the one proposed by Guba (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1986). This approach includes four criteria: credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability (Merriam, 1998; Houghton et al., 2013). In this study, the researcher adopted Lincoln and Guba's approach to control the quality of her research.

4.5.1. Credibility

Credibility refers to “confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings” (Guba, 1981, p. 79), or the congruence of findings with reality that is described by Guba and Lincoln (1994) as being alterable and judged in terms of their informedness or sophistication rather than their truthfulness (Merriam, 1998). Credibility is considered the most important criterion in ensuring research rigour (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

Credibility can be ensured using various methods (see, for example, in Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986; Shenton, 2004; Houghton et al., 2013). In this study, the researcher planned to use prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer-member debriefing and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Houghton et al., 2013) to ensure the credibility of her research.

However, she could not carry out the member-checking technique because when the researcher asked the participants if they wanted to read the transcription of their interviews, no participants (students and teachers) expressed interest in reading them.

Therefore, the researcher could only use prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation and peer debriefing to control credibility.

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation. The presence of the researcher can produce distortion in participants' behaviours. To mitigate this, the researcher's prolonged engagement at the site allows the participants to adjust to the researcher's presence and to satisfy themselves that he/she does not pose any threat. It minimises the impact of their presence on the participants' behaviours (Guba, 1981). Additionally, the researcher needs to have a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, so persistent observation can help the researchers achieve this goal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Houghton et al., 2013).

In the current study, participant observation was conducted over four months at the research site. Forty observations across three classes in total—each lasting 150 minutes—allowed the researcher sufficient time to understand thoroughly the context and the phenomenon under investigation. The impact of the researcher's presence in the class was minimal, as the participants had sufficient time to get used to her presence at the site and identified by themselves that the researcher did not pose any threat to them. **Triangulation** can also be used to increase the credibility of the research. Triangulation refers to the use of a variety of data sources, different investigators, diverse perspectives and numerous methods compared and contrasted in order to verify data and interpretations (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bitsch, 2005).

The data collected for this study were from different sources. The research adopted semi-structured interviews, participant observations and document analysis as methods of data gathering, all of which provided adequate and accurate data for the research. Additionally, data from different sources were compared to determine if the findings could be confirmed. For instance, observations were utilised in the three

classes to identify the teachers' assessment practices, the students' demonstration of autonomy and the factors in teachers' assessment practices that facilitated or inhibited learner autonomy in the class. Interviewed teachers were also asked about their practices in the class and the extent to which they allowed their students to be involved and make decisions relating to various learning aspects. Interviewed students were asked about their responses to teachers' practices and the extent to which they were involved in and took control of different aspects of learning.

Peer debriefing enables researchers to check their growing insights and research findings (Guba, 1981). Peer debriefing involves interaction and discussion with other professionals (e.g., faculty colleagues or members of a supervision panel) about their thinking and questions they might have during the research process, so that timely changes and adjustments can be made (Guba, 1981; Bitsch, 2005).

The researcher met on a regular basis with her supervision panel to discuss the emerging issues that she identified or encountered during the data collection. Sample field notes and interpretations of the field notes were also sent to supervisors for comments and suggestions. Ideas and first impressions of data were discussed with supervisors so that adjustments to methodology during the data collection could be made in a timely way. Emerging themes were also discussed. In the wrap-up of data analysis (before the writing stage), peer debriefing was used to verify if there was consensus about the coding process. The researcher asked the principal supervisor to code observation data from one class. The results were then reviewed, compared and contrasted with the researcher's coding. In most instances, the principle supervisor's coding matched that of the researcher's coding. The researcher and her supervisor then discussed and finalised points of disagreement. Extracts of observation data that had been coded and themed by the researcher were also sent to all three supervisors in the

panel for independent coding. The results showed consistency in coding among the researcher and supervisors. Some minor divergences, e.g., where only one supervisor in the panel coded differently, were discussed and finalised by the whole group.

4.5.2. Transferability

Transferability refers to whether or not particular findings can be applied to a similar context or situation while still preserving the meanings and inferences from the completed study (Houghton et al., 2013; Anney, 2014). According to Guba (1981), inquirers can increase the transferability of their research by carrying out theoretical/purposeful sampling, collecting rich descriptive data, and developing thick descriptions (p. 86). These are further detailed as provision of thick descriptions of the research context; detailed explanation of the methods used; instances of raw data and a rich and vigorous presentation of the findings with proper quotations, so that the reader can make informed decisions about whether or not to apply the findings to their context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Houghton et al., 2013).

In the current study, the researcher expected to observe divergences in teachers' assessment practices and practices implemented to support learner autonomy. Therefore, teacher participants were purposefully selected using a survey questionnaire designed to gauge their assessment practices and the practices they used to promote LA. Three teachers were chosen: one had a high score and two had a medium score, indicating the different teachers used a range of formative assessment practices and allowed different levels of autonomy in their class. The study also provides a thick description of the research context (presented in Chapter 2) and research participants (presented in Chapter 4). All the findings are illustrated with appropriate quotes or examples.

4.5.3. Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of the data (Guba, 1981; Houghton et al., 2013); stable research findings are consistent and could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to address the issue of dependability, researchers can use the *audit trail* technique (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985)—the key technique in ensuring dependability (Ryan-Nicholls & Will, 2009). This technique enables the independent external researcher to track the processes of data collection, analysis, interpretation and the decisions made by the researchers throughout these processes (Guba, 1981; Houghton et al., 2013) and arrive at comparable conclusions to those reached by the original researcher (Noble & Smith, 2015). In order to do that, researchers should elucidate and document their research process throughout different stages, from research design, method development, and data collection to data analysis and reporting of findings (Shenton, 2004; Noble & Smith, 2015).

In this study, dependability was attained by detailed documentation of the research process. The researcher kept a record of all the issues and questions for discussion and decisions made in every meeting with the supervision panel. This could help the auditor see the development of the research at different stages. Additionally, all the operations of the study (e.g., data collection procedures and analytical framework development for data analysis) were presented transparently and vigorously in the research.

4.5.4. Confirmability

Confirmability concerns the inquirers' ability to show that "the findings of an inquiry are a function solely of subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not of the biases, motivations, interests, perspectives and so on of the inquirer" (Guba, 1981, p. 80). Confirmability can be achieved by using strategies such as triangulation and practicing reflexivity (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986). These tactics are also

used to assess other criteria. For example, triangulation can be used to establish credibility of the research, and practicing reflexivity can also be used to protect dependability (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Noble and Smith (2015), confirmability of a piece of research is attained when credibility and transferability have been addressed.

4.6. Ethical considerations and clearance

This study conforms to the ethical requirements and guidelines of the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee. Ethics approval number H-2016-147 was acquired from the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee on the 7th of July 2016. Data collection for this study was conducted in a university in Vietnam. Therefore, permission from the rector to conduct research at the selected university was also obtained before data collection was carried out. All the initial contacts with teachers and students were made by a third party (the researcher's colleague) to avoid any pressure that might arise. All the participants were provided with information and consent forms in both English and Vietnamese. Consent was obtained before any data collection was conducted.

4.6.1. Level of risk

This study was considered to be low-risk research by the ethics committee, meaning that it would pose minimal risks to the participants. However, there still arose some possible potential risks to the participants as follows:

- The researcher's presence in the class during the observation might make the teacher participants feel uncomfortable.
- Participants would have to spend time completing the questionnaire and the interviews

- Teacher participants might feel reluctant to talk about issues relating to institutions
- Student participants might be reluctant to talk about their teachers' activities.

4.6.2. Measures to minimise risks

The researcher was aware of the potential risks to the participants and proposed the following measures to minimise the risks:

- All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the project at any time they wished.
- All the information about the project activities was made clear to the participants so that they could decide whether to take part in the project or not.
- Teacher participants were clearly informed of the frequency of the observations, and the schedule of the observations was provided for them in advance.
- Teacher participants were informed that no audio or video recordings would be made during the observation.
- The time for the interviews was arranged at each participant's convenience.
- Participants were informed that their identities would be kept confidential and data would be made non-identifiable before being reported.

4.6.3. Confidentiality

The identity of the participants was treated with the strictest confidentiality during data collection and during the reporting of research results, so as to ensure that participants could not be identified.

In the survey, only those who were willing to continue in the study had to provide their personal details. However, they were assured that their information would remain confidential, and no one except the researcher and her supervisors would have access to this piece of information.

In the observations, both teachers and students had been informed that the researcher would only take field notes. No audio or video recordings were made. The name of each class was coded.

During the transcription of the interview data, pseudonyms were used instead of real names in order to guarantee participants' anonymity. All identifying content in the data was also removed or changed (where applicable) to guarantee the anonymity of the participants.

4.6.4. Storage of information

Digital materials (records, transcripts, field notes) were stored in the researcher's computer and password-protected portable drives. Printed and analogue materials were stored in secure lockers in the researcher's office. Only the researcher and the supervisors had access to those materials. All signed consent forms were kept in a secure locker in the researcher's office during the conduct of the research, to be retained for five years after the submission of the thesis.

Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the research design for the study. The constructivist research paradigm underpins the current study and a qualitative case study approach was used to probe the impacts of assessment on the demonstration of LA in the context of EFL classes at tertiary level in Vietnam.

Data was collected using participant observations of teachers' and students' practices in three EFL classes at a university during a complete semester, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with three teachers and sixteen students, and post-observation interviews with three teachers and their students. The three teachers were purposefully selected based on the results of a survey questionnaire about assessment

practices and activities to promote LA, and interviewed students were selected on a voluntary basis. Both interview and observation data were analysed using a qualitative content analysis approach. Analysis of documents relating to higher education policies, assessment policies, English teaching and learning policies, EFL curriculum and syllabus, test samples and English teaching textbooks was conducted to provide characterisation of the context for the research.

Various measures, such as prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, thick descriptions of the research context, and detailed documentation of the research process were implemented to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the research. Ethical issues were taken into consideration and cleared with ethics approval from the University of Adelaide Ethics Committee (approval number H-2016-147).

CHAPTER 5: TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Chapter overview

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with three English teachers and sixteen non-English major students at the researched university. The chapter starts with background information about the three classes. The chapter then presents the findings on teachers' and students' understandings of LA, their perceptions of assessment and their perspectives on the relationship between assessment and LA. The chapter also presents details on the levels of autonomy demonstrated in the students' reports about their English learning.

Coding principles are as follows:

- Interviews with teachers have a letter indicating the teacher and 'I' for interview (e.g., 'SI' means 'interview with Teacher S').
- Interviews with students have a letter indicating the teacher, 'S' for student and a number indicating the student (e.g., 'CS2' means 'interview with student 2 in Teacher C's class').

5.1. Background information about the three classes

5.1.1. Profile of the teachers

Teacher S was a young male teacher who had around eighteen months' experience of teaching English to non-English major students in higher education in Vietnam. He graduated from university in 2015, and was completing his master's degree at the time of the interview. He had just been teaching English at the university for one year.

Before starting at his current university, he taught English at a university for a semester. He had also been working as a casual teacher at one other university in Hanoi since September 2016. Results from the participant selection survey questionnaire (see Chapter 4) indicated that he was a high ‘autonomy-supportive’ teacher. That is, he was the one to most frequently implement activities that seemed to the researcher to be designed to promote LA.

Teacher C was an experienced female teacher who had around fourteen years’ experience teaching English to non-English major students in VHE. She graduated from university in 2002 and received a master’s degree in English teaching methodology in 2007. She had been working at the current university from 2006. Before that, she had taught English for a private university in Hanoi for three years. She had not attended many conferences, workshops or training courses for EFL teachers since she graduated from university. She had attended some training courses on teaching methodology but no courses or workshops on assessment. Results from the participant selection survey questionnaire indicated that Teacher C was a medium ‘autonomy supportive’ teacher. That is, she sometimes used activities and techniques that are supposed to encourage LA.

Teacher A was a female teacher who had around twelve years’ experience teaching English. After graduating from university in 2004, she taught English for high school students for 6 months, and then she taught English at a college from 2005 to 2010. She had been teaching in the current university since 2010. She completed her master’s degree in 2013. She said she had a few chances to attend conferences and workshops on English teaching and assessment which were organised by publishers to train teachers to use their textbooks effectively. Results from the participant selection

survey questionnaire indicated that Teacher A was a medium ‘autonomy supportive’ teacher.

5.1.2. Profile of the students

The profiles of the students in the three classes are summarised in table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Profiles of the students in three classes

	Total number of students	Male	Female	Age range	>10 years' experience learning English	From 5 to 9 years' experience learning English	< 4 years' experience learning English	From Hanoi city	From other provinces
Teacher S's class	25	6	19	19-26	13	12	1	11	14
Teacher C's class	27	18	9	19-21	21	6	0	6	21
Teacher A's class	29	11	18	19-21	21	8	0	6	23

5.1.3. The classroom

Teacher S was teaching in a classroom which was rectangular and had an area of about 20 square metres. It had two columns of seven rows in a fixed table-and-chair arrangement. There were no technological facilities such as computers, projectors, or speakers in the class - just two ceiling fans, two wall fans and a blackboard. If teacher S wanted to use any technological facilities, he had to borrow them from the department or bring his own equipment.

Teacher C's students were learning English in the same classroom as Teacher A. The classroom had an area of about 25 square metres. It had four columns of four rows of fixed table-and-chairs arrangements. The classroom was air-conditioned. The facilities in the classroom included a desktop computer, a projector, two speakers, two ceiling fans and a black board.

5.1.4. The module

Students in all three classes were studying English module 3, the last module in the curriculum for English at the university. English module 3 was a three-credit module (equivalent to 45 periods of 50 minutes) which included 39 periods for teaching, five periods for mid-term tests and one period for revision and wrap-up. Students had one three-period class a week for 15 weeks. The textbook used for the module was *Objective KET* (Capel & Sharp, 2009), units 11 to 20. This is an integrated and exam-oriented book, preparing students for the A2 level of English competence in the CEFR. The assessment of the module consisted of ongoing assessment, a mid-term test and an end-of term test. More details about the textbook and the assessment of the module are presented in Chapter 2.

5.2. The teachers' and students' voices on assessment and autonomy

5.2.1. The teachers' and students' voices on learner autonomy

5.2.1.1. Teachers' voices

Teachers' understanding of the concept of LA was explored through (a) their direct statements about LA itself, (b) their perceptions of the characteristics of an autonomous learner, (c) the role of LA in language learning, (d) the role of teachers and students in the learning process, and (e) the activities that they reported using in their class to enhance LA.

Teacher S interpreted the concept of LA as follows: "students' self-regulation and initiative in the learning process to acquire knowledge". He explained on this definition: "students' diligence, positive attitude towards learning, homework completion and active inquiry for teacher's clarification for something they do not understand". In Teacher S's view, "learner autonomy plays an extremely significant role

in learning, especially at the tertiary level”. He thought that LA was essential for students at tertiary level because at this level, students would have many projects, group and individual assignments. However, due to class time constraints, they would not be able to complete all of these in the class and would have to opt for doing self-study outside of the class. Teacher S’s elaboration on the importance of LA in language learning indicated that for him, autonomous learning was the continuation of classroom learning and was still under the direction of the teacher. Autonomous learning from Teacher S’s perspective can be understood as *other directed - self-regulated* learning. The above findings indicate that Teacher S conceptualised LA across two different levels. His initial statement indicated an ideal level of *proactive autonomy* in which students take control of all aspects of their learning. However, his elaboration on the characteristics of an autonomous learner and his perception of the role of LA in language learning indicated that his conception of LA was more about *reactive autonomy*, in which students initiate actions while following the teacher-initiated learning agenda.

Teacher S indicated a belief that the teacher should only be the facilitator or mentor who scaffolds students with difficult knowledge, while students should play the primary role in the learning process. His belief about the respective roles of teachers and students in the learning process implied an expectation that the students should be the ones to take a proactive role in their learning. That could be the reason why he stated that he would attempt all possible methods to make students more autonomous. However, his reported activities to foster LA did not seem to match his belief.

The students in Teacher S’s class were not English major students and their motivation to learn English might not have been as high as that of their English major counterparts. However, regarding autonomy promotion, Teacher S believed that LA

could be promoted irrespective of students' majors through teachers' and students' activities. He thought that LA could be enhanced by assigning various tasks to the students which they would conduct alone before he checked and corrected their work. In other words, fostering autonomy (in his view) meant putting students in situations where they had to take some action. This is more likely, however, to foster students' *compliance* with or *reactivity* to the teacher's agenda rather than their *proactive autonomy*.

Teacher S also reported that he always allowed his students to access available resources in the class and encouraged them to work on their own before seeking help from the teacher. He also deliberately delayed his assistance for the students to allow time for them to attempt tasks on their own, and arranged pair and group work so that the students could learn from one another. He believed that his approach could develop the students' habit of self-reliance, or autonomous learning:

I think autonomy is essential to university students. Thus, I will try all possible ways to help students become autonomous. Teachers normally do not allow students to use mobile phones in the class because they are afraid that students may use smartphones to play games or surf the Internet, losing attention to their lessons. However, I always allow students to use their smartphone in the class because I think they can use it to look up new words (e.g., meanings and pronunciation) instead of having to ask the teacher. For example, normally, when students do not know a word, they will ask "what does this word mean, how to pronounce it". In such a situation, if I answer them right away, they may remember at that time and forget right after that, but if I ask them to look it up by themselves, they might

remember longer. . . I also give them pair or group tasks to encourage their participation and develop their teamwork skills. (SI)

Again, even though the teacher's techniques were intended to encourage students to demonstrate their autonomy in certain situations, these techniques might not result in students' autonomous learning because students in these situations were still the passive recipients of the teacher's actions. It could be argued that these activities could be used as the initial seed-planting steps to train students to carry out autonomous learning. But in order to promote LA, the teacher might have to scaffold students further so that they could demonstrate a higher level of LA.

The data suggests that Teacher S's interpretations and understanding of LA covered a spectrum from *compliance* to *reactiveness* to *proactivity*. Data also suggests that *compliance* might be necessary for the students before they could demonstrate a higher level of autonomy. He appeared to hold a positive view towards LA and the feasibility of the concept in the context. The findings also suggested that there was a mismatch between his perception and his practices. He seemed to recognise the active role of the students in learning, but his reported practices indicated that he was the primary agent who orchestrated learning for the students in his class.

Teacher C perceived that LA represented students' initiative in their learning, but that this initiative originated from the requirements and objectives set by the university and English department for the course or module. She thought that LA entailed students knowing the course requirements and the course objectives, and that once they were clear about these, they could display initiative in learning such as preparing vocabulary or grammar for the next lessons, completing assigned homework, and/or interacting with teachers and peers. She said:

Autonomy is the ability to determine learning tasks and aims based on course requirements and objectives. For example, the main objective in English modules is to help students to grasp grammar rules, right? Students, therefore, base themselves on this objective to set their aim of mainly comprehending grammar rules. ...taking initiative in learning based on the requirements and objectives set by the teacher for the course and each lesson. For example, some students display initiative in doing homework, preparing vocabulary or reviewing grammar for the upcoming lessons. (CI)

This understanding of autonomy seemed to distinguish between the role of the teacher and that of the students. The teacher's role was to set up the directions while the students' role was to actively manage and navigate within this boundary. This understanding of autonomy appeared to reflect LA in a *reactive* sense.

Teacher C's interpretation of LA was complemented by her portrait of an autonomous learner and her belief about the role of LA in language learning. She described an autonomous learner as one who had a positive attitude toward learning, by which she meant "enthusiastically taking part in activities designated by the teacher in the class", "making efforts in learning", and "regular attendance and attentiveness in the class". The autonomous attributes depicted related to students' abilities to respond to other-initiated agendas rather than the ability to set up their own agendas and act accordingly. Teacher C believed that LA was crucial to students, especially in learning English. She thought all that the teacher could do in the class was to guide the students in learning and provide them with basic knowledge, because time for learning in the class was not adequate, and the class was too crowded. Therefore, students had to be

“autonomous both inside and outside the class” in order to learn effectively and efficiently:

Students need to initiate learning activities to have deep understanding about an issue. For example, with grammar and vocabulary, they have to learn and practice more at home because the teacher cannot cover everything in the class. (CI)

Teacher C indicated a belief that teachers “should only guide students in learning” and the students are “supposed to display initiative in their own learning activities”. She appeared to recognise the active role of the students and expect them to perform this active role in the learning process:

Students are supposed to display initiative in their own learning activities. For example, if they think I give them too much homework when they are having exams in other subjects, they can tell me and ask me to reduce the amount of homework or discuss with me about the deadline for homework. That is what they can and should do. Students also need to actively give feedback on the Department’s requirements or regimes for the subject so that these requirements and regimes become more appropriate for them. (CI)

Teacher C’s students, however, appeared reliant and passive in her view. They took little initiative in issues relating to learning but opted to follow any agenda established by the English department or the teacher. Even when the teacher tried to involve them in discussions about learning issues, they did not raise their voices.

Despite perceiving non-English major students as being passive and reliant, Teacher C thought that it was possible to promote LA among them. She believed LA enhancement required a mechanism (e.g., assessment) to ‘force’ students to take on

more learning, especially outside of the class, and to control what they did. She also believed this mechanism would increase students' participation in the class:

I think this (developing learner autonomy) depends on teachers' activities and assessment methods. For example, if teachers give students homework and do not check it, it is very likely that students will not do the homework . . . To develop learner autonomy, teachers need to, for example, frequently have tasks in the class for students to do, and frequently check students' homework. In other words, teachers need to carry out assessment frequently. (CI)

Teacher C's ideas about fostering autonomy reflected her perception that LA could be the product of a stimulus-response mechanism. Within this view, the teacher is the primary agent to orchestrate the students' learning, rather than a fosterer of student agency.

By contrast, Teacher A believed that the concept of LA was central to the learner-centred teaching approach:

To my general understanding, learner autonomy means that learners know learning is their responsibility. In other words, learners can determine their learning purpose, learning goal, learning methods and their reflection on the effectiveness of their chosen learning methods in relation to their learning goal. (CI)

Teacher A's statement about LA reflected her perception of the concept as *proactive*. She perceived students as having to both initiate a direction for their learning and self-regulate their learning activities to reach their goals.

Teacher A's perspective on LA was complemented by her description of autonomous learners and her conception of the role of LA in language learning. In her

view, autonomous learners possessed specific abilities such as self-reflection and critical thinking, and qualities relating to both style and attitude, such as activeness, adaptability, seriousness, and attentiveness. These attributes appeared, from Teacher A's perspective, to contribute to the students' capacity to not only respond to other-initiated agendas but also to initiate and carry out their own agenda.

In my observation, highly autonomous students are very dynamic in style. For example, when the teacher assigns them a task, they are quickly adaptable to it. Regarding attitude, they are serious in learning, attentive and enthusiastic in the class. They pay close attention in the class in order to both acquire new knowledge and to compare what they have prepared and what the teacher is teaching to see if these are relevant and if they need to change anything. They ask the teacher to explain if there is a mismatch between what they read elsewhere and what their teacher is teaching. (AI)

Teacher A believed that LA was significant in the students' English learning. She linked the importance of LA to the class time constraints and the syllabus for English at the university. She thought that learning English in the class could not be satisfactory because the number of class hours was limited, resulting in the need for the students to spend time learning outside of the class. She also added that students could only learn foundational knowledge in the class. Therefore, autonomous learning was necessary:

I think autonomy is essential in all subjects, including English. This is because what students can learn in the class is only the frame of knowledge, and it is the students' responsibility to develop this frame

by doing self-study. I think self-study helps to make students' knowledge become complete. (A1)

Additionally, she thought that the teacher should only be the facilitator, and the students should not only follow the teacher's guidance but also go beyond. This indicated her expectation that students be proactive in the learning process.

The students in Teacher A's class were non-English majors, and she thought that it was very challenging to promote LA among such students. In her view, non-English major students were not aware of the importance of learning English because they were not learning it for their future profession, but only in order to become eligible for graduation. She believed that when the students were not conscious of the significance of English to their personal needs, they would not invest time and effort in studying and researching the subject, resulting in a lack of autonomy.

She believed that the enhancement of LA among non-English major students would involve various agents. These included the students (e.g., their awareness of the importance of learning English and their corresponding effort in the subject), the learning content presented to the students (e.g., whether the learning content was relevant to the students' needs), the teacher (e.g., whether her teaching method could motivate the students) and the situated context (e.g., the requirement for English in the society).

Regarding her practice, Teacher A admitted that her priority was not to foster LA but to help her students pass their exams. Therefore, activities that she carried out in her class were exam-oriented. She thought that the activities that she was using at that moment might result in a low level of LA demonstration, meaning that students only learned what she taught them in order to pass exams. In other words, students were learning to make themselves compliant with the system of which they were a part.

I do not know about other teachers, but I am always under pressure of helping my students to pass their exams, making my lessons exam-oriented. My priority in my class is to help my students have sufficient knowledge so that they can do well in exams. I think this may restrict students to learning only what I taught them in the class to meet my set objectives for them, and therefore, influence their learner autonomy. (A1)

She reported that she paid attention to helping students take charge of their English learning only after she achieved the first goal of presenting the knowledge for the tests and exams. What she did was to provide her students with basic knowledge for communication (e.g., how to deal with real-life situations and vocabulary), and to arouse their motivation for learning English, which she believed to be central to their development of autonomy in their language learning. In her own words:

My second objective other than helping the students to prepare for the tests and exams is providing them with some basic knowledge about English so that they can develop their language skills. For example, I will help my students communicate simple, basic ideas in English at A1 level and deal with some communication in real-life situations at A2 level . . . I will design my lesson plan as follows: I will focus on the knowledge for the exams first, and then I will help the students to deal with some real-life situations and provide them with vocabulary. Additionally, I organise some language games in the class so that the students can play and learn at the same time. That is what I have been doing in my class. (A1)

In sum, findings relating to Teacher A's perspective on LA suggested that she understood LA in a proactive sense, and she held a consistent view about the concept. These findings also indicated that from her perspective, promoting LA depended on various factors, not just on the students. This teacher also saw the challenges of fostering LA among non-English major students, and she perceived the current assessment regimes as being a barrier to her practices to promote LA in her class. The way she promoted her students' autonomy was akin to preparing the soil for the seeds of autonomy to grow.

5.2.1.2. Students' voices

Of the 16 students interviewed, 11 of them, comprising four students in Teacher S's class, three students in Teacher A's class, and four students in Teacher C's class, perceived the concept of LA in a *proactive* sense. That is, they saw themselves as the primary agent in their learning process who had to demonstrate the ability to initiate, carry out, and monitor their learning agenda. They interpreted LA as a learner's ability to be self-reliant, self-regulated, and to display initiative in learning. All of these refer to the ability to carry out learning without a teacher or direct support from a teacher, and they were reflected in students' having learning goals, learning plans and schedules, learning methods, and learning motivation. Students further elaborated the meaning of LA as "not depending on anyone but yourselves" (SS1, CS5), "without waiting to be forced or urged by others" (SS2, AS5, CS2), and "others do not have to urge and force you to learn" (SS6, CS3).

LA also involved the ability to self-reflect on learning. In other words, LA means that students should have the ability to recognise what they want and need. They should be able to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and the resources and

investments they need in order to realise their purpose, as illustrated in the following comment.

I think autonomy means that you know what you need, what is important to you, what are your weaknesses. If you know what you need, then you will know how to select appropriate materials and choose an appropriate learning method. When you have the appropriate materials and learning method, you will be motivated and learn more effectively. (SS4)

Students' understanding of LA appeared consistent when they self-evaluated their demonstration of autonomy. Four students in Teacher S's class thought that LA meant being self-regulated, self-reliant and displaying initiative in learning, and they believed that they were autonomous because they demonstrated these abilities in learning:

I can say I am an autonomous student. I am persistent in carrying out my learning plan without being influenced by different sources of information. I spend a fixed amount of time every day to learn English, and I also use an app to assess and control my learning. (SS4)

However, student SS6 thought that he was not autonomous because he was still lazy sometimes and he still needed teachers to urge him to study. This reflected his understanding of LA as being hard-working and self-regulated in everything.

Student AS1 saw LA as “the ability to study anywhere and anytime”, and he perceived himself as an autonomous student because he demonstrated this ability, as illustrated in his report:

I think I am starting to be autonomous in learning English. For example, I learn about 20 new words every day. On my way to school,

I always listen to a conversation in English repeatedly. Before bedtime, I watch English video clips, which I find interesting and helpful. (AS1)

Student AS2, in contrast, did not think she was autonomous because she did not demonstrate abilities that she believed to be significant components of LA such as “taking control of your activities and behaviours and displaying initiative.”

One student in Teacher S’s class, one student in Teacher C’s class, and two students in Teacher A’s class perceived the concept of LA in a *reactive* sense. They also conceived LA as the students’ ability to self-regulate their learning, but this self-regulation was intended to meet the requirements of an other-initiated agenda (e.g., achieving an excellent course grade). In their view, LA meant the ability to manage and carry out study both inside and outside of the class, such as by actively engaging in activities in the class, completing lesson preparation and homework at home, and researching the subject matter or searching for learning resources:

Autonomy in learning means you have to take the initiative in doing homework and in self-studying. In short, you have to take an active role in learning the subject. (SS5)

I think autonomy means the ability to control and manage our time for learning and our everyday learning tasks, meaning staying focused in the class and being self-regulated at home. (AS4)

These two students’ self-evaluations of their autonomy supported their interpretations of the concept. One student perceived himself as being autonomous because he had become attentive in the class and had initiated a schedule for learning at home in order to study as well as his friends, while the other student thought that she

was not autonomous in learning English, as she was still lazy and she did not manage her time in order to allow for self-study outside of the class.

One student in Teacher S's class perceived autonomy as something that needs to be discovered by students. That 'learner autonomy' could vary among people, but the core idea was that it originated from oneself. This student emphasised that "once you have found that autonomy, you should not leave it, but develop it". This student appeared to see autonomy as existing independently of human agents, believing that LA was similar to a way of being in the world. LA, to him, seemed more concerned with students' compliance or reactivity to an initiated learning agenda rather than their level of proactivity in English learning.

I am the most autonomous before the exam. At that time, I often immerse myself in studying. English is a subject at my university, so learning in the class is only one part. However, like most other students, I do not pay much attention to doing exercises and learning the subject until maybe one week before the exam when I start to revise all that I have learned and seek for help from my friends. At the moment, I think I am autonomous in learning English to meet the university requirement about English. (SS3)

Findings from the interviews revealed that students depicted autonomous learners in terms of four main aspects: personal qualities, learning management and method, learning results, and affective aspects.

Regarding personal quality, the majority of students (n=13) thought that autonomous learners possessed a number of good qualities, particularly diligence, perseverance, consistency and self-discipline. For instance, one student described an autonomous learner as follows:

Autonomous learners are diligent and perseverant. When they encounter a difficult task, they will try their best to do it. Non-autonomous learners only complete exercises that the teacher gives them, while autonomous learners study even when the teacher does not give them tasks. (CS1)

It seemed that from the students' perspective, an autonomous learner very much resembled a good language learner. That may be the reason why apart from being ascribed a number of good personal qualities, autonomous learners were also described as successful learners. They were pictured as those who "have high achievement" (AS1), "learn more effectively" (CS1), "are fast learners" (CS4), and "have good learning results" (SS3).

In terms of learning management and method, ten students believed that autonomous learners had a clear goal in learning. Added to this, they had a clear learning plan (n=5), learning schedule (n=2), learning method (n=5; e.g., taking note of important information, identifying sources of information on the Internet or through senior peers), and managed their time effectively (n=3). The following excerpts illustrate this finding:

These people (autonomous learners) can manage their time and have a learning plan and learning schedule for each subject. They also have a clear goal and a learning method to reach their goal. (AS2)

These people often have a small notebook for taking note of anything they found interesting . . . they have both long-term and short-term plans and a clear goal. (AS1)

They have clear goals for their life. They stay focused on what they need to achieve their goals. (CS3)

Regarding the affective aspect, seven students thought that autonomous learners had a love or passion for what they were doing. It seemed that in the interviewed students' perceptions, intrinsic motivation was an important factor which made students autonomous.

All students (n=16) noted that LA was important in language learning. Although the rationales for their viewpoints were divergent, these rationales implied the need for students to take a proactive role in initiating and carrying out English learning if they wanted to be successful.

Ten students believed that LA was important in language learning because of the specific nature of this process. In the students' view, language was multifaceted and there were many things to learn in a language, especially vocabulary. Language learning was a time-consuming and ongoing process, not something that could be achieved overnight. Therefore, language learning required diligence and self-discipline. Additionally, when learning a language, it was necessary to carry out a lot of practice and to have authentic experiences that might not be available at school, so self-studying was crucial. For example, student SS3 said:

I think autonomy is quite important in language learning because learning a foreign language is not something over one night [sic]. Even with Vietnamese, we have to learn in such a long time like from kinder to primary school. Besides, to be able to speak a language, you need to know a great amount of vocabulary, which takes a long time to grasp. It also takes time to practice and master language skills. (SS3)

Five students thought that LA played an important role in language learning because of the inadequate university English syllabus. In their view, language learning included not only language systems (e.g., vocabulary and grammar), but also language

skills (e.g., listening and speaking), which required a lot of practice and effort. However, at university, they mainly learned grammar rules and structures, not how to communicate in the target language, and there were not many opportunities for them to practice language skills at university. Therefore, they believed that only learning English at university was insufficient. In order to be successful in learning a foreign language (English, in particular), students had to be self-directed and display initiative in their learning.

Learning a language means learning skills like speaking, listening, reading and writing, which cannot be developed only in the class. You need to practice communicating in the target language a lot if you want to master these skills. However, in the context of Vietnam, you cannot communicate in the target language in the class, so you have to rely on other sources like YouTube or foreign friends. (AS1)

Two students in Teacher A's class and one student in Teacher C's class linked the importance of LA in language learning to the role of teachers and their own role in the language learning process. One of them said:

I think autonomy is important in foreign language learning because teachers are not always there to teach you. Besides, we will have to learn something completely new that we have not learnt before. For example, we have to learn vocabulary by ourselves; no one can teach you. (CS3)

Three students considered LA crucial in language learning because they believed that they needed to possess and demonstrate metacognitive skills such as self-reflection and self-evaluation in their learning process. That is, students had to be able to evaluate the available resources and methods and select the most appropriate ones for their learning needs and styles. They had to be able to identify their very purpose in learning:

what they needed and what was relevant to them. They perceived that LA could help them do all of this in order to stay focused and persistent in their learning journey:

I think autonomy is important in language learning because today, there are abundant sources of information on the Internet. There are so many learning methods and materials available that you can be overwhelmed and do not know which ones are suitable for you. If you are not autonomous, you may not find your own way to go. (SS4)

I think autonomy is important in language learning because we need to prioritise what you need to learn. ...you need to know your weaknesses so that you know where to invest more time and efforts on. (AS2)

All interviewed students appeared to appreciate the role of teachers in their learning. Three students in each class reported that they could not learn English without a teacher. The rest of the students (n=7) believed that they could learn without a teacher, but also confessed that this would be much more challenging. All interviewed students (n=16) stated that teachers should only be the facilitators who scaffolded them in their learning, showing them the methods, providing them with guidance when necessary, and orchestrating a learning environment. Students should be the owners and the primary agents in their learning process.

Students' perceptions of teachers' roles and their own role in learning suggest that they were aware of their responsibility in learning, but still recognised teachers as playing a significant role in their learning process.

Findings relating to students' understanding of LA indicated that they held a positive attitude towards the concept and showed a consistent understanding of it. Their views illustrate LA at various levels, from compliance to reactivity and proactivity.

5.2.2 Teachers' and students' views on assessment

5.2.2.1. Teachers' voices

The role of assessment in students' learning

Both Teacher S and Teacher A asserted that assessment should exist to serve the purpose of learning. They explained that assessment helped teachers adjust their teaching and students adjust their learning. They both cited feedback as the aspect in assessment that made it 'for learning', helping students to reflect on their learning and make corresponding decisions regarding their learning:

I think assessment is for learning. For example, when we give feedback to students, we always consider what students can learn from our feedback and whether our feedback works for them. We also think of different types of feedback for different types of students so that they can adjust their learning. Therefore, for me, assessment is for learning. (SI)

I think assessment is for learning. The feedback or marks that we give to the students can help them reflect on their learning. That is, they can look back at the amount of effort they invest in learning and the results they receive to determine how effective their learning is and what they need to do next. Assessment is for students to make improvement and progress in their learning. (AI)

Teacher C thought that learning and assessment had a bilateral relationship. That is, assessment should serve the purpose of learning, and learning should also serve the purpose of assessment. In her view, assessment acted as a learning objective for students to pursue, and as a source of direction for the students in their learning.

Therefore, from Teacher C's perspective, assessment might enhance *reactive autonomy* among the students. She commented:

Assessment implies the formulation of learning objectives. In fact, if learning is without assessment, it is challenging to specify and attain learning objectives. For example, if there were no assessment in a subject the students are learning, they might not know what content to focus on and which learning methods to use. Therefore, assessment exists to help the students to determine their learning methods and the learning content... In short, there should be a combination of both directions: assessment should serve the purpose of learning and learning should also exist for serving the purpose of assessment, right? (CI)

All three teachers believed that assessment should provide students with information about their learning (i.e., their strengths and weaknesses) so that they could take action to rectify their current learning methods and make progress. In other words, assessment helped students to understand their current position in their learning journey and future directions for their learning plans. For example, Teachers S and A contended that assessment results indicated to students the extent to which they met the course requirements and helped them determine what to do next in the course. Teacher C asserted that if the students knew that they were weak at listening skills, it was likely that they would spend more time on practicing listening skills, improving their vocabulary, and acquiring techniques to best answer listening questions. She emphasised that the key to the effectiveness of assessment information in the students' learning was their action in response to this information. She added that her students lacked initiative in acting on assessment information and blamed her assessment

practices for not having fostered the students' independent learning outside of the class. Teacher C's perspective on the role of assessment suggested that assessment could act as a direction for the students in their learning, and it might enhance reactive autonomy among the students. The findings also indicated that current assessment practices did not fulfil the task of promoting proactive, independent learning outside of the class.

The teachers' perspective on the role of assessment in learning suggested that assessment existed to help the students to proceed in their learning process, and it was supposed to encourage students to demonstrate their autonomy in learning. The finding also indicated that the teachers perceived assessment feedback as the aspect of assessment that really contributed to the demonstration of LA.

Assessment regime

Teachers' perspectives on the university's assessment regime indicate its negative impact on English teaching and learning and the students' demonstration of LA in learning English at the university.

Teacher C believed that the current assessment regimes at the university allowed teachers more autonomy in their assessment practices. The assessment framework for English included ongoing assessment (for which teachers could determine the content and format) and an end-of-term test. Ongoing assessment accounted for 40 percent of the final course grade, so teachers could demonstrate their initiative within this scope. However, she thought that the administration of assessment for English at the university did not support and encourage LA among students. She believed that LA promotion meant encouraging students to display their initiative in learning. However, assessment methods as they stood encouraged students to remember the answer keys rather than really learning the language.

Both Teacher S and Teacher A stated that in the current context, “learning is for assessment”. They blamed four factors in the current assessment regimes for prompting assessment-dependent learning: the fixed format of summative assessment, the ‘pass-rate’ pressure from the university, the detailed format and guidelines for the end-of-term English test, and the administration of the A2 test.

Teacher S reported that the formats for English tests and exams were predefined and fixed, leading to a situation where “teachers were teaching for the test, and learners were learning for the test” in order to achieve good results in the tests or exams.

Teacher A stated that teachers were always under pressure from the university regarding exam pass rates. She said:

Teachers are under pressure from the university to help the students pass the exam. For example, if 50 percent of the students fail in the exam, you will be worried and have to think about how to help 70 – 80 percent of students to pass, resulting in test-oriented teaching. ... in the meeting the management board often complain about the exam failure rate among students and question the teachers about their teaching methods. (AI)

Additionally, both Teacher S and Teacher A reported that the English department provided the teachers with the assessment guidelines and format for the subject at the beginning of the semester. These guidelines contained detailed information relating to the number of questions in the test papers, the contents to be tested (e.g., topics for the speaking test, vocabulary and grammar items in the multiple-choice questions and grammar structures for sentence transformation) and the weight allocated for each question and section. In their view, these guidelines encouraged the

teachers to adopt “test-oriented teaching”, as this would be useful in helping the students to pass their exams and achieve good exam results. Teacher A commented:

The drawback of assessment guidelines is that teachers only focus on these (i.e., the tested knowledge and skills). Although teachers are aware that they have to instruct the students to practise listening, speaking, reading and writing and help them to communicate in the target language, they have to prioritise assessment preparation purposes first. Assessment guidelines make the teachers become inclined to prioritise items specified to be tested in the exam... The current assessment regime accidentally turns the learning process into learning to serve the purpose of assessment. (AI)

Teacher C agreed, stating that although the provision of assessment guidelines and formats to the students could offer some advantages to both the teachers and the students, informing them where to focus in teaching and learning, the provided assessment guidelines and format could hinder the demonstration of LA in learning English.

The administration of the A2 test also created the risk of test-oriented teaching and learning at the university. All the three teachers reported that the English department did not use CEFR standard tests for A2 level. Instead, the tests were modified to focus more on grammar and vocabulary. Additionally, the university used a test bank which consisted of only 10 multiple-choice tests. They believed that these features of A2-related administration had an adverse impact on the teachers' teaching and the students' learning:

Students can learn the answer keys by heart and do well in the exam without having to learn or practice language skills. (SI)

Findings relating to teachers' perspectives on the current assessment regime reveal that the system focused on summative and certification purposes rather than supporting students' learning. This system is likely to encourage the adoption of rote learning to achieve good results in exams, as well as promoting the students' *compliance* with the system and, perhaps, *reactive autonomy*. Within the current assessment system, the students either adhered to the teacher's instructions closely or actively managed their own learning within the direction set by others in order to do well in the exams.

The students' role in assessment

Teacher S reported that he did not involve his students in the determination of the classes' approach to implementing university assessment policy regarding, for example, assessment activities in class, assessment format and assessment criteria, or grading methods. This is because all these policies had been determined by the top-down system, demonstrating the passive and receptive role of the students in regard to assessment. He said:

I do not involve students in deciding assessment policies because they are decided by the university and the department, so we cannot change them. However, I do involve them in determining the content and level of difficulty of the assessment tasks by asking for their opinion about the task so that I can adjust the difficulty of the task.

(SI)

Teacher C stated that she was willing to involve the students in discussion and decision-making regarding assessment practices (e.g., assessment criteria and assessment format), and open to students' feedback and suggestions relating to her assessment practices. However, this rarely happened:

I have almost never involved my students in the determination regarding assessment practices. I always communicate the assessment framework for the course and my assessment practices in the course in the first class. The students never give any feedback or make any questions on my assessment policies. I am willing to involve the students in discussion about assessment practices and can even change my assessment approaches. However, I did not do that because the students are not responsive. (CI)

Teacher A believed that the students should be involved in both assessment policies and assessment practices. She believed that if the students could engage in the determination of assessment guidelines, they might become confident in their learning and in completing tests. Teacher A reported that she involved the students in determining the criteria and some regulations and rules regarding assessment (e.g., homework rules) and part of the assessment format (e.g., multiple choice or matching).

I always do that [involving the students in the decision-making relating to assessment] in the first class with the students in the orientation section. I will outline the class regulations and rules for students to vote. If they all agree, we will follow the proposed regulations and rules. If they do not agree, I will give my suggestions, and the students will discuss so that we can build up common criteria. I think that people will do it best when they do what they want. If being forced, students will still follow, but the effectiveness will be limited.For example, I will make it clear at the beginning with the students that they have to do homework before going to class. If not, they will be punished.

Regarding assessment format, I will allow them to negotiate part of it.

I will consider students' opinions and conduct assessment as they suggested. I normally respect students' opinions. (AI)

Nevertheless, when observed, students did not appear willing to get involved in the determination of assessment policies, rules and regulations in the class.

In relation to assessment practices, all three teachers reported that they implemented self/peer-assessment in their classes. However, the techniques they used were restricted to self/peer-marking. That is, students marked their own work or their colleagues' work against the answer keys that the teacher provided. Teacher S said that he opted to use peer-marking because that technique enabled students to learn from their peers, for example, by avoiding the mistakes that their colleagues had made. Therefore, he used this technique even though it was more time-consuming than assessing the students' work by himself. Teacher C reported that apart from self- and peer-marking, she also used portfolios, which she described as a collection of exercise handouts that she designed for the students to start in class and finish at home as a means to foster the students' independent learning and self-assessment. Teacher A reported that she only used self-marking in her class. She said she was not in favour of peer-marking because this technique was not effective in her big class, and the students might not be confident in showing their result to others. She also reported that she did not use self-marking in writing tasks because it might be too challenging for her students to self-assess their writing.

The above findings suggest that students' involvement in assessment was still minimal in each of the three classes, and the teacher was still the primary agent in this respect. This might be due to the students' unreadiness for taking part in decision-making relating to assessment and the teacher's lack of confidence in the students'

ability to perform self/peer-assessment. This lack of confidence appeared to result in students being given a *prescribed* scope for involvement in assessment tasks.

Assessment feedback

Teacher S believed that his feedback was vital because it helped to raise students' awareness of their learning so that they could improve:

For example, in writing, my students are more aware of their mistakes and make progress when I repeatedly give comments on one mistake. In speaking, I give much feedback on pronunciation and ask students to use a dictionary to look up new words, and students seem to get more autonomous in their learning. (SI)

He showed his awareness of the students' English level when giving feedback to them. He thought that at the current stage, where the students' English level was low, the most critical language aspects for them were pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Accordingly, his feedback would focus more on these aspects.

I always give students feedback when they do exercises. For example, when checking students' writing, I always correct for them the spelling, grammar and vocabulary mistakes. I think that if students can write without making grammar and vocabulary mistakes, it is ok at this level. Therefore, I don't give much feedback on the content. In the class, I focus on students' pronunciation. If they make pronunciation mistakes, I will correct for them and ask them to use the dictionary to check the pronunciation for familiar words. (SI)

This finding illustrates that Teacher S attended more to task-level feedback, paying attention to the corrective aspect of the task. These types of feedback belong to the *prescribed* category, encouraging students' reliance and compliance.

Teacher C believed that feedback could provide the students with information about their learning—what they had acquired and what their weaknesses were, so that they could understand their current level of English compared to the required level. In her view, assessment feedback should include both information relating to the students' performance or work and information about the students' learning process that could help to nurture their motivation, positive feelings and attitudes. However, she reported that her feedback could only focus on the learning product, not on the learning process, due to time constraints.

For example, when I give the students feedback about their writing, I will comment on writing content, language use, grammar and vocabulary. Apart from that, I think we should motivate the students by giving them praise and encouragement. For example, I can tell them that they have made a great effort, or I can draw a smiley face on their writing. However, I have not done much of that due to time constraints. My feedback now mostly focuses on mistake identification and correction, not on psychological aspects of the students. (CI)

Teacher A believed that the impact of feedback on the students' learning depended on the students' attitude toward it, and their responses to the teacher's feedback. She reported that there were two groups of students in her class: the students who attended to comments and feedback, and the students who only paid attention to the mark or grade they received. From her perspective, the former group often included active and autonomous students, and feedback was most helpful to this group because they paid attention and acted on it. For example, they were not going to repeat the same mistakes that the teacher had identified and corrected for them. Teacher A did not think

her feedback had much influence on the learning of those who only cared for marks, as they often did not progress and made the same mistakes many times.

Teacher A appeared to consider cultural factors when offering feedback to the students. She thought that the Vietnamese culture was not open to negative feedback. Therefore, in the class, she tried not to give negative feedback on the students' work or performance. Instead, she complimented the students' performance if it was good, and tried to focus on what the students could do rather than their weaknesses.

Vietnamese culture is different from Western culture. I think Vietnamese people are not willing to receive comments and feedback in public, no matter if they are positive or negative. If the teacher gives negative feedback to the students during her lesson, this could bring about adverse effects. This is one of the cultural factors that teachers need to consider when giving feedback. I only give simple feedback in the class. For example, I praise the students when they do a task well. Even when they make mistakes, I will try to compliment on, for example, their efforts or attempts first and then mention their mistakes later. (AI)

Cultural factors might have prompted the teacher's choice to only give more detailed feedback on individual students' work.

I often give direct and detailed feedback on the students' writing. I always try to identify the mistakes in their writing ...I normally correct the mistakes for the students no matter how big or small the mistakes are. (AI)

5.2.2.2 Students' voices

The role of assessment in learning

All sixteen students thought that assessment played a crucial role in their learning. Students' perceptions of the role of assessment in their learning showed their insights into LA and the extent to which assessment can enact LA.

The findings indicate that assessment was perceived by the students as being significant to their learning because it could act as a source of information about their learning, a motive for learning, a consolidation of learning, and a means to control their learning quality.

Two students in Teacher C's class, three students in Teacher S's class, and three students in Teacher A's class thought that assessment activities could generate information about their learning, informing them of what they had achieved and their current position in the learning journey, and helping them plan their next actions, rectify their learning and make progress. For instance, students CS3 and SS5 said:

I think assessment is very important. Its role is to help us know our current learning and which level we are in so that we can determine what to learn next. (CS3)

The role of assessment is to show us our mistakes/errors, where we are doing well and where we are not. If there was no assessment, we would not be able to recognise our mistakes or errors to correct. (SS5)

One student in Teacher S's class perceived the role of assessment in terms of self-assessment, which he believed to help him determine his current position in learning so that he could plan and initiate learning to meet his goals. He said:

The role of assessment in my learning is that I can self-assess my ability to know where I am so that I know if I need to take extra-curricular activities and put more effort into learning. (SS6)

Student SS6's recognition of self-assessment as an example of the role of assessment in learning indicated an emphasis on their own central role in assessment, and in turn in the learning process, signifying that student SS6 might be able to demonstrate *proactive autonomy* in his learning.

Assessment was also perceived as being a motive for students' learning. Three students in Teacher C's class reported that teachers' comments on their work or performance, especially compliments, could rouse positive feelings and motivated them to take on more learning. For instance, student CS2 commented:

Assessment, more or less, influences my motivation to learn. For example, when I perform a task correctly, my teacher will praise me and I will feel contented. In this case, I will want to try next time in order to receive similar praises. If I do not perform the task well, meaning I cannot meet my teacher's expectation, I will be sad, but still try harder so that I can do better next time. (CS2)

Students in Teacher S's class thought that if there was an assessment, they would invest more time and effort in learning in order to satisfy the teacher's requirements or to get good assessment results. In other words, the teacher's assessment activities pressure students to take on more learning or condition their learning. Students in Teacher A's class shared this view. For example, one student reported that he felt motivated when his teacher regularly checked if he understood the lesson. Additionally, when the teacher frequently carried out an assessment in a subject, this student would

have to spend more time studying the subject (i.e., doing homework and reading materials). Another student admitted,

I think assessment is a driving force for my studying. It is also the pressure for me in the sense that if I am not hard-working, I will not be able to pass the final test. Therefore, I always try to learn hard right at the beginning. (AS5).

The above findings indicate that students perceived assessment as being external to them in the learning process. They were either the receivers of assessment information or the respondents to assessment regimes. They might initiate and carry out some learning activities, but they were not entirely in control of the process. This finding provides support for the idea that students in this sample held a *reactive* conception of LA.

Students perceived the choice of assessment tasks as influencing their motivation for learning. Four students in Teacher A's class reported that assessment in the form of group work competition could stimulate them enormously:

Teachers can motivate students by using assessment in the form of group-work competition. It is boring learning only by doing exercises and following the same direction all the time. This form of assessment (group work competition) can encourage the winners and stimulate the losers. (AS3)

Three students admitted that the teacher's method of awarding marks could affect students' motivation. For example, two students reported that they liked it when a teacher only gave a mark to those who did well in a task. Those who did not do well in a task would only receive feedback for improvement. When a teacher carried out assessment this way, all students wanted to engage and contribute to the lesson because

they felt safe in terms of grading. One student emphasised that if teachers used a mark as a reward, it would stimulate students greatly. She said:

I think assessment has an impact on motivation. For example, it motivates the students a lot when the teacher awards mark 10 to all members of the group that won the group work competition. If the teacher does not give any mark, I think the motivation will deteriorate significantly. Some students will not take part in the activity even when they know the answer if the teacher does not award any mark.

(AS5)

Assessment was also conceived as a consolidation of learning. One student in Teacher A's class believed that assessment could help refresh the students' prior knowledge and reinforce newly-learned knowledge.

For example, when my teacher asks me about something that we have learned, if I do not remember, I can ask my teacher to explain again. This is consolidation. In case we have just learned something new (e.g., a grammar rule or a structure) if the teacher gives a test at the end of the lesson it can help us see how much we understood the lesson. This is also consolidation, and it is very good for the students' learning. (AS1)

One student in Teacher S's class perceived assessment as a means to merely control students' learning quality. He believed that assessment existed for the purpose of determining students' level of competency in a subject after a certain learning period, and grading and certifying students' learning. This student merely talked about the summative purpose of assessment and considered this the main role of assessment in

students' learning. This might reflect a perception of students in the assessment process as being *compliant* or *reactive*.

Findings on students' perceptions of the role of assessment in learning supported the notion that autonomy can be described along a continuum. That is, the degree of autonomy reflected in students' views seemed to be manifested at different levels: from being compliant and reactive to the system to being proactive in all aspects of learning.

Assessment regime

The current assessment regime at the university was a credit-based system (see Chapter 2). All the interviewed students (n=16) in the three classes believed that a credit-based system allowed the students more space and freedom for decision-making than the traditional yearly-based system, and at the same time required the students to demonstrate greater autonomy in their learning. First, the system required students to demonstrate greater autonomy in the management of their learning. The system required students to register for the number of credits they wanted to learn in a term and select subjects for the term. They also had to choose the lecturers, the schedule and the learning pace. Therefore, the students had to consider and manage their personal needs, preferences, and plans, and manage their time accordingly. They also needed to actively search for information about different courses, lecturers and their teaching methods and styles so that they could choose the most relevant courses for their needs and the most appropriate lecturers for their learning. In order to do all of this, the students needed the capacity for evaluation and reflection as well as planning and monitoring skills.

The credit-based system also appeared to require the students to display initiative in learning outside of the class, because self-study was officially one of the requirements in the system. Additionally, students believed that in this assessment

regime, lecturers were only the facilitators or mentors for the students in their learning process, so that students had to take an active role in their learning.

...the credit-based system is a system originated from western countries and this system obviously requires the students to be more autonomous in their learning because for every hour learning in the class, we need two and a half hours learning at home in order to fully acquire the knowledge. (CS2)

At the university, students mainly rely on themselves for their study; the lecturers are only the facilitators. Therefore, we have to read the materials at home and make questions to ask the lecturers to explain where we cannot understand. (AS2)

The students saw the credit-based assessment regime as promoting LA and self-discipline. They believed that when the assessment framework was made transparent and public to them right at the beginning, they would be able to self-assess and control their learning process. Additionally, apart from end-of-term tests, the credit-based system also relied on ongoing assessment of students' learning. Students reported that ongoing assessment encouraged them to demonstrate their autonomy in learning. They believed that when their effort in learning (e.g., their attendance, their participation, their homework completion) was counted in the course Grade Point Average, they would invest more time and effort in learning in order to achieve a better result.

...For example, with the information about the proportion of class attendance, homework, participation, mid-term tests and end-of-term test in the final grade, students can control their learning, that is, self-assess the whole learning process. When you know how many times

you have been absent from class, whether or not you have completed your homework....you can be in control of your learning. (SS1)

Findings relating to the students' viewpoints about the current assessment regimes showed that the credit-based system allowed them more freedom and scope for decision-making, and at the same time required them to demonstrate greater autonomy in aspects relating to the learning process in comparison to more traditional assessment regimes.

The role of students in the assessment process

All students in the three classes (n=16) believed that they could help their teacher in assessment practices by participating in assessment tasks (e.g., answering the teacher's questions and taking part in group work activities), assisting the teacher in giving feedback (e.g., identifying mistakes for colleagues), and completing self/peer-assessment. The findings indicated that students considered self/peer-making to be the most prominent method through which they could help teachers with assessment.

I think students can help in such things as peer-marking. That is, students swap their works and do the marking for one another. Students with better English can even do the correction for the weaker ones. (SS5)

I think if there are so many students in a class, the teacher can involve the students in peer-marking in order to save the teacher's time and effort. Additionally, when we check our friends' work, we might also identify our similar mistakes. (AS5)

This finding indicates that the level of autonomy that the majority of the interviewed students could demonstrate in assessment was still limited. They appeared to work more confidently within a prescribed scope.

Two students in Teacher S's class thought that the teacher, instead of giving feedback to students, could invite other students in the class to give feedback on their peers' work. This could not only help the teacher to see the student's work from multiple perspectives, but also provide the teacher with information about the students who gave feedback to their fellow student.

I think students can help the teacher in assessment practice. After a student gave the answer, the teacher can invite one or two students to give feedback or comments instead of his giving feedback straightaway. This can not only help the teacher have the overarching and diversified perspectives about the student's work, but also help him to know the level of the students who gave feedback to their peer's work. (SS2)

These two students' perspectives suggested that they were willing to be involved in giving feedback and to demonstrate a high level of autonomy in this respect.

Regarding self/peer-assessment, the majority of the interviewed students showed a willingness to take part in these activities, but at the same time displayed their lack of confidence in their ability to carry them out. They were not confident in their language proficiency, so they thought that the teacher should be the one to carry out the assessment. Five interviewed students stated that they could not self-assess their work and relied entirely on teachers for assessment. Eight interviewed students reported that they could assess some specific tasks such as simple grammar tasks, but still recognised teachers as taking the primary responsibility. Only three interviewed students believed that they could perform self-assessment and often self-assessed their work, signifying their ability to carry out autonomous learning.

The above findings suggest that students tended to be more confident and comfortable complying with the teacher's instructions rather than having to manage the assessment process by themselves. They believed that they could help in assessment practices, but only by cooperating with the teachers. In cases where they had to carry on assessment practices by themselves, they lost their confidence. This indicated the students' lack of readiness to take responsibility for assessment. They were more ready for interdependence than independence in this respect.

Assessment feedback

All sixteen students in the three classes thought that feedback played a crucial role in their learning. The data indicated that the majority of students (n=12) perceived corrective feedback as playing the most significant role, believing that mistake identification and correction were the most helpful types of feedback. In other words, they focused on responding to task-specific corrections.

Teacher's feedback is important because it can show us our mistakes and how to fix these mistakes so that we will not make similar mistakes in the future. Teacher's feedback can also help us perfect our work or show us how to perfect our work. (SS3)

I find the teacher's feedback very important to the students. For example, when my teacher marks our writing, she often shows us the grammar mistakes that we have made, or the sentence structures that we have used incorrectly so that we can avoid similar mistakes in the future. (CS1)

The teacher's feedback is beneficial because it identifies our mistakes, our weaknesses and our strengths so that we can rectify our mistakes, overcome our weaknesses and exploit our strength. (AS4)

The students' perceptions of the role of feedback in their learning suggested that the majority of them valued *prescribed* instructions, which might indicate a potential for *compliance* with and reliance on the teacher's instructions.

The above finding was also reflected in the students' reporting about their responses to feedback. For example, four students in Teacher S's class indicated their dependence on their teacher when handling feedback. They took the teacher's feedback for granted, waited for the teacher's corrections, or just used the teacher's guidance to correct particular mistakes. For example, student SS5 perceived the role of the teacher to be that of the knowledge holder, while perceiving himself as the one to receive knowledge from his teacher:

I will follow my teacher's feedback and correct my mistakes. I think my teacher's knowledge is greater, so he must be right. (SS5)

All the interviewed students in Teacher A's class believed that feedback played a significant role in their learning and they all welcomed feedback irrespective of whether it was positive or negative. For example, positive feedback could build up the students' confidence in their learning, while negative feedback could identify learning weaknesses for them to improve on.

One student stated that the teacher's feedback could help to build up his self-efficacy. He said:

When the teacher gives me positive feedback on my performance, I will be more confident with this type of knowledge and skill. For example, when the teacher tells me that my grammar use is correct, I will be confident in using it in other situations. Now, whenever I have to use English, I feel unconfident because I do not know if I am using the right vocabulary or grammar or not, especially in situations

where people know English well. If I make a mistake, I will be very embarrassed. (AS1)

For other students, feedback could result in a more long-term benefit to their learning. Feedback in these cases could inform the students of their current position in the learning path, indicating their strengths and their weaknesses so that they could make learning decisions. Students reported that feedback helped them “know your current level and what to do to make progress” (CS3), “know where you are, and what you need to do to have better result” (CS4), and become “more confident” (AS1). In addition, two students noted that teacher’s feedback “[helped them] be more autonomous in [their] learning” (CS2).

Feedback could also influence the students’ motivation to learn:

Feedback has effects on my learning process and my learning spirit.

That is, it encourages me to make more efforts to achieve what I want.

If my work is not good yet, I will try to improve it until it is good. If my work is already good, I will try to make it even better. (CS2)

Students in Teacher S’s and Teacher A’s classes appeared to be comfortable with *prescribed* feedback, and they wanted to passively receive feedback from their teacher without having to take any further action:

I want the teacher to suggest me the knowledge to learn. I mean, the teacher shows me where to learn so that I only need to follow at home. (AS5)

I like it when the teacher gives feedback in a direct way. That means he identifies the mistakes and corrects the mistakes for students without suggesting this or that or showing how to do it. (SS3)

Students in Teacher C's class also cited mistake identification as the most useful form of feedback. However, only one student wanted the teacher to identify then correct the mistakes straight away for him, suggesting that he was comfortable to receive *prescribed* feedback from the teacher and comply with the teacher's instructions. Four students said that they did not want the teacher to give them immediate mistake corrections. Instead, the teacher, after identifying mistakes or errors, should allow students some time to think about their mistakes or errors and try to correct the mistakes by themselves. The teacher could scaffold them by providing them with some resources or guidance if necessary. The students thought this type of feedback could help them learn more effectively and retain knowledge longer. For instance, Student CS1 commented:

I think teacher gives mark [sic], and then underlines the mistakes or errors. Immediate correction may be not necessary, but the teacher leaves the mistakes or errors for students to correct by themselves. When students have to figure out why they made the mistakes/errors and try to correct the mistakes/errors by themselves, they will remember better. (CS1)

One student added that the teacher should decide the amount of guidance to offer to the students based on the complexity of the knowledge associated with the mistakes that they made, as illustrated in her comment:

The most useful feedback to me is when the teacher identifies the mistakes for me. If the mistakes relate to simple knowledge, the teacher should let me fix them. If the mistakes relate to difficult knowledge, the teacher should correct the mistakes for me and inform

me of the knowledge I need to pay attention to in order to not make the mistakes in the future. (CS5)

These students appeared to prefer more space and freedom than they normally had so that they could demonstrate their agency in learning. This suggested that the current feedback might be too *prescribed* for them.

5.2.3. Teachers' and students' perspectives on the relationship between assessment and LA

5.2.3.1. Teachers' perspectives

The findings indicated that all three teachers perceived assessment as a separate component from teaching and learning which could be used as a tool to encourage students to demonstrate their autonomy in learning. The findings also suggest that assessment can influence LA at different levels.

Teacher S thought that assessment (e.g., feedback) could be used to train students to be more autonomous in their learning. He reported that he often used his feedback to shape his students' thinking so that whenever they faced an issue in their learning, they had to rely on themselves before seeking help from others. Additionally, whenever his students approached him for help, he tended to delay his help so that students would have to make an effort first. He believed that this technique, at first, could make students become self-reliant in a *compliant* way, meaning that they only took the initiative because they were asked to do so. However, this could gradually build up students' habits of taking the initiative in solving their problems before approaching others for help, gradually making them reactive and ideally proactive in their learning. He said:

I think the teacher's assessments have a direct relationship with students' attitude and autonomy in learning. For example, if our feedback can raise awareness like 'oh, you have to be self-reliant in

solving this problem', I think students will certainly have to be more autonomous in their learning. An example of what I often do in my class is that when my students ask me 'how is this word pronounced?' I will typically respond to them 'look it up by yourself first. If you still cannot find it, then ask me'. After using this technique for a while, I recognised that my students have had the habit of working on their own before approaching me for help and the incidences of students' asking are less frequent. (SI)

It seemed to the researcher that in Teacher S's view, two separate elements determine the influence of assessment on LA. First is the feedback that promotes the idea of students taking responsibility and ownership for their learning. Second are the teacher's pedagogical techniques, which put students in situations where they have to exercise ownership and responsibility for their learning. In addition, the data carried some implications about the impact of assessment on the development of LA. Firstly, assessment may serve to move a student along a continuum of LA, ranging from *compliant to reactive*. Secondly, the influence of assessment on LA might not be immediate. Therefore, the process of developing LA may be a long and gradual one, requiring teachers' consistent efforts and commitment.

Teacher C stated that assessment could influence the demonstration of LA. She believed that assessment could enhance LA in the sense that it could 'force' students to take on more learning, especially outside of the class, and to control what they did. She also believed that assessment could increase the students' participation in the class:

I think this (developing learner autonomy) depends on teachers' activities and assessment methods. For example, if teachers give students homework and do not check it, it is very likely that students

will not do the homework . . . To develop learner autonomy, teachers need to, for example, frequently have tasks in the class for students to do, and frequently check students' homework. In other words, teachers need to carry out assessment frequently (CI)

Teacher C's ideas about developing autonomy illustrated a stimulus-response mechanism in which assessment tasks were used to condition students' learning behaviours. This mechanism made students *compliant* with assessment tasks rather than encouraging autonomy. Students' learning did not come from their own volition, so if the stimulus no longer existed, the response would be very likely to stop.

Teacher A perceived assessment as providing direction for the students' learning. Assessment could help the students to identify the requirements of the course and display learning initiative in order to meet these expectations.

I think that students will get used to the assessment methods that their teacher often uses. They can be unfamiliar the first time, but they can be more ready in the following times. Secondly, when the teacher informs students of the assessment methods that she will be using in the next lesson, they will prepare for it in terms of both knowledge and psychological aspect. (AI)

Teacher A's statements reflected her belief that assessment can foster *reactive autonomy*. Assessment acted as the other-initiated learning agenda for the students to follow, and the students, being aware of the direction, would actively manage their learning in this direction. In Teacher A's view, the influences of assessment on LA could be fluid, non-linear and fluctuating depending on a number of variables, including nature of feedback, students' attitude towards learning and their existing degree of autonomy.

Teacher A believed that feedback could contribute to LA. She stated that her comments and feedback could show her students what they had acquired and not acquired, and where they needed to improve. Those who are active in learning would make use of this information to initiate some changes. However, she thought that the key and challenging task was how to make non-autonomous students become autonomous, and in this case, the teacher's assessments could come into play by 'forcing' them to take on their learning. This teacher thought that assessment, in the initial stage, could be used as conditioning for students' behaviours. In this sense, assessment was the stimulus for students' actions.

The teacher's assessments can have an impact on learner autonomy.

First can be the obligatory tasks like homework that force them to take on learning if they do not want to get bad marks or be criticised or punished. (AI)

Teacher A's perspective suggested that assessment influenced LA on different levels, depending on students' attitudes towards learning and their existing levels of autonomy. For those who were already autonomous to some degree and had a positive attitude towards learning, teachers' feedback and comments could help them take more initiative in their learning, as feedback could help them position themselves in their learning path and plan their future learning actions. For those who were passive, teachers' assessment could at least make them take on some learning. She thought that assessment might therefore be a good place to start in getting students to become more autonomous.

5.2.3.2. Students' perspectives

All 16 students in the three classes believed that assessment practices have an impact on LA. However, the way they conceived these impacts varied, depending on how they understood the concepts of assessment and LA.

Three students in Teacher S's class, one student in Teacher C's class, and two students in Teacher A's class believed that feedback had the most impact on LA. They conceived feedback as the awareness of their own conditions (i.e., their needs and wants, their resources, their strengths and weaknesses) and the consequential initiatives they took to make progress in their learning. They noted that the feedback they received in the assessment process could show them their strengths and weaknesses in their learning, help them look back at what they had been doing and look forward to where they needed to go, and reflect on how they could go to where they wanted. As such, they saw assessment as both the mirror that helped them to reflect on their learning process and a guideline for them in their learning. The following excerpts illustrate this finding.

Teacher's feedback helps students to reflect on their learning process, on their learning method, their strengths and weaknesses. When students can do these things, they can make progress in their learning, leading to higher motivation to learn and greater learner autonomy. Teacher's assessment encourages me to put more effort on my learning and helps me identify my mistakes and then enhances my autonomy. (SS4)

I think assessment influences learner autonomy because assessment helps us to know our weaknesses so that we could improve (CS1)

Assessment can influence learner autonomy in the sense that it helps to identify our mistakes so that we can improve and make progress. (AS2)

Two students in Teacher S's class and one student in Teacher C's class perceived that assessments affected the development of LA by acting as a driving force for students to improve themselves, resulting in greater autonomy in learning. The students believed that self-and peer-assessments could encourage students to be more autonomous in their learning because the key requirement in these activities was to develop sufficient knowledge, which was, in turn, perceived as the result of autonomous learning. These students appeared to conceive of assessment as an internal part of their learning, and they were the primary agents in assessment. In this sense, assessment (self/peer-assessment) could help them to display *proactive* autonomy in their learning.

I think assessments have an impact on the development of learner autonomy.

This means students need to be able to self-assess their work or assess their friends' work. In order to be able to do so, students need to have adequate knowledge, which in turn leads to the demand to improve themselves in order to carry out assessment practices on their own. (SS2)

Assessment influences learner autonomy in the sense that in order to be able to assess others' work, we need to have knowledge, so we need to be self-regulated in learning at home to have adequate knowledge to assess others' work.

Teachers' assessment motivates me to be autonomous because when the teacher assesses my work, I will have a look at the assessment criteria and then at home pay more attention to these points. (CS3)

One student in Teacher S's class and two students in Teacher C's class saw assessments as parameters for their learning, and autonomy as the ability to take responsibility or display initiative in learning using these parameters. In their view, assessments set the boundaries, directions, and the overall goal for their learning path/journey. Once these aspects were set, the students would actively take

responsibility for their learning, i.e., by making plans, managing their time and searching for materials so that they could learn effectively and achieve the best results. Therefore, assessment (in this student's perspective) that assessment influenced LA in the sense that it helped to promote the learner's ability to take the initiative in their learning within a bounded learning space. In other words, assessment can promote *reactive autonomy* among students.

This (assessment) urges students to prepare for it in advance. This preparation depends on students' autonomy. Students normally want good results, so they will set goals and plans so that they can achieve these results, leading to greater autonomy. Ongoing assessment motivates us to take part in classroom activities such as collaborating with other students. (SS3)

There are many subjects that require learner autonomy – those with a lot of exercises and assignments which cannot be completed in the class. Therefore, in order to learn these subjects effectively, we have to display initiative in searching for materials and carry out self-study at home. (CS2)

Three students in Teacher A's class appeared to perceive assessment as a motive for their learning. They thought that assessment could promote LA in the sense that it could make them take on some learning actions (e.g., doing homework and doing revision). They appeared to perceive assessment in a *summative* sense because they tended to use the word 'test' instead of 'assessment', and they put a lot of emphasis on grading. In their view, students were passive, and assessment existed to force the students to learn. It seemed that from the students' perspective, they were like

clockwork dolls and assessment was the key that operated them. Only when the key was wound did the doll start to dance. The following excerpts illustrate this viewpoint.

...Second is grading. If the teacher assesses and awards a grade, we will try our best. If the teacher assesses without awarding a grade, we still try, but not our best. (AS2)

Students are more keen on playing than learning, so without teachers' assessment, students will be passive. If my teacher does not assess me, I will not study and become lazy. Therefore, assessment is like the driving force for our study. My teacher's assessment makes me more hard-working. (AS4)

Assessment influences learner autonomy in the sense that if my teacher carries out many assessment practices, I will learn harder. If not, I will be lazy and inattentive. (AS5)

One student believed that assessment could help to develop the students' habit of taking responsibility for their learning. In other words, the teacher's assessment practices could plant seeds of LA among the students. They could be *compliant* at the initial stage and become *reactive* afterwards, as illustrated in his comment:

I think teachers' assessment influences learner autonomy. For example, the checking of homework might oblige the students to complete it at first, but this obligation can build up the students' habit of doing homework or at least opening the books before going to class. I think this is part of learner autonomy. (AS1)

Findings relating to the students' perspectives on the relationship between assessment and autonomy illustrated that assessment could potentially encourage various autonomy levels in practice.

5.3. Students' self-reports of their English learning

5.3.1. Demonstration of proactive autonomy

The findings showed that seven interviewed students appeared to demonstrate a high level of autonomy in their English learning. These students either realised intrinsic motivation for learning English or had clear goals such as learning English for their future job. These students initiated their learning agendas for English outside of the class to serve their own needs and goals, and chose the learning pathway and pace suitable for their agenda and needs. They also took the initiative in trying and adopting different methods to best follow their agendas. Additionally, they demonstrated a set of skills and strategies which indicated that they were autonomous learners.

The two students in Teacher S's class, for example, had clear goals for their English learning. One student aimed to further his study overseas, while the other learned English for her future career

I have two objectives in learning English. First, I want to communicate with foreigners in English. Second, I want to find a job in a foreign company when I graduate from university. (SS2).

Therefore, they initiated their learning agendas, choosing their learning pathways and adopting the pace for learning which might be relevant to their agendas and needs.

I spend about three hours a day to learn English at home, one and a half hours in the morning, half an hour in the afternoon and one hour in the evening. (SS4)

I learn English almost every day in the morning or at noon.... I do one listening topic a day, and at the end of the week, I will collect all the listening topics that I have done during the week and listen again. (SS2)

When there was a conflict between their learning agenda and the teacher's learning agenda, they would accept their responsibility for actions and judgements in reference to their priorities and needs.

I often do English exercises, but when I am busy, I will prioritise my English learning rather than doing homework because I think it is more useful and practical to me. (SS4).

Additionally, they displayed initiative in identifying, searching for and selecting materials appropriate for their learning. Student S4 searched for materials on the Internet, on Facebook and books. Student S2, focusing on practising listening skills, searched for learning materials on the English-learning websites and YouTube, and often listened to clips on a Facebook group called 'Learning English is Easy'.

Both students demonstrated an ability for self-reflection and self-evaluation in relation to learning content and learning method. They knew their strengths and weaknesses and what they needed to do to reach their goals. The student aiming to study overseas was aware that he needed to have an English certificate such as IELTS, TOEIC or TOEFL, so he established language content acquisition accordingly:

I focus on three main areas: pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary because I think these are the basis for such English exams as IELTS, TOEIC or TOEFL. (SS4).

He also illustrated an ability to evaluate the materials and learning resources in relation to his aims:

For pronunciation, I have a bedside book called Spelling Method by Nguyen Ngoc Nam which helps me to know how to speak with intonation, stress and how to link ending sounds. This book is ranked 3rd or 4th in the bestseller list. For grammar, I use the book called IELTS Handbook by Kien Tran, who is a successful IELTS learner and the admin of a page called Self-study IELTS for 8.0. For vocabulary. (SS4)

The other student was aware that listening skills were her weaknesses, so she prioritised these skills in her language learning. These two students demonstrated an ability to reflect on the effectiveness of different learning approaches and then chose the one they felt was best for themselves. One student stated:

After learning in several places, I have found self-studying is the most effective for foundation building period. (SS4)

Both students demonstrated an ability to carry out ongoing self-assessment. They accepted responsibility for judgement of their learning and thoroughly reflected on learning outcomes and performances, trying out new tools to assess and control their learning progress.

I will listen to a topic until I can comprehend everything in the listening and translate into Vietnamese, then I will move on to the next listening. (SS2)

I use an App on my iPhone called Memrise. I learn about 30 new words a day, and I have finished its A1 course of 1600 words. (SS4)

5.3.2. Demonstration of reactive autonomy

Some students (n=6) did not initiate any agenda for learning English at the time of the interview. They followed the learning agenda initiated by teachers in order to meet the short-term need of passing the exams and then graduating from the university. They initiated and carried out some learning activities outside of the class and displayed initiative in selecting and choosing materials and learning resources, but mostly for the purpose of helping them proceed in the direction that had been initiated by teachers. For example, one student in Teacher C's class stated that his first goal in learning English was to achieve an A2 certificate. He appeared to comply with the teacher's instructions for out-of-class learning closely and initiated his own learning activities

I try to finish the exercises in the handout at class and prepare for the next lesson or do exercises in the book at home. I took an English course at an English centre some months ago because I think class is not a good environment for communication in the target language. (CS2)

Two interviewed students in Teacher A's class also reported that their prime goal at the time of the interview was to be able to get the A2 certificate for graduation. One student followed the teacher's syllabus, but he also initiated his own learning activities so that he could achieve his goal:

I spend about 45 minutes a week to do English homework. I also spend 30 to 45 minutes every two days to practise listening or learn new vocabulary. (AS3)

The other student reflected on the effectiveness of a learning course she took and made decisions regarding her learning methods, which she considered appropriate and

effective for her objective of getting an A2 certificate. She managed the contents of her learning and chose her own pathway and pace.

I stopped learning at the English centre because they only taught simple English grammar rules such as present simple or present continuous, which I found not very useful.....Now I am only studying at the university and doing self-study English at home. At home, I review grammar and learn new vocabulary. I spend about 30 minutes to 1 hour every day. (AS5)

5.3.3. Demonstration of compliance

Three interviewed students did not initiate any learning outside the class. They followed the teacher's syllabus and paid attention to the list of specific language items and skills designated in the course, in order to serve the needs identified by the English department and the university—passing the tests and getting an A2 certificate. For example, two students in Teacher S's class stated that they studied English to achieve a good course mark, to pass the English exam, and to achieve an A2 certificate for graduation. That is why they said:

I only focus on the contents the teacher informed us that they would be tested/assessed in the exams. (SS3)

I spend one hour a week for doing English exercises and prepare for English test – practice speaking about myself. (AS4)

The data also showed that one student in Teacher S's class appeared to be aware of the benefit of English to his future, and he had some motivation to learn. However, this motivation was not strong enough to encourage him to demonstrate his agency in learning. In other words, he wanted to be proactive, but he was constrained by his current situation of working and learning to become compliant.

When I worked part-time as a cashier in a food shop near Hoan Kiem Lake, there were foreigner customers coming to the shop. I could understand them, but I could not talk to them. . . . Usually, I am quite confident with my communication skill, but I was embarrassed and nervous and could not talk to foreigner customers due to my lack of English vocabulary. That was why I was motivated to plan to learn English. However, I was too busy learning and working at the same time, so I have not realised my plan yet. I might spend more time learning English after I graduate from university because I cannot manage my time for English now. (SS3)

It could be argued from the findings that these were compliant students. They were *compliant* to the requirements of the university, and therefore *compliant* with the syllabus and teacher's instructions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented findings from interviews with teachers and students about their understandings of LA, their perceptions of assessment, and their perspectives on the relationship between assessment and LA. The chapter has also reported levels of autonomy demonstrated, which were reflected in the students' reports about their learning English.

The findings indicate that the teachers had limited understanding of LA, and appeared to perceive the concept at different levels. The findings also show that the students appeared to hold a positive view of LA. They conceived the concept at different levels and showcased a consistent understanding about the concept.

The findings about perceptions of assessment suggest that assessment, especially assessment feedback, played a significant role in teaching and learning and the demonstration of LA. There was a divergence in findings about teachers' and students' views about the current assessment regime. From the teachers' perspective, the current assessment regime appeared to have a negative impact on teaching and learning, and inhibited the promotion and demonstration of LA. From the students' perspective, however, the current assessment system appeared to both empower them to display more autonomy and require them to demonstrate a higher level of autonomy. The findings also showed that teachers did not allow much space for students to demonstrate their autonomy in assessment, and students' involvement in decision-making regarding assessment practices was limited.

Concerning perspectives on the relationship between assessment and LA, the findings indicated that both teachers and students thought that assessment had a significant impact on the demonstration of LA. Teachers appeared to perceive assessment as external to students' learning, while students appeared to view assessment as both external and internal to their own learning. This illustrates that assessment could potentially encourage various levels of autonomy.

The findings also indicated that students appeared to demonstrate higher levels of autonomy outside of the class context than during formal classroom learning.

CHAPTER 6: OBSERVED ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND STUDENTS' RESPONSES

Chapter overview

This chapter presents the findings from participant observations in three English classes. The observations focussed on the teachers' assessment practices and the students' responses to these practices. Teachers' assessment practices were categorised into assessment tasks, assessment techniques, assessment feedback and assessment-related communication. All these practices were viewed in terms of levels of *autonomy offered* ranked from *prescribed* to *bounded* to *open*. Students' responses in these assessment practices were viewed in terms of levels of autonomy demonstrated, ranked from *compliant* to *reactive* to *proactive*.

Coding principles for data recognition are as follows:

- Observation data includes a letter representing the class teacher, 'OB' (abbreviating 'observation'), and a number at the end representing the number of the observation (e.g., 'SOB2' would mean 'the second observation in Teacher S's class').
- Post-observation interviews with teachers include 'PO' (abbreviating 'post observation'), a letter indicating the teacher, 'I' for 'interview', and a number indicating the number of observation (e.g., 'POSI2' means 'post-observation interview with teacher S after the second observation').
- Post-observation interviews with students include 'PO', a letter indicating the teacher, S for 'student', 'I' for 'interview', and a number indicating the number

of the observation (e.g., ‘POCSI3’ means ‘post observation with Teacher C’s students after observation number 3’).

- Interviews with a teacher have a letter indicating the teacher and ‘I’ for ‘interview’ (e.g., ‘SI’ means ‘interview with Teacher S’).
- Interviews with students have a letter indicating the teacher, ‘S’ for student and a number indicating the student (e.g., ‘CS2’ means ‘interview with student 2 in Teacher C’s class’).

6.1. Assessment tasks and students’ responses

In this section, assessment tasks were first analysed using Ellis’s (2003) framework⁵, in which a task is subdivided into *goal*, *input*, *condition*, *procedure*, and *output*. The tasks were also investigated in relation to the level of students’ decision-making in a task. If the teacher decided all aspects of the task, it was termed *prescribed*. If the students could determine some aspects such as the output or the procedures, then the task was regarded as *bounded*. If the students determined all the aspects of the task, then the task was described as *open*.

The students’ responses to the tasks were also analysed in terms of the levels of autonomy demonstrated. If the students closely followed the teacher’s instruction, they were considered to be *compliant*. If they initiated some actions to complete the assigned tasks, they were viewed as demonstrating *reactive* autonomy. If they initiated some action in order to complete the tasks they initiated, they were viewed as demonstrating *proactive* autonomy. In cases where students in one class had different responses to the teacher’s assessment practices, their responses would be analysed as representing *mixed autonomy*.

⁵ Ellis’s (2003) framework is described in detail in section 3.3.2.2 of Chapter 3

6.1.1. Tasks for in-class learning

Prescribed tasks

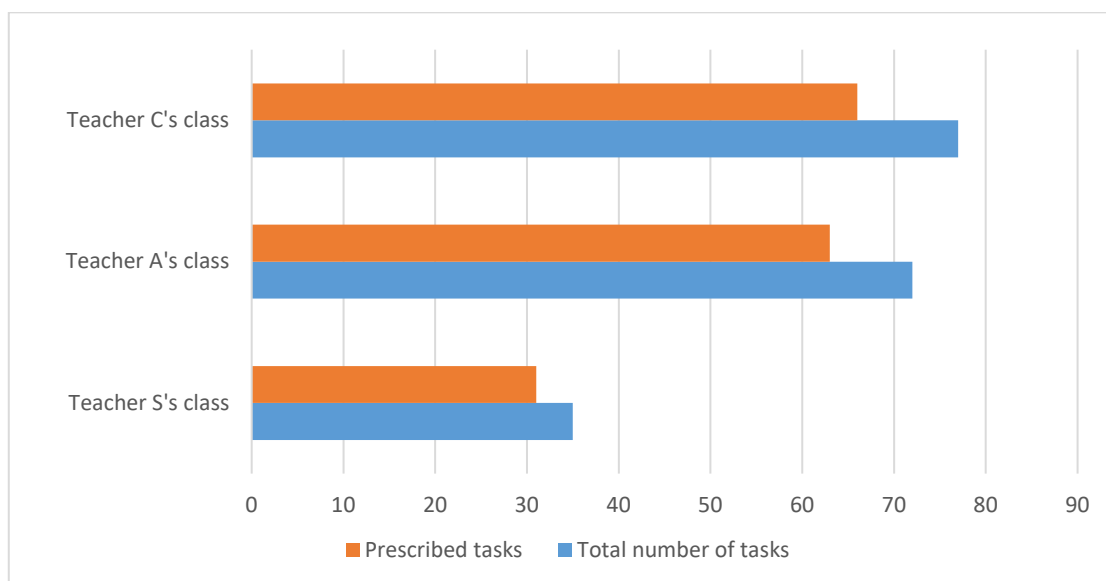


Figure 6.1 Number of prescribed tasks compared to total number of tasks in three classes

Data analysis showed that the majority of tasks designated for in-class learning in the three classes belonged to the *prescribed* category (see figure 6.1). The teachers initiated these tasks for particular purposes, but in most cases, they did not communicate these purposes to the students. They decided on the input of the task (i.e., the verbal or non-verbal information supplied for the task, such as pictures, a map, and a written text). They also determined the time needed to complete the task and how the task should be carried out (i.e., individually, in pairs or in groups). The outcomes of the tasks were often pre-defined and limited to one correct answer, as in example 1.

Example 1. Reading task: the teacher asked the students to read a passage about a family and underline new words and structures in the passage in seven minutes. The teacher told the students that if they did not know any words, they should ask their colleagues or the teacher, rather than looking them up in the dictionary. (SOB3)

This reading task was initiated by the teacher. He did not explain to the students the purpose of underlining the new words and structures in the text. He decided on the amount of time needed for the reading task and the way to deal with new vocabulary. Therefore, students had little room for their own decision making.

Students' responses in prescribed tasks

The students' responses in prescribed tasks varied. In some cases, the students were *compliant*. In other cases, they demonstrated their *reactivity* in completing the tasks (see Figure 6.2).

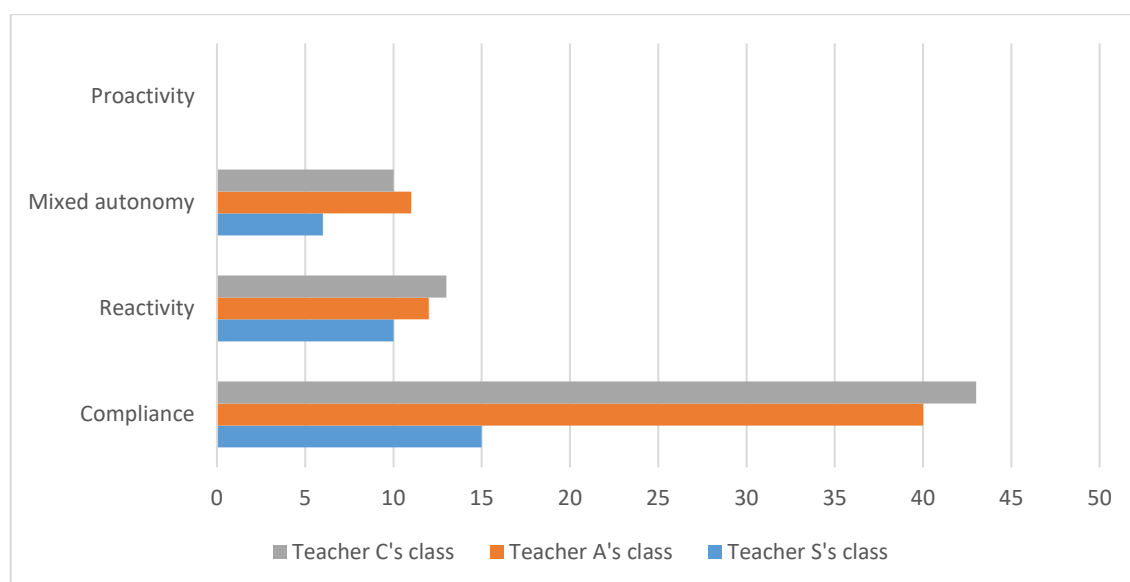


Figure 6.2 Students' demonstration of autonomy in prescribed tasks

Prescribed tasks and students' demonstration of compliance

The findings indicated that the *prescribed – compliant* pattern of students' responses to tasks was the most prominent pattern across the three classes. In other words, the students complied with or followed the teachers' instructions closely in *prescribed* tasks. They adhered unquestioningly to their teachers' instructions. In the *prescribed-compliant* pattern, the teachers were the primary agents who were in charge from task initiation to task implementation, while the students received and followed the teachers' instructions. Example 2 is an illustration.

Example 2. Speaking task: the teacher asked the students to talk about a person that they admire by answering the guided questions - who this person is, what kind of job he/she does, and why they like him/her. First, the teacher provided students with structures to answer the questions ('A is my idol because...he/she is a/an.../what's special about him or her is that.../I like/admire him/her so much because...'). Then he asked the students to look back at the reading about David Beckham to see how the author talked about the things she admires about the famous footballer.

Students took note of the teacher's model structures on the board and then opened the reading to find the model answers. (SOB10)

This task was *prescribed* in scope because it was initiated by the teacher. The output was somewhat predefined by the guided questions. Usually, the output of a speaking task is not predictable, but in this case, it was somewhat predictable because all the answer structures were provided by the teacher. This task, therefore, offered almost no scope for students to make decisions. Students demonstrated their compliance in the task by looking for model answers in the reading and used the model answers and structures (that the teacher provided) to prepare their answer.

Prescribed tasks and students' demonstration of reactivity

Students in some cases navigated beyond the scope designated for them in a *prescribed* task. Instead of strictly following teachers' instructions, they initiated their own actions, made their own choices, or applied their own strategies so that they could complete the tasks more easily and effectively, demonstrating a higher level of autonomy than that supported by the task. For example, they made use of available resources such as their mobile phone and the Internet to look up new vocabulary or translate their ideas from Vietnamese into English. They cooperated with their colleagues and sought help from the teacher and fellow students. They opted to work individually when told to work in

pairs, and vice versa. They brainstormed ideas in Vietnamese instead of in English and then asked their fellow students or the teacher for help to convey these ideas in English. Examples 3 and 4 illustrate the *prescribed - reactive* pattern.

Example 3. Teacher C organised a group work activity. She divided the students into groups and provided them with a card, which contained a name of a place and some information in Vietnamese about the weather in this place. The students were required to work in groups to make a weather forecast in English for the place on their card, using the information (in Vietnamese). A student from each group would present the group's completed weather forecast to the class.

The students were actively engaging and participating in the task. They used mobile phones to look up new words and used Google Translate to translate the provided information from Vietnamese into English. They also discussed noisily with friends and sought help from the teacher and the observer for new words and expressions in English. However, it seemed to the researcher that the students could not complete the task successfully. (COB3)

The task in example 3 was prescribed in scope because it was initiated by the teacher. She decided on the input of the task. The output was predefined by the teacher, as she provided the students with information about the weather in the relevant place in Vietnamese. She also determined the grouping and time allocation for the task. The students were *reactive* in the sense that they attempted different strategies in order to complete the task. They cooperated with their peers, actively managing different resources around them (e.g., the Internet, Google Translate, the observer, the teacher).

In this case, the teacher had turned the speaking task into a translating task by providing the Vietnamese version of the weather forecast, which made the speaking task

more challenging for the students. Post-observation interviews with the students supported this speculation. Students reported that the Vietnamese version of the weather forecast made it very difficult for them, as it made the task inflexible in terms of language use. Additionally, there were many uncommon Vietnamese words and phrases in the teacher's writing, which made it hard for them to translate it into English.

Example 4. Students were asked to work in pairs to match the definitions with appropriate occupations. They had 20 minutes to complete the task. Students just needed to write the number next to the definition.

Students discussed noisily. They all used mobile phones to look up new words. They all enthusiastically and fully engaged in the task. Some pairs decided in advance who would look up words and who wrote the meanings before they matched pictures and words together in order to complete the task more quickly.

(SOB6)

This vocabulary task was also highly *prescribed* because it was initiated by the teacher, who determined every aspect of the task. However, students actively applied many different cognitive and social strategies, such as using mobile phones and cooperating with peers. In fact, although the teacher did not explicitly communicate with his students about how the task was assessed, the students knew that the teacher would ask different pairs to exchange their completed work for peer-marking and then grant a good mark to the fastest pairs with the most correct answers, as he had been applying this technique since the first lesson. This speculation was confirmed because after the students completed the task, the teacher did require them to exchange their work and gave full marks to the group that had all the answers right. This could be the reason for students' active engagement in the task and their demonstration of *reactivity*, which seemed to be beyond the scope given to them. In this case, the students *complied*

not with the teacher's instructions, but with the rewards that the teacher explicitly offered or implicitly implied in his communication.

Prescribed tasks and students' demonstration of mixed autonomy

The data also showed that in some cases, the students had mixed responses to the *prescribed* tasks. Some of the students appeared *compliant* with the teacher's instructions, while others cooperated with peers, implemented their own strategies or used different resources (e.g., the Internet, mobile phones, dictionaries) in order to complete their tasks effectively. Examples 5 and 6 illustrate this finding:

Example 5. The teacher asked the students to work individually. They needed to look at the pictures in the handout and write the names of the sports they saw. The first letter for each sport was provided.

Most of the students worked individually. Some of them worked in pairs and used their mobile phones to look up words and search for information. One pair found the words in Vietnamese and then used the dictionary on their mobile phones to find the English equivalent for this word. One student turned around and tried to ask other students. (COB1)

In example 5, the task was termed *prescribed* because the teacher was the sole agent involved in the orchestration of the task. Most of the students were compliant with the teacher's instructions. They did the task individually as instructed. However, some students worked in pairs instead of working individually as instructed by the teacher, or sought help from their peers. Some were flexible in carrying out the task, actively implementing their strategies and cooperating with others.

Example 6. Teacher S asked his students to do a listening task. They had to listen to a recording in which a girl talked about her favourite subject and do two

gap-filling exercises, which means they had to fill in the blanks with words (subjects) provided in a box.

In the first gap-fill exercise, the majority of students listened to the recording and did the task as prescribed. However, one student Huy (pseudonym) could not write the words into the blanks (at the first listening) because the recording was fast. Tu (pseudonym), sitting next to Huy, advised him to apply his technique for the task – number the provided words and then write the number in the blanks. Huy took Tu’s advice on the second listening and completed the task. In the second gap-fill exercise, while other students followed the teacher’s instructions, Huy numbered the provided words and wrote the number in the blanks during the first listening. In the second listening, he wrote the words in the blanks. (SOB5)

In the above example, the task was *prescribed* in scope, as the teacher initiated it and described the steps to complete the task. In the first listening, the majority of the students, Huy included, appeared compliant with the teacher’s instructions, except for Tu, who implemented his own strategy to complete the task. Huy struggled to comply with the teacher’s instructions in the first listening, and in the second listening he opted to take Tu’s advice and was able to complete the task.

Bounded tasks

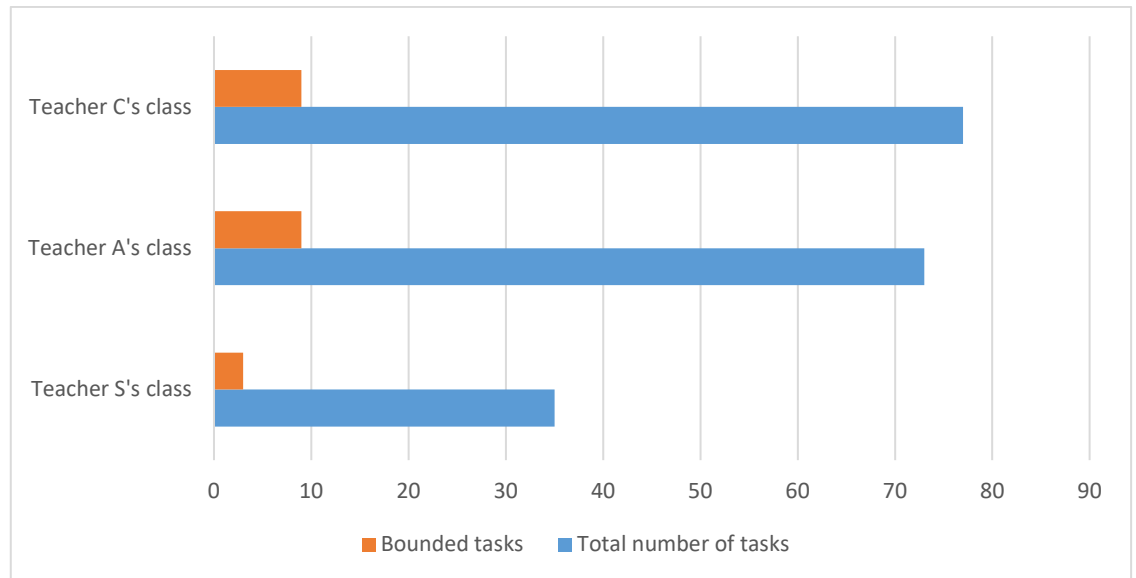


Figure 6.3 Number of bounded tasks compared to the total number of tasks in three classes

There was a small number of tasks in the three classes that provided scope for students to demonstrate their autonomy (see figure 6.3). The teachers still initiated these tasks, but the outcome was often not confined to a specific correct answer or a predefined standard or criterion. The students could also make decisions regarding when, where and with whom they would conduct these tasks. Examples 7 and 8 illustrate this finding.

Example 7. Teacher S asked his students to write a short letter to a father answering his questions about weather in Vietnam. The questions included what the weather was like, what season it was, what people did in this season, and one special thing about this season. Before the students did the writing task, the teacher read the instructions, translated them into Vietnamese for the students, and explained some words. (SOB4)

The task in example 7 was *bounded* in scope because the output of this task was somewhat predefined by the guided questions, but not predictable. Therefore, students

could produce and use their own ideas for writing. They could also decide where and how to find the information for their writing.

Example 8. Teacher A divided her students into groups by asking them about their favourite season. Those who liked the same season were placed in the same group. Those who did not answer the teacher's question were placed in another group. Students had to work in groups to discuss in 10 minutes the provided questions about seasons ('how many?', 'what is the weather like in each season?', 'what is your favourite season?', 'what do you often do in this season?'). (AOB3)

The task in example 8 was initiated by Teacher A. Although the teacher provided the students with some guiding questions, the answers to these questions were open-ended. The grouping of students and the time allocated to the task were determined by the teacher, but the students could make their own choice regarding where and how to find the information for their speaking task.

Students' responses in bounded tasks

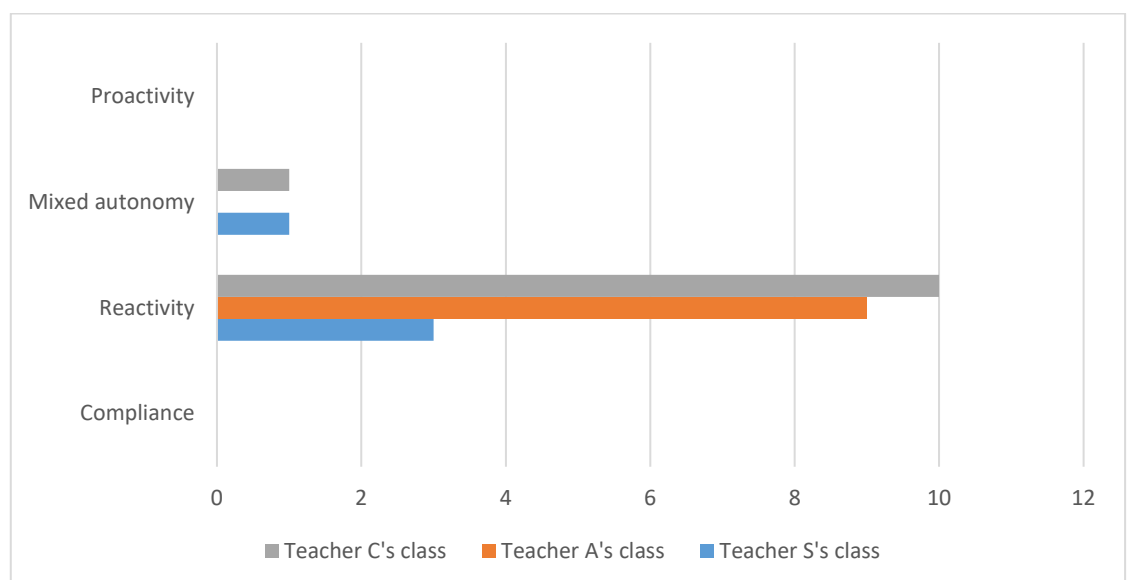


Figure 6.4 Students' responses in bounded tasks

Figure 6.4 shows that students across the three classes appeared to demonstrate *reactivity* in the teachers' bounded tasks. They actively adopted some learning strategies and used resources such as the Internet and their mobile phones to complete the task effectively. For example, they used mobile phones and Google Translate to help to translate their ideas into English. They also actively participated in the tasks to generate their ideas or solutions, discussing with their peers or searching the Internet for ideas. Some of them brainstormed ideas in Vietnamese and then used their phones to look up words, or used Google Translate to translate their ideas into English. Example 9 exemplifies students' demonstration of *reactive* autonomy in *bounded* tasks.

Example 9. The teacher asked the students to work in pairs to ask each other about their family members and then report the information about their partner's family to the class. The teacher provided the students with guided questions as follows:

1. *How many people are there in your family? Who are they?*
2. *What are their jobs?*
3. *What does your family often do at the weekend?*

The students were active and engaged well in this activity. They asked and answered noisily. Some students asked others for help with vocabulary so that they could convey their ideas in English, as illustrated below:

“What if my family members still go to work at the weekend?”

“Teacher, how can I say ‘can bo’ in English?”

“How to say ‘do choi’ in English?”

One student asked the observer, *“What does ‘quan ly’ mean in English?”*

(AOB2)

Example 9 was initiated by the teacher. It is described as *bounded* because its outcome was somewhat predefined by the guiding questions but not predictable, as it

was not tied to a specific solution. Therefore, students could enjoy freedom in demonstrating their thoughts. Students in the above situation appeared to demonstrate their *reactivity*. They attempted to use the language by translating their ideas from Vietnamese into English. They actively sought help from others—their teacher, their colleagues and the observer—in order to complete the task.

Open tasks

The findings indicate that there were no *open* tasks evident in the observation data across the three classes. The teacher was always the one who initiated the tasks for in-class learning. The students were not officially encouraged or entitled to initiate learning tasks for in-class learning.

6.1.2. Tasks for out-of-class learning

The findings indicate that teachers' attitudes towards homework and the practices relating to homework were divergent. Teacher S did pay attention to students' out-of-class learning, which in many situations was perceived as autonomous learning by both the teacher and the students. He assigned the students homework in every lesson, which he said: "focuses on language skills" (SI). He also confessed that the tasks he assigned for his students were test-oriented, but also expressed a belief that "this is good for students in the short-term although it might be not in the long-term" (SI). The tasks designated for out-of-class learning were mostly the left-over exercises in the handout and writing and speaking tasks. All the tasks for homework were test-oriented. That is, they were designated to help the students strengthen knowledge that would be assessed in the test or exam, as well as helping them get used to the format of the test. The tasks for out-of-class learning also varied in levels of scope offered for student autonomy.

Teacher A stated that she did not assign much homework to her students. She did not focus much on homework. She believed that if the teacher assigned students homework but could not control their completion of it, it would be useless. She thought

that homework existed for the purpose of making weak students become hardworking and self-regulated, so it was necessary to control homework completion through frequent checking. Due to time constraints, she could not check her students' homework completion regularly, so she decided not to assign her students much homework.

Teacher C assigned a number of tasks to her students to complete outside of the classroom. Right from the orientation class, she explained that the students should prepare vocabulary in advance of each lesson, checking the meaning and pronunciation of new words. The students had to complete the exercises in the workbook and the left-over exercises in the book and in the handout that the teacher designed and gave to the students at every lesson. She repeated her requirements for homework during and after each lesson. In the first few lessons, she checked students' completion of homework very carefully before she started a new lesson. The class atmosphere seemed intense and stressful during homework checking time, and the students appeared disengaged with the upcoming tasks in the lesson. That might be the reason why from lesson 5 onwards, she no longer checked the students' homework.

In the observation data, student autonomy could only be judged in terms of the level of autonomy offered in each of the tasks and the rate of task completion and submission. The researcher was aware that the observation data could not reveal much about student autonomy outside of the class. Therefore, findings relating to the students' reports on their completion of homework will be discussed so as to provide more insights into student autonomy.

Prescribed tasks

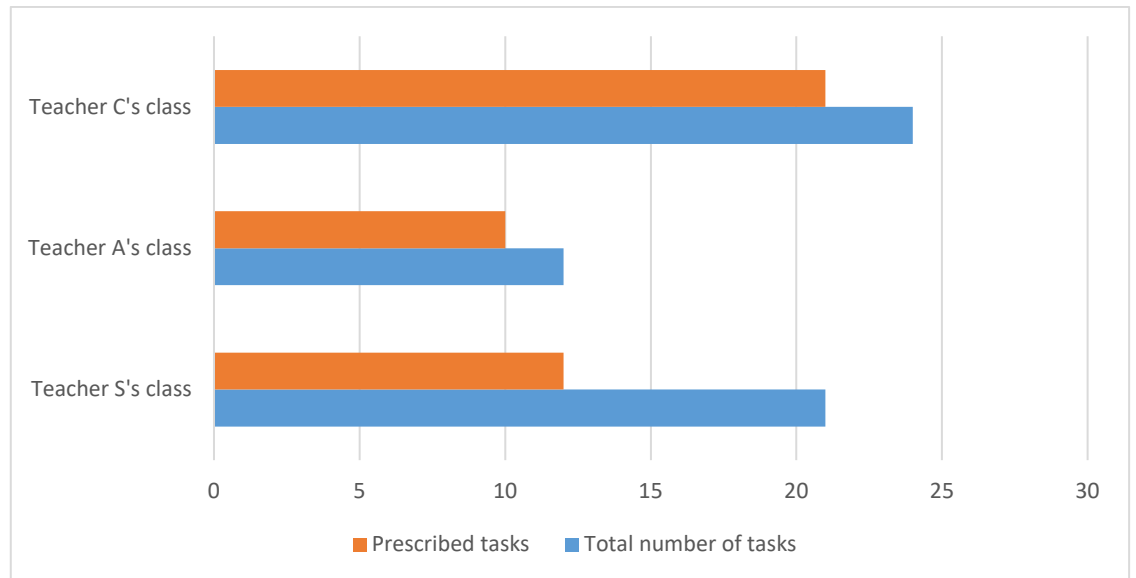


Figure 6.5 Number of prescribed tasks compared to total number of tasks for out-of-class learning

The majority of tasks for out-of-class learning belonged to the *prescribed* category (see figure 6.5). These tasks mostly related to grammar and vocabulary exercises with predefined answers. There were some writing and speaking tasks for homework, but these tasks were *prescribed* in scope because the teacher provided the students with the ideas for the tasks, as illustrated in example 10.

Example 10. Grammar and vocabulary exercises for homework: Students were asked to complete two exercises in the course book, and two exercises in the workbook, writing answers on A4 paper and submitting their work to the teacher in the next lesson. (SOB8)

Bounded tasks

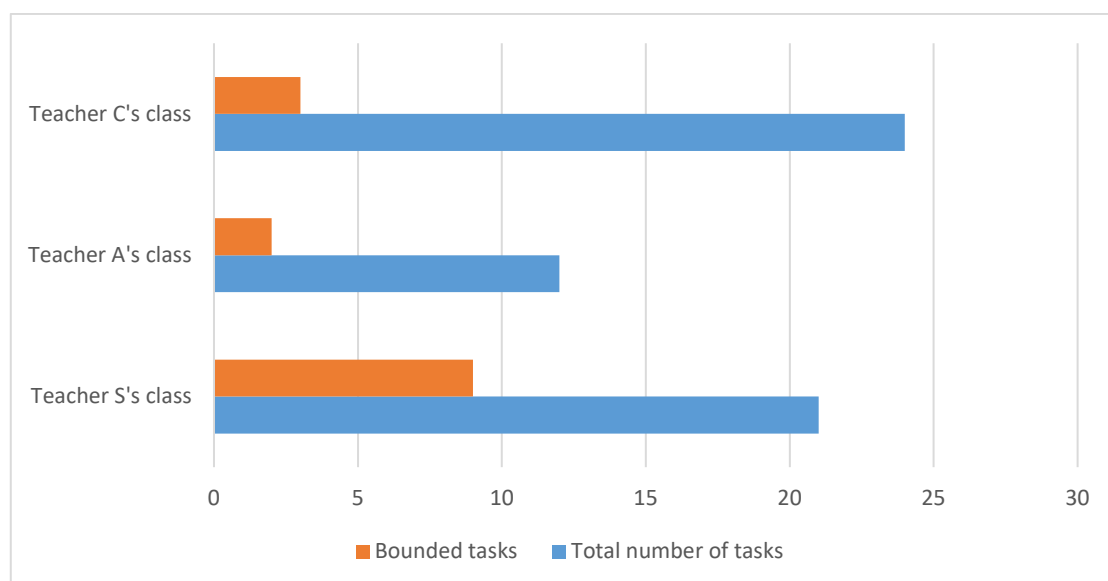


Figure 6.6 Number of bounded tasks compared to the total number of tasks for out-of-class learning

Observation data showed that a small number of homework tasks offered a *bounded* scope for student autonomy (see figure 6.6). These tasks were all speaking and writing tasks. The majority of the speaking tasks were preparation for the topics that would be used in the tests and exams. Teacher S asked his students to record their answers for the guided questions and send the recordings to him.

Example 11. Speaking task: The teacher asked the students to search for as much information as possible about a famous person of their choice. (COB10)

The writing tasks were mostly in the form of a reply to a letter, which was similar to the format of the writing task in the test or exam. These tasks allowed students to make decisions regarding strategies, schedule and time needed for the task, signifying a *bounded* scope for the demonstration of autonomy. The following tasks exemplify bounded tasks for out-of-class learning.

Example 12. Students were asked to complete the writing task in the handout at home. They would have to write a reply letter to their teacher and answer her questions about their study (Which school? How many subjects? What subject

did they like most?...) The teacher translated the requirements of the task with his students. (SOB5)

Open tasks

The observation data did not indicate any *open* tasks (tasks that the students initiated) for out-of-class learning. In the class, the teacher did not officially and explicitly encourage the students to initiate any tasks to complete outside the class. Additionally, the observation data could not capture evidence of students' initiation of tasks for their out-of-class learning. However, indications of task initiation were evident in the interview data and are reported in section 5.3 of Chapter 5, which concerns students' self-reports of their out-of-class English learning.

6.1.2.2. Students' reported responses to tasks for out-of-class learning

As mentioned earlier in section 6.1.2 (which addresses out-of-class learning tasks), the students' reports on their homework completion were analysed and presented to provide more insights into their demonstration of LA in out-of-class tasks.

Demonstration of proactive autonomy

One student in Teacher S's class appeared to demonstrate a proactive level of autonomy when he reported how he balanced doing homework and carrying out learning that he initiated. He said:

I sometimes do not do my homework. When I do not have enough time, I normally prioritise my learning (3 hours every day) first because I feel that this is more useful to me. Alternatively, when I have a test or exam, I will prioritise my learning for the test or exam. (SS4)

This student demonstrated critical thinking, self-reflection and choice-making ability in reference to his own needs and purpose. When it was necessary, he chose to follow his own learning agenda rather than his teacher's, because he found his agenda to be more valuable at that time. However, at other times, he opted to follow his teacher's

agenda, because it might be more useful for an upcoming test or exam. This suggested that his flexibility in following learning agendas allowed him to balance his learning for the exam and learning for his own goals.

Demonstration of reactive autonomy

The majority of students (n=10) demonstrated *reactive* autonomy when doing homework. They complied with the teacher's agenda, but actively displayed their initiative in arranging their learning so that they could complete their tasks in the most effective way. For example, students in Teacher S's class sought help from their peers or their teacher or made use of the available resources such as the Internet, dictionary or mobile phone in order to complete their homework, as illustrated in SS2's report:

I always do my homework. I usually can do most of my English homework by myself. When I have difficulty with vocabulary, I will use a dictionary to look up. Sometimes I ask my friends who are better at English than me; sometimes I ask my ex-teachers for help because I have quite a good relationship with them. (SS2)

Students in teacher C's class believed that homework was meaningful to their learning, helping them to better understand and remember the knowledge presented to them in a lesson. They reported that they normally attempted to complete the homework on their own. However, if there were any difficult questions, they would actively search for help from their peers or their teachers, or they would search for clues in books or on the Internet. One student collaborated with her friends to form a study group in order for students to help one another with homework, as illustrated in her statement below.

I always complete my homework. If I have a lot of homework, I will spend two to three hours for it. I will do my homework when I have time, normally before the next lesson. I often try to do homework by myself first. If there are questions that I cannot answer, I will search

for the clues on the Internet to discuss with my friends in my study group. Our group has six members. We also have a Facebook group, and we often discuss with one another in this group. Sometimes, we have meetings in the library. I think it is very useful to have this study group because I can learn a lot from others. (CS5)

Students in Teacher A's class thought that homework completion could contribute to a better test or exam result, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

We will do selective homework when we think this homework is about something important. By 'important' we mean when the teacher emphasises that it is important and this is the knowledge that will be tested in the exam. (APOI4)

Therefore, they displayed initiative in doing the homework. For example, when they had difficult questions, they would actively search for answers in different places:

When I have a difficult question, I will google the solution clues on the Internet. If I can't find any clues on the Internet, I will ask my peers who are good at English, or I will ask my teacher when I come to class for the next lesson. (AS1)

Demonstration of compliance

Five students in Teacher S's and Teacher C's classes appeared compliant with the teacher's agenda. One student in Teacher S's class completed homework, although he did not see the value in it:

....my learning at home has nothing to do with teacher's assessment in the class, but I still do homework. If the teacher assigns homework, we have to do it. (SS6)

Other students tried to complete homework because they wanted to avoid the negative consequences that might arise if they did not:

In order for homework to be useful for students, homework must be compulsory in the sense that if you do not do homework, you will have some bad consequences. If the teacher gives homework without checking or controlling, we will not do it. I think checking homework is necessary. If the teachers check homework regularly, we will have to do it. Therefore, the teacher's checking homework is a method to force us to do homework. (SS3)

The observation data also showed that students appeared *compliant* with the teacher's agenda because they were afraid of punishment. For example, in the first few lessons of Teacher S's class, the rate of homework completion was low, so the teacher informed his students of the rules that he would apply in the class regarding homework (a fine of 10,000VND and a record of absence) (SOB2). After the teacher's communication about the homework rule, the rate of homework completion increased dramatically. All students completed and submitted the homework in the handout, and only 2-4 students did not submit the speaking assignment each time. Students in Teacher A's class appeared to share a similar view:

We will do homework when the teacher has strict punishment such as giving bad marks or minus points.” (APOI4)

6.2. Assessment techniques and students' responses

The most prominent assessment techniques used by the three teachers were questioning, observation, checking of individual performance/role play and self/peer-assessment, as shown in figure 6.7. The following section presents the scope offered in these techniques for students to demonstrate their autonomy and the extent to which students demonstrated their autonomy within that scope.

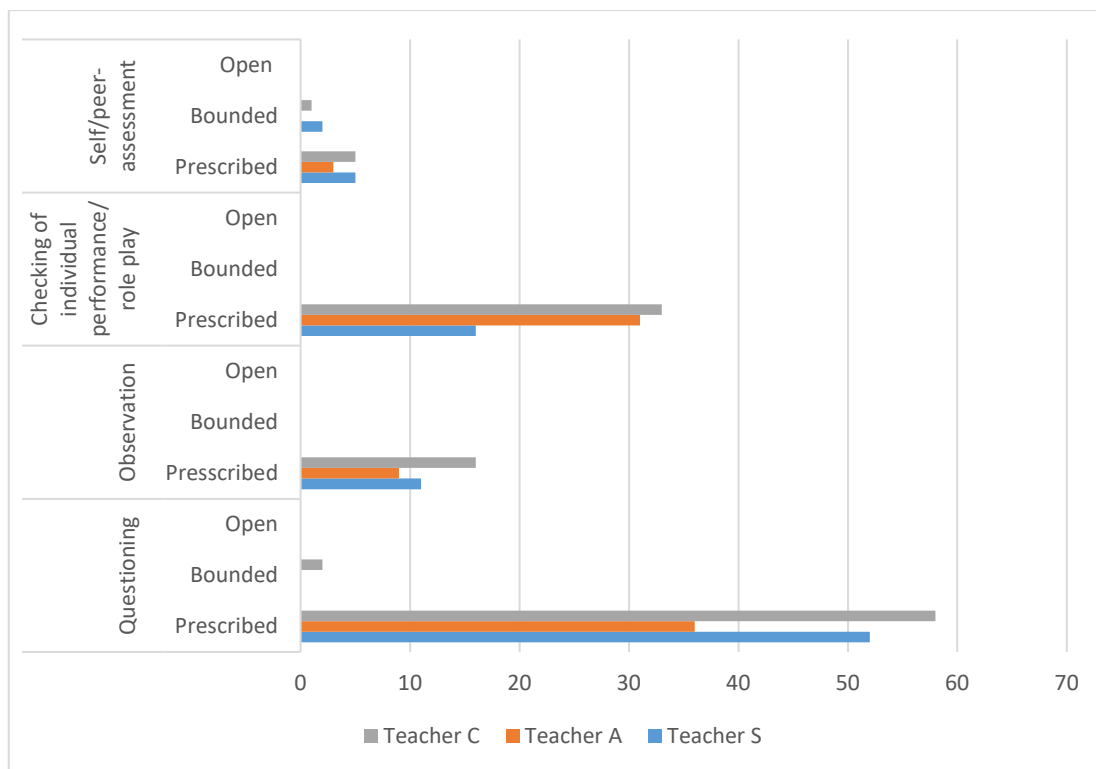


Figure 6.7 Assessment techniques utilised in the three classes

6.2.1. Questioning

Prescribed level and students' responses

Observation data indicated that questioning was the most commonly used assessment technique across the three classes (see figure 6.7). The majority of questions used by the three teachers were closed and convergent. Teachers used these questions to check if their students knew something predefined and known or expected to the teachers. Typical examples of closed convergent questions that teachers used in the three classes included questions to check students' responses: "what is the answer for question" (AOB 3, COB1, COB2, COB5, COB6, COB8, COB9); questions to check if the students knew a structure in English: "how can you ask for the way to the canteen?" and "How can you make negative statements?" (AOB7); questions to check students' vocabulary: "what does **generation** mean?" (SOB2); "what does **weather** mean in Vietnamese?" (SOB4); "what does '**too much weather mean [sic]**'?; what does '**too**' mean" (COB3); "What does '**ngươi ban hang**' mean in English?); questions to check if

the students understood or remembered a grammar structure: “If we put adjectives in order, what order will they be in? What is the rule?” (COB4);

Teachers also asked students to elaborate on their answers. Some instances of teachers using questions to ask students for clarifications and clues for their answers included: “why do you use ‘eating’ for question 1? Can you explain why you choose this answer? Why do you use present perfect and not past simple?” (COB7).

The students in all three classes appeared *compliant* with their teachers’ instructions. They answered the teacher’s questions, provided explanations for their answers or engaged in the task where they were able.

Student-initiated questioning

Demonstration of reactive autonomy

Observation data showed that students in the three classes sometimes initiated questions during lessons. However, these questions were often in Vietnamese and often involved requests for the teacher’s assistance with vocabulary.

These questions arose from tasks initiated by the teacher, and the students initiated the questions with the hope of better completing the task, indicating their demonstration of *reactive autonomy*. In these cases, the teacher usually answered students’ questions straight away.

6.2.2. Observation

Prescribed level

All three teachers used observation as an assessment technique in their classes to see whether students were complying with instructions, making any mistakes, and making any inquiries or requiring any further explanation for the task. When Teacher C identified that the students were not attentive, she encouraged them to engage in the task. Teacher A explained new vocabulary or checked students’ understanding of vocabulary and sometimes praised the students if she recognised that they were doing a

good job. Observation was basically a teacher-controlled assessment technique whose prime purpose was to make sure that learning activities happened as planned, indicating the teachers' expectation of students' compliance with their instructions. Therefore, no bounded or open level is expected from observation assessment technique.

6.2.3. Checking of individual performance/role play

Prescribed level and students' demonstration of compliance

Another assessment technique that the three teachers used in their classes was checking of individual performance or role-play. That is, they called one or more students to write their answers on the board, give solutions to a problem or perform a language task. Sometimes, they called pairs to role-play their conversations. This assessment technique was *prescribed* in scope, as the majority of incidents involved forced engagement. Although the teachers sometimes called for the students' voluntary engagement, if students did not volunteer, they were required to perform the task regardless. The answers were always assessed against a predefined standard or answer keys. The students appeared to comply with the teacher's requests when possible.

There were no *bounded* or *open* examples observed in the context of this technique.

6.2.4. Self/peer-assessment and students' responses

Prescribed self/peer-assessment and students' demonstration of compliance

The three teachers sometimes organised self/peer-assessment activities to involve students in the assessment of a task (see figure 6.6). However, most of the self/peer-assessment tasks were *prescribed* in scope because they required students to judge their own or others' works against a standard or criterion predefined and provided by the teacher. All the students needed to do was to follow the teacher's instructions strictly.

For example, Teacher S involved his students in peer-marking of their fellow students' work. Students swapped their work and teachers checked and confirmed the

answers with the whole class. The students then calculated and wrote the number of correct answers for their fellow-students and handed the marked work to the teacher.

Teacher A and Teacher C involved their students in self-marking of their own work. They asked their students to complete a test or exercise, and then provided them with answer keys so that students could check their answers by themselves.

The observation data indicated that students were *compliant* with the teachers' instructions, but participated in the task enthusiastically. They listened to their teacher and fellow-students, and used the answer keys to carry out self-marking or peer marking.

Bounded self/peer-assessment and students' demonstration of reactivity

There were some cases in Teacher S and Teacher C's class where the teachers offered *bounded* scope for students in self/peer-assessment practices.

Teachers initiated an assessment for the students, but did not provide them with the answer keys. Students had to exchange their answers, discuss, compare and defend their choice of answers. During the exchange and discussion of answers to the listening tasks, the students were involved in the process of determining the criteria for task achievement and specifying their own and their peers' attainment in the listening task.

6.3. Assessment feedback and students' responses

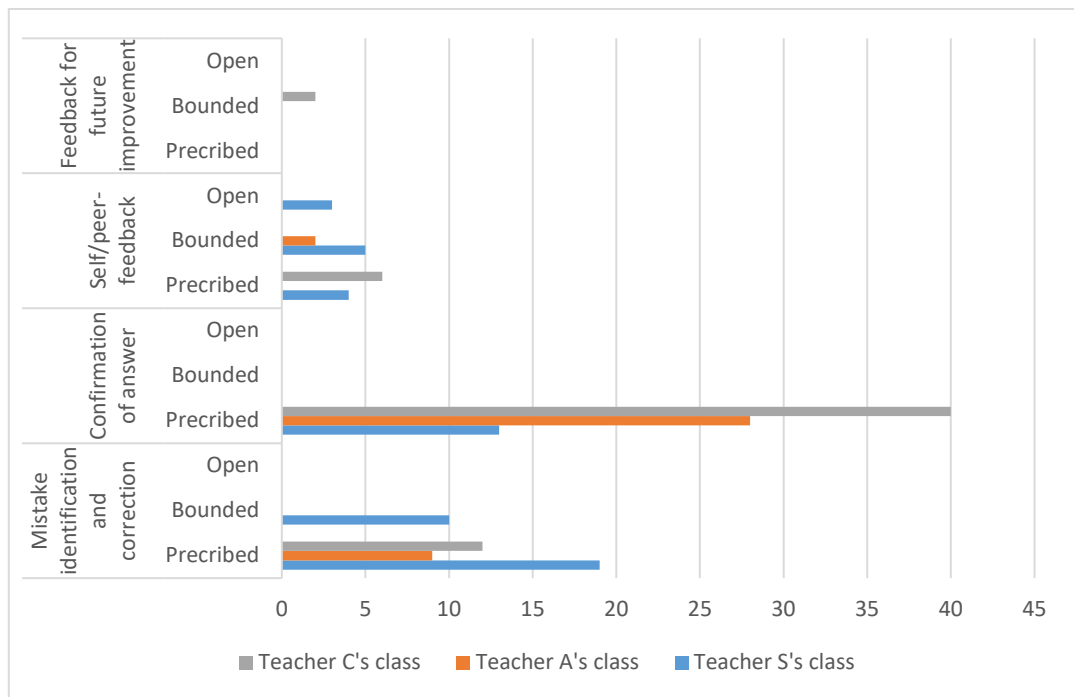


Figure 6.8 Feedback used in the three classes

6.3.1. Mistake identification and correction

Prescribed mistake identification and correction and students' demonstration of compliance

All three teachers appeared to pay attention to corrective aspects when giving feedback. They often identified the mistakes for the students and corrected these mistakes for them immediately without allowing students the chance to think about or correct their own mistakes. The students' involvement in mistake identification and correction was restricted to listening to the teacher and taking notes on what they said.

Bounded mistake identification and correction and students' demonstration of compliance

Teacher S did offer some scope for students' involvement in corrective feedback. In some cases, he did not directly point out mistakes for his students but tried to help them recognise their mistakes in an indirect way, sometimes by repeating them several times with a raised voice. Students in these cases were involved, albeit still minimally, in the identification and correction of mistakes. This technique was believed to make students

“be more aware of their mistakes so they would make progress” (SI). Similarly, the teacher avoided correcting the mistakes by himself, but assisted his students so that they could correct their own mistakes. For example, he again explained the differences between ‘miss’ and ‘remember’ for the students when they misused these two verbs (SOB4), and he re-taught students the pronunciation of the word ‘history’ when they mispronounced it (SOB5). Additionally, he asked guided questions so that the students could know why they made mistakes and how to correct them (SOB6, SOB10), or he offered a chance for students to think about their mistakes and how to correct them (SOB3, SOB7). In these cases, although the teacher was still the main agent who triggered students’ actions in the mistake identification and correction, he provided opportunity and scaffolding for students to get involved in the process and carry out part of it by themselves.

6.3.2. Confirmation of students’ answers

Prescribed level and students’ compliance

As shown in the observation data, confirmation of answers was one of the most widely used types of feedback across the three classes. The teacher typically confirmed the right answer by giving students praise or by just moving to the next question. Where the students provided the wrong answer, the teacher simply stated that the answer was not correct and gave them the right answer. Sometimes, the teachers confirmed the answer and provided elaboration. For example, if it was a reading question, teachers would show the students the information for the answer in the reading passage, or if it was a listening question, they would stop the recording at the answer and translate it into Vietnamese. The confirmation feedback did not appear to support the students’ demonstration of autonomy, as the scope for their active involvement in feedback was limited. In this feedback, the role of students as active learners was not apparent. They were provided with a correct answer. The teachers were the sole information holders,

and they decided the amount of information they would provide to the students. The observation data indicated that the students were compliant with the teacher's instructions by offering their answers on request, listening to the teacher's explanation and taking notes on the information provided.

6.3.3. Self/peer-feedback and students' responses

Prescribed level and students' demonstration of compliance

Teacher S and Teacher C created opportunities for students in their classes to be involved in self/peer-feedback. They typically invited some students to write their answers on the board or called some students to stand up and perform a task, then invited one or more students to give comments. Teachers often confirmed the correct answer with the class. These peer-feedback tasks were confined in scope because the students judged a performance or answer against a predefined right or wrong answer.

Observation data indicated that students were compliant with their teachers' instructions. They wrote their answers on the board, provided their answers or performed tasks, and gave comments on their friends' answers.

Bounded level and students' demonstration of compliance

There were two cases in Teacher A's class in which she created an opportunity for students to give feedback on their colleagues' work. These two cases both related to sentence transformation. The teacher first provided the students with a formula for transforming sentences from one structure to another (i.e., from past simple to present perfect), and then asked the students to complete sentence transforming exercises. She then invited some students to write their answers on the board and asked the class to give comments on their fellow-students' work. In these cases, the teacher allowed some scope for students to demonstrate their autonomy. The peer-feedback process in these two cases involved students' independent analysis and thinking. The students had to analyse the assessment criteria (i.e., formula for sentence transformation) and analyse

their fellow-students' transformed sentences, then make decisions about these sentences.

Moving from Open to Bounded level

There were cases in Teacher S's class in which he offered open scope in the provision of feedback. However, the students failed to cope with this open scope, leading the teacher to provide some scaffolding in order to help the students carry out the task. The process of shifting from *open* to *bounded* scope is detailed in example 11.

Example 11. In lesson 3, the teacher checked his students' preparation for a speaking topic about a hobby. He called four students to go to the front and speak about the topic in turn. While the students were speaking, the teacher noted their mistakes on the board. After the first student finished speaking, he asked the class to comment, but no one volunteered. He called three individual students to comment, but they either kept silent or said they had no comment.

(SOB3)

In this situation, the teacher offered students an *open* scope for their demonstration of autonomy. However, the students did not comment on their fellow student's speech; in other words, they did not demonstrate any autonomy in this situation.

Example 12. In the same lesson, when the second student finished speaking, the teacher did not invite students to comment straight away. Instead, he communicated the assessment criteria for the content of the speaking to the students: "There are four requirements in the speaking task: name of the sport; when you started playing it; what you like about the sport; and why this sport is important to you". He then asked the class if the second student's speech covered all the required content. Although no one volunteered, when the teacher

called some students, they did make some comments: “the speaking had not covered all the required contents. Question 3 was not clearly answered” (SOB3)

In the second situation, the scope for students was narrowed. The students were provided with some assessment criteria for the content of the speech, and within this narrowed scope, the students could give some feedback.

6.3.4. Feedback for future learning

There were two cases in Teacher C’s class in which she specified the students’ attainment and indicated to them how to improve their work. Teacher C started the feedback about students’ writing by referring back to the requirements for each writing task, then she pointed out good points in their writing and places where they needed to improve. This was general feedback for the whole class. Individual feedback was provided in the context of each student’s writing, where the teacher underlined all the mistakes (grammar, structures, expressions). Some of the mistakes she corrected; others she just underlined for students to correct independently

6.3.5. Student-initiated feedback

Demonstration of proactive autonomy

These were seven cases in the three classes where students initiated feedback. Students took initiative in identifying and correcting their own or others’ mistakes, demonstrating *proactive* autonomy. Example 13 illustrates student-initiated feedback in Teacher S’s class.

Example 13. This example was a vocabulary task. The students were given a table containing the names of nine countries and corresponding nationalities. They were asked to complete the table with languages spoken in these countries. When checking with the class, the teacher mistranslated **Switzerland** as Sweden in Vietnamese, so the information about languages spoken in this country was incorrect. One student corrected it for him.

6.4. Assessment-related communication

This section presents details on the three teachers' communication with students regarding assessment. The communication relating to assessment was analysed in terms of the levels of autonomy that it might potentially promote. If assessment communication helped the students to internalise assessment knowledge and techniques so that they could assess their future learning by themselves, or encouraged them to determine their directions and actions in learning, it was considered as promoting *proactive* autonomy. If the assessment communication helped to indicate the direction in learning for the students, it was regarded as promoting *reactive* autonomy. If the communication used assessment as a means to control students' learning, it was considered as promoting *compliance*. Figure 6.9 illustrates episodes in assessment-related communication that potentially promoted demonstration of different levels of autonomy across the three classes.

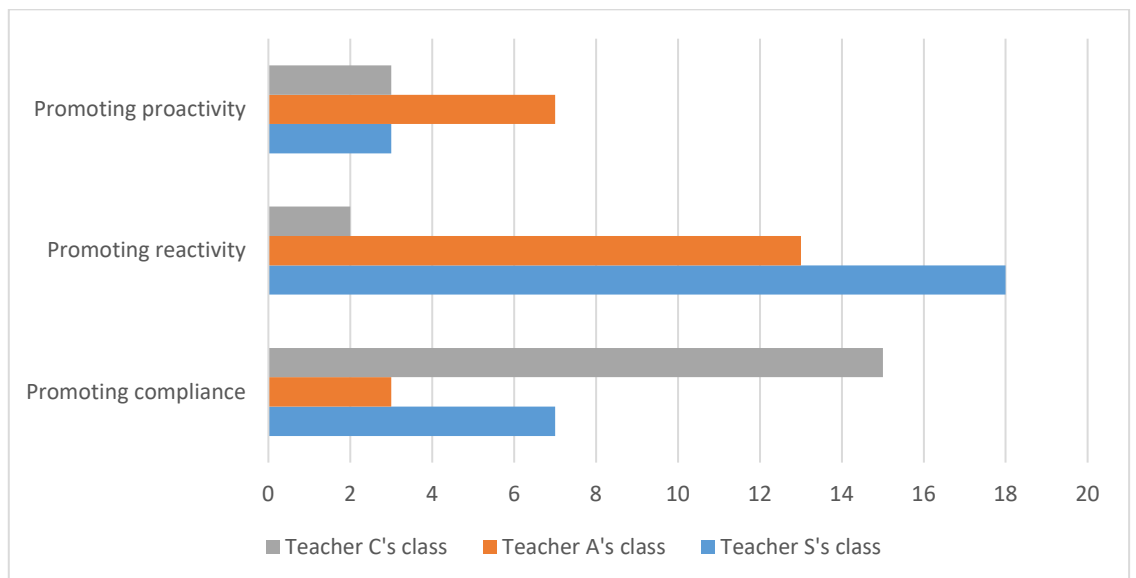


Figure 6.9 Levels of autonomy that assessment-related communication might have potentially promoted

6.4.1. Promoting proactive autonomy

Teacher A communicated her expectation clearly in the very first lesson that the students would have to take responsibility for parts of their learning, and she reiterated this during the semester. She said:

There is so much to learn, but the time in the class is limited, so I only focus on important parts (relating to test) in the class. Other parts that we cannot cover in the class, you have to self-study at home.
(AOBI)

She showed the students the answer keys for exercises in the workbook and advised them to do the exercises and self-assess their work. She also emphasised that she was not going to check students' completion of exercises in the workbook, and so they should do the exercises for the sake of acquiring knowledge, rather than for assessment.

Teacher A and teacher C also communicated clearly with their students that mistakes were an acceptable part of the learning process. Teacher A's and Teacher C's tolerance for the students' mistakes seemed to create a safe and friendly environment to them. This might have served to nurture their confidence in learning the language and encouraged them to engage in a task or display their language ability, demonstrating their *proactivity* in language learning and performance.

6.4.2. Promoting reactive autonomy

The observation data suggested that teachers used different methods to communicate learning direction for the students, as shown in figure 6.9.

All three teachers used tests and exams to shape the direction of their students' English learning. For example, Teacher S often related objectives for a lesson or an assigned task to the incoming tests or exams. Teacher A often emphasised that a task

was necessary because its format was akin to the format of a task in the coming tests or exams. She also tried to link a piece of knowledge that she was introducing to the students to the content to be tested in upcoming tests or exams.

Example 14. The teacher introduced to the students the order of adjectives in a sentence. She drew out the OPSACOMK rule to help students remember the order of adjectives more easily (OPinion - Size – Age – Colour – Origin – Material – Kind) and told her students that “in the final term test, there will be questions asking you to order the adjectives and noun. Remember the noun is always at the end of the phrase.” (AOB4)

Teachers’ use of tests and exams to direct students’ learning might have kept students on track and encouraged them to invest time and effort in learning, both inside and outside the class. This was supported by the students in Teacher A’s class, who all said that they would search for the information and vocabulary and practice (in advance) the topics that their teachers provided them for the midterm test. (POASI3)

Apart from using tests and exams, Teacher C established learning direction by communicating her expectations and requirements relating to the students’ learning in her class (e.g., homework completion, engagement in the class, lesson preparation) and informing her students of the assessment framework. In the very first lesson, Teacher C explained what would be calculated in the final course grade, and how she would assess the students. The framework provided the students with a learning orientation, and if they wanted to achieve good results, they would have to display initiative in, for example, homework completion, engagement in the class and preparation for the next lesson. She also spent an hour on class orientation in which she communicated all her expectations and requirements to the students.

Teacher C appeared to direct the students' learning outside of the class. She assigned the students many tasks to complete at home which all contributed to their course mark at the end. This approach encouraged the students to adopt a strategic learning approach in order to achieve a good result for the course, promoting the demonstration of *reactive* autonomy.

Teacher S and Teacher A sometimes used grades as rewards for students' task achievement and performance. These rewards motivated the students to try their best and provided a source of information for the students on their performance in the task.

6.4.3. Promoting compliance

The observation data showed that all three teachers used punishment and rewards to control their students' learning, as demonstrated in figure 6.8.

Teacher S frequently used punishment and imposed his rules to control students' out-of-class learning, as illustrated in examples 15, 16 and 17.

Example 15. When the teacher checked students' homework in lesson 2, some students did not do the homework, so he established a rule to control that:

I do not punish those who did not do homework today, but from now on not doing homework means a record of absence from class.

(SOB2)

From lesson three onwards, all students submitted the homework to the monitor every lesson.

Example 16. In lesson 4, he formulated another rule to control the students' speaking assignment when he recognised that only 17 out of 24 students had sent the speaking assignment to him.

I didn't tell you about the punishment if you don't do and send me the assignment. Now, I will tell you. If you don't do and send me your

speaking assignment, it means you are recorded as being absent from class, and you will be fined 10.000 Vietnamese Dong (about 0.6 AUD). (SOB4)

From lesson five onwards, only a couple of students failed to submit their speaking assignment, and they often had a legitimate justification for this.

Example 17. In lesson 5, the teacher organised an activity in which students had to work in groups of five to match a set of pictures with a set of words. The teacher set the rule for the task as follows:

The group which finishes first will get 10 points, second will get 9 points, and third will get 8 points and so on. For each correct match, you will get one point. Your total points will be the points you get from your correct match and the points for your matching speed. The group with the highest points will get 10 marks for this task. (SOB5)

In example 17, the students completed the task or engaged enthusiastically in the task, discussing, using a mobile phone to look up new words, and urging one another to work fast. This can be seen as an indicator of their *reactivity* in these tasks. However, their reason for engaging so enthusiastically was to win the competition and the rewards, or to avoid punishments, rather than to learn per se. This suggests that the type of communication exhibited in example 15 - 17 promoted *compliance*, rather than any level of autonomy.

Teacher A also used marks as a reward to motivate her students to engage in tasks and to arouse competitiveness among her students. Students usually engaged enthusiastically in the tasks. However, when there was no reward, the students did not appear motivated to engage.

In some cases, the students requested a mark or grade as a condition for their engagement in an activity, and when the teacher complied, they did the tasks enthusiastically.

Teacher A appeared aware that the chief factor that determined her students' engagement in an activity was marks and she also believed that in order to control the students' homework completion, she would need to use the 'stick and carrot' policy, which implied a mixture of strict punishment and rewards (POAI4). She reported that if she gave the students a selective task, only 20% of the students would complete it—those who were hard-working, had a right attitude toward learning and were aware of the usefulness of the task to their goals (POAI4).

Teacher C often mentioned punishment or checking in her lesson to control the students' homework completion. She reiterated the consequences of not completing and handling homework to her: suspension from class or reporting to the department of academic affairs. She used records such as bonus points to encourage the students to engage in assessment tasks. Students appeared to participate more enthusiastically when rewards were offered. This finding suggests that students' engagement in a task was conditioned by the teacher's rewards or punishment. The students supported this finding when they stated that "if the teacher awarded a good mark to volunteer students, we would volunteer to participate in a task. If not, we did not want to volunteer" (POCI3).

Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the findings from the observations in three English classes. It has reported teachers' assessment practices in terms of the levels of autonomy offered for students' involvement and decisions or the potential levels of autonomy that these

practices could promote. It has also described students' behaviours in these practices in terms of the levels of autonomy that they demonstrated.

The findings indicate that, in general, teachers allowed students limited autonomy in assessment practices. The majority of assessment tasks, assessment techniques and assessment feedback belonged to the *prescribed* category, indicating limited student involvement in these aspects. Assessment-related communication appeared to promote students' *compliance* and *reactivity* rather than their *proactivity*.

The findings also show that students appeared to demonstrate a low level of autonomy, and the levels of *autonomy demonstrated* appeared to correspond to the levels of *autonomy offered*. The majority of students demonstrated their *compliance* in *prescribed* assessment practices, and their *reactive* autonomy in *bounded* ones.

Observation data also recorded cases where students demonstrated a higher level of autonomy than that which was offered, and cases where students struggled with the level of autonomy offered to them.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

Chapter overview

This research enquiry was carried out to address the question, ‘What are the assessment-related factors that enable or constrain the demonstration of learner autonomy in learning English as a Foreign Language in the Vietnamese Higher Education context?’

The overarching aim of the thesis was achieved by addressing the following objectives:

- Explore English language teachers’ and students’ understandings of the concept of LA
- Examine English language teachers’ and students’ perspectives on assessment and the relationship between assessment and LA
- Investigate the current EFL assessment practices in the VHE context
- Investigate students’ demonstration of LA in learning English in the VHE context.

This chapter discusses the findings from the case study comprising three classes (including teachers and students) in light of the literature and theoretical framework, and reviews how each objective was addressed.

7.1. Teachers’ and students’ understandings of learner autonomy

7.1.1 Teachers’ understanding of learner autonomy

There were inconsistencies in each teacher’s understandings about LA, as demonstrated in the contradictions between each person’s interview statements and actions in the classroom in relation to assessment. For example, Teacher S’s statements indicate that he understood LA in a *proactive* sense, while his reported practices and methods to enhance LA in his class indicated implementation of LA in a *reactive* or even *compliant* sense. Similarly, Teacher C tended to discuss autonomy in a *reactive* sense, but her

understanding of the concept conflicted with the methods and activities that she reportedly used to promote LA – assigning the students many tasks and using assessment as a mechanism to force and control the students’ learning, indicating her implementation of LA in a *compliant* sense. These inconsistencies led each teacher to act ineffectively in the promotion of LA, as research has shown that teachers’ perceptions, beliefs and understandings of LA can have a great impact on their methods and practices, as well as the extent to which LA is fostered in language classrooms (Borg, 2006, 2011; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; T. N. Nguyen, 2014; Suraratdecha & Tayjasanant, 2018).

Data also indicated that the teachers’ understandings of the concept diverged from each other. For example, Teacher S’s interpretations appeared to cover a spectrum from *compliance* to *proactivity*, while Teacher C interpreted the concept in a *reactive* and *compliant* sense. Teacher A, on the other hand, seemed to consistently view LA in a *proactive* sense. She was also aware that the development of LA involved various factors relating to the learners, the teachers, the learning content presented to the students and the situated context. This finding are in line with those of previous studies (e.g., Marsh, Richards, & Smith, 2001; Hamad, 2018) which reported varying understanding about LA among their participants. This finding also highlights the complicated and multifaceted nature of LA, which has been widely accepted in the literature (Boud, 1988; Candy, 1991; Little, 1991; Benson, 1997; Nunan, 1997; Sinclair, 2000; Everhard, 2015a; Lamb, 2017). Benson (2011), for example, claims that “autonomy is a multidimensional capacity that will take different forms for different individuals, and even for the same individual in different contexts or at different times” (p. 37), implying that various interpretations and understandings of the concept are to be expected. The divergence in teachers’ understandings of LA suggests that it is very

likely that there would be no uniformity in teachers' practices to promote LA in the current context, which could reasonably influence the effectiveness of autonomy promotion.

During interviews, there was a convergence of the three teachers' perspectives on the role of teachers and students in the learning process. They agreed that teachers should only be the facilitators or mentors who provided students with guidance and support, while the students should be the main agents in their own learning. This finding appears to contradict a currently common concept about the teacher-student relationship in the Vietnamese education system, which has been consistently portrayed as heavily influenced by Confucianism (Woodside, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2005; Nguyen et al., 2005, 2006; To, 2010; Marginson, 2011; Q. X. Le, 2013; Q. T. N. Nguyen, 2016). As suggested in the literature, Confucianism leads to an unequal and hierarchical teacher-student relationship in education. In this relationship, teachers are often perceived as being authority holders, knowledge transmitters or experts who are expected to make all decisions about learning, while students are supposed to be obedient and compliant in class (Le, 2011; C. T. Nguyen, 2011; Q. X. Le, 2013; V. L. Nguyen, 2016). The above finding indicates there may be a movement in teachers' perceptions of learning from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness, which has been a focus of education reforms in Vietnam for over a decade (Vietnamese Government, 2005; Dang, 2006; L. H. N. Tran, Phan, & Tran, 2018). It is possible that the education reforms have started to cause some changes in teachers' perceptions of learning in the current context, and if so, it is likely that these changes in perceptions will lead to innovations in practices.

All three teachers believed that autonomous learners possessed certain similar qualities and abilities, such as the ability to reflect, quick adaptation, attentiveness, a positive attitude, love for the subject, and diligence. Additionally, they felt that

autonomous learners searched for information about subject matter, studied the textbook and completed all assigned tasks. Teacher S and Teacher A agreed that autonomous learners actively cooperated and interacted with their teacher and peers for their learning purposes. The three teachers' descriptions of autonomous learners resonate with the 'psychological', 'technical' and 'sociocultural' dimensions of LA (Oxford, 2003; Benson, 2007; Murase, 2015). The *psychological* dimension is concerned with characteristics of an individual, such as attitudes and behaviours that permit autonomy. The *technical* dimension relates to situational settings, learning strategies and techniques supporting LA (Benson, 1997; Murase, 2015). The *sociocultural* dimension deals with the interactions between teachers and students and between students and their peers, both of which support students in the process of becoming self-regulated in their learning (Oxford, 2003; Murase, 2015). It is noticeable that the three teachers did not mention 'choice' and 'freedom', which are recognised by many scholars and researchers as being the cornerstones of LA (Holec, 1981; Grow, 1991; Dam, 1995; Esch, 1996; Hughes, 2003; Patall, Cooper, & Wynn, 2010; Assor, 2012; Benson, 2013). The absence of these words in the teachers' perceptions of LA suggests that the teachers in the current context might not be aware of that dimension of LA. Consequently, it is possible that the students in the current context would not be offered much freedom vis-à-vis choices in their learning process. This could inhibit students from demonstrating their LA.

Findings relating to the teachers' perceptions of the role of LA showed that all three teachers believed that LA played a crucial role in language learning. They considered LA to be a solution to contextual constraints, including constraints relating to time, syllabus and class size. For example, Teacher S believed that LA was necessary because the students could not complete all the learning tasks in the class, resulting in

the need for self-regulated learning outside of the class. Teacher S's perspective illustrated his understanding of autonomous learning as the continuation of classroom learning outside of the class, without teachers. Teacher A and teacher C contended that the time in the class was only adequate for the teachers to provide the students with fundamental and basic knowledge, and the students would have to initiate learning outside the class if they wanted to be successful in their language learning. The three teachers' perceptions about the role of LA in language learning align with economic justifications for LA in the literature (Crabbe, 1993; Smith et al., 2018). Such justifications take the following form: it is reasonable to assume that formal education cannot accommodate all students' personal learning needs (Crabbe, 1993; Everhard, 2015a), and there exists a dissonance between what formal education can offer and learners' needs and wants. Formal language education is no exception. Language learning should not and cannot be restricted to learning in schools or classes, because no language institution or program can equip learners with all the language skills and knowledge necessary for their communication in the outside world. Therefore, much of the students' language learning has to happen outside of the class without assistance from teachers, so LA is indispensable in students' life-long learning (Everhard, 2015a). Additionally, teachers' perspectives on the role of LA appeared to reflect their understanding about LA in a technical sense. That is, they perceived it as a rescue strategy for teachers' problems. However, the teachers desired students to be autonomous, rather than providing a learning environment that guided students towards being able to learn autonomously at times, or to facilitate LA among students. This finding supports a previous study about teachers' perceptions of the role of LA in learning and their role in promoting LA, in which teachers showed positive views about

the role of LA in learning, but did not appear to recognise their role in promoting this kind of learning among their students (Lai, Yeung, & Hu, 2016).

In summary, analysis of the teachers' interpretations and understandings of LA reveals potential factors in their perceptions that might inhibit or facilitate the promotion of the concept in the current context. The major barriers include teachers' limited and inconsistent understanding of the concept, together with a lack of consideration for the role of 'choice' and 'freedom' in LA. The enablers include the teachers' appreciation for LA in language learning and their recognition of the students' active role in the learning process. These findings suggest that in order to promote LA, the first step could be helping teachers (as one stakeholder in the learning process) have a clear understanding of the concept, implying that higher education policy makers should introduce a consistent definition or description of LA (that they want teachers to promote in VHE). Additionally, teachers should support the students in taking their own active role in learning by, for example, designing tasks for autonomous learning, equipping students with learning strategies and methods, providing them with learning resources, and supporting their preferred learning style.

7.1.2 Students' interpretations and understandings of the concept

There were varying understandings about LA among students in the three classes. Students' interpretations reflected their understandings of LA in two senses: *reactive* and *proactive*. The majority of students across the three classes understood LA in a *proactive* sense in terms of their ability to be self-reliant and self-regulated and to display initiative in their learning. They perceived themselves as being primary agents in the learning process who needed to both initiate and carry out learning. Some other students understood LA in a *reactive* sense, conceptualising it as the ability to be self-regulated and display initiative in learning. However, these students tied their learning

to a common learning agenda determined for everyone taking part in the course. As discussed in the previous section, divergence in understandings of LA is to be expected due to the complicated and multifaceted nature of the concept. Nevertheless, the understandings, beliefs and attitudes students have about LA can have a significant impact on their autonomous learning behaviours (Cotterall, 1995; Altunay et al., 2009; Joshi, 2011; T. V. Nguyen, 2011). The students' varying understanding of LA suggests that they are likely to demonstrate various degrees of LA.

There was consensus among the students across all three classes that autonomous learners possess certain qualities such as diligence, perseverance, consistency and self-discipline. They were depicted as being able to demonstrate various skills such as planning and time management, and having clear learning goals, learning plans, learning schedules and learning methods. They were also seen as having intrinsic motivation in learning. The students' perceptions of an autonomous learner corresponded with literature about the characteristics of autonomous learners (Holec, 1981; Boud, 1988; Candy, 1991; Dickinson, 1993; Littlewood, 1996; Breen & Mann, 1997; Little, 2003b).

The findings show that the students in the three classes appeared to hold a positive view towards LA. They all believed that LA played an important role in language learning because of the specific nature of the language learning process. In the students' view, language was diverse, and there were so many things to learn in a language, especially vocabulary. Additionally, language learning was an ongoing process and took time, so it was not something that could be achieved overnight. Therefore, language learning required diligence and self-discipline. Additionally, when learning a language, it was necessary to do a lot of practice and to have authentic experiences that might not be available at school, so self-studying was crucial. The

students all believed that LA could help them be successful in their language learning. It seemed that from the students' perspective, an autonomous learner very much resembled a good language learner. That may be the reason why apart from being depicted as possessing a number of good personal qualities, an autonomous learner was also described a successful language learner. The students' perceptions are in line with literature about the relationship between LA and language achievement, which often reports a positive correlation between the two (e.g., Dafei, 2007; Nguyen, 2008; Pan & Chen, 2015; Faramarzi et al., 2016).

Students also thought that LA was necessary to compensate for the university's inadequate English syllabus. In their view, language learning included not only language systems (e.g., vocabulary and grammar), but also language skills (e.g., listening and speaking), all of which required a lot of practice and effort. However, at the university, they mainly learned grammar rules and structures, rather than how to communicate in the target language, and there were few opportunities for them to practise language skills. Therefore, they believed that learning English only at the university was not adequate. In order to be successful in learning a foreign language (English, in particular), students had to be self-directed and display initiative in their learning. These findings suggest that students were aware of the language learning process and the current contextual constraints on their language acquisition and the acts they needed to perform in order to overcome constraints and be successful in their language learning.

In short, analysis of students' interpretations and understandings of LA indicates that they had positive attitude towards the concept and were aware of its role in language learning, demonstrating that students in this study had potentials for LA. However, some students' understanding of LA in a *reactive* sense might be barriers to

the effectiveness of their attempts to become more autonomous. An implication of this finding is that helping students understand LA adequately is a significant step in promoting them to demonstrate LA.

7. 2. Teachers' and students' perspectives on assessment

7.2.1 Teachers' perspectives

There was little convergence in the three teachers' perspectives on the role of assessment in learning. Teacher A and Teacher S focused on the formative roles of assessment in learning. They agreed that assessment existed for serving the purpose of learning. That is, assessment should provide the students with information about their learning so that they know where they are, what they have achieved, their strengths and weaknesses, where they need to go, and what they need to do in order to reach their destination. However, the impact of assessment on learning in Teacher S's perception appeared to be narrower than that in Teacher A's view. Teacher S tied the students' learning to classroom learning that aimed to meet the course requirements, while Teacher A related assessment to the students' learning both inside and outside the classroom. Teacher C's perception suggests that she paid more attention to the summative purposes of assessment than to formative ones. She believed that there was a bilateral relationship between assessment and learning; assessment could be thought of as the learning objective, and therefore learning should serve the purpose of assessment. Simultaneously, assessment should serve the purpose of learning.

With regards to current assessment regimes, all three teachers shared the view that the existing system focused more on summative and certification purposes rather than supporting students' learning. Consequently, learning served the purpose of assessment. All three teachers blamed the administration of the A2 test and the provision of assessment guidelines and formats for having a negative impact on the teaching and learning of English at the university. In their view, these prompted test-

oriented teaching and learning, which impeded LA. Teacher A added that the pressure from the university of achieving a pass rate forced her to opt for test-oriented teaching at the expense of LA. Additionally, all three teachers questioned the validity and reliability of the A2 test in the current context. They thought that the use of a test bank of only 10 tests for the A2 test could not determine students' language competency, as students might still be able to achieve a good result by memorising the answer keys.

There are several insights from the findings relating to teachers' views on current assessment regimes. First, the assessment system had negative washback on the teaching and learning of English at the university, which is considered a typical impact of high-stakes assessment on teaching and learning in the literature (Bailey, 1996; Spratt, 2005; Taylor, 2005; Cheng & Curtis, 2012). This system inhibited teachers from implementing assessment practices that could promote LA among their students, and fostered rote and surface learning among students (Little, 2003a). In short, the negative washback of current assessment regimes is inhibitive to the enhancement of LA. This supports previous claims about the negative impact of a summative assessment system on LA (e.g., Boud, 1988; Little, 2003a; Benson, 2015; Everhard, 2015a). Second, in the current system, the teachers' practices might not always be congruent with the values they perceived they should foster, as in the case of Teacher A. She held a positive attitude towards LA, believing that it facilitated students' learning of English, and that it was feasible to promote LA among her students. However, in her practice, the existing system required her to sacrifice the goal of promoting LA in her class and opt for test-oriented teaching instead. This finding aligns with James and Pedder's claim that teachers have to confront the contradiction between their values and their practices relating to assessment and autonomy promotion (James & Pedder, 2006).

The findings also indicated that the students' involvement in both assessment policies and practices in the current context were very limited. Teacher S did not think that the students should be involved in the determination of assessment policies (e.g., assessment format and criteria). Teacher A believed that students should be allowed to participate in assessment in relation to both policies and practices, and she reported having involved her students in the determination of assessment criteria, rules and regulations (e.g., homework, format). However, observational data indicated that she sketched out all the rules and regulations relating to assessment beforehand, and then asked her students if they had any opinions on these. The students kept silent when asked their opinion about the teacher's proposed assessment framework, rules and regulations, so engagement in this aspect was limited. Teacher C also indicated her willingness to involve the students in decisions relating to assessment policies, but had never done that in practice, because her students seemed passive and reliant in her observation.

All three teachers appeared to offer a *prescribed* scope for the students' participation in actual assessment practices. Their self/peer-assessment techniques were limited to the students marking their own or their colleagues' work using the answer keys provided by the teachers. Therefore, the students' involvement in assessment practices was restricted to following the teachers' prescribed instructions. In fact, the self/peer-assessment practices that the teachers utilised only served the "technical knowledge interest" (Boud & Brew, 1995, p. 133). They did not contribute significantly to the development of LA, because the control of assessment rested in the hands of the teachers (Boud & Brew, 1995; Brew, 1999).

As suggested in the literature, in order for the students to develop their autonomy in learning, it is necessary that they be empowered and involved in the

assessment process (Boud, 1988, 1995; Williams & Burden, 1997; Leach, Neutze, & Zepke, 2001; Falchikov, 2005; Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Brookhart, 2011). They should be able to negotiate assessment criteria and learning contracts with their teachers and able to carry out the assessment of their own or their colleagues' work (Boud, 1988; Berry, 2009; Little, 2010; Little & Erickson, 2015; Panadero et al., 2017). Findings relating to teachers' views on the role of students in assessment indicated that the teachers in the current context were still the main agents who controlled the assessment process. The students appeared to be marginalised. This marginalisation may have hindered both the demonstration and the development of LA among the students.

In terms of assessment feedback, all three teachers thought that feedback could inform and raise the students' awareness of their learning, so that they could plan future actions to improve their learning and make progress. Both Teacher A and Teacher C agreed that the effectiveness of feedback depended on the students' responses to it, which is consistent with previous perspectives on feedback (Sadler, 1989; Hattie, 2011; Boud & Molloy, 2013; Carless & Boud, 2018). Teacher A stated that feedback was more helpful for those students who paid attention to the teacher's comments and feedback than for those who only focused on grades and marks, and she stated that the former group often included active and autonomous students. The findings also indicate that the teachers' choice of feedback was determined by various factors such as the students' level of language competence, time and cultural factors. Teacher S reported that he mainly focused on corrective feedback because his students' English level was low, so he believed that identifying and correcting grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation mistakes was critical for his students. Teacher C believed that feedback should not only include information about the students' performance or work, but also information about the students' learning process. She believed that the latter could

contribute to the students' positive attitude and feelings towards learning. She reported that due to time constraints, she could only fulfil the first purpose of feedback. Teacher A thought that teachers should be sensitive to cultural factors when giving feedback. She assumed that Vietnamese culture was not open to feedback in public, especially negative feedback and criticism. Therefore, in her practice, she often avoided giving these types of feedback to her students in public and provided direct and detailed feedback on private individual work.

All three teachers believed that LA related to assessment. Both Teacher S and Teacher A stated that assessment feedback could help to promote LA. Teacher S believed he was promoting students' demonstration of LA by providing iterated feedback and delayed responses to students' enquiries (e.g., not immediately showing them how to pronounce a word). Teacher A thought that her feedback could help the students position themselves in their learning journey. Teacher A and Teacher C contended that assessment could be utilised as a mechanism to make the students learn. For example, they could assign the students many tasks to complete at home, check the students' homework completion frequently and use rewards or punishment to control the students' learning. In their view, these activities could move the students towards autonomy, since assessment would force students to engage in regular learning. This was in line with a common view that teachers in New Zealand and Vietnam shared about assessment and autonomy (Wass et al., 2015; Vu & Shah, 2016). Wass et al. also noted that the practices of awarding a grade, frequent assessment and punishment have a negative impact on the development of LA. The teachers' views about the relationship between assessment and LA illustrates their limited understanding of this aspect.

In summary, findings relating to the teachers' perspectives on assessment reveal the factors that influence the demonstration and development of LA in the current

context. The key factors are: (1) the washback of the current assessment system on teaching and learning; (2) the teachers' limited understanding about the role of assessment in LA promotion and development; (3) the failure of teachers' assessment practices to allow scope for students' demonstration of LA; (4) cultural factors that made students passive, compliant and closed to feedback and prevented them from displaying initiative in assessment. Some implications can be drawn from these findings. For example, to encourage teachers to promote LA, they should have more autonomy in their teaching, not being restricted in implementing learning activities and assessment methods. Also, teachers should have opportunities to participate in professional development programs to develop their assessment literacy and improve assessment practices.

7.2.2. Students' perspectives

With regards to the students' perspectives on the role of assessment in their learning, the most prominent similarity across the three classes was that the students felt assessment was external to them, and they were not in control of the process. Instead, they were receivers of, or respondents to, assessment.

The majority of students in all classes perceived assessment as a source of information about their learning, generated by their teachers' assessment practices. This source of information could inform them of their strengths and weaknesses, indicate where they were in their learning, and signpost their future learning. Their perceptions suggest that they viewed assessment as formative assessment (Sadler, 1989; Black, 1998; Black & Wiliam, 2009) which has potential for the development of autonomy (Assessment Reform Group, 2002; Black & Wiliam, 2009). Students in Teacher A and Teacher C's class agreed that assessment information not only benefited the students but was also crucial for informing teachers of the quality and relevance of teaching

methods to students and guiding future teaching. These views conform to previous views about the formative role of assessment in teachers' teaching (Sadler, 1989; Black, 1998; Black & Wiliam, 2004; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005; Black & Wiliam, 2010; Hattie, 2011; Gao, Liu, & McKinney, 2019). Findings about the students' perceptions of the role of assessment in their learning illustrate that they were aware of the formative role of assessment in their learning. However, as suggested in the literature, if students are still reliant on teachers for information about their learning, they cannot become fully autonomous (Boud, 1988, 1995). In other words, the students' perceptions of assessment as an external force in their learning could be a barrier to their development of full autonomy.

Students in all three classes also perceived assessment as being a source of motivation for their learning. Students in Teacher C's class believed that the teacher's positive comments and feedback on their performance could rouse positive feelings and motivate them to take on more learning. This is supported by Hancock (2002)'s finding that students who are exposed to well-administered verbal praise spend more time doing homework and exhibit significantly higher learning motivation. The majority of students in Teacher C and Teacher A's class perceived assessment as a motive for their engagement in a task. They reported that competitiveness and rewards in an assessment task motivated them to participate. Students in Teacher S and Teacher A's class also reported that assessment forced them to commit to their learning if they wanted to achieve a good learning result. The above finding indicates that for the students, assessment was an external force that controlled their learning. Students relying on this extrinsic motivation for their actions are considered by deCharms (1968) "pawns" whose behaviours are determined by external forces beyond their control (cited in Stefanou et al., 2004, p. 98). They might carry out tasks, spend time learning or engage

in a task not for the sake of learning per se, but for the promise of reward or an avoidance of punishment (Ryan, Mims, & Koestner, 1983; Dickinson, 1995; Assor, 2012). The aforementioned points of view indicate that the students' perceptions of assessment reflect their *compliance* with assessment rather than their autonomy in learning.

Only one student mentioned self-assessment when talking about the role of assessment in learning. He believed that self-assessment helped him determine his current position in learning so that he could plan and initiate learning to reach his goals. It has been well-established in the literature that self-assessment plays a crucial role in the development of LA (Boud, 1995; Assessment Reform Group, 2002; Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & William, 2003; Little, 2003a; Berry, 2009; Everhard, 2015b; Little & Erickson, 2015; Panadero et al., 2017). Boud, for example, states that "if learners were to take responsibility for their own learning, then part of this process was, inevitably, their involvement in making assessments of their own learning goals, the activities in which they were to engage and the ways in which they would judge the outcomes" (Boud, 1995, p. 5). The finding suggests that this student was aware of his central role in the assessment process, and that he viewed assessment as an integral embedded part of student learning. In other words, this student appeared to be ready to demonstrate a high level of autonomy.

There was convergence in the students' perspectives on the existing assessment system across the three classes. All students believed that the system required them to demonstrate a greater level of LA. They all reported that the system required them to choose the subjects they wanted to learn in a semester, to choose lecturers they wanted to work with and to register their learning schedule with the university. Additionally, students reported that self-study was officially a requirement in the credit-based system,

so they had to display initiative in their learning if they wanted to achieve good results. Students also said that the combination of ongoing assessment and end-of-term assessment made them more autonomous in their learning. They reported that the assessment framework was made public to them and all their effort in learning (e.g., participation, homework completion and lesson preparation) was counted in the final grade, encouraging them to invest time and effort in order to achieve their learning objective. Benson, in a series of publications, argues that LA relates to the students' capacity to take control of three aspects of learning: learning management, cognitive processes and learning content (Benson, 2001, 2010, 2011, 2013). The students' views about the current assessment system suggested that the system encouraged the students to take control of their learning management and probably their cognitive processes, but not the learning content. As such, it hence might have enhanced *reactive* autonomy among the students (Benson, 2011) because their learning direction was still bounded by the learning content, which was determined by others.

The majority of the students believed that they could help their teacher with assessment. Some students in Teacher S and Teacher C's classes believed that they could help the teacher with the marking of their own or others' work against the provided answer keys, suggesting that these students preferred prescribed instructions in assessment, and hence might have been more likely to demonstrate compliance in this respect. Some students in Teacher S and Teacher C's classes reported that they could help their teacher by giving comments and feedback to their colleagues (e.g., identifying mistakes), which indicated that they were capable of engaging in assessment within a bounded scope. It was likely that these students would demonstrate *reactive autonomy* in giving feedback.

The majority of the students showed their lack of confidence in carrying out self/peer-assessment, even though they indicated their willingness to take part in these activities. They reported that they were not confident about their language competence. This finding supports the finding from a literature review about assessment by Asadinik and Suzani (2015), where students were not in favour of self-assessment, nor were they confident in doing this kind of task. Some students in Teacher C and Teacher A's classes said that they could self-assess their work and peer-assess their colleagues' work, but that assessment tasks should be limited to simple grammar or vocabulary tasks, or to marking with provided answer keys. As mentioned in section 7.2.1, self-marking or peer-marking do not contribute much to the promotion of LA. Therefore, these students' views suggest they were unlikely to support a high level of autonomy in learning.

Only two students in Teacher S's class stated that they were willing and able to carry out self/peer-assessment. They reported that they normally self-assessed their learning progress to see if they were on the right track, reflecting on their learning methods. These two students' reports indicate that they might have demonstrated a higher level of autonomy than their peers.

The majority of the students perceived mistake identification and correction as the most helpful kind of feedback, which suggested that the students appeared comfortable working within a *prescribed* scope in the teachers' instructions. Data from this study also showed that there was a mismatch between the teachers' *offered* scope for involvement in feedback and the students' *expected* scope. The majority of the students in Teacher C and Teacher S's classes wanted their teachers to allow them more autonomy in assessment feedback. They reported that teachers should not provide corrections for students immediately but allow them time to think and find the solution

by themselves. This finding indicates that students did not want to be passive receivers of teachers' instructions. Rather, they wanted to actively participate in the learning process. This also suggests that the teachers' current feedback practices were a barrier to students' demonstration of autonomy, and if teachers wanted to encourage students to demonstrate LA in learning, they should allow space for students' involvement in learning tasks in general and assessment tasks in particular.

Students in all the three classes contended that their teacher's assessment practices had an impact on LA. However, their explanations illustrate their diverse understanding about both assessment and LA.

Some students believed that the teacher's assessment could promote LA because autonomy in their view meant taking some action or completing learning activities (e.g., homework and revision), and the teacher's assessment could encourage this kind of learning to take place. For example, three students in Teacher A's class reported that they would work harder if their teacher assessed them, and they would try harder if she awarded them a grade; otherwise, they would not try their best and would become lazy and inattentive. This perspective is in line with behaviourists' views of learning, which recognise the stimuli-responsive mechanism underlying human actions (McLeod, 2007). In this sense, assessment conditioned students' behaviours, or to put in a metaphorical sense, students were like dolls, and assessment was like the dolls' *key wind* - once wound up, the doll would start to dance.

Other students saw assessment as a parameter or a signpost for their learning, and autonomy as the ability to take responsibility or initiative in learning using these parameters or signposts. In their view, assessment set the boundaries, directions, and overall goal for their learning path. Once these aspects were set, the students would

actively take responsibility for their learning, by making plans, managing their time and searching for materials so that they could learn effectively and achieve the best results.

Students also saw assessment as a source of information for their learning and believed that feedback is the aspect in assessment that has the most impact on LA. They thought that feedback information could help them reflect on their learning (i.e., their learning needs and wants, their learning resources, their strengths and weaknesses) in order to plan and take action. Assessment, in this case, can be seen as the mirror that helps students to reflect on their learning process and the guideline for them in their learning.

Findings relating to the students' perceptions of the relationship between assessment and LA again illustrate that the students had limited understanding about both LA and assessment, and this limitation was a barrier to the demonstration of LA.

In summary, findings relating to the students' perspectives on assessment indicate factors that contribute to the demonstration of LA in the current. They include: (1) students' unreadiness for carrying out assessment by themselves; (2) their perception of LA as being external to them; (3) their preference for *prescribed* assessment; and (4) their limited understanding about the role of assessment in LA promotion and development. One of the pedagogical implications from these findings is that in order to promote LA, teachers need to train students to carry out self/peer-assessment, involve them in assessment practices and scaffold them in doing self/peer-assessment.

7.3. Characterisation of assessment practices in Vietnamese higher education

7.3.1. Assessment tasks

The observation data from this study indicate that the three teachers did not allow much scope for students to demonstrate their autonomy in assessment tasks. The three teachers used a majority of *prescribed* tasks in their assessments, both inside and

outside of the class. *Bounded* tasks that allowed the students some choice and freedom to make decisions regarding different aspects of a task were rare. There were no *open* tasks for learning either inside or outside the class, meaning that teachers did not formally encourage students to initiate learning tasks and take control of learning content.

Researchers have agreed that in order to promote LA, it is necessary to, first and foremost, create opportunities and conditions and allow space for students to develop and demonstrate their autonomy in learning (Boud, 1988; Macaro, 1997; Hughes, 2003; Little, 2004a; Reinders, 2010; Benson, 2013; Tatzl, 2016). In other words, the prerequisite for LA to flourish is arranging a learning environment in which students have opportunities to make choices and decisions about their learning, and they are allowed space to participate in different aspects in the learning process. Empirical studies (Perry, VandeKamp, Mercer, & Nordby, 2002; Patall et al., 2010) have also compared and contrasted different learning environments and the impact of these environments on LA. These studies found that students demonstrated a higher level of autonomy in an autonomy-supportive environment (i.e., one which allowed students choices and opportunities for involvement). This finding suggests that students' autonomy might be constrained by the low level of *autonomy offered* to them by teachers.

7.3.2. Assessment techniques

The three teachers used four different assessment techniques in their classes: questioning, observation, checking of individual performance/role play and self/peer-assessment. However, the majority of these assessment techniques were *prescribed* in scope, with little room for students' involvement in assessment itself and limited information that could guide the students in their future learning.

Questioning was the most popular assessment technique in use across the three classes. However, the majority of questions that the teachers used in their classes were closed convergent questions that were either restricted to one correct answer or the answers were known or predefined by the teacher. These questions mainly served to check whether the students knew, understood or could propose a predefined solution. The students' involvement in this questioning was limited to answering the teachers' questions, without any further elaborations or explanations. This questioning technique is deemed to lead to a common pattern of IRE (Initiate – Response – Evaluation) in classroom discourse, producing surface learning (Roth, 1996) which has limited value in promoting LA (Van Lier, 1996).

All three teachers used observation as an assessment technique in their class. Observation was basically a teacher-controlled assessment technique that served to collect data about students' learning, which was in turn used to adjust teachers' teaching or provide contingent assistance to students while they were doing a task. The prime purpose of teachers' observation in the three classes was to make sure that learning activity happened as planned, indicating the teachers' expectation of students' compliance with their instructions. Therefore, the observation technique did not appear to support LA.

Checking of individual performance/ role play was a common assessment technique that the three teachers used in their classes. Similar to observation technique, this technique is mostly teacher-controlled because the teachers normally decided on what, when and who to check. Sometimes, the teachers invited students' voluntary engagement, but in case students did not volunteer, they would be forced to engage regardless. Additionally, the students' answers were always assessed against a

predefined standard or answer keys, so students almost had no space to demonstrate their autonomy in this assessment.

The three teachers did create opportunities for their students to carry out self/peer-assessment practices in their classes. However, the self/peer-assessment practices that teachers used were limited to peer-marking based on provided answer keys. As such, students' involvement in these practices was restricted to following the teachers' instructions. Students acted as 'marking machines' for the teachers, since they could not control any aspect of assessment except for the task of marking. Although self/peer-assessment is considered part of an indispensable autonomous learning toolkit (Boud, 1995; Gardner, 2000; Tholin, 2008; Berry, 2009; Panadero et al., 2017), self/peer-assessment practices used by teachers in this case only served "technical knowledge interest" (Boud & Brew, 1995, p. 134). Therefore, these practices did not contribute to the demonstration of LA (Boud & Brew, 1995; Brew, 1999).

7.3.3. Assessment feedback

The findings indicated that all three teachers appeared to focus on task-level corrective and evaluative feedback in their current practices. Observation data showed that the most common type of feedback in the three teachers' classes was teachers' confirming or disconfirming of students' answers, mistake identification and correction. The students' involvement in feedback was minimal. Among the three teachers, only Teacher S involved his students in mistake identification and correction. Students in the other two classes were only receivers of feedback information.

Gipps (2002) argues that feedback can be analysed in terms of the power relationship between teacher and student, which implies levels of empowerment in different types of feedback. Tunstall and Gipps (1996), for example, suggest a typology of feedback which consists of evaluative feedback and descriptive feedback. Evaluative

feedback involves judgemental information such as confirming/disconfirming of students' answers, and descriptive feedback involves students' actual competence and achievement. Descriptive feedback is further categorised into "specifying attainment and achievement" and "constructing achievement and the way forward" (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996, p. 392). The typology of feedback: (1) Evaluation, (2) Specification, (3) Construction indicates a decrease in teacher power and control in the this sequence of feedback (Gipps, 2002), suggesting an increase in the support of student self-regulated learning from low to high respectively. In the present study, teachers' feedback was limited to evaluating feedback, which had limited value in promoting autonomous learning (Gipps, 1999; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hattie, 2011).

Researchers have emphasised the importance of feedback to students' self-regulated learning (e.g., Butler & Winne, 1995; Tunstall & Gipps, 1996; Taras, 2002; Black et al., 2004; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hattie, 2011). Butler and Winnie (1995) suggest that feedback should be viewed as being embedded in self-regulated learning because they found that students used their knowledge, beliefs and emotions to internalised external feedback they received. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006, p. 203) recognise the significant role of feedback in self-regulated learning and propose a seven-rule feedback framework to promote self-regulated learning: (1) clarify what a good performance is, (2) facilitate self-assessment, (3) deliver high quality feedback information, (4) encourage teacher-student peer dialogue, (5) encourage positive motivation and self-esteem, (6) provide opportunities to close the gap, and (7) use feedback to improve teaching. Hattie and Timperley (2007) claim that apart from helping students understand their goals and have a clear picture of what their successful goals should look like, feedback should help students reflect on past and current learning and show them the way forward. The element of feedback

which concerns the ‘way forward’ (also referred to as ‘feedforward’ information) is deemed to play a significant role in students’ self-regulated learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hattie, 2011; Boud & Molloy, 2013). Compared to the conditions for feedback to enhance autonomous learning, feedback utilised in the current context appeared to be inadequate because the teachers were still in control of giving feedback to the students, and the element of feedforward was missing from teachers’ feedback.

7.3.4. Assessment-related communication

The findings indicated that the most prominent theme in teachers’ assessment communication related to different measures for controlling students’ learning. For example, they frequently informed the students of the negative consequences associated with failing to conform to teacher instructions - a bad mark, a minus point in their grade, a record of absence, or missing a turn in a competition. Teachers also informed students of the rewards (e.g., attaining a good mark or a plus point in their grade) they would earn if they complied with teacher instructions. The data indicated that when teachers used punishment or rewards with students, students appeared to comply with teachers’ instructions. For example, students in Teacher S’s class did not submit their speaking homework in the first two lessons, so he informed his students in lesson 4 that he would apply a punishment of 10,000VND⁶ and a record of absence for those who did not submit their homework. From lesson 5 onward, only two to four students failed to submit their speaking assignments, and they often had a legitimate justification for this. Observation data in teacher C’s class indicated that students often volunteered to engage in a task or to give answers or solutions for problems whenever the teacher informed the students that they would receive a plus point in their course grade. Post-observation interviews with students in Teacher C’s class supported this finding. They stated that if

⁶ 1 AUD is equivalent to around 17,000 VND

the teacher awarded a good mark to volunteer students, they would volunteer to participate in a task. If not, they did not volunteer (POCSI3). Cognitive evaluation theory (Ryan, 1982; Ryan et al., 1983; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Reeve, 2012) explains why and how external events such as rewards, punishment and prizes influence students' perceived autonomy. According to this theory, external events such as rewards or punishment have two aspects: information and controlling. The information aspect communicates competence feedback, while the controlling aspect implies an expectation of compliance. The impact of external events depends on teachers' purposes in using these events. In the above cases, the teachers used punishment and rewards as the condition for students' engagement in a task or as a method to control students' learning behaviours outside of the class. As such, their use of these external events mostly promoted learner *compliance*.

Teachers sometimes used grade rewards for the students' achievement or performance in the task. For example, they promised to award good grades or marks to pairs or groups that had the largest number of correct answers or to a person who completed the task first with the highest score. Unlike the above cases (where rewards were used as an exchange for the students' *compliance*) in these cases, grade rewards were used to channel the students' attempts and efforts and communicate to the students about their performance or achievement, resulting in student *reactivity*. The students often engaged enthusiastically in tasks with embedded rewards and attempted different strategies in order to complete these tasks as fast and effectively as possible. Post-observation interviews with students in Teacher S and Teacher A's classes also supported this finding. They all cited marks or grades as contributing factors to their active and enthusiastic engagement in a task. For example, students in Teacher S's class

reported “if there were no marking or grading, we would not have participated that enthusiastically” (POSSI4).

The findings also showed that the three teachers often related a task they assigned to tests and exams, which seemed to serve the purpose of promoting students’ engagement in a task. Teachers’ techniques appeared to influence the students’ learning behaviours. Teacher A’s class reported that they would search for the information and vocabulary to prepare for speaking topics that she told them she would use for the midterm test, and they would practise these topics in advance (POASI3). This finding resonates with Littlewood (1999)’s description of *reactive* autonomy, which refers to students’ displaying initiatives in their learning within a learning direction set for them. There is little doubt that tests and exams are significant to students, as students’ learning achievement in formal education is normally accredited in this way. Therefore, the teachers’ technique of linking a task to exams and tests could be seen as creating a learning direction for the students and making the task relevant to the students in that direction. The teachers’ technique, at its best, might have encouraged students to display initiative in completing the task in order to achieve good test results. They might, for example, have actively engaged in the task, invested time and effort, and cooperated with their peers in order to complete the task more effectively.

Teachers’ assessment communication sometimes contained information that could promote, or at least nurture, learners’ *proactivity*. This information related to the teachers creating a non-threatening environment for students’ engagement, transferring learning responsibility to the students, equipping the students with knowledge for independent learning, and prompting students to internalise the value of a task to their personal learning goals. Although students’ overt responses to the teachers’ communication were not always evident, observation data recorded some indicators of

students' proactivity as a result of the teachers' assessment communication. For example, Teacher A and Teacher C often showed tolerance for their students' mistakes, emphasising that mistakes were part of the learning process, in order to encourage student engagement or initiatives. Students in Teacher A's class displayed their initiative by engaging in the tasks. They volunteered to perform a task or provide answers or solutions to teachers' questions when they knew that their mistakes did not count.

The findings relating to teachers' assessment communication indicated that the focus of the teachers' practices was not on encouraging students to demonstrate LA, but on fostering a surface learning approach among the students to meet the course requirements. In terms of autonomy promotion, teachers' assessment communication could foster students' *compliance*, or at best, *reactive* autonomy among the students.

7.4. Students' demonstration of learner autonomy

7.4.1. Demonstration of autonomy in the classroom

Students' uptake of autonomy mainly corresponded to the level of *autonomy offered* to them. That is, the majority of the students in the three classes demonstrated their *compliance* with their teachers' *prescribed* tasks or instructions, and demonstrated their *reactivity* to the *bounded* ones. The majority of the teachers' tasks and instructions belonged to the *prescribed* category; accordingly, the majority of students' responses to these tasks and instructions were *compliant*.

In some cases, the students demonstrated *reactivity* within the *prescribed* scope offered. The students appeared to initiate their own actions, implement their strategies and made their own choices in order to complete tasks effectively or respond to the teachers' instructions. For example, they actively made use of available resources such as their mobile phone and the Internet to look up new vocabulary or translate ideas from Vietnamese into English. They autonomously cooperated with their colleagues or

sought help from their teacher or other students, and opted to work individually instead of working in pairs as instructed.

Students appeared to demonstrate their *reactive* autonomy when the teachers' *prescribed* instructions or tasks became an obstacle to their task completion. For example, in lesson 5, Teacher S asked the students to do a task in which they listened to a girl talking about her favourite subject and filled in the blanks with provided words. The majority of the students in the class listened to the recording and did the task as prescribed except for Huy and Tu (pseudonyms). Huy was struggling and actually could not complete the task at his first listening because the speed of recording was faster than his writing speed. Tu, sitting next to him, advised him to implement the strategy that he was using – number the provided words and write the number in the blanks instead of words. Huy took Tu's advice on the second listening and was able to complete the task (SOB5). It is clear from the above example that the students' lack of strict *compliance* with the teacher's instructions enabled them to complete the task more easily and effectively.

Another example where the teachers' *prescribed* scope acted as an obstacle to students' completion of a task was in Teacher C's class. She assigned students to prepare a spoken weather forecast for different regions in Vietnam, organised the students into groups and provided them with information about the forecast in Vietnamese. Students in Teacher C's class engaged well in the tasks. They used mobile phones to look up new words and used Google Translate to translate the provided information from Vietnamese into English. They also enthusiastically discussed with colleagues and sought help from the teacher and the observer for new words and expressions in English. However, they could not complete the task successfully. One point that the researcher recognised in the above task was that if the teacher had not

provided the Vietnamese version of the weather forecast, it would have been easier for the students to handle the task. It seemed to the researcher that the narrow scope of the task made it more challenging for the students to complete than if it had been more *bounded* and less *prescribed*. When the researcher interviewed the students about this task after the observation, they reported that the Vietnamese version of the weather forecast made it very difficult for them because it made the task inflexible in terms of language use. Additionally, there were many uncommon words in the teacher's writing, which were hard for them to translate into English. In this case, the teachers' *prescribed* instructions became an obstacle for the students' completion of the task and the students' *reactivity* could not help them be successful in it.

The above finding conforms to Vermunt and Verloop (1999) finding that complex interplays exist between teachers' external regulation of learning processes and students' self-regulation. Vermunt and Verloop propose that congruence takes place when teachers' strategies and learners' strategies are compatible, and friction occurs when this is not the case. Friction can be constructive or destructive, depending on whether the friction challenges students to increase their learning and cognitive strategies or decreases students' learning and thinking skills. Their finding provides insightful implications for understanding the relationship between *autonomy offered* and *autonomy demonstrated* in this study. As with the relationship between teachers' regulation and learners' self-regulation, *autonomy offered* and *autonomy demonstrated* can have complex interplays, either of congruence or friction. If teachers' *autonomy offered* is compatible with students' *autonomy demonstrated*, congruence occurs, resulting in a positive learning outcome. If teachers' *autonomy offered* is not compatible with learners' *autonomy demonstrated*, friction occurs. The results depend on whether *autonomy offered* is a barrier to students' learning or a challenge for them. In Teacher S

and Teacher C's classes, friction occurred. In teacher S's class, the friction was constructive, as it challenged the students to think and do differently to what was instructed. In Teacher C's class, friction was destructive, as her *prescribed* instructions prevented her students from exercising flexible and creative thinking. An important implication of this finding is that while it is necessary to allow students space to demonstrate their LA, it is essential that teachers be sensitive to students' ability to demonstrate LA and provide them with adequate scaffolding.

Another prominent cause of students' reactivity in *prescribed* tasks and instructions was the grade rewards embedded in these tasks and instructions. Students engaged enthusiastically, initiating and using various strategies in tasks with grade reward involvement. As discussed in section 7.3.4, the influence of grade rewards on LA depends on whether such rewards are used in exchange for students' compliance or as feedback for students' competence (Ryan, 1982; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Reeve, 2012). In fact, the use of grade rewards made students *reactive* to the tasks and instructions but *compliant* with the grade rewards. Therefore, it could be argued that this technique produces 'surface' *reactive* autonomy rather than 'deep' *reactive* autonomy. It is likely that these instances of 'surface' *reactive* autonomy will not develop into fully *reactive* autonomy, as they derive from external events. This finding appears to be in line with Breen and Mann (1997)'s argument that students can sometimes wear a 'mask of autonomy' for some specific purpose without being necessarily autonomous. Benson (2001) also point out that students can sometimes be forced by circumstance to perform actions involving self-management. However, this does not mean that they can demonstrate these actions in a systematic and effective manner, or, in other words, that they are autonomous.

7.4.2. Discrepancy between demonstration of LA in the classroom and outside of classroom context

The findings also illustrated that there was a discrepancy between the students' demonstration of LA in formal education (classroom-based learning) and informal education (learning outside of the class). There was hardly any evidence of *proactive* autonomy to be recorded in formal education. However, the data showed that many students demonstrated their *proactivity* outside of the class where they initiated their learning agendas, and displayed initiative in carrying out their learning agendas to reach their goals. This suggests that teachers allowing a low level of autonomy inside of the class could be for setting up students with foundations so that they can demonstrate a higher level of autonomy outside of the class, or that LA might be suppressed in formal education. Both cases indicate that LA is more about the relationship between the students and the surrounding environment than an attribute of learners. This finding is in line with the constructivist views on LA (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Paiva & Braga, 2008; Van Lier, 2008; Tatzl, 2016) and the results of previous studies (e.g., Q. L. Trinh, 2005; Willison et al., 2017). The finding has implications for teachers wanting to promote LA. Because LA is more about the emergent product of the interactions between learners and different contextual factors (e.g., teachers, tasks), the arrangement of the learning environment is crucial in facilitating autonomy.

7.4.3. Personal relevance—the key to the demonstration of LA

The data indicated that the drive for students' demonstration of autonomy was their need to see the relevance of English learning to their personal needs and purposes. This 'personal relevance' (Benson, 2013; Huang & Benson, 2013) influences students in establishing and carrying out learning agendas, and is considered a "defining characteristic of an autonomous learner" (Huang & Benson, 2013, p. 11). Nunan (1996) also claims that

LA is not an absolute concept. There are degrees of autonomy, and the extent to which it is desirable and feasible for learners to embrace autonomy will depend on a range of factors to do with the personality of the learner, their goals in undertaking the study of the other language, the philosophy of the institution (if any) providing the instruction, and the cultural context within which the learning takes place (p.13).

Data from this study showed that students' purposes for learning English were divergent and their demonstration of LA also appeared divergent. For example, six student participants had *private* goals for learning English on top of the *public* goals set for anyone taking the course— achieving good grades and completing the A2 English certificate for graduation. These six students all had their own *private* agendas for learning English outside of the class and demonstrated proactivity in their learning. For example, they built up their own learning paths and selected learning strategies and materials apt for their needs, styles and preferences. They constantly reflected on the effectiveness of their choice and monitored their learning progress by utilising tools for self-assessment. Eight students did not have any private goals; their goals were the same as the public goals of the course. These students did not initiate private agendas for learning English, but took surface or strategic learning approaches to meet the course requirements. For example, they displayed their initiative in doing homework, attending an A2-preparation class organised by the English club at the university, organised learning groups to discuss difficult learning issues in the class and prepared for speaking topics designated for a speaking test. This finding suggests that LA may be primarily a matter of individual students, as their motives for learning can vary. This finding carries multiple pedagogical implications. For example, teachers should understand students' motives for learning English so as to nurture and support various levels of LA

associated with students' learning motives because different kinds of learning motives might lead to different levels of *autonomy demonstrated*. Additionally, because 'personal relevance' is the key to the demonstration of LA, it is crucial to raise students' awareness of the role of English in their current and future education and career prospects so as to make the learning of English relevant to each student.

Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed major findings relating to teachers' and students' understandings about LA, their perspectives about assessment and the relationship between assessment and LA, teachers' assessment practices, and the students' demonstration of LA.

The findings relating to teachers' and students' understanding about LA appear to resonate with the literature about, for example, the limits of teachers' and students' understandings, the complicated and multifaceted nature of the concept, the characteristics of autonomous learners, and the role of LA in learning. One finding indicating teachers' recognition of students as main agents and themselves as facilitators in the learning process appears to contradict the current concept of the unequal teacher-student relationship in the Vietnamese education system. Teachers' descriptions of autonomous learners indicates that their understanding of LA lacks a dimension relating to freedom vis-à-vis choices, which is vital in the promotion of LA.

The findings relating to teachers' and students' perspectives on the impacts of current assessment regime on teaching and learning support the literature on the negative washback of high-stakes assessment on teaching and learning, and, in turn, on the promotion and demonstration of LA. The findings also highlight the marginalisation of students in assessment practices and the externality of assessment to students'

learning, which might influence the students' demonstration of LA. Teachers' and students' perspectives on the relationship between assessment and LA show that assessment can influence the demonstration of LA at various levels, depending on how assessment is used and what purpose it serves.

The findings relating to teachers' assessment practices show that none of the aspects relating to their assessment practices, such as assessment tasks, assessment techniques, assessment feedback and assessment-related communication appeared to support the demonstration of LA.

The findings relating to the students' demonstration of LA indicate that they mainly demonstrated a low level of autonomy in the classroom, but generally demonstrated a higher level of autonomy outside of the class if they found a 'personal relevance' in learning English.

The chapter has also drawn out the factors that contribute to the demonstration of LA. They include the negative washback of current assessment systems on teaching and learning practices; prescribed assessment practices in the class; teachers' and learners' limited and divergent understandings about the concept of learner autonomy; and their limited understanding about the role of assessment in learning in general and in learner autonomy promotion and development in particular.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Chapter overview

This chapter concludes the thesis by reflecting on the research aims, summarising the main findings of the research, discussing the contributions of the research program, considering its limitations and recommending directions for future research.

8.1. Summary of the research

This research aimed at investigating the impacts of EFL assessment on the demonstration of LA, with the research question: What are the factors in assessment that enable or constrain the demonstration of learner autonomy in learning English as a Foreign Language in the Vietnamese Higher Education context?

The overarching research question was addressed through the following objectives:

- Explore English language teachers' and students' understandings of the concept of LA
- Examine English language teachers' and students' perspectives on assessment and the relationship between assessment and LA
- Investigate the current EFL assessment practices in the VHE context
- Investigate students' demonstration of LA in learning English in the VHE context.

The research program generated the following key findings:

- English language teachers in the current research had limited understanding about LA. It is possible that their limited understanding might have influenced their practices in relation to promoting LA.

- Both teachers and students had divergent interpretations of LA. This finding supports the claim in the literature that multiple interpretations and understandings of LA are to be expected in such a complicated and multifaceted concept as LA. While it may be infeasible to have only one definition of LA, it is necessary to streamline interpretations of LA in order to clear up the confusion about the concept.
- Both teachers and students recognised students as being the owners of their learning and teachers as being the facilitators in the learning process. This finding appears to contradict the common belief about teacher-student relationships in a Confucian heritage culture like Vietnam. The finding suggests a movement in teachers' perceptions from teacher-centredness to learner-centredness as a result of the past decade's educational reforms in Vietnam. It may be that the reforms have started to cause some changes in teachers' perceptions and if so, it is likely that these changes in perceptions will lead to innovations in practices. This finding also indicates that Vietnamese culture did not seem to inhibit students from demonstrating their autonomy in learning.
- Teachers' understandings of LA appear to lack any dimension that denotes the freedom or choices offered to students so that they can demonstrate their LA. The absence of these elements in teachers' understandings of LA suggests that students in the current context may not be offered many choices or much freedom in their learning. This may inhibit students from demonstrating their autonomy in assessment contexts.
- Both teachers' and students' perspectives on assessment indicated that they perceived assessment as being external (i.e., it is imposed from outside) to students and their learning. This finding suggests that teachers are not ready to

support students to demonstrate the optimal level of proactive autonomy, and students are also not ready to demonstrate the optimal level of proactive autonomy.

- The assessment regime in the current context focused more on summative and certification purposes than on serving learning. It prompted test-oriented teaching and learning, exerting negative impacts on teaching and learning and inhibiting the demonstration of LA.
- Students' perspectives on their role in assessment indicated that they are more comfortable working within a prescribed scope because they lack confidence in taking responsibility for the evaluation of their own learning. This suggests that students in the current research were not ready to demonstrate a high level of LA.
- All teachers believed that autonomy related to assessment. Assessment can be the signpost for students' learning or a mechanism to condition their learning. Teachers' perspectives on this relationship revealed that assessment can support different levels of LA depending on how teachers use assessment in their teaching. Their ways of using assessment, in turn, might depend on their beliefs about the role of assessment in learning and in promoting LA.
- From the students' perspective, assessment can support different levels of LA. First, assessment can condition students' learning, promoting compliance with teachers' instruction. Secondly, assessment can provide parameters or signposts for learning, shaping directions for students' learning and promoting *reactive autonomy*. Finally, assessment can be the internal element in the students' learning (i.e., it is an inseparable component in the students' learning and students have to carry it out by themselves) and the ability to carry out

evaluation of their own work, signifies a high level of proactive autonomy among students. This finding suggests that the impacts of assessment on LA depend largely on how it is used and which purposes it serves.

- The majority of assessment tasks, assessment techniques and assessment feedback belonged to the *prescribed* category. The research also found that students appeared to demand more *autonomy offered* in assessment practices in comparison to what is currently offered. This suggests that teachers' current prescribed assessment practices can be a barrier to their demonstration of LA.
- Students' uptake of autonomy mainly corresponded to the level of autonomy offered to them in the class. However, there were times when students demonstrated a higher level of autonomy than that which was offered to them, or failed to manage the high level of *autonomy offered*. This finding suggests that in the classroom context, *autonomy offered* and *autonomy demonstrated* are not always compatible and congruent, so the role of teachers is to make sure this compatibility and congruency happen in order to produce good learning results.
- Sometimes, students did not demonstrate *proactive autonomy* in the class, but demonstrated this level of autonomy outside of the class. Therefore, LA is more about relationships between students and the learning environment than an attribute of learners, being an emergent product of the interactions between students and different contextual factors.
- The drive for students' demonstration of *proactive autonomy* emerges from their awareness of the relevance of learning English to their personal needs and purposes. Therefore, the demonstration of proactive autonomy might be a matter for each individual student.

8.2. Contributions

Theoretical contributions

This study clearly distinguished three dimensions of LA that are often blurred in the literature, proposing three terms that refer to three prominent connotations of LA in the literature. The first term is *autonomy capacity*, which refers to students' internal resources to take control of their own learning. The second term is *autonomy offered*, which refers to the level of freedom (the extent to which students are permitted to control their learning) or opportunities created for learners to exert control over their learning. The third term is *autonomy demonstrated*, which refers to the extent to which the students actually exercise their capacity to take control of their learning in different learning situations. This distinction can help to streamline interpretations and understandings of LA and clear up the conceptual mist surrounding the construct.

This study contributes a framework designed to categorise the level of *autonomy offered* in activities and tasks for learning and assessment. The framework offers three levels: *prescribed*, *bounded*, and *open*. *Prescribed* is used to describe tasks or activities in which students can make almost no choices or decisions regarding their learning. *Bounded* is used to describe tasks or activities in which students can make some choices and decisions regarding their learning. *Open* is used to describe tasks or activities in which students can make all the choices or decisions regarding their learning. All activities and tasks can be categorised based on the level of conceptual space embedded in these activities and tasks for students' involvement and decision.

This study also contributes a framework to categorise the level of *autonomy demonstrated* in students' learning. Starting from Littlewood's (1999) framework, the framework proposed in this study describes three levels of *autonomy demonstrated*. *Compliant* is used to describe a situation where students closely follow teachers' instructions. *Reactive* is used to describe a situation where students initiate some actions

in order to follow an other-initiated learning agenda. *Proactive* is used to describe a situation where students initiate their learning and actions in order to complete their own learning agenda.

This research is the first to investigate the impacts of assessment on the demonstration of LA in the light of the interplay between *autonomy offered* and *autonomy demonstrated*. The findings suggest that rather than being an attribute of learners, LA is more about the relationship between learners and the learning environment. Therefore, the demonstration of LA changes in line with changes in the learning environment. As such, it is essential that the learning environment be arranged in a way that fosters the demonstration of autonomy.

To the best knowledge of the researcher, this study is the first study in Vietnam and is one of very few empirical studies that have used sociocultural theory to investigate the impacts of assessment on the demonstration of LA in learning English. The research suggests that sociocultural theory can be a useful framework to investigate the facilitative and inhibitive factors in assessment in regard to the demonstration of LA. While the findings of this research confirmed the significance of different sociocultural factors in the demonstration of LA, the findings also recognised the significance of students' personal factors.

This research also adds to the existing literature on factors contributing to the demonstration of LA. Findings indicate that such factors include negative washback of assessment systems on teaching and learning practices, prescribed assessment practices in the class, teachers' and learners' limited and divergent understanding about LA, and teachers' and students' limited understanding about the role of assessment in learning in general and in LA promotion in particular.

Methodological contribution

This study has also made a number of methodological contributions to the literature. First, it utilised a qualitative case study design to investigate the impacts of assessment on the demonstration of LA in learning English. It is notable that the current research is one of the rare Vietnamese studies on LA to use a qualitative case study design, providing evidence for the effectiveness of using qualitative case studies in researching complicated phenomena. Additionally, this research is one of very few studies on LA to adopt participant observation as a method of data collection. Few studies on LA use participant observation as a method of study, as LA is believed to be a psychological construct that is not observable. However, evidence from this study suggests that observation of both teachers' and students' practices can provide insights into LA. Moreover, the analytical framework for *autonomy offered* and *autonomy demonstrated* developed in the current study provides a useful reference for future LA researcher who wish to design a framework for observation and to analyse teachers' and students' practices.

Pedagogical recommendations

Several implications for practice can be drawn from the findings of this research. First, teachers' understandings of LA, as indicated in the research, are limited, which can inhibit their practices in promoting LA. Therefore, this research proposes that educational policy makers should be clear about the concept of LA when they introduce it to the local context, in order to reduce misunderstanding and divergent interpretations among teachers and students. Additionally, professional development is important when new concepts or ideas are introduced to the local context, in order to prepare and scaffold teachers in their implementation of these concepts in practice. Based on the findings about teachers' understandings of LA, their perspectives on assessment and the relationship between assessment and LA, and their assessment practices and their

practices to promote LA, this study proposes that teachers need assistance in the following aspects:

- Understanding new terms and concepts such as LA, formative assessment, summative assessment, self/peer-assessment, authentic assessment, and portfolios.
- Having a clear model of LA.
- Designing and utilising assessment tasks and techniques to support the demonstration of LA.
- Involving students in self/peer-assessment practices and scaffolding them in carrying out these practices.
- Using assessment information to support students' learning and LA.
- Arranging the classroom environment so that it can promote LA.

Secondly, as LA is an emergent product of the interaction between learners and the learning environment, it is important to build up a learning environment that provides favourable conditions for teachers to promote LA and for students to demonstrate it. In order to do so, teachers should be able to negotiate curriculum and assessment at the university level so that they are not restricted in implementing learning activities and assessment methods in their class. Additionally, LA could be included in the course as one of the learning objectives. This would help to raise awareness of the importance of LA among both teachers and students.

Thirdly, in order to support students to demonstrate their LA, it is essential to allow them space for involvement and decisions regarding both learning and assessment. However, students' ability to demonstrate autonomy in learning is not always compatible and congruent with the level of *autonomy offered* to them. Thus, it is necessary for teachers to be very sensitive about the students' ability to demonstrate

autonomy in order to provide them with just the right amount of autonomy for compatibility and congruency. Moreover, since students' demonstration of autonomy is not fixed and may vary from situation to situation, scaffolding by the teacher is vital.

8.3. Limitations

It is inevitable that there are some limitations in any research. In this study, the first limitation pertains to the translation of the concept of learner autonomy to Vietnamese in the student interviews. Translating a term from one language into another always poses the risk of losing some nuance due to linguistic and culture-specific factors (Sutrisno, Nguyen, & Tangen, 2014). It is unlikely that one can find a single exact equivalence for a foreign concept in the target language (T. N. Nguyen, 2014; Sutrisno et al., 2014). The researcher used the Vietnamese equivalent of *tính tự chủ, chủ động, tự giác* for the term 'learner autonomy' in the interviews with student participants. This is because 'learner autonomy' appeared to be an uncommon term for them, and *tính tự chủ, chủ động, tự giác* are the most common among the Vietnamese equivalents for LA embedded in education initiatives and policies (T. N. Nguyen, 2014; Phan, 2015; Phan & Hamid, 2017). The students' interpretations of autonomy might thus have been influenced by the researcher's choice of translation. In Vietnamese, the word *tự* means *by oneself* or *on one's own* (T. N. Nguyen, 2014; Sutrisno et al., 2014). That may be the reason why the majority of the student participants understood LA as the ability to be self-reliant and self-regulated and the ability to display initiative and to do self-study.

The second limitation relates to generalisability. This is a case study which aims to investigate a case in depth in order to provide a rich description of it. The study relied on the observations of three English classes in a university, interviews with three English teachers and sixteen non-English major students. Therefore, the results of this study may be not generalisable to other contexts (e.g., students and teachers in other

universities in Vietnam and students and teachers in other countries) or to disciplines other than English (e.g., engineering or accounting).

The third limitation may be due to the observation method. Due to ethical issues, the researcher could not video record the observations. She could only opt for a running record technique to record teachers' and students' practices in the class. For that reason, she might have missed some data (e.g., non-verbal communication between teacher and students, their feelings and emotions, and class atmosphere), even though she attempted to record what was happening in the class as far as possible.

8.4. Recommendations for future research

There is still insufficient empirical research on assessment and LA, so future research should consider the following directions:

- As the current research found that teachers' perspectives on assessment influenced their LA-promoting practices, future research could investigate teachers' assessment literacy and its impacts on teachers' practices to promote LA.
- As this research only focused on non-English major students, future research could consider including English major students to see if there are any differences in autonomy demonstration between two groups.
- Future research should investigate the relationship between the levels of autonomy that students demonstrate and their academic achievements.

8.5. Concluding remarks

This study examined the impacts of EFL assessment practice on demonstration of learner autonomy in the Vietnamese higher education context, in order to discover assessment-related factors that facilitate or inhibit the demonstration of LA in that context. Learner autonomy appears to have three facets: *autonomy capacity*, *autonomy*

offered and *autonomy demonstrated*. This study used *autonomy offered* and *autonomy demonstrated* to analyse teachers' assessment practices and students' responses to these practices, in order to discover the interaction between the two and the factors that contribute to that interaction. Teachers' and students' understanding about LA and perspectives on assessment and the relationship between assessment and LA were also taken into consideration. LA appears to be the emergent product of the interaction between students and contextual factors including their teacher, their peers, learning tasks, class rules and values, and university values and regulations. This suggests that students, first and foremost, need to be allowed autonomy in order to demonstrate it. Additionally, the compatibility and congruence between *autonomy offered* and students' uptake of autonomy are vital in making sure that fruitful results can be achieved. The study concludes that the level of *autonomy offered* in assessment practices is a significant assessment-related factor that contributes to the demonstration of LA. Other than *autonomy offered*, teachers' and students' understanding of LA, their perspectives on assessment and the relationship between assessment and LA all contribute to the promotion and demonstration of LA.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview protocols

Appendix A1: Teacher interview protocol in English and Vietnamese

TEACHER/ACADEMIC INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	
Fieldwork Stage: Teacher interview session	
Data Identity	
Pseudonym name:	
Date:	
Site/Venue:	
Duration: 60 minutes	
Interview Goal	
To explore the teacher's interpretation of the concept of autonomy and his/her beliefs about the role of assessment practices in learning and in the development of autonomy.	
Type of Interview	
Semi-structured interview	
Language Used	
Vietnamese	
Nature of themes/ Interview Questions	
Questions to allow elaboration are indicated underneath the main question.	
A. Teachers' interpretation of the concept of autonomy	
1	What do you understand by "learner autonomy"? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the key characteristics of an autonomous language learner?• Is learner autonomy important in students' learning? Why? Why not?
2	How could English language teachers develop learner autonomy in the Vietnamese higher education context? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is it possible to develop learner autonomy among Vietnamese students? Why? Why not?• How can learner autonomy be best promoted among Vietnamese students?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you do to encourage learner autonomy in your class?
B. Teachers' beliefs about the role of assessment in learning	
3	<p>What do you think the role of assessment is in students' learning?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think assessment is for learning or learning is for assessment? • In what ways do assessment practices affect students 'learning'?
4	<p>What do you usually include in your feedback to your students' work or performance?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you don't give feedback, why not? • What do your students often do with your feedback? • How important do you think your feedback is to your students' learning?
C. Teacher's choice of assessment practices and factors that influence their choices	
5	<p>What do you know about the assessment requirement in a credit-based system? What do you think of these requirements?</p>
6	<p>What do you think about the assessment policies of the university and the division?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do these policies affect your assessment practices in class? • Should they be changed? In what ways?
7	<p>What assessment strategies do you use? Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the factors that you take into consideration when you choose an assessment practice in your class? • How do your assessment strategies affect your students' motivation and self-efficacy?
D. The impacts of assessment on autonomy and the factors that define these impacts	
8	<p>Do you think assessment links to learner autonomy? If no, why do you think that? If yes, in what way?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does your assessment impact your students' autonomy? • Do you ever let your students discuss and co-decide on the assessment practices in the class? For example, students could decide on assessment criteria, assessment formats, and assessment contents? Why? /Why not? • Have you ever used peer-assessment, self-assessment, portfolios and other forms of authentic assessment in your class?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If yes, what are their advantages? - What difficulties did you encounter? - If not, why not? • Do you want to change your assessment strategies? - How would you like to change them? - What would you require to make that occur?
9	<p>Do you take the need to foster autonomy into consideration when you use an assessment practice in your class?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do your students respond? • Why do you think they respond this way?

<p>TEACHER/ACADEMIC INTERVIEW PROTOCOL</p>	
<p>Fieldwork Stage: Teacher interview session</p>	
<p>Data Identity</p> <p>Pseudonym name:</p> <p>Date:</p> <p>Site/Venue:</p> <p>Duration: 60 minutes</p>	
<p>Interview Goal</p> <p>To explore the teacher's interpretation of the concept of autonomy and his/her beliefs about the role of assessment practices in learning and in the development of autonomy.</p>	
<p>Type of Interview</p> <p>Semi-structured interview</p>	
<p>Language Used</p> <p>Vietnamese</p>	
<p>Nature of themes/ Interview Questions</p> <p>Questions to allow elaboration are indicated underneath the main question.</p>	
<p>E. Teachers' interpretation of the concept of autonomy</p>	
1	<p>Thầy cô hiểu khái niệm "learner autonomy" có nghĩa là gì?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Đặc điểm nổi bật của các sinh viên tự chủ/chủ động là gì? • Sự chủ động/tự chủ có quan trọng đối với việc học của sinh viên không? Tại sao có? Tại sao không?

2	<p>Làm thế nào để các giáo viên tiếng Anh có thể phát triển tính tự chủ của sinh viên trong các trường đại học ở Việt nam?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liệu có thể phát triển được tính tự chủ trong sinh viên Việt nam không? Tại sao có? tại sao không? • Làm thế nào để phát triển tốt nhất tính tự chủ trong sinh viên Việt nam? • Các thầy cô thường làm gì để khuyến khích tính tự chủ của sinh viên trong lớp các thầy cô giảng dạy
F. Teachers' beliefs about the role of assessment in learning	
3	<p>Theo các thầy cô thì vai trò của kiểm tra đánh giá trong việc học của sinh viên là gì?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theo các thầy cô thì kiểm tra đánh giá vì mục đích học hay mục đích học là để kiểm tra đánh giá? • Theo các thầy cô thì các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá tác động đến việc học của sinh viên như thế nào?
4	<p>Các thầy cô thường đưa thông tin gì trong phần nhận xét đối với bài làm hoặc thể hiện của sinh viên?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nếu các thầy cô không đưa ra nhận xét thì lý do à tại sao? • Các sinh viên thường làm gì với các nhận xét của các thầy cô? • Theo các thầy cô thì phần nhận xét của các thầy cô quan trọng như thế nào đối với việc học của sinh viên?
G. Teacher's choice of assessment practices and factors that influence their choices	
5	<p>Các thầy cô biết gì về yêu cầu trong kiểm tra đánh giá của hệ thống tín chỉ? Các thầy cô nghĩ gì về các yêu cầu đó?</p>
6	<p>Các thầy cô nghĩ gì về các quy định về kiểm tra đánh giá do trường/bộ môn đưa ra?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • các quy định này ảnh hưởng đến các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá trên lớp của các thầy cô như thế nào? • Những quy định này có nên thay đổi không? nếu có thì nên thay đổi như thế nào?
7	<p>Các thầy cô sử dụng các hình thức kiểm tra đánh giá nào? Tại sao các thầy cô lại dùng các hình thức đó?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Các yếu tố mà các thầy cô xem xét đến khi lựa chọn một hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá là gì?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hình thức đánh giá mà các thầy cô sử dụng có ảnh hưởng gì tới hứng thú và sự tự tin trong học tập của sinh viên?
H. The impacts of assessment on autonomy and the factors that define these impacts	
8	<p>Các thầy cô có cho rằng kiểm tra đánh giá liên quan tới tính tự chủ của sinh viên không? nếu không thì tại sao các thầy cô nghĩ vậy? nếu có thì nó có liên quan như thế nào?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của các thầy cô ảnh hưởng như thế nào đến tính tự chủ của sinh viên của các thầy cô? Các thầy cô có bao giờ để cho sinh viên thảo luận và cùng quyết định về các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá trên lớp không? Ví dụ như sinh viên có thể tham gia quyết định về tiêu chí đánh giá, hình thức đánh giá, nội dung đánh giá. Nếu có thì tại sao? Nếu không thì tại sao? Các thầy cô đã bao giờ sử dụng hình thức đánh giá chéo, tự đánh giá, hồ sơ học tập hoặc các hình thức đánh giá thực tiễn khác trong lớp của các thầy cô chưa? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nếu có thì điểm mạnh của các hình thức này là gì? Các thầy cô có gặp khó khăn gì không? Nếu không thì tại sao không? Các thầy cô có muốn thay đổi các hình thức đánh giá mà các thầy cô đang sử dụng không? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Các thầy cô muốn thay đổi như thế nào? Các thầy cô cần các điều kiện gì để có thể thay đổi?
9	<p>Các thầy cô có xem xét đến yêu cầu phát triển tính tự chủ của sinh viên khi sử dụng một hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá trong lớp mình không?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sinh viên của các thầy cô phản ứng như thế nào? How do your students respond? Theo các thầy cô thì tại sao sinh viên của các thầy cô lại có phản ứng như vậy?

Appendix A2: Student interview protocol in English and Vietnamese

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Fieldwork Stage: Student interview session

Data Identity

Pseudonym name:

Date:

Site/Venue:

Duration: 45 minutes

Interview Goal

To explore students' interpretation of the concept of autonomy, and their beliefs about the role of assessment practices in learning and in the development of autonomy.

Type of Interview

Semi-structured interview

Language Used

Vietnamese

Nature of Interview Questions

Questions to allow elaboration are indicated underneath the main question.

A. Demographic information	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about yourself • Where are you from? • How long have you been learning English? • Do you like English? • Why are you learning English?
B. Students' interpretation of autonomy concept	
1	<p>Have you ever heard of the term "autonomy"? What does that term mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think learner autonomy is important in language learning? Why? Why not? • What makes an autonomous learner? • Are you an autonomous learner? Why? Why not? • Do you think you can learn without a teacher? Why? Why not?

2	What do you think are the requirements of a credit-based system for students? What do you have to do to meet these requirements?
C. Students' beliefs about the role of assessment in their learning	
3	<p>What do you think the role of assessment is in your learning?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think assessment is important? Why? Why not? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is your first response when you are given an assessment? • How do your teacher's assessment practices impact your motivation and self-efficacy? • How does assessment affect your learning inside and outside class?
4	<p>How important is teacher's feedback to your learning?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you feel when teacher assess your work? • How often do you get feedback on your work/performance? • What kind of feedback does your teacher usually give? • What do you usually do with your teacher's feedback? • Do you think your teacher's feedback is useful? Why? Why not? • What kinds of teacher's feedback do you find the most helpful to your learning? Why?
5	<p>Can students help with assessment and feedback in class?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think you can self-assess your learning? • Do you think you can assess your friends' work? • If your teacher let you assess your friends' work, would you like to?
D. The impacts of assessment practices on students' autonomy	
6	Do you think assessment links to learner autonomy? If yes, in what way? If no, why not?
7	<p>How does your teacher's assessment impact your autonomy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you do when you are informed that you are going to have an exam? • What assessments do you like to have? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do they give you autonomy in your learning? Why do you think so? - Do they motivate you to learn? - How do you learn for those assessments? • What assessments would give you more autonomy?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would you be more motivated to learn with more autonomous assessments? - Explain how you might behave in those assessments?
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STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (Vietnamese version)	
Fieldwork Stage: Student interview session	
Data Identity	
Pseudonym name:	
Date:	
Site/Venue:	
Duration: 45 minutes	
Interview Goal	
To explore students' interpretation of the concept of autonomy, and their beliefs about the role of assessment practices in learning and in the development of autonomy.	
Type of Interview	
Semi-structured interview	
Language Used	
Vietnamese	
Nature of Interview Questions	
Questions to allow elaboration are indicated underneath the main question.	
E. Demographic information	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Em hãy giới thiệu về bản thân mình? • Em quê ở đâu?? • Em đã học tiếng Anh được bao nhiêu lâu rồi? • Em có thích học tiếng Anh không? • Tại sao em lại học tiếng Anh?
F. Students' interpretation of autonomy concept	
1	<p>Em đã bao giờ nghe về khái niệm “tự chủ” chưa? em hiểu như thế nào về khái niệm đó?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Em có nghĩ rằng tự chủ quan trọng trong việc học ngoại ngữ không? Tại sao có? Tại sao không? • Điều gì làm nên một người học tự chủ/chủ động?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Em có phải là một người chủ động không? tại sao có? tại sao không? • Em có cho rằng em có thể học mà không cần có giáo viên không? Tại sao có? tại sao không?
2	Theo em thì yêu cầu của hệ thống tín chỉ đối với sinh viên là gì? em cần phải làm gì để đáp ứng được các yêu cầu đó?
G. Students' beliefs about the role of assessment in their learning	
3	<p>Theo em thì vai trò của kiểm tra đánh giá trong việc học của em là gì?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theo em thì kiểm tra đánh giá có quan trọng không? Tại sao có? tại sao không? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Khi em bị kiểm tra đánh giá thì phản ứng đầu tiên của em là gì? • Các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của giáo viên ảnh hưởng như thế nào tới hứng thú cũng như sự tự tin của em trong việc học? • Các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá có tác động như thế nào tới việc học của em ở trên lớp cũng như ở nhà?
4	<p>Các nhận xét của giáo viên quan trọng như thế nào đối với việc học của em?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Em cảm thấy như thế nào khi giáo viên đánh giá bài làm của em? • Em có thường xuyên nhận được nhận xét đánh giá của giáo viên đối với bài làm cũng như thể hiện của em? • Giáo viên thường đưa ra kiểu nhận xét như thế nào đối với bài làm của em? • Em thường làm gì với các nhận xét đánh giá của giáo viên? • Em có thấy nhận xét đánh giá của giáo viên hữu ích không? Tại sao có? Tại sao không? • Các nhận xét đánh giá như thế nào em thấy hữu ích nhất đối với việc học của em? Tại sao?
5	<p>Theo em thì sinh viên có thể giúp trong việc kiểm tra đánh giá và nhận xét trong lớp không?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Em có cho rằng mình có thể tự đánh giá được bài làm của mình không? • Em có cho rằng em có thể đánh giá được bài làm của bạn mình không?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nếu giáo viên cho phép em đánh giá bài làm của bạn em thì em có muốn làm không? Tại sao?
H. The impacts of assessment practices on students' autonomy	
6	Theo em thì kiểm tra đánh giá có liên quan đến tính tự chủ của sinh viên không? nếu có thì nó liên quan như thế nào? nếu không thì tại sao lại không?
7	<p>Các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của giáo viên tác động như thế nào lên tính tự chủ của em?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Em thường làm gì khi được thông báo là sắp có bài kiểm tra? • Em thường thích có dạng kiểm tra như thế nào? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dạng kiểm tra đó có cho em tự chủ trong việc học của mình không? tại sao em nghĩ vậy? - Dạng kiểm tra đó có tại hứng thú học tập cho em không? vì sao? - Em học như thế nào để đáp ứng tốt được yêu cầu của các dạng bài kiểm tra đó? • Dạng kiểm tra đánh giá nào cho phép em tự chủ trong học tập? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Em có hứng thú học hơn với những hình thức đánh giá cho phép em chủ động không? - Em hãy giải thích cách thức em sẽ phản ứng trong các dạng kiểm tra đánh giá này?

Appendix B: Observation protocol

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Date:

Time of observation: Start: End:

Case code: Teacher's gender:

Number of students: Female: Male:

Course book used:

A. Classroom context:

1. Classroom resources and teacher resources

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.....
.....

2. Classroom space

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.....
.....
.....

3. Room arrangement

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.....
.....
.....

B. Description of the lesson observed

		Comments
1. Major way(s) in which student activities were structured (As a whole group/ small groups/pairs/ individuals)		
2. Major activities of students in the lesson (listen to presentation/engage in discussion/Engage in problem solving/engage in reading/reflection/written communication, etc.)		

C. Assessment practices observed

o	Teachers' assessment practices (Formative/summative)	Comments	Students' strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, affective)	Comments

Appendix C: Survey questionnaire for selecting participants

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

Thank you for taking part in this survey. The survey asks you about your current teaching practices in your classroom. The survey consists of two parts, namely Background information and Teachers' teaching practices. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete, and you can choose to do either the English version or the Vietnamese version. This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Adelaide (approval number...). By completing the survey you will be consenting to be involved in the project. Your participation is entirely anonymous, and you will not be identified in any research based on this survey. **Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary, and you may leave the survey at any time.**

The University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee monitors all the research projects which it has approved. The committee considers it important that people participating in approved projects have an independent and confidential reporting mechanism which they can use if they have any worries or complaints about that research.

If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the project co-ordinator, Dr Julia Miller (email: julia.miller@adelaide.edu.au; telephone: 00 61 8 8313 4721).

If you wish to discuss any concerns about the project with an independent person, contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat by phone (00 61 8 8313 6028) or by email: hrec@adelaide.edu.au

Part I: Background information

Your gender (tick ONE): Male Female

Your age group (tick ONE): 22-29 30-39 40-50 over 50

Years of experiences as an English teacher (tick ONE):

Under 5 years 5 to 10 years 11 to 15 years more than 15 years

Years of experience as an English teacher at your current university (tick ONE):

Under 5 years 5 to 10 years 11 to 15 years more than 15 years

Number of classes you usually teach each semester (tick ONE):

1 -2 3-4 More than 4

Your highest qualification (tick ONE):

Bachelor Master Doctorate Other Please specify

Number of conferences/ training sessions about assessment you have taken part in (tick ONE):

0 1-2 3 4 5 or more

Part II: Teachers' teaching practices

Instructions:

Please read each statement starting with "IN MY ENGLISH CLASS" carefully and then tick the frequency level that best matches your teaching practices.

Your honest responses are very important and highly appreciated.

IN MY ENGLISH CLASS	Never	A few times a term	In about half of my lessons	In most lessons	In every lesson
1. I explain the objectives of my lessons at the beginning.					
2. I use assessment to determine how much help my students need from me.					
3. I test my students using task-based activities other than written tests.					
4. I determine the degree of accomplishment of a desired learning outcome for a lesson.					
5. I provide feedback to students in order to improve their learning.					
6. I use assessment activities (e.g. quizzes, probing questions) to identify better learning opportunities for students in class.					
7. I grade my students based on their class performance.					
8. I use questions to check my students' understanding of what I have taught.					
9. I make notes about my students while observing them working.					
10. I use the last 5 minutes to prompt student reflection on what they have learnt.					
11. After a learning task, I ask students to reflect on what they have done using criteria I have given to them.					
12. I set up practice activities (presentation, listening and writing) before exams.					
13. I ask students to set their own goals and monitor their own learning progress.					
14. I encourage students to identify their learning difficulties in class.					

IN MY ENGLISH CLASS	Never	A few times a term	In about half of my lessons	In most lessons	In every lesson
15. I share criteria for good work before asking my students to do a task.					
16. I model tasks before asking my students to do them.					
17. I use online tools (e.g. Facebook groups) to give students feedback.					
18. I use online tools (e.g. Facebook groups) to allow students to ask questions about my lessons.					
19. I provide opportunities for students to peer-assess each other's work (e.g. mark each other's test paper, assess each other's writing or speaking).					
20. I provide opportunities for students to assess their own work using criteria I have given.					
21. I use student learning portfolios.					
22. I take my students' opinions into consideration while determining objectives for the lessons, in-class activities and deadlines for the assignments.					
23. I encourage my students to determine their own needs for the acquisition of English.					
24. I support the different learning preferences/styles of my students.					
25. I emphasize that the responsibility of learning belongs to the students themselves.					
26. I arrange group work in class.					
27. I arrange group work as an out-of-class activity.					
28. I give my students various responsibilities (board arrangement, today's proverb, phonetics, important events, etc.) in in-class and out-of-class activities.					
29. I set projects so that students have to use various sources to complete them.					
30. I encourage students to use as much English as possible.					
31. I tell students not to be afraid of making mistakes when using English because they are part of the learning process.					
32. I encourage students to discuss topics they have researched.					
33. I encourage my students to further their learning of English in situations outside the classroom without help from any teacher.					
34. I try not to answer my students' questions but give them sources so that they can find the answer themselves.					

Would you like to participate in a project that can give you ideas and techniques of how to improve your assessment practices so that they support your students' learning and develop their autonomy, and GET A GIFT FROM AUSTRALIA?

Yes No

If you are interested in participating in this project by taking part in an interview, could you please give me some personal details?

Your

name:.....

Your

email

address:.....

If you agree to do an interview, please tick the box if you agree with the following piece of information.

I agree for my survey results to be matched to my interview. I understand my overall results will be confidential.

Thank you for your help
Your answers will remain confidential

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

(Vietnamese version)

Cám ơn thầy/cô đã tham gia vào cuộc khảo sát này. Các câu hỏi khảo sát nhằm tìm hiểu hoạt động giảng dạy mà các thầy cô sử dụng trong lớp học của mình. Các câu hỏi khảo sát gồm 2 nhóm: Thông tin chung và các hoạt động giảng dạy của các thầy cô. Các thầy/cô sẽ mất khoảng 10 phút để hoàn thành cuộc khảo sát này. Các thầy cô có thể lựa chọn làm bản tiếng Anh hoặc tiếng Việt.

Đề tài nghiên cứu này đã được phê duyệt bởi Ủy ban Đạo đức trong Nghiên cứu Con người, Trường Đại học Adelaide. Việc hoàn thành các câu hỏi khảo sát thể hiện các thầy/cô đã đồng ý tham gia vào đề tài. Việc tham gia của các thầy cô là hoàn toàn ẩn danh, và danh tính của thầy/cô sẽ không bị tiết lộ trong bất kỳ nghiên cứu nào sử dụng thông tin của cuộc khảo sát này. **Việc tham gia vào cuộc khảo sát này là hoàn toàn tự nguyện, các thầy/cô có thể dừng lại không tiếp tục tham gia khảo sát vào bất kỳ thời điểm nào.**

Ủy ban Đạo đức trong Nghiên cứu Con người quản lý, giám sát tất cả các nghiên cứu mà đã được phê duyệt. Ủy ban nhận thức được tầm quan trọng của việc có một cơ chế báo cáo độc lập và bảo mật để cho những khách thể nghiên cứu của dự án đã được phê duyệt sử dụng khi họ có bất kỳ lo lắng hay khiếu nại gì về dự án mà họ tham gia

Nếu thầy/cô có câu hỏi hay vấn đề thắc mắc nào về các lĩnh vực tham gia của thầy/cô trong đề tài nghiên cứu, hoặc muốn phàn nàn hay phản án gì về đề tài nghiên cứu, hãy liên lạc với giáo viên hướng dẫn chính của tôi, Tiến sỹ Julia Miller (email: julia.miller@adelaide.edu.au; số điện thoại: 00 61 8 8313 4721) Nếu thầy/cô muốn trao đổi với 1 người độc lập về những phàn nàn của thầy/cô, hãy liên lạc với Thư ký của Ủy ban Đạo Đức trong Nghiên cứu Con người theo số điện thoại +61 8 8313 6028 hoặc gửi thư tới địa chỉ email hrec@adelaide.edu.au.

Phần I: Thông tin chung về người tham gia khảo sát

Giới tính (chọn một thông tin): Nam Nữ

Nhóm tuổi (chọn một thông tin): 22-29 30-39 40-50 trên 50

Số năm kinh nghiệm dạy tiếng Anh (chọn một thông tin):

Dưới 5 năm 6-10 năm 11-15 năm trên 15 năm

Số năm kinh nghiệm dạy tiếng Anh tại trường hiện thầy/cô đang dạy (chọn một thông tin):

Dưới 5 năm 6-10 năm 11-15 năm trên 15 năm

Số lớp các thầy/cô thường đảm nhận trong một học kỳ (chọn một thông tin):

1 -2 3-4 Hơn 4

Bằng cấp cao nhất (chọn một thông tin):

Đại học Thạc sỹ Tiến sỹ Bằng cấp khác

Số lượng các hội thảo hoặc khóa đào tạo về kiểm tra đánh giá mà các thầy cô đã tham gia (chọn một thông tin):

0 1-2 3 4 5 hoặc hơn

Phần 2: Hoạt động giảng dạy của giáo viên

Hướng dẫn:

Các thầy/cô hãy đọc kỹ các thông tin bắt đầu bằng “**Trong lớp học tiếng Anh của tôi**” và đánh dấu vào các cột thể hiện mức độ mà thầy cô thấy rằng phản ánh đúng nhất các hoạt động giảng dạy trên lớp của các thầy cô.

Tính chân thực trong các câu trả lời là rất quan trọng và được đề cao.

TRONG LỚP TIẾNG ANH CỦA TÔI	Không bao giờ	Một vài lần trong một học kỳ	Trong khoảng một nửa các bài giảng	Trong hầu hết các bài giảng	Trong mỗi bài giảng
1. Tôi giải thích mục tiêu của bài giảng trước khi bắt đầu buổi học.					
2. Tôi sử dụng phương pháp kiểm tra đánh giá để xác định xem sinh viên của tôi cần tôi hỗ trợ như thế nào.					
3. Tôi kiểm tra sinh viên bằng các tổ chức các hoạt động trên lớp thay vì sử dụng bài kiểm tra viết.					
4. Tôi xác định mức độ hoàn thành của một mục tiêu học tập vào cuối mỗi buổi học.					
5. Tôi đưa ra các nhận xét đánh giá nhằm giúp sinh viên cải thiện việc học của mình.					
6. Tôi sử dụng các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá (ví dụ như các câu hỏi trắc nghiệm và câu hỏi thăm dò) để tìm ra các cơ hội học tập tốt hơn cho sinh viên trong lớp.					
7. Tôi cho điểm sinh viên dựa trên sự thể hiện của sinh viên đó ở trên lớp.					
8. Tôi sử dụng câu hỏi để kiểm tra mức độ hiểu bài của sinh viên.					
9. Tôi ghi chép về sinh viên khi quan sát các em thực hiện các nhiệm vụ học tập mà tôi yêu cầu					
10. Tôi sử dụng 5 phút cuối bài để đánh giá lại những gì mà sinh viên vừa học trong bài.					
11. Sau mỗi nhiệm vụ học tập, tôi yêu cầu sinh viên đánh giá lại những gì các em đã làm được dựa trên các tiêu chí đánh giá mà tôi cung cấp.					
12. Tôi tổ chức các hoạt động luyện tập (nói, nghe, viết) trước các kỳ thi chính thức.					
13. Tôi yêu cầu sinh viên xác định mục tiêu học tập cho mình và theo dõi sự tiến bộ của mình.					
14. Tôi khuyến khích sinh viên tìm ra những khó khăn của các em trong việc tiếp thu bài trên lớp.					
15. Tôi chia sẻ các tiêu chí đánh giá một bài tập tốt trước khi cho sinh viên thực hiện bài tập.					
16. Tôi làm mẫu trước khi yêu cầu sinh viên thực hiện một yêu cầu trong lớp.					
17. Tôi sử dụng các công cụ trực tuyến (ví dụ như các nhóm trên facebook) để đưa ra nhận xét cho sinh viên.					

TRONG LỚP TIẾNG ANH CỦA TÔI	Không bao giờ	Một vài lần trong một học kỳ	Trong khoảng một nửa các bài giảng	Trong hầu hết các bài giảng	Trong mỗi bài giảng
18. Tôi sử dụng các công cụ trực tuyến (ví dụ như các nhóm trên facebook) để cho sinh viên đặt câu hỏi về bài giảng của tôi.					
19. Tôi tạo cơ hội cho sinh viên đánh giá chéo bài của nhau (ví dụ như chấm điểm bài kiểm tra trên lớp hay đánh giá bài viết hay bài nói của nhau) dựa trên các tiêu chí đánh giá mà tôi cung cấp.					
20. Tôi tạo cơ hội cho sinh viên tự đánh giá bài của mình dựa trên các tiêu chí mà tôi cung cấp.					
21. Tôi sử dụng hồ sơ học tập của mỗi sinh viên (ví dụ như bài kiểm tra, nhận xét của giáo viên trên mỗi loại bài tập, kế hoạch, mục tiêu).					
22. Tôi xem xét tới ý kiến của sinh viên khi xác định mục tiêu cho bài giảng, các hoạt động tôi sẽ triển khai và thời gian hoàn thành các các bài tập.					
23. Tôi khuyến khích sinh viên xác định nhu cầu học tiếng Anh cho riêng mình.					
24. Tôi ủng hộ các sở thích và phong cách học khác nhau của sinh viên.					
25. Tôi nhấn mạnh với sinh viên của mình rằng việc học là trách nhiệm của sinh viên.					
26. Tôi tổ chức các hoạt động nhóm ở trên lớp.					
27. Tôi tổ chức các hoạt động nhóm ngoài lớp học.					
28. Tôi giao cho sinh viên các trách nhiệm khác nhau (ví dụ như chuẩn bị bảng, chuẩn bị câu thành ngữ của ngày, luyện phát âm, chuẩn bị các sự kiện quan trọng) ở cả trong và ngoài lớp học.					
29. Tôi thiết lập ra các dự án mà sinh viên sẽ phải sử dụng nhiều nguồn lực khác nhau để hoàn thành.					
30. Tôi khuyến khích sinh viên sử dụng càng nhiều tiếng Anh càng tốt.					
31. Tôi khuyên sinh viên không nên sợ mắc lỗi khi sử dụng tiếng Anh vì lỗi là một phần của quá trình học.					
32. Tôi khuyến khích sinh viên thảo luận các chủ đề mà các em đã tìm hiểu.					
33. Tôi khuyến khích sinh viên học tiếng Anh trong các tình huống bên ngoài lớp học mà không có sự trợ giúp của giáo viên.					

TRONG LỚP TIẾNG ANH CỦA TÔI	Không bao giờ	Một vài lần trong một học kỳ	Trong khoảng một nửa các bài giảng	Trong hầu hết các bài giảng	Trong mỗi bài giảng
34. Tôi cố gắng không trả lời trực tiếp câu hỏi của sinh viên mà cung cấp các nguồn thông tin để sinh viên có thể tự tìm câu trả lời cho mình.					

Các thầy cô có muốn tham gia và một dự án mà có thể mang lại cho thầy/cô các ý tưởng và các hoạt động để cải thiện các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của các thầy/cô, giúp các thầy cô phát triển tính tự chủ/chủ động của sinh viên trong việc học tiếng Anh và nhận một món quà từ Úc không?

Yes No

Nếu các thầy cô sẵn lòng tham gia vào dự án thông qua việc tham gia vào một cuộc phỏng vấn thì xin các thầy cô để lại thông tin để chúng tôi có thể liên lạc.

Tên:.....

Địa chỉ email:.....

Nếu các thầy/cô đồng ý tham gia phỏng vấn, xin các thầy cô hãy đánh dấu và ô thông tin dưới đây

Tôi đồng ý là thông tin chung mà tôi cung cấp trong bản khảo sát cũng là các thông tin mà tôi sẽ cung cấp nếu được hỏi các câu hỏi tương tự trong cuộc phỏng vấn tôi. Tôi hiểu rằng kết quả chung của cuộc khảo sát sẽ được giữ bí mật.

Trân trọng cảm ơn sự giúp đỡ của thầy/cô

Tất cả các câu trả lời của các thầy cô đều được giữ bí mật

Appendix D: Ethics approval



RESEARCH BRANCH
OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS, COMPLIANCE
AND INTEGRITY
THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

LEVEL 4, RUNDLE MALL PLAZA
50 RUNDLE MALL
ADELAIDE SA 5000 AUSTRALIA

TELEPHONE +61 8 8313 5137
FACSIMILE +61 8 8313 3700
EMAIL hrec@adelaide.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Number 00123M

Applicant: Dr J Miller

School: School of Education

Project Title: English language learner autonomy in the Vietnamese
Higher Education context: Enabling factors and barriers
arising from assessment practices

The University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee
Low Risk Human Research Ethics Review Group (Faculty of Arts and Faculty of the Professions)

ETHICS APPROVAL No: H-2016-147 **App. No.:** 0000021791

APPROVED for the period: 07 Jul 2016 to 31 Jul 2019

Thank you for your response dated 5.07.2016 to the matters raised.

It is noted this study includes Ha Thi Ngoc Tran, PhD candidate.

The relevant approvals from the universities referred to in 2.7 is required before research at each institution can commence.

DR JOHN TIBBY
Co-Convenor
Low Risk Human Research Ethics Review Group
(Faculty of Arts and Faculty of the Professions)

Appendix E: Participant information sheets

Appendix E1: Participant information sheet for teachers



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

PROJECT TITLE

English language learner autonomy in the Vietnamese Higher Education context:
Enabling factors and barriers arising from assessment practices

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: H-2016-147

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Julia Miller

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Ha Thi Ngoc Tran

STUDENT'S DEGREE: PhD

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

This study explores the enablers and barriers to the development of English language learner autonomy in assessment practices in the Vietnamese higher education context. The research explores the characterisation of current assessment practices in the Vietnamese higher education context, whether these classroom assessment practices enable or constrain English language learner autonomy, and what factors in assessment practices enable and constrain learner autonomy.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Ha Thi Ngoc Tran.

This research will form the basis for her PhD studies at the University of Adelaide under the supervision of Dr Julia Miller, Dr Edward Palmer and Dr John Willison.

Why am I being invited to participate?

The participants invited in this research are those who are identified as:

- Willing to take part in the project

- Using a variety of assessment practices in their English language classes
- Allowing some degree of learner autonomy in their classes

What will I be asked to do?

The participants will be involved in the following activities:

- Have one of their class observed by the researcher during the period of 15 weeks.
- Interact with the researcher before and/or after class time.
- Take part in one audio-recorded interview section that will last for one hour.
- Possibility for follow-up interview (s): when clarity for further information is needed.

Locations and time for the interview will depend upon agreement of both the participant and the researcher.

How much time will the project take?

The observation will be conducted over 15 weeks.

There will be one interview that takes about one hour. The interview will be conducted at the participants' most convenient time.

The participants involving in the project will get an English book and a pen for their interviewing time.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

For the observation, there are no foreseeable risks other than those associated with regular observation process. The researcher will only focus on and take notes about the assessment activities carried on in the class and the responses of the students. The researcher will sit quietly in the class like a normal student and will not interfere in the teacher's teaching and the students' learning. In addition, teacher participants will be clearly informed of the frequency of the observations, and the schedule of the observations will be provided for them in advance. Teacher participants will also be informed that no audio-recordings or video-recording will be made during the observation.

For the interview, there are no foreseeable risks other than those associated with regular interview process.

The interviewees can choose the time and place they are happiest with for the interview.

What are the benefits of the research project?

This research may benefit the participant and/or the community in several ways:

- This research may provide a framework for English language teachers at tertiary education in Vietnam who would like to promote autonomy among their students to reflect their teaching activities in general and assessment practices in particular.
- This research may propose some assessment models that would be useful for English teachers who would like to promote learning in general and learner autonomy in particular via assessment practices.

Can I withdraw from the project?

Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and the participant may withdraw at any stage or avoid answering questions which are considered too personal or intrusive. A decision not to take part in or withdraw from the project will not affect the participants' professional status at the affiliated institution.

What will happen to my information?

All the information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence during the research process (i.e. recruitment, data collection, data analysis) and during the reporting of research results and publications. Participants' identities will not be revealed.

The interview data will be transcribed and the participant will have access to the transcripts in order to give additional comments or feedbacks. Access to the interview data will be restricted to the researcher, the supervisors and the participant. The interview transcript will be stored in two secure places: the researcher's password-protected computer and a secure locker in the researcher's office.

Only the significant and relevant parts of the interview transcripts will be translated into English language for discussion with the PhD supervisors as well as for the research report. The participant will be given a summary of the research results in Vietnamese language.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

If you have questions or inquiries regarding the project, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher or the supervisory panel.

Name, Title	Telephone Number	Email
Ms Ha Thi Ngoc Tran	+61 410250690	ha.tran@adelaide.edu.au
Dr Julia Miller	+61883134721	julia.miller@adelaide.edu.au
Dr Edward Palmer	+ 61 883138931	edward.palmer@adelaide.edu.au
Dr John Willison	+61883133219	john.willison@adelaide.edu.au

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (approval number H-2016-147). If you have questions or problems associated

with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator, Dr Julia Miller. Contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat on phone +61 8 8313 6028 or by email to hrec@adelaide.edu.au. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding concerns or a complaint, the University's policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If I want to participate, what do I do?

If you would like to participate in this research project, please contact the researcher on the aforementioned details or reply to the email sent to you by the third party. A consent form will be given to you to sign before the project starts.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Ha Thi Ngoc Tran

Dr Julia Miller

Dr Edward Palmer

Dr John Willison

BẢNG THÔNG TIN DÀNH CHO KHÁCH THỂ NGHIÊN CỨU LÀ GIÁO VIÊN

TÊN ĐỀ TÀI: Tính tự chủ trong việc học tiếng Anh của sinh viên đại học không chuyên ở Việt nam: Những yếu tố thúc đẩy và cản trở nảy sinh trong các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của giáo viên

SỐ PHÊ DUYỆT CỦA ỦY BAN ĐẠO ĐỨC TRONG NGHIÊN CỨU CON NGƯỜI:
H-2016-147

GIÁO VIÊN HƯỚNG DẪN CHÍNH: Tiến sỹ Julia Miller

NGHIÊN CỨU SINH: Trần Thị Ngọc Hà

BẠC HỌC: Tiến sỹ

Kính gửi các thầy/cô tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu

Thầy/cô được mời tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu dưới đây

Đề tài nghiên cứu vấn đề gì?

Đề tài này nghiên cứu để tìm ra các yếu tố thúc đẩy và cản trở nảy sinh trong các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của giáo viên đối với sự phát triển tính tự chủ/chủ động trong việc học tiếng Anh của sinh viên không chuyên trong các trường đại học ở Việt nam. Mục tiêu của đề tài nghiên cứu là tìm ra các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá trong các lớp học tiếng Anh trong các trường đại học ở Việt nam đang diễn ra như thế nào, các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá này cản trở hay thúc đẩy tính tự chủ của sinh viên và các yếu tố nào góp phần cản trở hay thúc đẩy tính tự chủ của sinh viên trong việc học tiếng Anh.

Đề tài nghiên cứu này được thực hiện bởi những ai?

Đề tài nghiên cứu này được thực hiện bởi Trần Thị Ngọc Hà

Đề tài nghiên cứu này là cơ sở cho việc hoàn thành bậc học Tiến sỹ tại Trường Đại học Adelaide, với sự hướng dẫn của Tiến sỹ Julia Miller (giáo viên hướng dẫn chính), Tiến sỹ Edward Palmer (giáo viên hướng dẫn phụ), và Tiến sỹ John Willison (giáo viên hướng dẫn phụ)

Tại sao tôi lại được mời tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này?

Những thầy/cô được mời tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này là những thầy/cô:

- Tự nguyện tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu
- Sử dụng đa dạng các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá trong lớp mình giảng dạy
- Khuyến khích sinh viên trong lớp mình giảng dạy thể hiện sự chủ động/tự chủ trong việc học tiếng Anh.

Tôi sẽ phải làm gì khi tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này?

Những thầy/cô tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu sẽ tham gia vào các hoạt động sau:

- Cho phép nghiên cứu sinh dự một trong các lớp học của mình để quan sát.
- Trao đổi với nghiên cứu sinh trước và sau giờ lên lớp.
- Tham gia vào một cuộc phỏng vấn có ghi âm kéo dài trong khoảng 1 giờ.

- Tham gia vào các cuộc phỏng vấn sau đó nếu có thông tin gì cần làm rõ.

Thời gian và địa điểm của cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ tùy thuộc vào sự đồng thuận giữa nghiên cứu sinh và thầy/cô.

Tham gia vào đề tài sẽ mất bao nhiêu thời gian?

Quá trình quan sát sẽ diễn ra trong vòng 15 tuần.

Sẽ có một cuộc phỏng vấn kéo dài khoảng một giờ. Cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ diễn ra vào thời gian thuận tiện nhất cho thầy/cô.

Trao đổi giữa thầy/cô và nghiên cứu sinh sẽ diễn ra trong thời gian từ 4-7 phút trước và/hoặc sau giờ lên lớp.

Các thầy/cô tham gia vào dự án sẽ nhận được một quyển sách tiếng Anh hoặc một món quà từ Úc để cảm ơn về thời gian tham gia vào dự án.

Có rủi ro nào mà các khách thể tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu có thể gặp phải không?

Thầy/cô tham gia vào đề tài không gặp phải rủi ro nào trong quá trình quan sát. Nghiên cứu sinh sẽ chỉ tập trung ghi chép các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá mà giáo viên sử dụng trên lớp và phản ứng của sinh viên đối với các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của giáo viên trên lớp. Nghiên cứu sinh sẽ không can thiệp vào quá trình giảng dạy của giáo viên cũng như quá trình học của sinh viên. Ngoài ra, tần suất cũng như lịch trình dự giờ quan sát sẽ được thông báo trước cho thầy/cô. Trong suốt quá trình quan sát, sẽ không có ghi âm hay ghi hình.

Thầy/cô tham gia vào đề tài không gặp phải rủi ro nào trong quá trình phỏng vấn.

Thầy/cô có quyền lựa chọn thời gian và địa điểm phỏng vấn mà họ cảm thấy thoải mái nhất.

Các lợi ích mà đề tài nghiên cứu mang lại là gì?

Đề tài nghiên cứu có thể mang lại một số lợi ích sau cho khách thể nghiên cứu:

- Đề tài nghiên cứu có thể cung cấp cho các thầy/cô một mô hình để các Thầy/cô mong muốn phát triển tính tự chủ/chủ động của sinh viên trong việc học tiếng Anh đánh giá lại các hoạt động giảng dạy của mình và đặc biệt là các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá trên lớp mà mình thực hiện.
- Đề tài nghiên cứu có thể đề xuất một số mô hình kiểm tra đánh giá mà có thể hữu ích cho những thầy/cô mong muốn phát triển tính tự chủ của sinh viên trong việc học tiếng Anh.

Tôi có thể rút khỏi đề tài nghiên cứu không?

Việc tham gia vào đề tài này là hoàn toàn tự nguyện, và các thầy/cô có toàn quyền rút khỏi dự án vào bất kỳ thời điểm nào hoặc từ chối trả lời bất cứ câu hỏi nào mà họ rằng riêng tư hoặc không phù hợp.

Quyết định tham gia hoặc rút khỏi đề tài nghiên cứu sẽ không ảnh hưởng gì đến vị thế của các thầy/cô trong cơ quan/tổ chức nơi thầy/cô công tác.

Thông tin của tôi được xử lý như thế nào?

Tất cả thông tin sẽ được bảo mật hoàn toàn trong suốt quá trình nghiên cứu (tuyển khách thể nghiên cứu, thu thập số liệu, phân tích số liệu) và trong suốt quá trình báo cáo và trình bày kết quả nghiên cứu. Đặc điểm nhận dạng của khách thể nghiên cứu sẽ không được tiết lộ.

Các ghi chép trong quá trình quan sát chỉ dùng duy nhất cho mục đích nghiên cứu. Chỉ có nghiên cứu sinh, giáo viên hướng dẫn và khách thể nghiên cứu là được truy cập vào dữ liệu. Bản ghi lại cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được lưu trữ ở hai nơi khác nhau: trong máy tính có cài mật khẩu của nghiên cứu sinh và trong tủ có khóa trong văn phòng của nghiên cứu sinh.

Chỉ những phần quan trọng và thích hợp mới được dịch sang tiếng Anh để thảo luận với giáo viên hướng dẫn cũng như trong báo cáo nghiên cứu. Khách thể sẽ được cung cấp bản tóm tắt kết quả nghiên cứu bằng tiếng Việt.

Tôi sẽ liên hệ với ai nếu tôi có câu hỏi về đề tài nghiên cứu?

Nếu thầy/cô có câu hỏi nào, hãy liên hệ trực tiếp với tôi hoặc các giáo viên hướng dẫn của tôi theo thông tin liên lạc cụ thể như sau:

Tên/chức danh	Điện thoại liên hệ	Email
Nghiên cứu sinh: Trần Thị Ngọc Hà	+61 410250690	ha.tran@adelaide.edu.au
Tiến sỹ Julia Miller	+61883134721	julia.miller@adelaide.edu.au
Tiến sỹ Edward Palmer	+ 61 883138931	edward.palmer@adelaide.edu.au
Tiến sỹ John Willison	+61883133219	john.willison@adelaide.edu.au

Nếu tôi muốn phàn nàn hay phản ánh về dự án thì tôi sẽ phải làm gì?

Đề tài nghiên cứu này đã thông qua bởi Ủy ban Đạo đức trong Nghiên cứu Con người, Trường Đại học Adelaide (theo số H-2016-147). Nếu thầy/cô có câu hỏi hay vấn đề thắc mắc nào về các lĩnh vực tham gia của thầy/cô trong đề tài nghiên cứu, hoặc muốn phàn nàn hay phản ánh gì về đề tài nghiên cứu, hãy liên lạc với giáo viên hướng dẫn chính của tôi, Tiến sỹ Julia Miller. Nếu thầy/cô muốn trao đổi với 1 người độc lập về những phàn nàn của thầy/cô, hãy liên lạc với Thư ký của Ủy ban Đạo Đức trong Nghiên cứu Con người theo số điện thoại +61 8 8313 6028 hoặc gửi thư tới địa chỉ email hrec@adelaide.edu.au. Ý kiến phản ánh hay phàn nàn của thầy/cô sẽ được xem xét và giải quyết triệt để. Kết quả giải quyết sẽ được thông báo tới thầy/cô.

Nếu tôi muốn tham gia, tôi phải làm gì?

Nếu thầy/cô muốn tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu thì hãy ký vào bản đồng ý tham gia đề tài mà đã được cung cấp và gửi lại cho người đại diện của tôi.

Tôi xin chân thành cảm ơn

Trần Thị Ngọc Hà

Julia Miller

Edward Palmer

John Willison

Appendix E2: Participant information sheet for observed students



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR OBSERVED STUDENTS

PROJECT TITLE

English language learner autonomy in the Vietnamese Higher Education context:
Enabling factors and barriers arising from assessment practices

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: *H-2016-147*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Julia Miller

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Ha Thi Ngoc Tran

STUDENT'S DEGREE: PhD

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

This study explores the enablers and barriers to the development of English language learner autonomy in assessment practices in the Vietnamese higher education context. The research explores the characterisation of current assessment practices in the Vietnamese higher education context, whether these classroom assessment practices enable or constrain English language learner autonomy, and what factors in assessment practices enable and constrain learner autonomy.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Ha Thi Ngoc Tran.

This research will form the basis for her PhD studies at the University of Adelaide under the supervision of Dr Julia Miller, Dr Edward Palmer and Dr John Willison.

Why am I being invited to participate?

The student participants invited in this research are those who are identified as voluntary to participate in the project.

What will I be asked to do?

The student participants will involve in the following activities:

- Have their class behaviours observed during class time.
- Interact with the researcher after the class time (possibly at break time).

How much time will the project take?

The observation will be over 15 weeks.

The interaction will take about 5 to 10 minutes each time.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

For the observation there are no foreseeable risks other than those associated with regular observation process. The researcher will only focus on and take notes about students' responses to teacher's assessment practices in the class. The researcher will sit quietly in the class like a normal student and will not interfere in teacher's teaching and students' learning. No video or audio recordings will be made during the observations.

For the interaction, there are no foreseeable risks.

What are the benefits of the research project?

This research may benefit the participant in several ways:

- The project may provide students with a different look at the role of assessment in learning and inspire them to take on some assessment models that help develop their autonomy.
- This research may propose some assessment models that would be useful for English learners who would like to self-reflect their own learning.

Can I withdraw from the project?

Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and the participant may withdraw at any stage or avoid answering questions which are considered too personal or intrusive.

A decision not to take part in or withdraw from the project will not affect the participants' status at the affiliated institution.

What will happen to my information?

All the information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence during the research process (i.e. recruitment, data collection, data analysis) and during the reporting of research results and publications. Participants' identities will not be revealed.

The observation field notes will be kept confidentially and used only for the purpose of this study. Access to the field notes will be strictly restricted to the researcher and her supervisors. The field notes will be stored in two secure places: the researcher's password-protected computer and a secure locker in the researcher's office.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

If you have questions or inquiries regarding the project, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher or the supervisory panel.

Name, Title	Telephone Number	Email
Ms Ha Thi Ngoc Tran	+61 410250690	ha.tran@adelaide.edu.au
Dr Julia Miller	+61883134721	julia.miller@adelaide.edu.au
Dr Edward Palmer	+ 61 883138931	edward.palmer@adelaide.edu.au
Dr John Willison	+61883133219	john.willison@adelaide.edu.au

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (approval number H-2016-147). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator, Dr Julia Miller. Contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat on phone +61 8 8313 6028 or by email to hrec@adelaide.edu.au. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding concerns or a complaint, the University's policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If I want to participate, what do I do?

If you would like to participate in this research project, please sign in the consent form and return it to the third party.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Ha Thi Ngoc Tran

Dr Julia Miller

Dr Edward Palmer

Dr John Willison

BẢNG THÔNG TIN DÀNH CHO KHÁCH THỂ NGHIÊN CỨU LÀ SINH VIÊN ĐƯỢC QUAN SÁT

TÊN ĐỀ TÀI: Tính tự chủ trong việc học tiếng Anh của sinh viên đại học không chuyên ở Việt nam: Những yếu tố thúc đẩy và cản trở nảy sinh trong các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của giáo viên

**SỐ PHÊ DUYỆT CỦA ỦY BAN ĐẠO TRỌNG ĐỨC NGHIÊN CỨU CON NGƯỜI:
H-2016-147**

GIÁO VIÊN HƯỚNG DẪN CHÍNH: Tiến sỹ Julia Miller

NGHIÊN CỨU SINH: Trần Thị Ngọc Hà

BẠC HỌC: Tiến sỹ

Kính gửi các anh/chị tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu

Anh/chị được mời tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu dưới đây

Đề tài nghiên cứu vấn đề gì?

Đề tài này nghiên cứu để tìm ra các yếu tố thúc đẩy và cản trở nảy sinh trong các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của giáo viên đối với sự phát triển tính tự chủ/chủ động trong việc học tiếng Anh của sinh viên không chuyên trong các trường đại học ở Việt nam. Mục tiêu của đề tài nghiên cứu là tìm ra các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá trong các lớp học tiếng Anh trong các trường đại học ở Việt nam đang diễn ra như thế nào, các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá này cản trở hay thúc đẩy tính tự chủ của sinh viên và các yếu tố nào góp phần cản trở hay thúc đẩy tính tự chủ của sinh viên trong việc học tiếng Anh.

Đề tài nghiên cứu này được thực hiện bởi những ai?

Đề tài nghiên cứu này được thực hiện bởi Trần Thị Ngọc Hà

Đề tài nghiên cứu này là cơ sở cho việc hoàn thành bậc học Tiến sỹ tại Trường Đại học Adelaide, với sự hướng dẫn của Tiến sỹ Julia Miller (giáo viên hướng dẫn chính), Tiến sỹ Edward Palmer (giáo viên hướng dẫn phụ), và Tiến sỹ John Willison (giáo viên hướng dẫn phụ)

Tại sao tôi lại được mời tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này?

Những sinh viên được mời tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này là những sinh viên tự nguyện tham gia vào dự án.

Tôi sẽ phải làm gì khi tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu này?

Những sinh viên tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu sẽ tham gia vào các hoạt động sau:

- cho phép nghiên cứu sinh quan sát các hành vi thể hiện trong lớp học
- Tham gia trao đổi với nghiên cứu sinh sau giờ học (giờ ra chơi)

Tham gia vào đề tài sẽ mất bao nhiêu thời gian?

Quá trình quan sát sẽ diễn ra trong vòng 15 tuần.

Thời gian trao đổi giữa nghiên cứu sinh và sinh viên sẽ diễn ra trong khoảng 5 đến 10 phút

Có rủi ro nào mà các sinh viên tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu có thể gặp phải không?

Sinh viên tham gia vào đề tài không gặp phải rủi ro nào trong quá trình quan sát. Nghiên cứu sinh sẽ chỉ tập trung ghi chép phản ứng của sinh viên đối với các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của giáo viên trên lớp. Nghiên cứu sinh sẽ không can thiệp vào quá trình giảng dạy của giáo viên cũng như quá trình học của sinh viên. Trong suốt quá trình quan sát, sẽ không có ghi âm hay ghi hình.

Trong quá trình trao đổi, sinh viên cũng không gặp rủi ro gì.

Sinh viên tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu có quyền lựa chọn thời gian và địa điểm phỏng vấn mà họ cảm thấy thoải mái nhất.

Các lợi ích mà đề tài nghiên cứu mang lại là gì?

Đề tài nghiên cứu có thể mang lại một số lợi ích sau:

- Đề tài nghiên cứu có thể mang lại cho sinh viên một cái nhìn khác về vai trò của công tác kiểm tra đánh giá trong quá trình học và có thể tạo động lực cho sinh viên thực hiện một số mô hình kiểm tra đánh giá để phát triển tính tự chủ/chủ động của mình
- Đề tài nghiên cứu có thể đề xuất một số mô hình kiểm tra đánh giá mà có thể hữu ích cho những người học tiếng Anh mà muốn tự đánh giá quá trình học của bản thân

Tôi có thể rút khỏi đề tài nghiên cứu không?

Việc tham gia vào đề tài này là hoàn toàn tự nguyện, và sinh viên có toàn quyền rút khỏi dự án vào bất kỳ thời điểm nào hoặc từ chối trả lời bất cứ câu hỏi nào mà họ cảm thấy tư hoặc không phù hợp.

Quyết định tham gia hoặc rút khỏi đề tài nghiên cứu sẽ không ảnh hưởng gì đến vị thế của sinh viên trong trường/tổ chức nơi sinh viên theo học.

Thông tin của tôi được sử lý như thế nào?

Tất cả thông tin sẽ được bảo mật hoàn toàn trong suốt quá trình nghiên cứu (tuyển khách thể nghiên cứu, thu thập số liệu, phân tích số liệu) và trong suốt quá trình báo cáo và trình bày kết quả nghiên cứu. Đặc điểm nhận dạng của khách thể nghiên cứu sẽ không được tiết lộ.

Các ghi chép trong quá trình quan sát chỉ dùng duy nhất cho mục đích nghiên cứu. Chỉ có nghiên cứu sinh, giáo viên hướng dẫn và khách thể nghiên cứu là được truy cập vào dữ liệu. Bản ghi lại cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được lưu trữ ở hai nơi khác nhau: trong máy tính có cài mật khẩu của nghiên cứu sinh và trong tủ có khóa trong văn phòng của nghiên cứu sinh.

Chỉ những phần quan trọng và thích hợp mới được dịch sang tiếng Anh để thảo luận với giáo viên hướng dẫn cũng như trong báo cáo nghiên cứu. Khách thể sẽ được cung cấp bản tóm tắt kết quả nghiên cứu bằng tiếng Việt.

Tôi sẽ liên hệ với ai nếu tôi có câu hỏi về đề tài nghiên cứu?

Nếu anh/chị có câu hỏi nào, hãy liên hệ trực tiếp với tôi hoặc các giáo viên hướng dẫn của tôi theo thông tin liên lạc cụ thể như sau:

Tên/chức danh	Điện thoại liên hệ	Email
Nghiên cứu sinh: Trần Thị Ngọc Hà	+61 410250690	ha.tran@adelaide.edu.au
Tiến sỹ Julia Miller	+61883134721	julia.miller@adelaide.edu.au
Tiến sỹ Edward Palmer	+ 61 883138931	edward.palmer@adelaide.edu.au
Tiến sỹ John Willison	+61883133219	john.willison@adelaide.edu.au

Nếu tôi muốn phản nài hay phản ánh về dự án thì tôi sẽ phải làm gì?

Đề tài nghiên cứu này đã thông qua bởi Ủy ban Đạo đức trong Nghiên cứu Con người, Trường Đại học Adelaide (theo số H-2016-147). Nếu anh/chị có câu hỏi hay vấn đề thắc mắc nào về các lĩnh vực tham gia của anh/chị trong đề tài nghiên cứu, hoặc muốn phản nài hay phản ánh gì về đề tài nghiên cứu, hãy liên lạc với giáo viên hướng dẫn chính của tôi, Tiến sỹ Julia Miller. Nếu anh/chị muốn trao đổi với 1 người độc lập về những phản nài của anh/chị, hãy liên lạc với Thư ký của Ủy ban Đạo đức trong Nghiên cứu Con người theo số điện thoại +61 8 8313 6028 hoặc gửi thư tới địa chỉ email hrec@adelaide.edu.au. Ý kiến phản ánh hay phản nài của anh/chị sẽ được xem xét và giải quyết triệt để. Kết quả giải quyết sẽ được thông báo tới anh/chị.

Nếu tôi muốn tham gia, tôi phải làm gì?

Nếu anh/chị muốn tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu thì hãy ký vào bản đồng ý tham gia đề tài mà đã được cung cấp và gửi lại cho người đại diện của tôi.

Tôi xin chân thành cảm ơn

Trần Thị Ngọc Hà

Julia Miller

Edward Palmer

John Willison

Appendix E3: Participant information sheet for interviewed students



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEWED STUDENTS

PROJECT TITLE

English language learner autonomy in the Vietnamese Higher Education context:
Enabling factors and barriers arising from assessment practices

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: *H-2016-147*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Julia Miller

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Ha Thi Ngoc Tran

STUDENT'S DEGREE: PhD

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

This study explores the enablers and barriers to the development of English language learner autonomy in assessment practices in the Vietnamese higher education context. The research explores the characterisation of current assessment practices in the Vietnamese higher education context, whether these classroom assessment practices enable or constrain English language learner autonomy, and what factors in assessment practices enable and constrain learner autonomy.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Ha Thi Ngoc Tran.

This research will form the basis for her PhD studies at the University of Adelaide under the supervision of Dr Julia Miller, Dr Edward Palmer and Dr John Willison.

Why am I being invited to participate?

The student participants invited in this research are those who are identified as:

- Willing to participate in the project.
- Demonstrating a variety of levels of autonomy.

What will I be asked to do?

The student participants will take part in an audio-recorded interview that will last for forty-five minutes.

Locations and time for the interview will depend upon agreement of both the participant and the researcher.

How much time will the project take?

There will be one interview that takes about forty-five minutes. The interview will be conducted at the participants' most convenient time.

The participants involved in the project will get a small gift from Australia for their time.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

For the interview, there are no foreseeable risks other than those associated with regular interview process.

The interviewees can choose the time and place they are happiest with for the interview.

What are the benefits of the research project?

This research may benefit the participant in several ways:

- The interview may be a fruitful sharing session to reflect the participants' beliefs and understanding about learning and assessment, as well as their roles and their teacher's roles in learning process.
- The project may provide students with a different look at the role of assessment in learning and inspire them to take on some assessment models that help develop their autonomy.
- This research may propose some assessment models that would be useful for English learners who would like to self-reflect their own learning.

Can I withdraw from the project?

Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and the participant may withdraw at any stage or avoid answering questions which are considered too personal or intrusive.

A decision not to take part in or withdraw from the project will not affect the participants' status at the affiliated institution.

What will happen to my information?

All the information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence during the research process (i.e. recruitment, data collection, data analysis) and during the reporting of research results and publications. Participants' identities will not be revealed.

The interview data will be transcribed and the participant will have access to the transcripts in order to give additional comments or feedbacks. Access to the interview data will be restricted to the researcher, the supervisors and the participant. The interview transcript will be stored in two secure places: the researcher's password-protected computer and a secure locker in the researcher's office.

Only the significant and relevant parts of the interview transcripts will be translated into English language for discussion with the PhD supervisors as well as for the research report. The participant will be given a summary of the research results in Vietnamese language.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

If you have questions or inquiries regarding the project, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher or the supervisory panel.

Name, Title	Telephone Number	Email
Ms Ha Thi Ngoc Tran	+61 410250690	ha.tran@adelaide.edu.au
Dr Julia Miller	+61883134721	julia.miller@adelaide.edu.au
Dr Edward Palmer	+ 61 883138931	edward.palmer@adelaide.edu.au
Dr John Willison	+61883133219	john.willison@adelaide.edu.au

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (approval number H-2016-147). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator, Dr Julia Miller. Contact the Human Research Ethics Committee’s Secretariat on phone +61 8 8313 6028 or by email to hrec@adelaide.edu.au.if you wish to speak with an independent person regarding concerns or a complaint, the University’s policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If I want to participate, what do I do?

If you would like to participate in this research project, please sign in the consent form provided and return it to the third party.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Ha Thi Ngoc Tran

Dr Julia Miller

Dr Edward Palmer

Dr John Willison

**BẢNG THÔNG TIN DÀNH CHO KHÁCH THỂ NGHIÊN CỨU LÀ SINH
VIÊN ĐƯỢC PHỎNG VẤN**

TÊN ĐỀ TÀI: Tính tự chủ trong việc học tiếng Anh của sinh viên đại học không chuyên ở Việt nam: Những yếu tố thúc đẩy và cản trở nảy sinh trong các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của giáo viên

**SỐ PHÊ DUYỆT CỦA ỦY BAN ĐẠO ĐỨC TRONG NGHIÊN CỨU CON NGƯỜI:
H-2016-147**

GIÁO VIÊN HƯỚNG DẪN CHÍNH: Tiến sỹ Julia Miller

NGHIÊN CỨU SINH: Trần Thị Ngọc Hà

BẠC HỌC: Tiến sỹ

Kính gửi các anh/chị tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu

Anh/chị được mời tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu dưới đây

Đề tài nghiên cứu vấn đề gì?

Đề tài này nghiên cứu để tìm ra các yếu tố thúc đẩy và cản trở nảy sinh trong các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của giáo viên đối với sự phát triển tính tự chủ/chủ động trong việc học tiếng Anh của sinh viên không chuyên trong các trường đại học ở Việt nam. Mục tiêu của đề tài nghiên cứu là tìm ra các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá trong các lớp học tiếng Anh trong các trường đại học ở Việt nam đang diễn ra như thế nào, các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá này cản trở hay thúc đẩy tính tự chủ của sinh viên và các yếu tố nào góp phần cản trở hay thúc đẩy tính tự chủ của sinh viên trong việc học tiếng Anh.

Đề tài nghiên cứu này được thực hiện bởi những ai?

Đề tài nghiên cứu này được thực hiện bởi Trần Thị Ngọc Hà.

Đề tài nghiên cứu này là cơ sở cho việc hoàn thành bậc học Tiến sỹ tại Trường Đại học Adelaide, với sự hướng dẫn của Tiến sỹ Julia Miller (giáo viên hướng dẫn chính) và Tiến sỹ Edward Palmer (giáo viên hướng dẫn phụ), và Tiến sỹ John Willison (giáo viên hướng dẫn phụ)

Tại sao tôi lại được mời tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này?

Những sinh viên được mời tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này là những sinh viên

- Tự nguyện tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu
- Thể hiện các mức độ tự chủ/chủ động khác nhau trong việc học tiếng Anh

Tôi sẽ phải làm gì khi tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu này?

Những sinh viên tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu sẽ tham gia vào một cuộc phỏng vấn có ghi âm trong vòng 45 phút.

Thời gian và địa điểm phỏng vấn sẽ phụ thuộc và sự đồng thuận giữa người nghiên cứu và người tham gia phỏng vấn.

Tham gia vào đề tài sẽ mất bao nhiêu thời gian?

Sẽ có một cuộc phỏng vấn kéo dài 45 phút. Cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ diễn ra vào thời gian thích hợp nhất cho khách thể nghiên cứu.

Sinh viên tham gia và đề tài nghiên cứu sẽ nhận được một món quà nhỏ từ Úc để cảm ơn về thời gian mà họ đã dành để tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu.

Có rủi ro nào mà các sinh viên tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu có thể gặp phải không?

Sinh viên tham gia vào đề tài không gặp phải rủi ro nào trong quá trình phỏng vấn.

Sinh viên tham gia và dự án có quyền lựa chọn thời gian và địa điểm phỏng vấn mà họ cảm thấy thoải mái nhất.

Các lợi ích mà đề tài nghiên cứu mang lại là gì?

Đề tài nghiên cứu có thể mang lại một số lợi ích sau cho các sinh viên tham gia:

- Quá trình phỏng vấn có thể là thời gian chia sẻ quý báu giúp cho sinh viên nhìn nhận lại nhận thức, hiểu biết của mình về việc học cũng như công tác kiểm tra đánh giá và vai trò của sinh viên và giáo viên trong hoạt động học.
- Đề tài nghiên cứu có thể mang lại cho sinh viên một cái nhìn khác về vai trò của công tác kiểm tra đánh giá trong quá trình học và có thể tạo động lực cho sinh viên thực hiện một số mô hình kiểm tra đánh giá để phát triển tính tự chủ/chủ động của mình
- Đề tài nghiên cứu có thể đề xuất một số mô hình kiểm tra đánh giá mà có thể hữu ích cho những người học tiếng Anh mà muốn tự đánh giá quá trình học của bản thân

Tôi có thể rút khỏi đề tài nghiên cứu không?

Việc tham gia vào đề tài này là hoàn toàn tự nguyện, và sinh viên tham gia dự án có toàn quyền rút khỏi dự án vào bất kỳ thời điểm nào hoặc từ chối trả lời bất cứ câu hỏi nào mà họ rằng riêng tư hoặc không phù hợp.

Quyết định tham gia hoặc rút khỏi đề tài nghiên cứu sẽ không ảnh hưởng gì đến vì thế của sinh viên trong trường/tổ chức mà sinh viên theo học.

Thông tin của tôi được sử lý như thế nào?

Tất cả thông tin sẽ được bảo mật hoàn toàn trong suốt quá trình nghiên cứu (tuyển khách thể nghiên cứu, thu thập số liệu, phân tích số liệu) và trong suốt quá trình báo cáo và trình bày kết quả nghiên cứu. Đặc điểm nhận dạng của khách thể nghiên cứu sẽ không được tiết lộ.

Dữ liệu phỏng vấn sẽ được ghi chép và khách thể nghiên cứu có thể truy cập vào các ghi chép này để đưa ra các nhận xét và góp ý. Chỉ có nghiên cứu sinh, giáo viên hướng dẫn và khách thể nghiên cứu là được truy cập vào dữ liệu. Bản ghi lại cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được lưu trữ ở hai nơi khác nhau: trong máy tính có cài mật khẩu của nghiên cứu sinh và trong tủ có khóa trong văn phòng của nghiên cứu sinh.

Chỉ những phần quan trọng và thích hợp mới được dịch sang tiếng Anh để thảo luận với giáo viên hướng dẫn cũng như trong báo cáo nghiên cứu. Khách thể sẽ được cung cấp bản tóm tắt kết quả nghiên cứu bằng tiếng Việt.

Tôi sẽ liên hệ với ai nếu tôi có câu hỏi về đề tài nghiên cứu?

Nếu khách thể nghiên cứu có câu hỏi nào, hãy liên hệ trực tiếp với tôi hoặc các giáo viên hướng dẫn của tôi theo thông tin liên lạc cụ thể như sau:

Tên/chức danh	Điện thoại liên hệ	Email
Nghiên cứu sinh: Trần Thị Ngọc Hà	+61 410250690	ha.tran@adelaide.edu.au
Tiến sỹ Julia Miller	+61883134721	julia.miller@adelaide.edu.au
Tiến sỹ Edward Palmer	+ 61 883138931	edward.palmer@adelaide.edu.au
Tiến sỹ John Willison	+61883133219	john.willison@adelaide.edu.au

Nếu tôi muốn phàn nàn hay phản ánh về dự án thì tôi sẽ phải làm gì?

Đề tài nghiên cứu này đã thông qua bởi Ủy ban Đạo đức trong Nghiên cứu Con người, Trường Đại học Adelaide (theo số H-2016-147). Nếu anh/chị có câu hỏi hay vấn đề thắc mắc nào về các lĩnh vực tham gia của nh/chị trong đề tài nghiên cứu, hoặc muốn phàn nàn hay phản ánh gì về đề tài nghiên cứu, hãy liên lạc với giáo viên hướng dẫn chính của tôi, Tiến sỹ Julia Miller. Nếu anh/chị muốn trao đổi với 1 người độc lập về những phàn nàn của anh/chị, hãy liên lạc với Thư ký của Ủy ban Đạo đức trong Nghiên cứu Con người theo số điện thoại +61 8 8313 6028 hoặc gửi thư tới địa chỉ email hrec@adelaide.edu.au. Ý kiến phản ánh hay phàn nàn của anh/chị sẽ được xem xét và giải quyết triệt để. Kết quả giải quyết sẽ được thông báo tới anh/chị.

Nếu tôi muốn tham gia, tôi phải làm gì?

Nếu anh/chị muốn tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu thì hãy ký vào bản đồng ý tham gia đề tài mà đã được cung cấp và gửi lại cho người đại diện của tôi.

Tôi xin chân thành cảm ơn

Trần Thị Ngọc Hà

Julia Miller

Edward Palmer

John Willison

Appendix F: Consent forms

Appendix F1: Consent form for teachers



Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

CONSENT FORM

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

Title:	English language learner autonomy in the Vietnamese higher education context: Enabling factors and barriers arising from assessment practices.
Ethics Approval Number:	H-2016-147

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. My consent is given freely.
3. Although I understand the purpose of the research project it has also been explained that involvement may not be of any benefit to me.
4. I have been informed that, while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will not be divulged.
5. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time.
6. I agree to the interview being audio recorded. Yes No
7. I am aware that if I do not agree for research on this project to be published in the future, I can decline to participate in the project
8. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Participant to complete:

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher/Witness to complete:

I have described the nature of the research

to

(print name of participant)

and in my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Signature: _____ Position: _____

Date: _____

BẢN ĐỒNG Ý THAM GIA ĐỀ TÀI NGHIÊN CỨU

1. Tôi đã đọc bản thông tin kèm theo và đồng ý tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu sau:

Tên đề tài:	Tính tự chủ trong việc học tiếng Anh của sinh viên đại học không chuyên ở Việt nam: Những yếu tố thúc đẩy và cản trở nảy sinh trong các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của giáo viên
Ethics Approval Number:	H-2016-147

2. Tôi đã được nghiên cứu sinh đã giải thích đầy đủ và cặn kẽ về đề tài nghiên cứu. Sự đồng ý của tôi là hoàn toàn tự nguyện.
3. Mặc dù tôi hiểu mục đích của đề tài nghiên cứu, nhưng tôi cũng vẫn được giải thích cụ thể rằng việc tham gia vào nghiên cứu có thể sẽ không mang lại lợi ích gì cho tôi.
4. Tôi đã được thông báo rằng, khi số liệu thu thập được có thể được công bố, tên tôi và các thông tin cá nhân của tôi cũng sẽ không bị tiết lộ.
5. Tôi biết rằng tôi có thể dừng tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu bất kỳ lúc nào
6. Tôi đồng ý để các cuộc phỏng vấn được ghi âm. Có Không
7. Tôi nhận thức được rằng nếu tôi không đồng ý để các thông tin trong nghiên cứu này được xuất bản trong tương lai, thì tôi có thể từ chối tham gia vào dự án này
8. Tôi biết rằng mình nên giữ một bản tham gia đồng ý tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu, sau khi đã được hoàn thành, và một bản thông tin dành cho khách thể nghiên cứu.

Phần dành cho khách thể nghiên cứu:

Tên: _____ Chữ ký: _____

Ngày: _____

Nghiên cứu sinh/ Người làm chứng

Tôi đã miêu tả bản chất của đề tài nghiên cứu cho

(in tên của khách thể nghiên cứu)

và tôi nghĩ cô ấy/ anh ấy đã hiểu rõ những gì tôi giải thích.

Chữ ký: _____ Chức danh: _____

Ngày: _____

Appendix F2: Consent form for observed students



Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

CONSENT FORM

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

Title:	English language learner autonomy in the Vietnamese higher education context: Enabling factors and barriers arising from assessment practices.
Ethics Approval Number:	H-2016-147

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. My consent is given freely.
3. I have been given the opportunity to have a member of my family or a friend present while the project was explained to me.
4. Although I understand the purpose of the research project it has also been explained that involvement may not be of any benefit to me.
5. I have been informed that, while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will not be divulged.
6. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and that this will not affect my study at the University now or in the future.
7. I agree to be observed in the class. Yes No
8. I am aware that if I do not agree for research on this project to be published in the future, I can decline to participate in the project.
9. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Participant to complete:

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher/Witness to complete:

I have described the nature of the research

to

(print name of participant)

and in my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Signature: _____ Position: _____

Date: _____

BẢN ĐỒNG Ý THAM GIA ĐỀ TÀI NGHIÊN CỨU (Dành cho sinh viên được quan sát)

1. Tôi đã được đọc bản thông tin kèm theo và đồng ý tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu sau:

Tên đề tài:	Tính tự chủ trong việc học tiếng Anh của sinh viên đại học không chuyên ở Việt nam: Những yếu tố thúc đẩy và cản trở này sinh trong các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của giáo viên
Ethics Approval Number:	H-2016-147

2. Tôi đã được nghiên cứu sinh đã giải thích đầy đủ và cặn kẽ về đề tài nghiên cứu. Sự đồng ý của tôi là hoàn toàn tự nguyện.
3. Gia đình và bạn bè tôi được tạo điều kiện có mặt khi tôi được giải thích về đề tài nghiên cứu
4. Mặc dù tôi hiểu mục đích của đề tài nghiên cứu, nhưng tôi cũng vẫn được giải thích cụ thể rằng việc tham gia vào nghiên cứu có thể sẽ không mang lại lợi ích gì cho tôi.
5. Tôi đã được thông báo rằng, khi số liệu thu thập được có thể được công bố, tên tôi và các thông tin cá nhân của tôi cũng sẽ không bị tiết lộ.
6. Tôi biết rằng tôi có thể dừng tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu bất kỳ lúc nào
7. Tôi đồng ý để người thực hiện đề tài quan sát các hành vi của tôi ở trên lớp.

Có

Không

8. Tôi nhận thức rõ rằng nếu tôi không đồng ý để các thông tin trong nghiên cứu này được xuất bản trong tương lai, thì tôi có quyền từ chối tham gia vào dự án.
9. Tôi biết rằng mình nên giữ một bản tham gia đồng ý và đề tài nghiên cứu, sau khi đã được hoàn thành, và một bản thông tin dành cho khách thể nghiên cứu.

Phần dành cho khách thể nghiên cứu:

Tên: _____ Chữ ký: _____

Ngày: _____

Nghiên cứu sinh/ Người làm chứng

Tôi đã miêu tả bản chất của đề tài nghiên cứu cho

(in tên của khách thể nghiên cứu)

và tôi nghĩ cô ấy/ anh ấy đã hiểu rõ những gì tôi giải thích.

Chữ ký: _____ Chức danh: _____

Ngày: _____

Appendix F3: Consent form for interviewed students

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)



CONSENT FORM

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

Title:	English language learner autonomy in the Vietnamese higher education context: Enabling factors and barriers arising from assessment practices.
Ethics Approval Number:	H-2016-147

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. My consent is given freely.
3. I have been given the opportunity to have a member of my family or a friend present while the project was explained to me.
4. Although I understand the purpose of the research project it has also been explained that involvement may not be of any benefit to me.
5. I have been informed that, while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will not be divulged.
6. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and that this will not affect my study at the University now or in the future.
7. I agree to the interview being audio recorded. Yes No
8. I am aware that if I do not agree for research on this project to be published in the future, I can decline to participate in the project.
9. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Participant to complete:

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher/Witness to complete:

I have described the nature of the research

to

(print name of participant)

and in my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Signature: _____ Position: _____

Date: _____

BẢN ĐỒNG Ý THAM GIA ĐỀ TÀI NGHIÊN CỨU (dành cho sinh viên được
phỏng vấn)

1. Tôi đã được đọc bản thông tin kèm theo và đồng ý tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu sau:

Tên đề tài:	Tính tự chủ trong việc học tiếng Anh của sinh viên đại học không chuyên ở Việt nam: Những yếu tố thúc đẩy và cản trở nảy sinh trong các hoạt động kiểm tra đánh giá của giáo viên
Ethics Approval Number:	H-2016-147

2. Tôi đã được nghiên cứu sinh đã giải thích đầy đủ và cặn kẽ về đề tài nghiên cứu. Sự đồng ý của tôi là hoàn toàn tự nguyện.
3. Gia đình và bạn bè tôi được tạo điều kiện có mặt khi tôi được giải thích về đề tài nghiên cứu
4. Mặc dù tôi hiểu mục đích của đề tài nghiên cứu, nhưng tôi cũng vẫn được giải thích cụ thể rằng việc tham gia vào nghiên cứu có thể sẽ không mang lại lợi ích gì cho tôi.
5. Tôi đã được thông báo rằng, khi số liệu thu thập được có thể được công bố, tên tôi và các thông tin cá nhân của tôi cũng sẽ không bị tiết lộ.
6. Tôi biết rằng tôi có thể dừng tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu bất kỳ lúc nào
7. Tôi đồng ý để các cuộc phỏng vấn được ghi âm. Có Không
8. Tôi nhận thức được rằng nếu tôi không đồng ý để các thông tin trong nghiên cứu này được xuất bản trong tương lai, thì tôi có quyền từ chối tham gia vào dự án
9. Tôi biết rằng mình nên giữ một bản tham gia đồng ý và đề tài nghiên cứu, sau khi đã được hoàn thành, và một bản thông tin dành cho khách thể nghiên cứu.

Phần dành cho khách thể nghiên cứu:

Tên: _____ Chữ ký: _____

Ngày: _____

Nghiên cứu sinh/ Người làm chứng

Tôi đã miêu tả bản chất của đề tài nghiên cứu cho

(in tên của khách thể nghiên cứu)

và tôi nghĩ cô ấy/ anh ấy đã hiểu rõ những gì tôi giải thích.

Chữ ký: _____ Chức danh: _____

Ngày: _____

Appendix G: Complaint forms

The University of Adelaide



Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

This document is for people who are participants in a research project.

CONTACTS FOR INFORMATION ON PROJECT AND INDEPENDENT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The following study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Adelaide

Human Research Ethics Committee:

Project Title:	English language learner autonomy in the Vietnamese higher education context: Enabling factors and barriers arising from assessment practices.
Approval Number:	H-2016-147

The Human Research Ethics Committee monitors all the research projects which it has approved. The committee considers it important that people participating in approved projects have an independent and confidential reporting mechanism which they can use if they have any worries or complaints about that research.

This research project will be conducted according to the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (see

<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/e72syn.htm>)

1. If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the project co-ordinator:

Name:	Dr Julia Miller
Phone:	+61 8 8313 4721
Email:	julia.miller@adelaide.edu.au

2. If you wish to discuss with an independent person matters related to:
 - making a complaint, or
 - raising concerns on the conduct of the project, or
 - the University policy on research involving human participants, or
 - your rights as a participant,

contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat on phone (08) 8313 6028 or by email to hrec@adelaide.edu.au

Appendix H: Sample assessment grid for CEFR A2 test

	Listening	Speaking		Reading	Writing
		Spoken interaction	Spoken production		
A2	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local areas, and employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear simple messages and announcements	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job	I can read very short and simple texts. I can find specific and predictable information in simple everyday materials such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus, and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can write short and simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need. I can write very simple personal letters. For example, thanking someone for something.

Appendix I: Sample of assessment grid for listening skill in

KNLNNVN (Vietnam Framework of Reference for English) A2 test

A2	Kỹ năng nghe
<p>Đặc tả tổng quát (general descriptors)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Có thể hiểu những cụm từ và cách diễn đạt liên quan tới nhu cầu thiết yếu hàng ngày (về gia đình, bản thân, mua sắm, nơi ở, học tập và làm việc...) khi được diễn đạt chậm và rõ ràng (can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment) - Có thể hiểu được ý chính trong các giao dịch quen thuộc hàng ngày khi được diễn đạt chậm và rõ ràng (Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters)
<p>Nghe hội thoại giữa người bản ngữ hay những người không trực tiếp đối thoại (listen to dialogues between native speakers or non-direct conversations)</p>	<p>Có thể xác định được chủ đề của các hội thoại diễn ra chậm và rõ ràng (can determine the topic of the clear and slow spoken dialogues)</p>
<p>Nghe trình bày và hội thoại</p>	<p>Không có đặc tả tương ứng (no descriptors)</p>
<p>Nghe thông báo hướng dẫn (listen to announcements and instructions)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Có thể hiểu được ý chính trong các thông báo hay tin nhắn thoại ngắn, rõ ràng, đơn giản (can understand main ideas in short and clear announcements or voicemails) - Có thể hiểu được những hướng dẫn chỉ đường, sử dụng phương tiện giao thông công cộng đơn giản (can understand directions or simple instructions to use public transports)
<p>Nghe đài và xem truyền hình (listen to the radio and watch TV)</p>	<p>- có thể xác định thông tin chính của các bản tin trên đài và truyền hình tường thuật các sự kiện, tai nạn... (Can determine main ideas on radio or TV news describing events, accidents etc.)</p>