Academia A publication of the
Higher Education
Policy Network

Contrastive Analysis of Vietnamese Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions towards Autonomous Language Learning

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Abstract

The most desirable goal in tertiary education is training students to become autonomous learners to pursue life-long learning. This study investigated teachers' and students' perceptions about autonomous English language learning. The participants were selected from 2 national universities, and 1 regional university during the 1st semester of the school year 2020-2021. Particularly, 370 teacher participants out of 5,000, together with 392 student respondents out of 20,000 were chosen by the judgmental sampling technique using Slovin's formula (CL=±5%). Questionnaires were administered to 762 participants via their email addresses embedded with the active link of Google form and handouts. The questionnaires adapted from Ustunluoglu (2009) with the piloted Cronchbatch's alpha liability ranged $0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$ included 3 contrastive sections such as responsibilities, abilities, and activities. Descriptive frequencies and mean were employed to differentiate the standpoints of respondents in terms of learner autonomy. The results reveal that students surrendered their responsibilities to their teachers' roles while teachers considered themselves as dominant figures who were responsible for students in learner autonomy. Furthermore, teachers and students mostly agreed that students had the ability to do well in autonomous language learning if given the chance. The finding shows a mismatch with teachers claiming that their students participated in autonomous learning activities at a moderate extent whereas students remarked they highly took part in them. It is necessary to transform teachers' responsibilities to students' accountability. Besides, the adjustment of curriculum and practical pedagogical approaches should be applied, and the encouragement for students to use authentic learning materials or communicate with foreigners in English should be promoted.

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Introduction

Experts in the educational field have widely acknowledged the congruence of the close ties between language teachers and students in the classroom, especially in the autonomous language learning context in which learning takes place. This has led to many studies conducted on the role of learner autonomy (LA) in language learning, particularly second language acquisition. In language teaching, LA can be understood as the principle that learners should be encouraged to assume a maximum amount of responsibilities for what they learn, and how they learn it. This will be reflected in approaches to the needs analysis, content selection, and choice of teaching materials and learning methods (Richards & Smidt, 2014). In terms of language pedagogy, a shift from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered approach can promote LA to the highest extent (Shreurs & Dumbraveanu, 2014). The term "autonomy" in language learning can be considered as the ability to take charge of one's own learning and be responsible for decisions concerning the goals, learning processes, and implementation of one's language learning needs. In other words, the term "autonomy" is regarded as one's ability to make rules for oneself (Joshi, 2011).

Dating back to the 1980s, Holec (1981) is the pioneer, taking the first step in the autonomous learning research, and defining the meaning of what LA is. He defines it as "the ability to take charge of one's learning". Since the emergence of Holec's autonomous notion, the theory and practice of autonomy have evolved continuously in response to the innovative and revolutionized language pedagogical approaches. The claims, cited by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) from the studies of Camilleri, 2007; Cotterall, 1995; Palfreyman, 2003 concerning rationale for promoting LA, have been confirmed: the improvement of the quality of language learning, the promotion of democratic societies, the preparation of individuals for life-long learning. They consider LA as a human right because LA encourages learners to take advantage of learning opportunities in and out of the classroom. Autonomy is considered to be complicated, multidimensional, and variably manifested. The denotation of the phrase "manifested LA" hence could refer to the form of autonomous language learning or learning practices, which require learners' control over aspects of their learning either inside or outside the context of formal instruction. In view of English language teaching and learning (ELT) the emergence of digital literacies might promote LA to a great extent.

This has resulted in autonomous language learning being more likely to be self-initiated, and taking place without the intervention, or knowledge, of language teachers. The shift from teacher-centered teaching to learner-centered teaching is emphasized in the form of LA. Evidently, there is a transition or change of emphasis away from encouraging learners to spend more time acquiring languages outside and towards trying to understand the complexity of the world of autonomous language learning beyond the classroom (Benson & Reinders, 2011).

As a matter of fact, the term "teacher autonomy" has not been paid much attention in comparison with "learner autonomy". Specifically, teacher autonomy can be thought of as a multidimensional concept which is determined by examining who makes the decisions on teachers' performance, and who controls the outcomes of the decisions made. In a simple explanation, the persons who are either within the school (internal control) or outside the school (external control) making decisions should be considered. Teacher autonomy could be understood as the capacity of teachers to make important decisions that have far-reaching consequences on the content and conditions of their work within a boundary of regulations and resources supplied by the state which controls and regulates education in terms of concentrating the instruments of governance at the national level or decentralizing them to municipal and school levels (Silva & Molstad, 2020). Teacher autonomy is defined as a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching practices through continuous reflection and analysis, the highest degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploring the freedom which it consults (Little, 1995).

Although there have been numerous studies conducted on either teachers' or learners' beliefs of LA, very few studies have been carried out on the contrastive analysis of teachers' and learners' beliefs towards LA. Studies concerning autonomous language learning have been conducted worldwide (Lamb, 2008; Joshi, 2011; Scott et al., 2015; Chamaipak & Sumitra, 2016; Chun & Jingjing, 2016; Szocs, 2017a; Lin & Reinders, 2019), and some studies (Loi, 2016; Thu, 2017; Anh, 2018; Le, 2009) have been conducted in Vietnam. Only a study was conducted by Van (2011) comparing the teacher autonomy and learner autonomy in one study. In her study, Van mostly highlighted learner autonomy, not contrasting it with teacher autonomy much. Given the circumstance, this study examined the contrastive analysis on teacher autonomy and learner autonomy in order to propose some practical implications for LA in ELT.

Literature review

Studies which have been carried out with regard to LA can be classified into 3 categories, namely teachers' beliefs (Ahmadianzadeh et al., 2018; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Chang, 2020), learners' beliefs (Silva & Molstad, 2020; Tran & Duong, 2018; Qiwei et al., 2018; Chiew & Elizabeth, 2017), and teachers' and learners' beliefs (Ustunluoglu, 2009; Szocs, 2017a; Lin & Reinders, 2019; Chun & Jingjing, 2016; Chamaipak & Sumittra, 2016) towards LA.

Teachers' beliefs about the learner autonomy

Borg and Al-Busaidi's study (2012) is remarkable. They examined language teachers' beliefs about autonomous language learning with respect to their practices of autonomy-friendly techniques they used while teaching. By developing their own questionnaire to explore teachers' beliefs and to interview the participants to elicit their instructional practices of autonomy, they concluded that teachers encouraged their learners to get involved in the decision-making process because of the positive influence on both learners' motivation and their learning. Despite the interesting outcomes, their study did not include actual practice and learners' perceptions. Ideally, there should have been observations of what takes place in real classroom activities and learners' reactions should have been included, too. In another study, Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) also investigated teachers' beliefs and practices of language learner autonomy in a tertiary context. They employed a questionnaire to survey 359 teachers to explore their beliefs, practices, and constraints in implementing LA. Similar to the previous research of Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), the results revealed that the participants endorsed LA and they were eager to find out effective ways to promote LA. This study, however, did not mention the constraints when applying LA, and it focused on teachers' perceptions towards LA without taking into account learners' beliefs.

The research instrument designed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) has been employed in other studies (Dogan & Mirici, 2017; Duong, 2014; Loi, 2016; Ahmadianzadeh et al., 2018). In general, teachers have highly positive and desirable views on LA though they claim that they have difficulties in applying their knowledge about LA (Duong, 2014), or they doubt that their learners have the ability to take charge of their own learning (Loi, 2016; Asmari, 2013). Learners' experience and licensure were quite different, especially with experience, with regard to LA (Ahmadianzadeh et

al., 2018). In order to avoid bias and provide a panoramic view on LA, learners' opinions have to be incorporated to a certain extent.

LA has attracted a lot of attention in autonomous learning research. Different researchers have access to LA through a variety of approaches with numerous research instruments that allow them to come up with reasonable results. In particular, teachers' understanding of LA is questionable in the study conducted by Al-Busaidi and Al-Maamari (2014). While the study investigated teachers' autonomous understanding by using semi-structured interviews and reviewing literature, it did not mention the effect or contribution of teachers' autonomous comprehension to their professional development as well as beneficiaries. According to Szocs (2015), little is known about the nature of teachers' beliefs towards LA; he claimed in his study that despite the positive teachers' attitudes to LA, teachers felt unwilling to empower their learners to make decisions on their choices of language learning approaches. The results were based on classroom observation, so there might be doubts about the reliability or the bias of the study because of subjective perspectives. In addition, Chiew and Elizabeth (2017) carried out a semi-structured interview with 5 English teachers' perceptions about their expectations and roles, their skills needed, their teaching practices to foster LA, and the challenges in fostering LA in the classroom. They concluded that the development of autonomous language learning was very challenging; it involved 4 components, namely educational policy makers, university administrators, teachers, and learners, too. The study was, however, conducted with a modest sample population, which might not reflect or convey persuasive perspectives on LA.

Students' beliefs about learner autonomy

Concerning the role of learners in autonomous learning, many studies (Oraviwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017; Qiwei et al., 2018; Tran & Duong, 2018; Balcikanli, 2010; Szocs, 2017a) have investigated learners' beliefs in different ways. Specifically, many studies have been carried out with students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL). The results have been disclosed that language learners have positive beliefs about the adoption of autonomous language learning (Oraviwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017; Melor & Nur, 2015; Balcikanli, 2010). The impact of LA on English proficiency, attitudes on English study, and language learning behaviors, was viewed positively by Oraviwatnakul & Wichadee (2017). Nevertheless,

the participants were limited to a private university with a small amount of respondents. Besides, the study employed Likert scales but the interpretation of the data was not practically based on them to elicit the explanation. Similarly, Anh (2018) investigated the beliefs of 60 EFL students who professed positive views on LA. Moreover, they thought LA was a long process which required students' sufficient ongoing efforts together with their teachers' assistance. Since the study was conducted with the help of narrative interviews, the outcomes yielded subjective perceptions, and without the intervention of teachers' opinions. In another research, Balcikanli (2010) did a mixed-methods study with 112 student teachers thanks to Camilleri's questionnaire (1997), and the researcher's interviews with 20 students. Although the student teachers were in favor of LA, most of them revealed that they discouraged their future students from participating in the decision-making process regarding the time, the place of the course, and the textbooks. In this study, the author concentrated on the learners' beliefs without mentioning the comparison with teacher autonomy.

To find out the relationship between students' beliefs and their language learning strategies, Tang and Tian (2015) undertook a study with 546 graduate students in China. They found out that the differences in genders, majors, age ranges, and proficiency levels led to the disparity among the respondents. These research results to a certain extent shared the similarity with that of the succeeding quasi-experimental study conducted by Qiwei et al., (2018), in which the participants were undergraduate students, who revealed that their perceptions towards LA were, somehow, different between high language achievers and low ones. Previously, Sakai and Takagi (2009) also conducted a study with 721 students using questionnaires to classify the respondents into independent users, independent learners, and dependent learners. The results showed that the more successful learners got, the more dependent on LA they seemed. Similar to Tang and Tian's (2015), and Qiwei et al.'s (2018) research, this study failed to incorporate teachers' viewpoints on LA.

Studies incorporate both teachers' and students' beliefs about leaner autonomy

The inclusion and comparison between teachers' and learners' beliefs towards autonomous language learning have been given little attention. Specifically, Lin and Reinders (2019) did a mixed methods study on 182 teachers' and 668 students' responses in 7 Chinese universities to find out their readiness for autonomy from a

psychological, technical, and behavioral perspective. Although the study pinpointed students' and teachers' readiness for LA, there was no contrast to the discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions. Similar to the readiness for autonomous learning aspect, Chamaipak and Sumittra (2016) carried out qualitative research conducting interviews with 76 teachers and 116 lower secondary students in 41 Thai schools. Their results indicated that both teachers and students had positive beliefs about LA. However, Thai students were not actually ready for LA as they still needed mental support, which was opposite to the later finding in Lin and Reinders (2019). As a result of the qualitative approach using the interviews, there is some doubt about the reliability of Chamaipak and Sumittra (2016) due to subjective bias.

For the combination and correlation between teachers' and learners' beliefs towards LA in one study regarding the EFL perspective, some researchers (Ustunluoglu, 2009; Joshi, 2011; Van, 2011; Szocs, 2017b) have come up with the conclusions that learners need to be supported for their English language learning. That is, the teachers' roles have a great influence on their learners' improvements, and teachers take on the responsibility to help their learners develop their autonomous language learning (Ustunluoglu, 2009; Van, 2011). Szocs (2017a) concluded that the congruence between teachers' and learners' beliefs towards LA in the EFL context resulted in more successful learning outcomes.

Previous studies have mainly concentrated on either teachers' or students' beliefs towards autonomous language learning in general, and not many studies have examined and contrasted students' and teachers' perceptions of LA with regard to responsibilities, abilities, and related activities inside and outside the classroom. This study aimed to fill these gaps by addressing the following research questions;
1. What are teachers' perceptions towards the three perspectives of learner autonomy?
2. What are students' perceptions towards the three perspectives of learner autonomy?
3. To what extent do teachers' beliefs and learners' beliefs match or differ?

The research outcomes would contribute resourceful references to the field of autonomous learning. In fact, not many studies are aimed at determining teachers' and learners' autonomy perceptions based on the investigation into the differences between them, which would be a unique feature of this study, useful for school administrators, teachers, students, and future studies as well.

Methods

Research design

The study was primarily designed to find out the contrasted Vietnamese teachers' and learners' perceptions towards autonomous language learning in ELT from 370 lecturers and 392 students chosen through the stratified sampling method. It employed a descriptive approach adapting Ustunluoglu's questionnaire (2009). The initial contact was made with 3 university administrators to obtain permission to carry out the survey questionnaire with both lecturers of English and EFL students. The respondents were asked to answer the questionnaire, which included two parts, namely the demographic information and 42-adapted Ustunluoglu's questionnaire items. The questionnaires, with a supporting letter from the university administrators, were sent to the participants both through email attachment with the active link to the Google form, and by the office of student affairs which distributed the questionnaires. The respondents were expected to send back the questionnaires within two weeks from receiving the email. In the case of a low response rate, another email serving as a courtesy reminder would be sent to participants politely asking them to take part in the survey. The collected data then went through data screening before being encoded with the IBM SPSS program for the data treatment. Based on the results, the researchers came to certain conclusions.

Sample population

Because of the constraints of time and resources, the sample population was selected from 3 universities during the first semester of the school year 2020-2021, namely the University of Languages and International Studies – Vietnam National University, Hanoi in the north of Vietnam, HCMC University of Education in the south of Vietnam, and Hue university – a big, regional one in the central part of Vietnam. The study used the judgmental sampling technique to select the sample population because of the uncertainty of information about the respondents' involvement. The researchers employed Slovin's formula to determine the population with both teachers and students. For the teachers, the approximation of 5,000 was calculated under the Slovin's formula with the margin of error ±5%, which yielded 370 teachers. In particular, 158 male teachers accounting for 42.7%, and 212 female teachers equivalent to 57.3% took part in the study. As for their occupational experience, 30 teachers (8.1%) have had less than 5 years teaching experience, 66 teachers (17.8%) less than 10 years, 124 teachers (33.5%) less than 15 years, 102 teachers (27.6%), and 48 teachers (13%) above 20

years. When requesting them to comment on their students' motivation, 130 teachers (8.1%) recognized that their students' motivation levels were highly motivated to learn English. 177 teachers (47.8%) reckoned that students were motivated to learn English. the minority in number, i.e., 63 teachers (17%) assessed that students were not motivated to learn English at all. Slovin's formula was also applied for the estimated sample size of 20,000 students, which came up with 392 participants.

Research Instrument

The study adapted the research instrument from Ustunluoglu's questionnaire (2009) going through the pilot study with 25 teachers and 70 students to evaluate the liability and suitability. The reliability of the questionnaire items ranged $0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$, which was considered good according to Cronbach's Alpha scales. The first part of the questionnaire exploited the respondents' demography. The second part included 42-questionnaire items categorized into 3 sections. Section 1 had 10 questions regarding the responsibilities which contrasted the perceptions of teachers with those of students, and vice versa. Section 2 had 10 questions investigating the abilities involved in teachers' and students' beliefs towards LA with the choice of very poor, poor, Ok, good, and very good assessment. Section 3 included 22 questions eliciting the frequency of activities that the participants participated in using a range of always, often, sometimes, rarely, and never.

Procedure

The researcher had initial contacts with 3 national and regional university administrators to explain the purpose of the study and the assistance needed from the schools, and to ask them for permission to conduct the study in the 1st semester of the school year 2020-2021. When the permissions were granted, the researchers composed an email embedded with the active link to the Google form, then the questionnaire was sent to the participants' email addresses provided by the universities concerned, and the printouts of the questionnaire were delivered to the office of student affairs for them to hand out. The questionnaire, in which the researcher's instruction was incorporated, explained the objectives and relevance of the study, assured participants regarding anonymity, and gave them the option of not participating in the study if they wished. The respondents were requested to send back the questionnaire within two weeks after

email was sent. A thank you email was sent back to the respondents as confirmation of reception.

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

Statistical tools

This study used a quantitative approach exploiting the attitudinal questionnaire. Specifically, descriptive frequencies were employed to analyze the demographic information and section 1 of the questionnaire. The descriptive mean was treated to find out the mean and the standard deviations for sections 2 and 3 with the explanation of the Likert sales, namely (1-1.8) very low; (1.9-2.6) low; (2.7-3.4) moderate; (3.5-4.2) high; (4.3-5.0) very high. In order to contrast the Vietnamese teachers' and learners' beliefs towards autonomous language learning, paired-sample statistics were employed to address the data.

Results

When taking the responsibilities into account, most teachers believed that they were responsible for students' progress during English lessons (n=242; 65.4%), a small number of them thought that students took charge of their own progress (n=77; 20.8%), and a few teachers (n=51; 13.8%) reckoned that both teachers and students shared this responsibility. Compared with students' opinions, they somehow showed similarities to the teachers' voices. Students acknowledged that teachers' responsibilities ensured students made progress during English lessons (n=168; 42.9%), the lower rank was students' accountability (n=143; 36.5%), and the least level was the shared duties by teachers and students (n=81; 20.7%).

In terms of ensuring students make progress outside class, 234 teachers, equivalent to 63.2%, accepted the teachers' roles. 58 teachers (15.7%) considered it the the students' responsibility, and 78 teachers, similar to 21.1%, confessed that this responsibility was coordinated by both teachers and students. In this perspective, students expressed the equivalent viewpoints with the teachers. 101 students, accounting for 25%, claimed that they took charge of their own progress outside classrooms. The majority of students, 218 ones or 55.6%, considered this task as the

teachers' duty, and the rest of the students, 73 or 18.6% supposed that this responsibility belonged to both parties.

When examining the motivation of student interest in learning English, the results showed that the assessment differed greatly between teachers and students. 259 teachers (70%) asserted that they bore the responsibility of stimulating their students in learning English. Moreover, 53 teachers (14.3%) thought that students had to take charge in motivating their interests. The adjacent figure of 15.7% or 58 teachers stated that raising the student interest in learning English required both teachers and students. On the contrary, students claimed that they were in charge of encouraging themselves to learn English (n=277; 70.7%). They had low remarks on teachers' duties (45 students, equivalent to 11.5%), and they also expressed low opinions on the shared responsibilities in this aspect (n=70; 17.9%).

When it comes to identifying student weaknesses in English, teachers acknowledged that this task belonged to their jobs (257 teachers; similar to 69.5%). They also did not have high attitudes regarding designating this duty to their students (n=48; 13%), and they confirmed that it was not highly blamed for the league of teachers' and students' responsibilities (n=65; 17.6%). Similarly, students remarked that their teachers helped them recognize their weaknesses in English (n=254; 64.8%). A modest number of students accepted it was their responsibility charge to know their weaknesses, which accounted for 21.7%, equivalent to 85 students, and the number of students expressing their attitudes towards this perspective was lower in line with the mutual responsibilities of teachers and students (n=53; 15.8%).

As for deciding the objectives of the English course, the majority of teachers (n=262; 70.8%) believed that teachers took this responsibility, whereas 34 teachers (92%) proposed to let their students decide the aims of what they learnt. Furthermore, the joint responsibility of this perspective was remarked on by 74 teachers (20%). When investigating students' perceptions in this aspect, 261 students (66.6%) admitted that their teachers set the aims of English course. The small amount of students reckoned that they were in charge of doing this (n=69; 17.6%) while 62 students (15.8%) supposed that this responsibility had to be coordinated by both teachers and students.

On considering deciding what should be learned next in English lessons, most teachers (n=253; 68.4%) thought they had to bear this responsibility; they also assumed that students were responsible for making up their mind about what to learn next in English lessons (n=55; 14.9%). Besides, 62 teachers (16.8%) remarked that this

responsibility had to be identified by both factors. Compared with students' viewpoints, they mostly designated this task to teachers (n=224; 57.1%), while 75 students (19.1%) remarked that they had to decide their own, and 93 students (23.8%) believed that this task had to be the result of the cooperative decision among teachers and students.

Regarding choosing what activities to use to learn English in English lessons, 202 teachers (54.6%) confirmed they were in charge. Surprisingly, one third of the teachers (n=124; 33.5%) assumed that this task was supposed to be a negotiation between teachers and students. 44 teachers (11.9%) thought that students had to have a say in this choice. The students had similar opinions with the teachers' perspectives. Two thirds of them (n=278; 70.9%) agreed that teachers took charge of this issue, students and the league of teachers and students had the same figures (n=57; 14.5%).

As regards the length of time spent on each activity, the majority of teachers (n=251; 67.8%) accepted their accountability to be in charge of time span. 52 teachers (14.1%) said that this was the students' decision, and 67 teachers, 18.1%, believed this matter was decided based on the cooperation of teachers and students. The same remarks were made by students when they thought that their teachers were the ones who decided the time length for each activity (n=289; 73.7%), succeeding this figure was the cooperation of teachers and students (n=62; 15.8%), and the lowest number was the students' responsibility (n=41; 10.5%).

As regards choosing what materials to use to learn English in English lessons, 283 teachers (76.5%) ascertained their responsibilities. 31 teachers (8.4%) thought that students had to be responsible for their choice of materials, and 56 teachers (15.1%) assumed this duty could be settled between teachers and students collaboratively. Taking students' angles into consideration, they shared the similarity in line with their teachers, i.e. they depended on their teachers for the choice of materials to use to learn in their English lessons (n=276; 70.4%). Next, it was the joint decisions made by teachers and students (n=82; 20.9%), and the least was the choice of students (n=34; 8.7%).

As to the evaluation of student learning, most teachers (n=273; 73.8%) ascertained that they had to be responsible for assessing and evaluating the progress of student learning. 44 teachers (11.9%) thought this task belonged to students' jobs, and the joint responsibility of students and teachers got 14.3%, which meant 53 teachers gave their viewpoints. Compared with students' opinions, the majority of them believed that this activity was the responsibility of their teachers (n=340; 86.7%), following this

rank was the students' charge with 45 students, equivalent to 11.5%, and only a few students (n=7; 1.8%) assumed that this had to be the shared responsibility of teachers and students.

Table 1 presents the teachers' beliefs towards students' abilities in autonomous learning. On average, teachers to a moderate extent believed in students' abilities to choose their activities in LA, as glimpsed from Table 1. They, however, had high remarks on students' capabilities of choosing learning activities outside class (*M*=3.65), learning objectives in class (*M*=.500), and identifying their weakness in English (*M*=3.57). On the whole, the choices of teachers on students' abilities in LA were not different as the standard deviations had similar scores with the highest figure (0.831) and the lowest one (0.478).

Table 1

Teachers' opinions towards students' abilities in autonomous language learning

If your students had the opportunity, how good do you think they would be at…	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Legend
11. choosing learning activities in class	370	3.39	.488	moderate
12. choosing learning activities outside class	370	3.65	.478	high
13. choosing learning objectives in class	370	3.47	.500	high
14. choosing learning objectives outside class	370	3.31	.680	moderate
15. choosing learning materials in class	370	2.86	.831	moderate
16. choosing learning materials outside class	370	2.96	.705	moderate
17. deciding what students should learn next in English lessons	370	3.06	.780	moderate
18. deciding how long to spend on each activity	370	2.72	.740	moderate
19. identifying their weaknesses in English	370	3.57	.502	high
20. evaluating their learning	370	3.25	.638	moderate

In students' self-assessment on their abilities to choose their activities as seen from Table 2, students had 4 items in common with their teachers' viewpoints. In particular, they thought they had moderate abilities in deciding the time length on each activity (*M*=3.38; SD=.486). They had high abilities in identifying their weaknesses in English (*M*=3.38), in choosing learning activities outside class (*M*=3.82), and learning objectives in class (*M*=3.81). As noted from Table 2, students had high assessment on other items, which were considered moderate extents by their teachers.

Table 2

Students' self-assessment on their abilities to choose their activities

If you have the opportunity, how good do you think you would be at…	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Legend
11. choosing learning activities in class	392	3.77	.419	high
12. choosing learning activities outside class	392	3.82	.386	high
13. choosing learning objectives in class	392	3.81	.394	high
14. choosing learning objectives outside class	392	3.76	.428	high
15. choosing learning materials in class	392	3.89	.319	high
16. choosing learning materials outside class	392	3.54	.499	high
17. deciding what you should learn next in your English lessons	392	3.51	.501	high
18. deciding how long to spend on each activity	392	3.38	.486	moderate
19. identifying your weaknesses in English	392	3.72	.449	high
20. evaluating your learning	392	3.66	.473	high

Table 3 reveals teachers' perceptions towards students' activities in autonomous language learning. Particularly, the results indicate that students had high extents on the learner autonomy for doing voluntary assignments (*M*=4.06), collaborating group studies in English lessons (*M*=3.50), and working cooperatively with their friends (*M*=3.59). Besides, they assessed thatstudents had low frequencies of reading newspapers in English (*M*=2.44), listening to English songs (*M*=2.68), communicating with foreigners in English (*M*=2.53), doing grammar exercises (*M*=2.52), and doing classifications or mind maps while studying (*M*=2.65). The majority of items, as seen from Table 3, received moderate extents according to teachers' remarks. In general, teachers shared the similarities in expressing their assessments in that the standard deviations did not fluctuate.

Table 3

Teachers' perceptions towards students' activities in autonomous language learning

Last year and in this academic year, how often do you think your students have…	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Legend
21. done assignments which are not compulsory?	370	3.56	.701	high
22. noted down new words and then meanings?	370	3.24	.682	moderate
23. read newspapers in English?	370	2.44	.524	low
24. come to see you about their studies?	370	3.40	.543	moderate
25. read books or magazines in English?	370	2.83	.504	moderate
26. watched English TV programs?	370	2.76	.474	moderate
27. listened to English songs?	370	2.68	.518	low
28. talked to foreigners in English?	370	2.53	.575	low
29. practiced using English with friends	370	2.94	.841	moderate

30. done grammar exercises?	370	2.52	.599	low
31. done group studies in English lessons?	370	3.50	.501	high
32. attended the self-study center?	370	2.86	.633	moderate
33. asked you questions when they don't understand	370	2.90	.755	moderate
34. made suggestions to you?	370	2.69	.582	moderate
35. planned their lesson or studies?	370	3.25	.610	moderate
36. activated their prior knowledge while studying?	370	3.01	.635	moderate
37. made inferences about English lessons?	370	2.76	.521	moderate
38. done classifications or mind maps while studying?	370	2.65	.478	low
39. summarized their studies while studying?	370	3.12	.752	moderate
40. taken notes while studying?	370	3.29	.770	moderate
41. used resources while studying?	370	2.82	.449	moderate
42. worked cooperatively with their friends?	370	3.59	.499	high

When examining students' participation into LA as glimpsed from Table 4, the results present many opposite outcomes out of similar viewpoints in comparison with the teachers in Table 3. Specifically, students highly preferred noting down new words and their meanings, but teachers had moderate ratings. Similarly, students expressed high remarks on seeing their teachers concerning their work whereas teachers had moderate assessments, too. The surprising fact was the contradiction between teachers and students in terms of listening to English songs. Teachers, in this aspect, assessed that students had low preferences (M=2.68) while students remarked that they highly preferred listening to English songs (M=3.75). In addition, the differences occurred in other perspectives, namely practicing using English with friends (M=3.61), asking the teacher questions if they did not understand (M=3.77), planning their lesson or study (M=3.88), activating their prior knowledge (M=3.86), summarising their studies (M=3.92), taking notes (M=4.29), and using resources while studying (M=3.88), these findings were acknowledged with high students' preferences and moderate teachers' choices, respectively. Besides, students believed that they did moderate classifications while studying (M=2.90), but teachers assumed that students performed low in this angle. The results of the standard deviation denote that students had similar choices in expressing their opinions because the values were under 1.0%.

Table 4

Students' frequency of involved activities in the autonomous language learning

Last year and in this academic year, how often have you…	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Legend
21. done assignments which are not compulsory?	392	4.06	.743	high
22. noted down new words and their meanings?	392	3.51	.501	high
23. read newspapers in English?	392	2.64	.481	low
24. visited your teacher about your work?	392	3.59	.492	high
25. read books or magazines in English?	392	3.18	.383	moderate
26. watched English TV programs?	392	3.17	.379	moderate
27. listened to English songs?	392	3.75	.435	high
28. talked to foreigners in English?	392	2.47	.500	low
29. practiced using English with friends	392	3.61	.489	high
30. done grammar exercises?	392	2.37	.483	low
31. done group studies in English lessons?	392	3.55	.498	high
32. attended the self-study center?	392	3.30	.459	moderate
33. asked the teacher questions when you didn't understand?	392	3.77	.419	high
34. made suggestions to the teacher?	392	3.17	.372	moderate
35. planned your lesson or study?	392	3.88	.331	high
36. activated your prior knowledge while studying?	392	3.86	.350	high
37. made inferences about your lesson?	392	3.15	.361	moderate
38. done classifications while studying?	392	2.90	.306	moderate
39. summarized your studies while studying?	392	3.92	.274	high
40. taken notes while studying?	392	4.29	.455	high
41. used resources while studying?	392	3.88	.328	high
42. worked cooperatively with your friends?	392	4.23	.421	high

Discussion

Some studies (Ustunluoglu, 2009; Van, 2011; Chamaipak & Sumittra, 2016, Szocs, 2017a; Lin & Reinders, 2019) have investigated the contrastive analysis of teachers' and students' perceptions towards autonomous language learning. The teacher participants in this study considered themselves as mainly taking charge of responsibilities in the improvement of teaching English classes at the tertiary level. Compared with the student respondents, they shared the similarities when supposing that these responsibilities had to be borne by their teachers' accountability for developing LA in the improvement of their learning English process. Mentioned in the research conducted by Shreurs and Dumbraveanu (2014) on a shift from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered approach, LA is regarded as life-long activities which require change in the pedagogical approach. Nevertheless, the results concerning the responsibilities in this study come up with different outcomes in comparison with the

research findings of Shreurs and Dumbraveanu (2014). That is, although teachers and students understand the meaning of LA, both parties assume that teachers are responsible for developing students' autonomous language learning. This finding is in line with the results in the study undertaken by Ustunluoglu (2009) in a Turkish university whose research instrument was adapted by this study and in another one performed by Van (2011). However, the research findings done by Van (2011) do not reflect clearly the contrastive comparison between teachers and students in terms of responsibilities.

When presenting an overview of the compared abilities between teachers and students, the results point out that both groups thought they had remarkable abilities in choosing activities in LA, which is quite different from the responsibilities when students mainly believed that their teachers were responsible for the progress of students in learning English. Unlike the previous studies investigating one-sided perceptions, i.e. either teachers or students or both factors (e.g. Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Anh, 2018; Alrabai, 2017; Lin & Reinder, 2019; Silva & Molstad, 2020), the present study combined and contrasted both opinions under the same items. This selection was an effort to shed light on the contradiction to avoid the bias of the participants' tendency to merely cling to their own standpoint. This finding is in line with Ustunluoglu (2009) who found significant differences between teachers and students concerning the abilities to choose their activities in autonomous language learning. The teacher participants express their doubts on the abilities of student respondents to choose the curriculum when learning English. This concern is similar to the finding of the study conducted by Borg and Alshumaimeri (2009), who thought that learners needed to receive pieces of advice and consultation from their teachers for what were resourceful for their capabilities in learning English.

When taking LA into account, Benson (2013) confirms that autonomy means the capacity to control important aspects of one's language. The discrepancies, however, reflect the opposite attitudes between the teachers' and students' perceptions in terms of their involvement in activities in this study. The previous studies (e.g. Chamaipak & Sumittra, 2016; Lin & Reinders, 2019; Scott et al., 2015; Van, 2011; Ustunluoglu, 2009) have acknowledged the autonomous activities in doing homework, taking notes during the lessons or group study. In learning English, reviewing the prior knowledge is very necessary because new forms of language should be revived, transforming from a temporary source of information into a permanent one through drilled practices

(Boyadzhieva, 2016; Shreurs & Dumbraveanu, 2014). The finding concerning autonomous activities outside the classroom setting such as reading books, magazines, newspapers in English, watching English TV programs or listening to English songs are found in line with Ustunluoglu (2009), Chun and Jingjing (2016) who yielded the similarities when coming to the conclusions that teachers had negative attitudes regarding students being involved in LA outside classroom activities. The findings, however, contrast with those of Benson (2013), Chiew and Elizabeth (2017) who thought that the teacher participants assessed highly their students participating actively in outside learning activities to improve their English learning. It is also surprising to recognize that the interaction between teachers and students under the teachers' views is not high while their students hold the reverse remarks. Teachers' standpoints may result from their traditional role as decision makers who play a crucial part in supervising students' autonomous learning activities in long-standing Vietnamese culture (Anh, 2018; Le, 2013; Thu, 2017). It is interesting to note here that the teacher participants acknowledge a high interaction among their students through the cooperative work or group studies, which are also found in other study results (e.g. Melor & Nur, 2015; Boyadzhieva, 2016; Chang, 2020; Gokhan & Ozgur, 2018; Qiwei et al., 2018). This finding sounds beneficial for educators to change the curriculum to organize more collaborative practices for learners to improve their ELT. As glimpsed from Table 3, teachers highly appreciated the students' preparation of the lesson or studies, which proves that students are willing to participate in their studies (Tang & Tian, 2015; Szocs, 2017a; Unal, 2017).

Conclusions

This study investigated the contrastive analysis of university language teachers' and students' perceptions concerning responsibilities, abilities, and activities in promoting learners' autonomous English acquisition. It reveals that students are not actually confident to claim to be sufficiently autonomous, so they are unwilling to take responsibility and surrender almost all responsibilities to their teachers (Ustunluoglu, 2009, Thu, 2017). Similar to students' assumption, teachers, to a moderate extent, think that their students do not take charge of their own decisions on responsibilities such as learning assessment, curriculum, learning motivations, and pedagogical practices. Moreover, teachers assume that the accountability belongs to their key roles as decision

makers who should be responsible for their students regarding LA in terms of ELT. This finding is partly because of the Vietnamese educational culture which is deeply rooted in the mind of Vietnamese educators who consider themselves as dominant figures in their own right (e.g. Loi, 2016; Thu, 2017; Anh, 2018). The traditional learning methods in which the EFL teacher plays an important part in the classroom somehow influences the learners' autonomous learning as well as their awareness of autonomy (Tran & Duong, 2018).

For the abilities to do well in LA, teachers and students share almost the same standpoints. While students suppose that they have good capabilities in all facets of autonomous language learning in ELT, teachers basically agree with their students but believe they have a moderate extent in some points, particularly the choice of learning materials in and outside classroom or pedagogical practices. These issues might be accounted for by the gradual transformation from the fixed-curriculum system to the credit-based one at the tertiary level in Vietnam (Van, 2011). Contrary to students' expectations, most teachers are positive towards the idea of allowing their students to choose learning activities, objectives, and what students should learn in English lessons, but they do not actually ascertain the student capabilities in choosing learning materials or the length of time spending each activity. These gaps highlight the needs to integrate learner independence into the language curriculum with focused materials (Boyadzhieva, 2016; Balcikanli, 2010).

There is a great mismatch of the teachers and students' perceptions towards the involvement of students in activities. Although students admit that they highly participate in many activities inside or outside classrooms, teachers assess that their students involve themselves in most activities to a moderate extent. Teachers, however, agree that their students highly take part in exchanges with their peers in cooperative activities or group work. These results indicate that students are fully aware of LA in ELT. There should be a change in curriculum as mentioned above to activate students' involvement into activities which require their own participations, a need arises for supplying students with further opportunities to practice a wide variety of group studies or cooperative work to encourage learner autonomy and self-confidence (Tang & Tian, 2015; Shahsavari, 2014). Developing such programs entails more collaborative activities which categorize and classify students into groups, namely independent users – using English in their daily life, independent learners – studying by themselves, and dependent learners – needing teachers' help in studying English (STEP, 2006), which is

essential to promote LA in ELT. One important conclusion which could be based on this study is that there are some constraining factors showing the tendency of learners to feel reluctant to get access to authentic materials or to communicate with foreigners in English; these sources of information are important for students to improve their competence of using English in real-life conversations (Sakai & Takagi, 2009; Unal, 2017).

Implications

Many practical pedagogical implications are drawn from the contrastive analysis of teachers' and students' perceptions towards autonomous English language learning in regard to responsibilities, abilities, and activities.

It is necessary to transfer responsibility from teachers to students by redesigning the curriculum and pedagogical practices to help learners be autonomous in ELT (Shreurs & Dumbraveanu, 2014). Similarly, the traditional teaching methods must be modernised in order to help students become active learners or at least be independent learners in ELT (STEP, 2006), one of the most rigorous strengths of LA in ELT. Teachers should not be considered as dominant figures in the process of teaching English, they must be fully aware of the fact that their vital role is, to a certain extent, a facilitator, a coordinator, an instructor, or a coach, not a supervisor. It goes without saying that teachers play a crucial part in the progress of learners under the view of LA in ELT (Asmari, 2013). It is time to surrender the teachers' responsibility to students, removing the obstacle of the long-standing teaching culture that teachers have to be in charge of all students' success in learning, particularly in ELT.

The unwillingness to use English in order to have access to authentic English materials or have direct communication with foreigners in English discourages them from developing autonomous language learning in ELT. Addressing these issues, it is essential to modify management, learning resources, teaching staff professional development, and policy frameworks to promote LA. English contests or competitions, talk shows with foreigners in English might raise the interests of learners to be more confident to use their English and meanwhile improve their English competency. In addition, teachers are advised to engender mutual trust in students' abilities to develop autonomous language learning in ELT. In fact, a classroom environment which is cooperative and which respects learners' affective filters is a must for students to feel

secure themselves and be dependent on their teachers to acknowledge initiative in promoting LA. By perceiving themselves to be unthreatened and encouraged, students will try their best to prove their utmost abilities to enhance their skills and learning strategies (Dogan & Mirici, 2017; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). It is hoped that giving the most favourable conditions for students to express themselves will bring back the fruitful achievements in autonomous language learning, especially in the field of ELT.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix 1

Table 1
Teachers' attitudes to the responsibilities of teachers compared with students

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

Appendix 2

Table 2
Students' attitudes to the responsibilities of students in comparison with their teachers

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