RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNER AUTONOMY AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Thi Phuong Dung CAO*[1]
Phuong Dzung PHO[2]
Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
[1]ctpdung@hcmussh.edu.vn
[2]phophuongdung@hcmussh.edu.vn

Manuscript received 9 December 2024
Manuscript accepted 19 September 2025
**Corresponding author*
https://doi.org/10.33736/ils.8441.2025

ABSTRACT

This study examines the level of learner autonomy and its relationship with academic performance among 420 EFL students across four academic years. Using quantitative methods, learner autonomy was measured through self-initiation and self-regulation scales, along with their subscales. Findings indicate moderately high levels of learner autonomy across all years, with Year Three students showing lower self-regulation ability than others. Spearman correlation analysis reveals a modest but positive correlation between learner autonomy and academic performance, suggesting that higher autonomy is associated with better academic outcomes. Notably, Year Two students exhibit the strongest correlations between learner autonomy and academic performance, indicating that the impact of autonomy varies across different stages of study. These findings highlight the need for action from key stakeholders. For teachers, the results support adopting learner-centred approaches that encourage goal setting, self-assessment, and motivation-driven activities to foster autonomy and improve academic outcomes. For policymakers, the study emphasises the importance of supporting teacher training programmes that equip educators with strategies to nurture learner autonomy.

Keywords: learner autonomy; academic performance; self-initiation; self-regulation; relationship

Introduction

Learner autonomy has been widely discussed in educational literature, gaining increasing attention due to a gradual shift in educational focus from teacher-centred

to learner-centred approaches (Gupta et al., 2024; Little, 2007). This paradigm shifts highlights the evolving role of students from passive recipients of knowledge to active participants in their learning process. The importance of learner autonomy is particularly significant in higher education, where it contributes to learners' comprehension and enables learners to engage deeply with educational materials, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. These skills are essential for academic success and lifelong learning (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). In language learning, particularly, the ability to self-direct study and practice plays a vital role in improving proficiency and facilitates effective acquisition of new linguistic skills (Benson, 2010; Giveh et al., 2018; Lee & Mori, 2021).

Despite the acknowledged importance of learner autonomy, studies examining its correlation with academic performance have produced mixed results. Research utilising proficiency tests to measure outcomes generally shows a positive correlation between higher levels of autonomy and better academic performance (Dafei, 2007; Myartawan et al., 2013; Sakai & Takagi, 2009). However, the study by Ezzi (2018) presents contradictory findings, challenging this positive correlation. These discrepancies have raised questions about the reliability of studies that solely rely on proficiency tests rather than Grade Point Average to measure academic performance, as proficiency tests may not fully capture the multifaceted nature of one's academic success. In contrast, other studies utilising Grade Point Average (Afshar et al., 2014; Lowe, 2009) employed the Learner Autonomy Profile developed by Confessore and Park (2004), a widely used tool for measuring learner autonomy, adding complexity to the overall picture. The Learner Autonomy Profile has several shortcomings, which might also impact the reliability of these studies. Although the Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form instrument improves the focus on key autonomous dimensions, it may still overlook important contextual factors such as teacher support and the learning environment.

Given these mixed findings, there is a pressing need for further research to accurately measure learner autonomy and determine whether there is a strong correlation with academic performance. Such research is essential for informing educational practices and interventions to foster learner autonomy and enhance academic outcomes. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What are the students' levels of learner autonomy?
2. Are there significant differences in autonomy levels among students of different year levels?
3. Is there a significant relationship between learners' level of autonomy in learning and their academic achievement?

To address these questions, the following hypotheses are tested:

H1: Students will demonstrate varying levels of learner autonomy across the sample.

H2: There are statistically significant differences in learner autonomy levels among students at different year levels.

H3: Learner autonomy is significantly and positively correlated with academic performance, as measured by Grade Point Average.

Literature Review

Conceptualisation of Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is widely regarded as crucial in higher education, yet its definition remains contested. Early work often equates it with self-directed learning. Holec (1981) defines learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3), conceptualising it as a potential capacity rather than observable behaviours. This ability is not innate but can be developed through a conscious learning process. Autonomous learners can identify learning objectives and choose suitable resources and activities, exercising control over planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning. Little (1991) reinterprets this control as self-regulation rather than self-direction and defines autonomy as "the willingness, proactive and reflective involvement in one's own learning" (p. 4). For Little (1991), autonomy depends primarily on learners' own initiative rather than external guidance. This initiative includes seeking help and collaborating with others, since "autonomous learners do things for themselves, but they may or may not do things on their own" (p. 223). In this study, learner autonomy is understood as comprising two elements: self-initiation (motivation, positive attitudes, and effort) and self-regulation (the ability to identify learning objectives, select resources, and plan and monitor learning).

How to Measure Learner Autonomy

Measuring learner autonomy is complex because it is multidimensional and shaped by culture, learning context, level, and individual experience (Benson, 2000; Little, 1991; Littlewood, 1996). To make it measurable, the construct is often divided into components that indicate its relative strength (Benson, 2000; Littlewood, 1996). A range of methods has been proposed, including teachers' observations, first-person narratives (Reinders & Balcikanli, 2011), interviews, learning journals (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012), self-assessments (Cotterall, 1995; Little, 1991), and peer assessments (Dam, 2003). Among these, self-assessment is often regarded as the most appropriate, as it offers a more direct indication of learners' autonomous capacity than external evaluations (Benson, 2000; Little, 1991).

Several instruments have been designed to operationalise learner autonomy. Guglielmino's (1977) Self-directed Learning Readiness Scale is the most widely used, yet it has been criticised for weak construct validity and is not recommended (Candy, 1991). Macaskill and Taylor's (2010) Autonomous Learning Scale includes items on independence of learning and study habits. The independence component covers responsibility, openness to experience, and intrinsic motivation; the study habits component addresses time management, learning practices, and attitudes to working alone. However, it was not developed for language learners and gives limited insight into language-specific strategies such as goal setting or social interaction (Ruelens, 2019).

The Learner Autonomy Profile by Confessore and Park (2004) is also widely used but has notable limitations. The original Learner Autonomy Profile contains 66 items, which can be burdensome and increase the risk of fatigue effects. The

shortened Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form, with 22 items, focuses on four dimensions: Desire, Resourcefulness, Initiative, and Persistence. "Desire" refers to motivation to engage in learning, "Resourcefulness" refers to intention to seek help and use available support, "Initiative" refers to willingness to take the first step in learning, and "Persistence" refers to sustained effort despite difficulties. Although more economical, the Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form pays limited attention to contextual factors such as learning environment, teacher support, and resource availability, which restricts its capacity to represent learner autonomy comprehensively.

Nguyen (2012) designed a scale with 31 items on self-initiation and 22 on self-regulation. While methodologically rigorous, it was developed for learners of writing and does not address autonomy across different skills or stages of language learning (Cao & Pho, 2024). The more recent Self-Efficacy Questionnaire of Language Learning Strategies (SeQueLLS) by Ruelens (2019) links self-efficacy beliefs with learner autonomy and examines cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. However, it does not explicitly capture learners' motivation and attitudes and includes aspects that do not align with the indicators of autonomy adopted in the present study. In light of these limitations and contextual mismatches, there is a strong rationale for developing a new, context-specific scale that better reflects the core dimensions of learner autonomy in English language learners.

Academic Performance

In educational research, Grade Point Average is often preferred to language proficiency tests as an indicator of academic performance, particularly when examining constructs such as learner autonomy. Whereas proficiency tests assess language skills at a single point in time, Grace Point Average offers a cumulative picture of long-term academic achievement across multiple subjects and over an extended period. This broader measure captures not only cognitive abilities but also autonomy-related behaviours such as time management, initiative, and persistence (Zimmerman, 2002), which proficiency tests may overlook.

Grade Point Average can also provide a more reliable index of learners' academic outcomes. Proficiency tests reveal a snapshot of language competence but do not reflect sustained effort or performance across diverse academic tasks (York et al., 2015). In contrast, Grade Point Average reflects consistent achievement across English-related subjects and assessment types, giving a more holistic account of success. Although language proficiency is important, relying solely on test scores risks underestimating kills that autonomous learners develop, such as adapting to varied academic demands and managing learning over time (Dörnyei, 2014). Consequently, Grade Point Average is frequently a more suitable metric in research on learner autonomy, as it encompasses student-driven behaviours associated with long-term academic achievement (Harlen, 2007).

The Importance of Developing Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is increasingly vital in effective education, especially in language learning. Little (2007) outlines three key reasons for its importance in student development. First, autonomy boosts motivation. According to the Self-Determination Theory, autonomy is a core psychological need that fosters intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When students feel ownership of their learning, they are more engaged and driven by internal goals rather than external pressures (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Second, autonomous learners tend to be more reflective and strategic. Their heightened metacognitive awareness enables them to monitor and adapt their learning processes, leading to more effective and efficient outcomes (Lamb, 2017). Third, in second and foreign language acquisition, autonomy is especially crucial. Communicative competence often develops outside the classroom through meaningful language use. Since no course can fully prepare learners for all real-world scenarios, those with social and interactive autonomy are better equipped to use the language independently across diverse contexts (Scharle & Szabó, 2000). In sum, these three aspects of learner autonomy, its role in fostering intrinsic motivation, reflective learning, and independent language use, underscore why autonomy is often associated with more effective learning. This connection supports the assumption that learner autonomy has a positive correlation with academic achievement.

The Correlation between Learner Autonomy and Learners' Academic Performance

Previous studies on learner autonomy report mixed findings regarding its relationship with academic performance. Several studies, including Dafei (2007), Faiz (2023), Myartawan et al. (2013), and Sakai and Takagi (2009), indicate that more autonomous learners tend to achieve higher scores on language proficiency tests. Other work challenges this association. Ezzi (2018), for instance, found no significant correlation, arguing that exclusive reliance on test scores may overlook important dimensions of learning such as persistence and self-regulation.

Studies using Grade Point Average as the outcome measure offer a different picture. Lowe (2009) and Afshar et al. (2014) used the Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form (Confessore & Park, 2004) to assess autonomy and reported significant correlations between learner autonomy and Grade Point Average, suggesting that Grade Point Average may serve as a more reliable indicator of the long-term relationship between autonomy and academic performance than proficiency tests. However, the Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form does not fully incorporate contextual factors such as learning environment and teacher support, which may influence these results.

Ozer and Yukselir (2023) also examined the relationship between learner autonomy and academic achievement among Turkish EFL learners, using Grade Point Average as the performance indicator and Macaskill and Taylor's (2010) 12-item Autonomous Learning Scale. This instrument focuses on learning independence and study habits and is suitable for general higher education contexts. Nonetheless, it has been criticised for omitting specific learning management strategies and neglecting goal setting and social aspects of autonomy (Ruelens, 2019). Despite these limitations,

studies that employ Grade Point Average, whether with the Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form or other validated tools, generally provide stronger evidence for a positive link between learner autonomy and academic achievement.

Given these mixed findings, there is a need to replicate studies on the relationship between learner autonomy and academic performance using more refined measures of both constructs. Research that combines Grade Point Average with contextually sensitive measures of autonomy could clarify this relationship and yield more conclusive evidence. Such work would also inform educational interventions designed to foster learner autonomy in order to improve academic outcomes across diverse contexts and learner populations.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional correlational research design (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) to investigate the correlation between learner autonomy and academic achievement. Learners' autonomy level was measured using a questionnaire. We then calculated the correlation between Grade Point Average and learner autonomy in general and between Grade Point Average and the subconstructs of learner autonomy across year levels.

Research Instrument

Building on the above review, we developed a questionnaire to investigate the learner autonomy of English-major students. The original questionnaire consisted of 26 items adapted from Nguyen (2012), Macaskill and Taylor (2010), and Ruelens (2019). It was based on two key components of learner autonomy: self-initiation and self-regulation. Self-initiation was divided into two sub-elements: motivation and attitudes and making efforts to learn. Self-regulation included two sub-elements: identifying needs and learning goals and selecting resources and planning (see Table 1).

Table 1
Structure of the Original Questionnaire

Themes	Sub-themes	Items	Number
Self-initiation	Motivation and attitudes (SIM)	Q1–Q7	7
	Making efforts to learn (SIE)	Q8–Q14	7
Self-regulation	Identifying needs and learning goals (SRN)	Q15–Q19	5
	Selecting resources and planning (SRP)	Q20–Q26	7

A pilot study was conducted with 220 students from a comparable programme. The results showed that the Cronbach's alpha for the subscales Motivation and attitudes (SIM), Making efforts to learn (SIE) and Selecting resources

and planning (SRP) would improve if the items SIM4, SIE4 and SRP4 were deleted (see Table 2).

Table 2
Reliability Statistics of the Original Likert-Scale Items

Subscales	Number of items	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Corrected item-Total correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
SIM	7	SIM1	0.803	.515	.781
		SIM2		.612	.763
		SIM3		.587	.768
		SIM4		.332	.813
		SIM5		.558	.774
		SIM6		.615	.764
		SIM7		.546	.776
SIE	7	SIE1	0.660	.453	.603
		SIE2		.394	.617
		SIE3		.385	.620
		SIE4		.081	.709
		SIE5		.440	.602
		SIE6		.401	.617
		SIE7		.483	.588
SRN	5	SRN1	0.804	.567	.772
		SRN2		.634	.752
		SRN3		.620	.757
		SRN4		.567	.774
		SRN5		.557	.776
SRP	7	SRP1	0.741	.548	.690
		SRP2		.455	.710
		SRP3		.476	.706
		SRP4		.274	.746
		SRP5		.605	.676
		SRP6		.405	.726
		SRP7		.452	.712

Construct validity was established through exploratory factor analysis, using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .851, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 2059.864$, $df = 325$, $p < .001$), indicating the data were suitable for factor analysis. The results of Principal Component Analysis also showed that the three items Making efforts to learn (SIE4), Motivation and attitudes (SIM4) and Selecting resources and planning (SRP4) should be removed from the questionnaire. The revised questionnaire thus includes 23 items.

Principal Component Analysis was rerun on the revised questionnaire, and the Rotated Component Matrix identified six factors. As shown in Table 3, the self-initiation construct was refined into four subscales, while self-regulation retained its two original subscales. Therefore, we decided to name the two new subscales appropriately. All subscales showed strong internal consistency.

Table 3

Rotated Component Matrix of the Revised Likert-scale Items

Rotated Component Matrix[a]						
	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
SRN2	.747					
SRN4	.729					
SRN3	.722					
SRN1	.676					
SRN5	.563					
SRP5		.685				
SRP2		.638				
SRP6		.623				
SRP1		.618				
SRP7		.604				
SRP3		.528				
SIM2			.790			
SIM1			.781			
SIM3			.616			
SIM6				.754		
SIM5				.752		
SIM7				.638		
SIE5					.778	
SIE6					.769	
SIE7					.661	
SIE1						.855
SIE2						.825
SIE3						.598
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.						
a. Rotation converged in 8 iterations.						

Note. SRN = Identifying needs and learning goals; SRP = Selecting resources and planning; SIM = Motivation and attitudes; SIE = Making efforts to learn.

The reliability of the revised questionnaire with six subscales was then assessed, and Cronbach's alpha values were above .700 (see Table 4). This revised questionnaire, Language Learner Autonomy Scale (LLAS), was considered reliable and valid.

Table 4

Final Structure and Reliability of the Revised Questionnaire

Themes	Sub-scales	Items	α	N
Self-initiation	Motivation and attitudes (SIM)	SIM6,5,7	.778	3
	Openness to new things (SIN)	SIM2,1,3	.759	3
	Making efforts to learn (SIE)	SIE1,2,3	.714	3
	Perseverance (SIP)	SIE5,6,7	.705	3
Self-regulation	Identifying needs and learning goals (SRN)	SRN2,4,3,1,5	.804	5
	Selecting resources and planning (SRP)	SRP5,2,6,1,7,3	.746	6
	Total		.888	23

Apart from learner autonomy, we also obtained data related to the students' academic achievement. To reflect the students' most recent academic achievement, the questionnaire asked them to provide their Grade Point Averages for all the previous semester English subjects. The Grade Point Averages of the compulsory Vietnamese subjects, such as Philosophy or Economics, were excluded from this study as it aimed at investigating the relationship between language learners' autonomy and students' academic achievement.

Participants

The study was conducted at an English faculty at a major university in the South of Vietnam. As we aimed at investigating learners' learning autonomy levels, i.e., whether there are any differences between learner autonomy levels across the years, and whether there is a significant correlation between learner autonomy and their academic performance, we decided to distribute the questionnaire to all the 536 students within the faculty in the academic year 2023-2024. The total number of valid questionnaires returned was 420. Table 5 gives the demographic information of the participants.

Table 5

Demographic Information of the Participants

		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	116	27.6
	Female	304	72.4
Year	Year 1	125	29.8
	Year 2	105	25.0
	Year 3	120	28.6
	Year 4	70	16.7

Data Collection and Analysis

The study was conducted based on the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Review Board of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Protocol Code: TC2024-08, approval date: June 2024). The questionnaire, created in Google Form with an attached consent form, was distributed to all English-major students in the regular program. A total of 420 valid responses were collected within two weeks, representing 78.36% of the target population. After data collection, responses were exported to Excel, cleaned, and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Grade Point Averages were calculated from English subject grades, while mean scores were computed for overall learner autonomy and its components (self-initiation, self-regulation) and subcomponents (motivation and attitudes, openness to new things, efforts to learn, perseverance, needs and goals, and planning and monitoring).

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were recalculated in the main study to assess the internal consistency of the two main scales and their subscales. The results are presented in Table 6. All scales and subscales yielded acceptable Cronbach's alpha values, indicating good internal reliability.

Table 6

Reliability Statistics of the Two Scales and Subscales

Scale /Subscale	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Self-initiation (SI)	12	.821
SIM	3	.761
SIN	3	.786
SIE	3	.703
SIP	3	.713
Self-regulation (SR)	11	.839
SRN	5	.805
SRP	6	.756

Note. SIM = Motivation and attitudes; SIN = Openness to new things; SIE = Making efforts to learn; SIP = Perseverance; SRN = Identifying needs and learning goals; SRP = Selecting resources and planning.

Since some of the data were not normally distributed, we used the Spearman correlation instead of Pearson correlation. Results are reported in the next section.

Results

Levels of Learner Autonomy Across Years

As shown in Table 7, the learner autonomy levels are similar across the years, ranging from 3.55 to 3.74, with the overall learner autonomy of 3.63. The learner autonomy levels are high for all four years (with the range of 3.34 to 4.15). The levels of the two scales of SI (self-initiation) and SR (self-regulation) and the subscales are also high, except for SR for Year 3 and its two subscales SRN (Identifying needs and learning

goals) and SRP (Selecting resources and planning), also for Year 3, falling in the range of 2.61 to 3.4, which are at a moderate level.

Table 7

Means and Standard Deviations of Learner Autonomy Scale and Subscales across Years

Year		LA	SI	SR	SIM	SIN	SIE	SIP	SRN	SRP
1	Mean	3.61	3.70	3.51	3.57	3.73	3.73	3.78	3.43	3.58
	SD	.482	.519	.584	.688	.781	.733	.701	.691	.634
2	Mean	3.68	3.78	3.57	3.55	3.69	3.93	3.94	3.54	3.60
	SD	.525	.541	.612	.796	.798	.640	.748	.681	.694
3	Mean	3.55	3.74	3.34	3.41	3.58	3.87	4.10	3.34	3.34
	SD	.484	.535	.561	.690	.808	.724	.655	.709	.627
4	Mean	3.74	3.90	3.58	3.75	3.85	3.86	4.14	3.48	3.66
	SD	.440	.450	.589	.730	.783	.604	.646	.729	.611
T	Mean	3.63	3.77	3.49	3.55	3.70	3.85	3.97	3.44	3.53
	SD	.490	.521	.592	.730	.795	.690	.703	.702	.653

Note. LA = Learner autonomy; SI = Self-initiation; SR = Self-regulation; SIM = Motivation and attitudes; SIN = Openness to new things; SIE = Making efforts to learn; SIP = Perseverance; SRN = Identifying needs and learning goals; SRP = Selecting resources and planning.

Table 8 shows the results of the Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Tests for the null hypotheses on the distribution of learner autonomy and its elements across years.

Table 8

Distribution of Learner Autonomy Scale and Subscales across Years

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	LA distribution is consistent across Years.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.063	Retain H_o
2	SI distribution is consistent across Years.		.080	Retain H_o
3	SR distribution is consistent across Years.		.009	Reject H_o
4	SIM distribution is consistent across Years.		.021	Reject H_o
5	SIN distribution is consistent across Years.		.200	Retain H_o
6	SIE distribution SIE is consistent across Years.		.089	Retain H_o
7	SIP distribution SIP is consistent across Years.		.000	Reject H_o
8	SRN distribution is consistent across Years.		.209	Retain H_o

9	SRP distribution is consistent across Years.	.002	Reject H_o

The significance level is .050.

Note. LA = Learner autonomy; SI = Self-initiation; SR = Self-regulation; SIM = Motivation and attitudes; SIN = Openness to new things; SIE = Making efforts to learn; SIP = Perseverance; SRN = Identifying needs and learning goals; SRP = Selecting resources and planning.

As shown in Table 8, there was no significant difference between the learner autonomy levels across the four years. While overall self-initiation remained consistent, significant differences emerged among Motivation and attitudes (SIM) and Perseverance (SIP) levels across the years. Similarly, significant differences were also found between the self-regulation levels in general and the ability to plan and monitor the learning process (SRP) in particular across the years.

To further examine these, a post-hoc analysis was conducted. Table 9 presents the significant results from the Pairwise comparisons of Year for Motivation and attitudes (SIM), Perseverance (SIP), Self-regulation (SR) and Selecting resources and planning (SRP).

Table 9

Pairwise Comparisons of Year for SIM, SIP, SR and SRP

Pairwise Comparisons of Year						
	Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.[a]
SIM	Year 3-Year 4	-55.707	18.069	-3.083	.002	.012
SIP	Year 1-Year 3	-53.369	15.326	-3.482	.000	.003
	Year 1-Year 4	-65.251	17.902	-3.645	.000	.002
SR	Year 3-Year 2	51.793	16.201	3.197	.001	.008
SRP	Year 3-Year 1	40.919	15.463	2.646	.008	.049
	Year 3-Year 2	52.190	16.169	3.228	.001	.007
	Year 3-Year 4	-55.471	18.197	-3.048	.002	.014

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and 2 distributions are the san
Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.
a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multi
tests.

Note. SIM = Motivation and attitudes; SIP = Perseverance; SR = Self-regulation; SRP = Selecting resources and planning.

As shown in Table 9, the SIM (Motivation and attitudes) level of Year 3 students is the lowest (M=3.41) while that of Year 4 students are the highest (M=3.75). Regarding Perseverance (SIP) level, Year 1 has the lowest mean (M=3.78), and it is significantly less than both Year 3 (M=4.10) and Year 4 (M=4.14). The self-regulation level of Year 3 (M=3.34) is significantly lower than that of Year 2 (M=3.57). While there are no significant differences between the ability to identify needs and learning goals (SRN) across the years, there are significant differences between the three SRP (Selecting resources and planning) levels, namely, Year 3-Year 1, Year 3-

Year 2, and Year 3-Year 4. As shown in Table 9, the SRP level of Year 3 (M=3.34) is much lower than those of the other years.

Correlation Between Learner Autonomy and Academic Achievement

The Spearman correlation test result shows that there is a significant correlation between the students' Grade Point Average and learner autonomy level (r = .105, sig. = 0.031 < 0.05) (see Table 10).

Table 10

Result of Spearman Correlation Test of Grade Point Average and Learner Autonomy

Correlations

			LA	GPA
Spearman's rho	LA	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.105*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.031
		N	420	420
	GPA	Correlation Coefficient	.105*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.031	.
		N	420	420

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note. LA = Learner autonomy; GPA = Grade Point Average

Table 11 summarises the results of Spearman correlation tests of self-initiation, self-regulation and the subscales of learner autonomy (i.e., Motivation and attitudes (SIM), Openness to new things (SIN), Making efforts to learn (SIE), Perseverance (SIP), Identifying needs and learning goals (SRN), Selecting resources and planning (SRP)) and Grade Point Average. The table presents the overall correlation along with correlations for each year level.

Table 11

Results of Spearman Correlation Tests of Elements of Learner Autonomy and Grade Point Average

Year		LA-GPA	SI-GPA	SR-GPA	SIM-GPA	SIN-GPA	SIE-GPA	SIP-GPA	SRN-GPA	SRP-GPA
1	CC	.106	.131	.069	.172	**.258***	-.004	.051	.028	.086
	Sig.	.240	.144	.447	.055	.004	.963	.575	.756	.339
2	CC	**.304***	**.320***	**.243***	**.348***	.154	.161	**.304***	**.240***	**.196***
	Sig.	.002	.001	.013	.000	.117	.101	.002	.014	.045
3	CC	.132	**.192***	.034	.153	.087	.121	**.191***	.097	-.039
	Sig.	.150	.036	.713	.095	.347	.187	.037	.292	.673
4	CC	.178	.217	.077	.040	.032	.175	.204	.060	.065
	Sig.	.140	.072	.527	.739	.790	.148	.090	.621	.591

T	CC	**.105***	**.179****	.015	**.145****	**.111***	.078	**.197****	.030	.011
	Sig.	.031	.000	.755	.003	.022	.109	.000	.544	.825

Notes. CC: Correlation Coefficient; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
LA = Learner autonomy; GPA = Grade Point Average; SI = Self-initiation; SR = Self-regulation; SIM = Motivation and attitudes; SIN = Openness to new things; SIE = Making efforts to learn; SIP = Perseverance; SRN = Identifying needs and learning goals; SRP = Selecting resources and planning.

Overall, a significant positive correlation exists between learner autonomy and academic achievement at the 0.05 significance level. The more autonomous the students are, the better their academic performance. The self-initiation level also has a very strong correlation with Grade Point Average (p =.000). Among the sub-elements of SI, there is no significant correlation between SIE (Making efforts to learn) and Grade Point Average. However, SIN (Openness to new things) positively correlates with Grade Point Average at the 0.05 level, and the other two sub-elements have a very strong correlation with Grade Point Average. The correlations between SIM (Motivation and attitudes) and SIP (Perseverance) with Grade Point Average are highly significant at the 0.01 level (p =.003 and .000, respectively). The test results show no significant correlations between self-regulation level in general, the two sub-elements SRN (Identifying needs and learning goals) and SRP (Selecting resources and planning), and Grade Point Average.

There were some interesting findings when the correlations for each year were examined. Results showed high correlations between learner autonomy, Self-initiation (SI), Self-regulation (SR) and almost all of the sub-elements of Self-initiation and Self-regulation and Grade Point Average for Year 2 students. However, there were no significant correlations between learner autonomy and Grade Point Average for Year 1, Year 3 and Year 4 students. Similar patterns were found with self-initiation level and Grade Point Average (except for Year 3) and self-regulation level and Grade Point Average across Year 1, Year 3 and Year 4. As for the sub-elements, there were almost no significant correlations between the six sub-elements and Grade Point Average for Year 1, Year 3 and Year 4 students. The only exceptions are the strong correlation between SIN (Openness to new things) and Grade Point Average for Year 1 students (p =.004) and between SIP (Perseverance) and Grade Point Average for Year 3 students (p =.037).

Discussion

The present study aimed to assess levels of learner autonomy across different year levels in a university setting, focusing on two primary dimensions: self-initiation and self-regulation. The results indicated that overall, learner autonomy remains high across all four years, with no statistically significant differences in the general learner autonomy scale across years. The high autonomy levels in this study align with Holec's (1981) foundational view of autonomy as a developed skill rather than an innate characteristic. The results suggest that these learners have generally cultivated

autonomy throughout their university experience, likely due to conscious efforts and the development of self-directed learning habits.

However, a closer examination of the two dimensions reveals nuanced differences, particularly in self-regulation. Year 3 students showed notably lower levels of Self-regulation (SR) and its subscale SRP (planning and monitoring the learning process) compared to other year levels, suggesting a potential dip in learner autonomy in this cohort. This finding aligns with Nguyen's (2012) model, which posits that self-regulation is crucial in achieving learner autonomy but can fluctuate due to academic demands throughout a student's educational journey. The Year 3 cohort may experience additional challenges, such as transitioning to more advanced or specialised coursework, which could impact their confidence and control over planning and monitoring the learning process. The lower self-regulation scores in Year 3 students suggest that a decline in Self-regulation (SR) may negatively affect academic performance if left unaddressed. By encouraging Year 3 students to engage more actively in planning and monitoring their learning activities, educators could help bridge this gap, thereby fostering stronger academic outcomes.

The findings of this study support the recommendation of Benson (2000) and Littlewood (1996) to utilise robust and contextually sensitive autonomy measures, such as the Language Learner Autonomy Scale, which accommodates both self-initiation and self-regulation aspects. Although previous scales like the Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form (Confessore & Park, 2004) and Nguyen's (2012) model have been informative, they were found to be inadequate in accounting for the fluctuations in autonomy across different educational stages, as seen in the Year 3 cohort. This underlines the value of tools like Language Learner Autonomy Scale in providing a more comprehensive understanding of learners' motivational and regulatory profiles.

The findings also show that there is a significant correlation between learner autonomy and Grade Point Average. Autonomous learning behaviours can enhance academic performance, confirming that learner autonomy is a key factor for success in higher education (Faiz, 2023; Myartawan et al., 2013; Ozer & Yukselir, 2023; Sakai & Takagi, 2009). However, this correlation is relatively modest, suggesting that while learner autonomy plays a role, other factors may contribute significantly to academic success. A closer examination of the sub-elements of learner autonomy reveals that self-initiation, specifically motivation, attitudes, and perseverance, has a robust association with academic performance. These findings support Little's (1991) emphasis on the proactive engagement of learners, indicating that motivated and resilient students are likely to perform better academically. This aligns with existing literature highlighting motivation and perseverance as critical components of learner autonomy, which foster a proactive approach to learning (Little, 1991; Nguyen, 2012; Ruelens, 2019). The lack of a significant correlation between self-regulation and Grade Point Average overall, however, suggests that while identifying needs and learning goals and planning and monitoring the learning process are valuable, they may not directly translate to measurable academic outcomes, especially in the current context.

Interestingly, the study shows that learner autonomy's influence on Grade Point Average varies by year level, with Year 2 students displaying particularly strong

correlations between autonomy and academic performance. This trend likely reflects the academic pressures unique to Year 2, where students must ensure satisfactory performance to qualify for specialisation courses. During this time, increased autonomy is expected as students adapt to more rigorous academic expectations. The stronger association between self-initiation and self-regulation elements and Grade Point Average among Year 2 students suggests that these students actively engaged in planning and monitoring to meet the demands of their coursework.

The study shows that learners display a moderately high level of autonomy overall but also reveals critical areas such as self-regulation where targeted support for Year 3 students may be needed. This underscores the importance of monitoring and scaffolding autonomy development, particularly at key transitional stages. The findings further indicate that the relationship between learner autonomy and Grade Point Average is complex and shaped by individual, academic, and contextual factors specific to each year level. Consequently, stage-sensitive support is essential for enabling students to use their autonomy effectively across their academic trajectories.

Pedagogical Implications

The study's findings on learner autonomy and academic achievement have several implications for English language teaching. The positive association between higher autonomy and better academic outcomes underlines the importance of autonomy-supportive learning environments. Teachers can incorporate learner-centred practices such as structured goal-setting activities, guided self-assessments, and project-based tasks to encourage students to take greater responsibility for their learning and, in turn, strengthen performance.

At institutional level, policies and curricula may need to shift away from purely test-oriented or teacher-centred models towards more flexible, learner-directed approaches. Revising assessment practices to include formative, self-reflective components alongside traditional examinations can provide opportunities for students to develop self-regulation, which is likely to support both autonomy and achievement.

The observed association between learner autonomy and academic success also suggests that barriers to autonomy, such as restricted access to resources or rigid regulations, should be systematically addressed. This may involve expanding access to learning tools, embedding technologies that support self-directed learning, and offering teacher development focused on autonomy-supportive pedagogy, including the promotion of self-study and independent learning habits.

Finally, enhancing internal factors such as motivation, personal interest, and positive attitudes is crucial for fostering learner autonomy and academic performance. English Language Teaching programmes can integrate authentic, real-world tasks and topics that connect with learners' interests and future goals, while explicitly encouraging goal setting to strengthen commitment and reinforce the reciprocal relationship between autonomy and achievement.

Conclusion

This study has provided valuable insights into the levels of learner autonomy among English major learners and their relationship with academic achievement. Findings indicate that learners have a moderately high level of learner autonomy, and higher autonomy often correlates positively with academic success, underscoring learner autonomy as a significant contributor to improved academic outcomes. This suggests that fostering autonomy in English as a Foreign Language settings can encourage learners to take greater responsibility for their progress, supporting both language acquisition and overall academic performance. These findings are consistent with existing literature advocating for learner-centred approaches in language education, which promote active and self-directed learning behaviours. Future studies could explore specific strategies or interventions that can effectively cultivate autonomy, such as peer collaboration or digital learning tools. By addressing these areas, potential studies can contribute to more effective pedagogical practices that support learner autonomy and academic success in diverse English as a Foreign Language settings.

Acknowledgements

This article is part of a research project, coding TC2024-08, which the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City funded.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest in Research

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

References

Afshar, S. H., Rahimi, A., & Rahimi, M. (2014). Instrumental motivation, critical thinking, autonomy and academic achievement of Iranian EFL learners. *Issues in Educational Research, 24*(3), 281-298.

Benson, P. (2010). Measuring autonomy: Should we put our ability to the test. In A. Paran & L. Sercu (Eds.), *Testing the untestable in language education* (pp. 77-97). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847692672-007

Benson, P. (2000). Autonomy as a learners' and teachers' right. In I. McGrath, B. Sinclair, & T. Lamb (Eds.), *Learner autonomy, teacher autonomy: Future directions* (pp. 111-117). Longman.

Borg, S., & Al-Busaidi, S. (2012). *Learner autonomy: English language teachers' beliefs and practices*. British Council.

Candy, P. C. (1991). *Self-direction for lifelong learning: A comprehensive guide to theory and practice*. Jossey-Bass.

Cao, T. P. D., & Pho, P. D. (2024). Learner autonomy in language learning: The development of a rigorous measuring scale. *Science & Technology Development*

Journal–Social Sciences & Humanities, *8*(3), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.32508/stdjssh.v8i3.995

Confessore, G. J., & Park, E. (2004). Factor validation of the learner autonomy profile, version 3.0 and extraction of the short form. *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning*, *1*(1), 39-58.

Cotterall, S. (1995). Readiness for autonomy: Investigating learner beliefs. *System*, *23*(2), 195-205. https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X(95)00008-8

Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2019). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Pearson Education.

Dafei, D. (2007). An exploration of the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency. *Asian EFL Journal, 24*(4), 24-34.

Dam, L. (2003). Developing learner autonomy: The teacher's responsibility. In D. Little, J. Ridley, & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom: Teacher, learner, curriculum and assessment* (pp. 135-146). Authentik.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry, 11*(4), 227-268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01

Dörnyei, Z. (2014). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410613349

Ezzi, N. A. A. (2018). The relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency of Yemeni postgraduate English students: A correlational study in Hodeidah University. *Learning, 9*(26), 80-89.

Faiz, A. (2023). The correlation between level of learner autonomy and learner's achievements in Arabic reading and listening: A quantitative, non-experimental correlational study. *Applied Language Learning, 33*(1), 26-40.

Guglielmino, L. M. (1977). *Development of the self-directed learning readiness scale*. University of Georgia.

Giveh, F., Ghobadi, M., & Zamani, Z. (2018). Self-directed learning in L2 acquisition: A review of theory, practice, and research. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *9*(6), 1335-1343. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0906.24

Gupta, N., Ali, K., Jiang, D., Fink, T., & Du, X. (2024). Beyond autonomy: Unpacking self-regulated and self-directed learning through the lens of learner agency-a scoping review. *BMC Medical Education*, *24*(1),1-12. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-024-06476-x

Harlen, W. (2007). *The quality of learning: Assessment alternatives for primary education*. The Primary Review.

Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy and foreign language learning*. Pergamon Press.

Lee, H., & Mori, C. (2021). Reflective practices and self-directed learning competencies in second language university classes. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 41*(1), 130-151. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2020.1772196

Lamb, M. (2017). The motivational dimension of language learner autonomy. In A. Chik, N. Aoki, & R. Smith (Eds.), *Learner autonomy in language learning: Stories*

from the field (pp. 139-154). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-52998-5_9

Little, D. (1991). *Learner autonomy: Definitions, issues and problems.* Authentik.

Little, D. (2007). Language learner autonomy: Some fundamental considerations revisited. *International journal of Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 1*(1), 14-29. https://doi.org/10.2167/illt040.0

Littlewood, W. (1996). "Autonomy": An anatomy and a framework. *System, 24*(4), 427-435. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(96)00039-5

Lowe, C. (2009). *A correlational study of the relationship between learner autonomy and academic performance*. The George Washington University.

Macaskill, A., & Taylor, E. (2010). The development of a brief measure of learner autonomy in university students. *Studies in Higher Education, 35*(3), 351-359. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903502703

Myartawan, I. P. N., Latief, M. A., & Suharmanto. (2013). The correlation between learner autonomy and English proficiency of Indonesian EFL college learners. *TEFLIN Journal, 24*(1), 63-81.

Nguyen, L. T. C. (2012). Learner autonomy in language learning: How to measure it rigorously. *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics, 18*(1), 52-67.

Ozer, O., & Yukselir, C. (2023). "Am I aware of my roles as a learner?" The relationships of learner autonomy, self-direction and goal commitment to academic achievement among Turkish EFL learners. *Language Awareness, 32*(1), 19-38. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2021.1936539

Reinders, H. & Balcikanli, C. (2011). Learning to foster autonomy: The role of teacher education materials. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal, 2*(1), 15-25.

Ruelens, E. (2019). Measuring language learner autonomy in higher education: The self-efficacy questionnaire of language learning strategies. *Language Learning in Higher Education, 9*(2), 371-393. https://doi.org/10.1515/cercles-2019-0020

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *61*, 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860

Sakai, S., & Takagi, A. (2009). Relationship between learner autonomy and English language proficiency of Japanese learners. *Journal of Asia TEFL, 6*(3), 297-325.

Scharle, Á., & Szabó, A. (2000). *Learner autonomy: A guide to developing learner responsibility*. Cambridge University Press.

York, T. T., Gibson, C., & Rankin, S. (2015). Defining and measuring academic success. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, *20*(5), 1-20.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory into Practice, 41*(2), 64-70. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4102_2

Appendix

LA Questionnaire

Self-initiation

	Code	Motivation & attitudes
1	SIM1	I have a willingness to learn.
2	SIM2	I have positive attitude towards learning English.
3	SIM3	I motivate myself to learn without external factors.

	Code	Openness to new things
4	SIN1	I am open to new ways of doing familiar things.
5	SIN2	I enjoy new learning experiences.
6	SIN3	I enjoy being set a challenge.

	Code	Making efforts to learn
7	SIE1	I am able to work cooperatively in pairs or groups.
8	SIE2	I am able to seek help or support from my peers.
9	SIE3	I am able to take part in classroom interactions and discussions.

	Code	Perseverance
10	SIP1	I am able to stick with tasks even when they are difficult.
11	SIP2	I am able to meet deadlines.
12	SIP3	I am able to take responsibility for my learning.

Self-regulation

	Code	Identifying needs & learning goals
13	SRN1	I am able to set my own learning goals
14	SRN2	I am able to identify my own needs (e.g., why I want to learn English)
15	SRN3	I am able to identify my own learning problems and means of addressing them
16	SRN4	I am able to identify my strengths and weaknesses and structure my learning accordingly
17	SRN5	I am able to evaluate to what extent I have achieved my learning goals

	Code	Planning & monitoring the learning process
18	SRP1	I am able to work with a variety of materials and resources to enhance learning.
19	SRP2	I am able to find information about new topics on my own.
20	SRP3	I am able to identify and develop learning strategies (e.g., learning words by association, repeating words or sentences, or organizing a table of important grammar rules)
21	SRP4	I am able to develop the ability to study by myself.
22	SRP5	I am able to plan where I want to learn (e.g., in/outside the classroom, at home…).
23	SRP6	I am able to develop daily/weekly learning plans.