INVESTIGATING UNIVERSITY LECTURERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEARNER AUTONOMY IN THE EFL CONTEXT IN VIETNAM

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Education
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March 2017
Statement of Originality

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Acknowledgements

First, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Associate Professor Shen Chen, Dr Jennifer Archer, and Dr Helena Sit for all the wise counsel and patience that they have provided throughout the time of my PhD journey. I feel fortunate and honoured to have an opportunity to work with such excellent academics who have always listened to me with the highest degree of attention, dedication, and empathy.

My deep appreciation goes out to my sponsors, the Vietnamese Government and the University of Newcastle, for offering me the full scholarship, excellent resources, and generous funding to support my fieldtrip home for data collection and attendance at international conferences.

My special thanks go to the lecturers in the five universities in Hanoi, Vietnam who have enthusiastically participated during the period of data collection for this research project.

I am so grateful to receive support from the wonderful staff of the Office of Graduate Studies and the School of Education, especially Ms Hayley McGregor, who have always responded quickly to my enquiries and have offered me excellent support throughout my research candidature.

I would also like to thank all the UON research students, especially Ms. Thi Thom Thom Nguyen and her family, who have been sources of personal and professional support and assistance. It is my pleasure to have shared academic and life experiences with them during my time in Australia.

Finally, I am extremely indebted to my husband Duong, my sons Ngoc Bee and Linh Ben for their love and encouragement without which the completion of my thesis would not have been possible.
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Abstract

In language learning, students’ competence can be improved if they reflect on their learning processes and become more autonomous in their behaviour. A dilemma facing educational reformers in Vietnam, as in other Asian contexts, is how to encourage students to become more independent in their studies. Since 2005, the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam has included students’ ability to learn independently as one of its national education objectives.

While there has been a considerable focus on foreign language learners and ways in which they can become more autonomous, there has been less attention on the teachers of foreign language students. Given that teachers play a central role in helping their students to be more autonomous, especially in a Confucian heritage culture like Vietnam, teachers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy should be investigated.

This study investigates Vietnamese lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The study used a mixed method approach to data collection, consisting of a quantitative survey of 262 EFL lecturers, individual interviews with 28 English lecturers, and classroom observations of 20 lecturers in five universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. The study was designed to examine how lecturers perceived the concept of learner autonomy, their attitudes towards learner autonomy, and the extent to which they encouraged learner autonomy in their classrooms.

The analysis of the data indicated that lecturers held generally positive attitudes towards learner autonomy. Most agreed that it was their responsibility to develop autonomy in their students. However, little evidence of learner autonomy emerged during the
classroom observation phase. Lecturers pointed to a number of factors that restricted the level of learner autonomy in their classes. These factors included the physical impediments of large classes, heavy teaching workloads, and inadequate resources. There were psychological factors at work as well, particularly a cultural context in which teachers are revered and students defer to them.

The study finishes with a set of recommendations for Vietnamese policymakers, higher education institutions, EFL lecturing staff, university students, and schools for ways to enhance learner autonomy in English language classrooms.
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<td>CRAPEL</td>
<td>Centre de Recherches et d’Applications Pédagogiques en Langues</td>
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<td>TOEIC</td>
<td>Test of English for International Communication</td>
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Chapter One  INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In the context of economic globalisation, Vietnam is engaging in the world economy. Teaching and learning foreign languages is an important part of this process. However, there are pressing issues with teaching and learning foreign languages in Vietnam, especially the teaching and learning of English, now long considered as the world language. Vietnam needs graduates who are both competent in their professional occupations and in their English proficiency.

Vietnam’s fast-growing economy in the doi moi (renovation) era from 1986 and its membership of numerous international organizations require a skilled labour force to meet the demands of the country’s moves to industrialisation, modernisation and globalisation. The Vietnamese Government has made reforming education and training a major priority. There have been various reforms to higher education. The Higher Education Reform Agenda (known as HERA) (Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, 2005) requires comprehensive reform of the higher education system by 2020. The elements of this reform in relation to the teaching and learning of foreign languages and English in particular include the following:

- Developing a more internationally integrated higher education system;
- Incorporating more international commitments and agreements;
- Improving the teaching and learning of foreign languages (especially English);
- Encouraging conditions favourable to increased foreign investment in the higher education system.
English has become a prerequisite for university students if they want good jobs on graduation. However, it is acknowledged widely that most graduates lack sufficient competency in English (H. T. T. Phan, 2009; Thanh, 2008). The Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has proposed in HERA that learners should be encouraged to take a more active role in their learning (Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, 2005). In the social and cultural context of Vietnam, promoting learner autonomy in English learning has become a pressing and arduous task for university teaching staff.

In this chapter, three fundamental elements related to the research question will be clarified. First, the context and background of the study will be presented through a brief overview of research in relevant areas in Vietnam. Second, the interpretation of the current situation of social changes in Vietnam will lead to the research question regarding the teaching and learning of English in Vietnam’s universities. Third, the potential significance of the research will be highlighted. Finally, the structure of the thesis will be outlined.

1.2 Background of the research

Vietnam is a relatively small country in the South East Asia region. With a land area of 329,314 square kilometres and a population of 85.85 million people (Vietnam General Statistics Office, 2010), the Vietnamese people are working hard to overcome poverty due to long years of war. Over the past decades, Vietnam has become a member of a number of international organizations including the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in July 1995, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in

English has become the most important foreign language in Vietnam because it is considered part of a process of globalisation. Vietnamese people now express little hostility toward the United States (Ashwill & Thai, 2005). English has enabled Vietnam to conduct diplomatic and economic negotiations with many nations. It has established relations with 174 countries and economic and trade ties with almost every country in the world. As a language of international communication, competence in English will promote Vietnam’s presence at the global level. English has become a prerequisite to accessing high quality education and employment opportunities in Vietnam (H. T. M. Nguyen & Hudson, 2010; H. T. T. Phan, 2009).

English has gained prominence as a consequence of the Vietnamese government implementing its renewal process in 1986. A target of the renewal process was to promote human development and emphasize the contribution of human resources to national development. The Vietnamese government has made education and training a focus of development. The government has issued two ten-year strategic plans (1991-2000 and 2001-2010) that include learning foreign languages. Vietnam has a centralised education system. The governing body is the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), responsible for both managerial and academic activities (T. T. Dang, 2010) Unlike the Western institutions where autonomy and academic freedom are two crucial elements (T. K. Q. Nguyen, 2011), both the public and non-public schools in Vietnam are monitored by MOET for administrative matters such as teacher and student recruitment processes or student intake quotas as well as academic matters like areas
Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam

of training, curriculum, assessment and testing schemes, and even teaching methods. All strategic development and policies of tertiary institutions are regulated by MOET.

There are standardized examinations that shape classroom interactions. National examinations are held annually for high-school graduation and university entrance. Other standardized examinations are also run by the Department of Education and Training in each province or equivalent area every semester. These examinations are used to regulate classroom teaching and learning activities. Teachers are required to follow certain classroom procedures and students are expected to learn from textbooks and from their teachers. The teaching and learning in English in Vietnam generally is influenced by these centralized mechanisms. Since the academic year 2006 – 2007 (an academic year in Vietnam lasts from September of a certain year until July of the following year), learning a foreign language is compulsory to students from the junior secondary level (from Grade 6). Secondary schools should encourage teaching of a second foreign language as an optional subject, where conditions allow, while the first foreign language is compulsory. The teaching of foreign languages is based on programs and textbooks designed by MOET (Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, 2006).

Given that the English curriculum and syllabus are pre-determined from the highest governing body in education, and that testing and assessment follow fixed rules, promoting learner autonomy in learning English is a major challenge.

Vietnamese students remain examination-driven and score-oriented (H. V. Dang, 2006; V. C. Le & Barnard, 2009). These orientations can produce passive secondary school students who go to class, listen to the teachers, and do what teachers tell them to do.
When students leave secondary schools to enter higher education, these orientations remain, even though they are given more tasks to do on their own and the time spent in face-to-face teaching is reduced.

Teaching and learning English is complicated at the tertiary level. Unlike the primary and secondary levels where English curriculum and textbooks are standardized, English teaching at tertiary levels is in the hands of each institution. There are 149 universities in Vietnam, including 103 public and 46 private universities (Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, 2011). There are no national standards for the textbooks as well as no national standards for methodology and curriculum. The teaching of English differs from institution to institution. The provision of resources to students and teachers is generally still limited and there is not much change in teaching practices. Teachers usually appear to dominate the classroom and rote learning occurs often.

Being accustomed to following teachers’ directions, tertiary students may find it challenging to bear more responsibility for their learning. On the one hand, lecturers teaching English complain that their students are passive and dependent on them. On the other hand, the teaching of English at Vietnamese universities has received much criticism from students. Tran (2013a) studied a majority of university students and reported that the current English teaching and learning at universities was ineffective and disappointing. Most of them expressed their frustration and confusion about the English teaching at their universities because, for many of them, after five to twelve years studying English, they still were unable to communicate in English outside the classroom in either spoken or written form.
One young lecturer of English in Tran (2013a)’s study indicated that she tried to make the class more interesting and her students more autonomous by interactive teaching methods and creating different language games. However, she was warned by senior colleagues not to do so because the class was too big and the class time was already insufficient to deliver content that would be tested in examinations. Consequently, many young enthusiastic lecturers like her did not use modern teaching methods. Tran (2013a) pointed out three reasons for this: (1) lecturers are not “forced” to use more interactive methods; (2) it is challenging and even risky to apply them due to big class sizes, limited resources, and the need to deliver examination knowledge to the students; and (3) changing a teaching style requires time and effort, but no incentives are given to the lecturers who have invested time in preparing lessons using new teaching methods.

Over the past few decades, different language teaching theories, approaches and methods have been introduced into the system. Communicative language teaching (CLT), as a language teaching approach was favoured by lecturers of English because it addresses the need to improve communication skills and promotes communicative competence rather than the practice of grammatical forms in isolation. The adoption of the principles of CLT in classrooms around the world marked the beginning of many changes in how second language teaching was conducted (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). These changes included increased responsibilities for learners and new roles for teachers as facilitators and negotiators of meaning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The use of CLT in Vietnam was encouraged by two factors: support from government policy, and Vietnamese teachers’ willingness to use this approach (T. H. A. Nguyen, 2002; H. H. Pham, 2004). However, there is not sufficient evidence to show that CLT is being implemented successfully in Vietnam.
In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning, CLT has been adopted for over two decades. There have been attempts to shift to a more student-centred approach and encourage students’ active participation in class. Unfortunately, these changes have been slow and inconsistent. Many teachers have not been prepared to teach in this manner (Duong, 2003; V. C. Le, 2002; H. H. Pham, 2001). Other challenges EFL teachers have to face are teaching load and shortage of material resources (Duong, 2003; V. C. Le, 2002). Students’ lack of proficiency in the target language, lack of effective learning strategies, and low motivation make it hard for teachers to motivate students to learn English (H. H. Pham, 2001).

The constraints on teaching and learning English at the tertiary level in Vietnam can be categorised into six main areas of challenge: curriculum challenges, challenges in teaching practices and methods, policy challenges, workload challenges, resource and facility challenges, and teacher training challenges (H. T. Le, 2013; H. C. Nguyen, 2007; Utsumi & Doan, 2008). All of these limitations have resulted in low levels of English proficiency.

Vietnamese graduates’ lack of ability to communicate in English has been of concern (H. T. T. Phan, 2009). Less than ten out of every fifty graduates from English programs have sufficient skills to work as interpreters, translators, tour guides, or teachers of English (H. H. Pham, 1999). In a survey of 59 universities, only 49.3% of students were reported to meet the objectives of their English training programs, and of their employers, 18.9% failed to do so, and 31.8% needed further training (Thanh, 2008).

Students’ weakness in generic skills resulted in the inclusion of the ability to learn independently in the national education objectives for 2005-2020 in HERA (Vietnamese
Ministry of Education and Training, 2005). Among factors leading to the poor English competence, a significant one is students’ lack of activity and autonomy (H. V. Dang, 2006; Trinh, 2005). One Vietnamese graduate student reported:

Together with economic changes in the transition period, the educational system in Vietnam needs changing as it is out of date and has not been able to stimulate the full participation of learners and make full use of the mental and creative capacity of students. The learning process is still too passive and inclined to one-way communication (Ashwill & Thai, 2005, p. 61).

There have been several responses to those challenges. The New Vietnamese Education Law (Vietnamese Education Law 2015) identifies general rules for the country’s education levels. It highly appreciates the learners’ ability to work independently and creatively and their ability to solve problems in the fields of study in which they are trained (Vietnamese Assembly, 2005). It is also clarified in the 2015 Education Law in Article 40 that the teaching methods at the tertiary level must emphasize the fostering of self-awareness in study, the enhancement of ability to self-study, self-research and the development of creative thinking. In terms of teaching and learning at the tertiary level, the two specific targets identified in HERA are “curriculum development” and “apply modern teaching methods” (Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, 2005).

The most recent official policy, Vietnamese Education Development Strategies for period 2011-2020, issued by Vietnamese Prime Minister in 2012, once again confirms that developing the positiveness, self-awareness, activeness, creativity and self-study ability of learners should be the approach to reforming teaching methods.
Fostering learner autonomy requires attention from policymakers, educational practitioners, and learners. One of the main aims of Vietnam higher education should be teaching students not just what is currently known, but also how to keep their knowledge up to date so that they will be able to refresh their skills when it is necessary.

Learner autonomy in Vietnam has not been explored to any extent. In fact, despite being a “buzz word” for more than two decades in international academic circles, learner autonomy is quite a new construct in Vietnam. There has been a small number of works on learner autonomy in Vietnam which will be presented in detail in the next chapter.

Several attempts have been made to construct a locally-driven definition of learner autonomy which could work in the local context, for example, the work of Dang (2012) and Le (2013). Given the situation of teachers as strong authority figures in Vietnam, the emergence of learner autonomy will require teachers to act in very different ways. One could argue that teachers must become the primary agents to foster learner autonomy. Vietnamese teachers and students are deeply influenced by the cultural values of collectivism and the acceptance of power and authority in the teacher-student relationship.

Under the influence of collectivism, Vietnamese consider benefits to the community before they consider benefits to themselves as individuals. Vietnamese learners usually want their opinions to merge with those of their classmates and feel uncomfortable if they are “standing out.” The result may be students who lack critical thinking skills because they usually agree with the view of the majority.
Vietnamese learners have been influenced by beliefs of a hierarchy in classrooms, where the roles of teachers and learners are rooted in people’s thinking and behaviours (C. T. Nguyen, 2011; T. N. Nguyen, 2012). Central to pedagogical practices in Vietnam is a traditional view of the teacher-student relationship. The cultural value that probably exerts the strongest impact on the teacher-student relationship is acceptance of power and authority. Students avoid making the teacher lose face (Littlewood, 1999). “Face” here refers to others’ self-image and feelings (T. N. Nguyen, 2012). Like in other cultures influenced by Confucianism, challenging and questioning teachers are behaviours generally avoided in Vietnam.

Students are expected to behave morally, come to class regularly, listen to teachers attentively, take notes carefully, understand the lectures, and memorise notes. The teacher-student relationship can be stronger than that between parents and their children (Ashwill & Thai, 2005). Students are reluctant to challenge their teachers because of Confucian respect for teachers. Teachers’ answers are always correct. The teacher is the major source of knowledge. Not only responsible for students’ intellectual life, teachers are considered responsible for their moral life as well. This teacher-student relationship can inhibit students’ creativity (K. D. Nguyen & Mcinnis, 2002). Vietnamese students are often contrasted with their Western peers who are characterised as free to challenge and argue with their teachers. In Vietnam, questioning a teacher is not as important as listening to everything the teacher explains in class.

As teachers are at the centre of authority in terms of both knowledge and power, they are expected to be the expert in every field of study and to be decision-makers in almost all academic aspects like the syllabus, learning materials, learning activities and time management (P. M. Nguyen, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2005). This power distance affects
not only students but also teachers. On the one hand, learners are afraid of challenging teachers and reluctant to question even when they are encouraged to do so. On the other hand, teachers may not be willing to encourage questions from their students. Teachers who favour a more communicative teaching approach or student-centred approach are confused as to how and to what extent they should hand power over to their students.

English language teachers are supposed to provide students with knowledge about English and to develop students’ English levels in the most effective possible way. Scores and certificates are more important than competence itself and failures in examinations are viewed as a face-losing incident. Classroom interactions largely are one-way, either between the teacher and an individual student or between the teacher and the whole class. Interruption, argument, seeking clarification, and challenging information would be rare in a typical English class.

However, it has been argued that East Asian learners, Vietnamese included, are not inherently passive. Rather, they are bounded by the socio-cultural contexts (Littlewood, 2001; T. N. Nguyen, 2012; T. T. Tran, 2013b). This argument has also been supported by several studies into learners’ readiness for autonomy in East Asian contexts, such as Hong Kong and Malaysia. These studies demonstrate that students are ready to take more responsibility in their own learning (H. W. Chan, 2011; Victoria Chan, 2001; V. Chan, Spratt, & Humphreys, 2002; Thang & Alias, 2007). It is possible to have a step-by-step approach towards promoting learner autonomy.

In order to be successful in implementing and developing learner autonomy at tertiary level, lecturers should be aware of their new roles and responsibilities. Teachers have to be prepared to take up their new role of taking the initiative in fostering autonomy in
their students (D. Little, 1994, 1995; T. N. Nguyen, 2012). The current research will focus on university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam.

1.3 Research questions

Are there socially and culturally appropriate pedagogical approaches and strategies to enhance learner autonomy in EFL classrooms in Vietnamese universities? In this study, university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in English learning are examined. The key research question is as follows:

*How do university lecturers view learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam?*

In order to answer this question, five sub-questions are posed:

1. What are lecturers’ interpretations of learner autonomy in the context of EFL education at the tertiary level in Vietnam?

2. What are lecturers’ perceptions of their responsibilities and students’ responsibilities in the process of learning English?

3. What are lecturers’ perceptions of students’ abilities to act autonomously?

4. What are teachers’ perceptions of the supportive and constraining factors for learner autonomy in English learning at the tertiary level in Vietnam?

5. How should teachers behave to promote learner autonomy as a means of improving the quality of EFL teaching at the tertiary level in Vietnam?
1.4 Significance of the research

The research is proposed in light of on-going efforts in the Vietnamese higher education sector to promote the teaching and learning of foreign languages in general and English in particular. Will greater student autonomy in learning English produce more competent users of English?

The study is first designed to provide insights into lecturers’ conceptions of learner autonomy. Although learner autonomy has been endorsed by many educational stakeholders in Vietnam, there has been limited empirical research into this approach to learning. There have been few research studies investigating teachers’ perceptions of learner autonomy. Current practices designed to enhance learner autonomy often reflect arbitrary and fragmented opinions of classroom teachers or policymakers. In a traditional education environment like Vietnam, with its examination-oriented approach and teacher-led classrooms, failure to take into account the attitudes of teachers when designing autonomy-enhancing activities may result in disappointing outcomes.

Second, the researcher proposes to identify appropriate classroom practices for the promotion of learner autonomy at the tertiary level. Implementing learner autonomy takes time and the process should be gradual for both teachers and learners. Abrupt changes to traditional teaching approaches are likely to cause problems. The findings of the research should shed light on teachers’ ideas about which changes should occur in which order and which changes are likely to take longer to effect. Teachers may need help with curriculum development and revisions to syllabus and supporting material without unduly upsetting cultural norms and practices.
Third, the study can contribute evidence to support other investigations of learner autonomy in the area of EFL in particular and of education in general. Comparing the constructions of learner autonomy in Vietnam with those in other countries should provide insights into this approach.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The structure of the thesis takes the form of eight chapters, including this introductory chapter.

Chapter One introduces the focus of the research and provides an overview of the historical context of language education and language policy in Vietnam. The socio-cultural impacts on the practice of teaching and learning English in Vietnam are also discussed. The context and significance of the research are then highlighted.

Chapter Two presents a review of literature on learner autonomy in education and its application in language teaching and learning. This chapter consists of six main parts. Part one considers different definitions of learner autonomy and why learner autonomy should be considered an educational goal, especially in tertiary education. Part two conceptualises learner autonomy from four perspectives: psychological, technical, socio-cultural, and political-critical. Part three expands on practices that encourage learner autonomy. Part four examines attitudes and perceptions of teachers towards learner autonomy. Part five makes links between learner autonomy and cultural context. Part six considers previous studies on learner autonomy which have been carried out in Vietnam.
Chapter Three provides arguments for the research methodology used in this study, how it is designed, conducted, and how the data are analysed. The research design, instruments, procedures, issues of validity and reliability, and ethical considerations are examined.

Chapter Four presents findings and initial discussions of the findings from the quantitative survey data. Data collected are from five universities in a major city in Vietnam.

Chapter Five presents the findings and initial discussions of the findings from 20 classroom observations.

Chapter Six presents the findings and initial discussions of the findings from 28 in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with EFL lecturers.

Chapter Seven organises in-depth discussion basing on the combination of the analyses of all three data sets.

Chapter Eight discusses pedagogical implications and recommendations in the practice of teaching and learning English in Vietnam in higher education sector. This chapter concludes the thesis with a discussion of the limitations and recommendations for future research in the field.

The structure of the thesis is summarized in Figure 1.1.
Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam

Figure 1.1 Structure of the thesis

Introduction

→

Literature Review

→

Research Methods

→

Quantitative Survey
   (262 lecturers)

→

Qualitative Interviews
   (28 individual lecturers)

→

Qualitative Classroom Observations
   (20 two-hour classes)

→

Overall Discussion

→

Conclusion

Figure 1.1 Structure of the thesis
1.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has introduced background information for the current study. It has presented the context of the research, a brief overview of previous studies done in the relevant research areas, and elaborated the aims of the research. The next chapter will focus on a literature review of learner autonomy, learner autonomy in different cultural contexts, learner autonomy from teachers’ perspectives, and learner autonomy in the context of Vietnamese higher education. It is noted here that the words “teacher” and “lecturer” are used interchangeably in Vietnam. As such these two words are also used interchangeably in this current study. It is also noted here that the focus of the study is on lecturers’ attitudes, not just on their perceptions. “Attitude” refers to a feeling or opinion about something or someone, or a way of behaving that is caused by this. “Attitudes” in the study refers to the feelings or opinions of lecturers about learner autonomy and those lecturers are those who have actually experienced the enactment of learner autonomy in their real teaching practices. “Perception” refers to a belief or opinion which is often held by many people and based on how things seem. As such, by saying “perceptions of learner autonomy”, we are mentioning the beliefs of lecturers who may or may not have actual teaching experiences regarding learner autonomy.
Chapter Two  

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews theoretical perspectives and empirical research on learner autonomy worldwide with a particular focus on Asian countries. The chapter defines learner autonomy as a multi-faced construct and then views learner autonomy from four different perspectives. It provides a brief overview on the approaches to fostering learner autonomy in the global context. It explores empirical research on teachers’ perceptions of learner autonomy. The chapter then discusses the concept of learner autonomy as it fits with cultural traits in Asian countries and particularly in Vietnam. It concludes with a review of research on learner autonomy in Vietnam.

2.2 Definitions of learner autonomy

2.2.1 A brief history of learner autonomy

Learner autonomy has been a “buzz world” in education. According to Benson (2007), many conferences featuring learner autonomy have been held in Europe, Asia, Australasia and Latin America as well as at the AILA 2005 World Congress. Benson (2007) noted that the literature on autonomy published since 2000 exceeded the literature published in the field over the previous 25 years.

The early history of autonomy in language education is well documented (Benson, 2001; D. Little, 2007). In brief, the concept of autonomy first emerged in the field of language teaching through the Council of Europe’s Modern Languages Project which was formed in 1971. Among many contributions made from this project, the foundation
of the Centre de Recherches et d’Applications Pédagogiques en Langues (CRAPEL) was the most prominent one.

CRAPEL rapidly became a focal point for research and practice in the field. Henri Holec remains a key name within the area of autonomy. His 1981 book “Autonomy and Foreign Languages Teaching” has always been considered as a pioneer in the development of autonomy in language education. As Holec put it in this publication, autonomy has a cultural and social context:

The end of the 1960s saw the development in all so-called industrially advanced Western countries of a socio-political tendency characterized by a definition of social progress, no longer in terms of increasing material well-being through an increase in consumer goods and services, but in terms of an improvement in the “quality of life” – an expression that did not become a slogan until some years later – based on the development of a respect for the individual in the society (Holec, 1981, p. 1).

In its early days, learner autonomy was linked with self-access learning centres to support self-directed learning. Although Holec considered autonomy as an attribute of the learner, the term was also used to describe learning situations: “the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions” (Dickinson, 1987, p. 11). Later the concepts of individualisation (Allwright, 1988), learning strategies (Wenden, 1991), independence and interdependence (David Little, 1991), learner training (Dickinson, 1992), computer assisted language learning – CALL (Blin, 2004; Luke, 2006), and course management system (Sanprasert, 2010) entered the field of learner autonomy.
In an appendix to his work on adult self-directed learning, Candy (1991) listed more than 100 competencies associated with autonomy. Sinclair (2000) agreed that autonomy could be viewed as a concept which accommodated different interpretations. Little argued that autonomy in learners could “… take numerous different forms, depending on their age, how far they have progressed with their learning, what they perceive their immediate learning needs to be, and so on” (1991, p. 4). Benson indicated that it might be neither necessary nor desirable to decide autonomy too precisely as it is “…a multidimensional capacity that will take different forms for different individuals and even for the same individual in different contexts at different times” (2007, p. 47).

2.2.2 Definitions of learner autonomy

As mentioned above, it is difficult to have one definition of learner autonomy. It is, nevertheless, essential to have clear ideas of the different elements employed for the concept. Within about two decades from the beginning of work with learner autonomy in the 1960s until the early 2000s, researchers gave it diverse definitions. The contemporary understanding of autonomy developed from the 1980s.

Learner Autonomy: Ability or Capacity

Holec’s (1981) definition of learner autonomy has remained the most widely cited one in the field. Autonomy is “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (p. 3). There are variations on this definition. “Ability” is often replaced by “capacity” (a term used by Holec himself elsewhere); “take charge of” is sometimes replaced by “take responsibility for” or “take control of” one’s own learning (terms also used by Holec).
There are three important points about this definition. First, this ability is not innate but is acquired either naturally or purposefully through systematic and well-organised means of learning. Second, the term “ability” here refers to one’s potential capacity to act in a learning situation, not the actual behaviour one has used in a situation. Third, a person who “takes charge” of his own learning is the person who has the responsibility for all the decisions he makes concerning his learning process. Holec also differentiated “self-directed learning” and “autonomous learner,” the former being a mode or a status of learning and the latter being a characteristic of a learner. “Self-directed” learning implies an “autonomous learner” but the latter does not necessarily involve the former.

Little (1991) associated learner autonomy with “capacity” in his definition of autonomy. He added a psychological dimension which was often absent in definitions of autonomy:

*Autonomy is a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts*” (Little, 1991, p.4).

He also emphasized the link between learner autonomy and a high degree of freedom, adding that this freedom was never absolute but “conditional” and “constrained” because as social beings, “our independence is always balanced by dependence” (p.5). Thus, interdependence was one essential feature of autonomy. This viewpoint was supported in the 1990s. Kohonen (1992) argued that: “Personal decisions are
Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam

necessarily made with respect to social and moral norms, traditions and expectations” (p.19). Autonomy thus included the notion of interdependence. It meant being responsible for one’s own conduct in the social context and being able to cooperate with others and solve conflicts in constructive ways.

Benson (2001) compared the two definitions of autonomy made by Holec and Little and concluded that both of them tended to underplay one critical element in autonomous learning, that the content of learning should be determined by the learners. He broadly defined autonomy as “the capacity to take control over one’s own learning”. It was not a method of learning; rather it was an attribute of the learner’s approach to the learning process. Benson concluded that “autonomy may be recognised in a variety of forms, but it is important that we are able to identify the form in which we choose to recognise it in the contexts of our own research and practice” (2001, p. 48).

**Learner Autonomy: Qualities of Learners**

Candy (1991) formed a profile of an autonomous learner. Assessing the qualitative similarities of attributes, characteristics and competencies of a learner, he classified them into various groups. Similarly, Breen and Mann (1997) suggested that an autonomous learner should possess eight qualities. Figure 2.1 summarizes the qualities of an autonomous learner.
Figure 2.1 Learner autonomy as learners’ qualities

The learners’ stance towards the world emphasizes their own role in the way that the learners are responsible for what and how they learn. The learners’ desire to learn or to acquire knowledge might be either intrinsic or extrinsic. The sense of self confirms that the learners’ relationship to themselves as learners is not influenced by assessment made by others. Instead, they are capable of evaluating judgements and rejecting those which are irrelevant and unhelpful. The learner’s metacognitive capacity enables learners to reflect and make decisions about what, when, and how to learn. Management of change allows learners to evaluate the usefulness and relevance of the changing
resources around them in order to adapt themselves to those changes. **Independence of educational processes** is regarded as the ability to take on the responsibility which is shifted from teachers to learners. Learners are able to find out and make use of available resources for their own study. Also, they are capable of seeking other resources beyond the classroom or institutional borders. **Strategic engagement with learning** is the learners’ ability to “choose the right thing at the right time for the right reasons against their own criteria” (Breen & Mann, 1997, p. 136). **Capacity to negotiate** enables learners to negotiate their needs and wants with those of other group members in a strategic way, which is crucial for them to make the best use of what is available. The argument that learner autonomy can be specified by a list of the desirable qualities by Breen and Mann (1997) was not supported by Benson (2001). He argued that in this way, autonomous learners appeared to be a particular kind of person, rather than people who possessed cognitive skills or abilities that could be acquired.

**Learner autonomy: Readiness and Willingness**

The idea that learner autonomy should be linked with learners’ readiness or willingness in their learning process first entered into the field in the early 1990s. It was later endorsed by Dam (1995) together with a group of scholars at a conference in Bergen, Germany.

“Learner autonomy is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one’s own learning in the service of one’s needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in co-operation with others, as a socially responsible person. An autonomous learner is an active participant in the social processes of learning, but also an active interpreter of new information in terms
of what she/he already and uniquely knows. It is essential that autonomous learner is stimulated to evolve an awareness of the aims and processes of learning and is capable of the critical reflection which syllabuses and curricula frequently require but traditional pedagogical measures rarely achieve. An autonomous learner knows how to learn and can use this knowledge in any learning situation she/he may encounter at any stage in her/his life” (Dam, 1995, p.1).

Littlewood (1996) also associated learner autonomy with readiness and willingness to take charge of his own learning when he examined the components that made up autonomy in language learning. He argued that at the core of the notion of autonomy was the learners’ ability and willingness to make choices independently. As such, an individual learner may have the ability to make independent choices but feel no willingness to do so. Conversely, a person may be willing to make independent choices but not have the ability to do so. Littlewood pointed out that “ability depends on possessing both knowledge about the alternatives from which choices have to be made and the necessary skills for carrying out whatever choices seem most appropriate” while “willingness depends on having both the motivation and the confidence to take responsibility for the choices required” (1996, p. 428). For the sake of promoting learner autonomy, these four subcomponents should be distinguished even though they were closely linked.

In Dam’s (1995) view, learner autonomy “cannot be taught, and there is no simple recipe for its implementation” (p.6). Rather it was an experience-based learning process for both teachers and learners. This idea was different from that of Holec (1981) who
maintained that learner autonomy was acquired through systematic and purposeful learning.

The history of the development of learner autonomy also marks various other ways of defining the term. Wenden (1991) highlighted the connection between learner autonomy and learning strategies, knowledge about the learning process, and attitudes toward learning. She argued that successful or expert or intelligent learners learned how to learn and that they were autonomous by acquiring the learning strategies and the knowledge about learning. The students gained autonomy upon possessing the attitudes that enabled them to use those skills and knowledge confidently, flexibly, appropriately and independently of a teacher (Wenden, 1991).

“Being autonomous means doing things yourself. Thus learner autonomy requires the learner’s full involvement in planning, monitoring, and evaluating his or her learning. Such involvement in turn requires the development of explicit skills of reflection and analysis. According to this definition, learner autonomy entails learning how to learn intentionally” (D. Little, 2004, p. 105).

Despite differences, all the definitions share some common characteristics: an autonomous learner as one who takes a proactive attitude and role in his or her learning process, generating and reflecting ideas as well as availing himself or herself of learning opportunities, rather than simply reacting to various stimuli of the teacher and the learning environment.
2.2.3 Misconceptions about learner autonomy

Little (1991) has indicated that there are five common misconceptions about learner autonomy. *First*, the most widespread misconception is that learning autonomously means learning without the teachers. What may be the root for this assumption is the association between autonomy and individualisation, which implies learners working on their own. On the contrary, many researchers have demonstrated that learner autonomy should involve collaboration and interdependence. Autonomous learners are not only those who can work effectively on their own, but also they are good team members who are capable of working collaboratively with their peers and with the help and guidance of the teachers. What should be emphasized here is that on the way to promoting autonomy, learners are freed from the direction and control of others. However, their decisions should always be made with respect to social and moral norms, traditions, and expectations of others.

The *second* false assumption about autonomy is that the more autonomous learners are, the more redundant teachers are. Many believe that teachers’ intervention may destroy whatever autonomy the learners have attained. As Eger (2009) stated:

*Although learner autonomy means a reshaping of the view that the learner is responsible for learning, teachers do not abdicate their responsibilities of teaching in the language learning process and on the contrary teachers become the primary agents on fostering the development of learner autonomy within the classroom context* (p.2023).
Obviously, this shift of responsibility from teachers to learners does not exist in a vacuum, but is the result of multiple changes to the curriculum towards a more learner-centred learning.

The third misconception is that autonomy is a teaching methodology, something that teachers can do to their learners. This is not totally wrong because teachers do play a crucial part in the development of learner autonomy.

The fourth misconception is that learner autonomy is described through a single behaviour. Although an autonomous learner is recognised through his behaviour, that behaviour can take numerous different forms depending on various factors such as his age, his speed in learning, or his perceptions of his own immediate learning needs.

The fifth mistaken belief is that the autonomy can only be achieved by some learners and it remains unchanged in every area. In fact, autonomy is difficult to achieve and nothing can guarantee its permanence. One learner who possesses a high level of autonomy in one area may be less autonomous or non-autonomous in another.

### 2.2.4 Justification for learner autonomy in education

Learner autonomy has been defended as an educational goal by many researchers (Reich, 2002; Winch, 2002). In language education, many advocate for learner autonomy. There is now an awareness of the importance of developing language and autonomous learning skills in addition to the language competencies. Little (1991, p. 8) supported the adoption of learner autonomy in language education in his summary, as follows:
because the learner sets the agenda, learning should be more focused and more purposeful, and thus more effective both immediately and in the longer term;

- because responsibility for the learning process lies with the learner, the barriers between learning and living that are often found in traditional teacher-led educational structures should not arise;

- if there are no barriers between learning and living, learners should have little difficulty in transferring their capacity for autonomous behaviour to all areas of their lives, and this should make them more useful members of society and more effective participants in the democratic process.

Cotteral (1995) built on Dickinson’s (1987) work to propose three types of justification: philosophical, pedagogical, and practical. Philosophically, learners are expected to have their own voice in their learning. We should prepare learners for a rapidly-changing future in which capacity for independent learning is required. Pedagogically, adults learn more effectively when they are consulted about dimensions such as the pace, sequence, mode of instruction and content of what they are studying. Practically, learners who are involved in making choices and decisions about different aspects of the program are also more likely to feel more secure in their learning process.

Benson and Voller (1997) described individualisation, learner-centredness, and the growing recognition of the political nature of language education as “related tendencies in language education with implications for the advocation of learner autonomy” (p.6). The emergence of learner-centred approaches such as the negotiated syllabus (Breen & Candlin, 1980), the learner-centred curriculum (Campbell & Krysiewska, 1992; Nunan, 1988), and other approaches that emphasise the role of learners as active agents in their own learning have also been promoting learner autonomy.
Many studies have been endorsing learner autonomy. Kenny (1993) discovered that “autonomy in education and language learning is something more significant than the ability to make responsible choices, relating more to exploration of self-concept and to the realization of personal and group potential” (p.431). Education empowers people’s autonomy, and this in turn unblocks people’s capacities for independent and interdependent thoughts and actions. A study investigating the roles played by both learners and teachers in the process of cultivating autonomy concluded:

“All learning is ultimately autonomous in the sense that learning depends on the efforts of the learners themselves, so autonomous way of thinking should be cultivated and developed among EFL learners and teachers. They need to be more aware of the benefits that autonomy brings forth to English education and be ready to take on their new roles, and interactively cooperate with each other to enhance autonomy abilities” (Shen, 2011, p. 31).

Advocates of learner autonomy see it as an essential goal of learning. Littlewood (1999) commented:

“If we define autonomy in educational terms as involving students’ capacity to use their learning independently of teachers, then autonomy would appear to be an incontrovertible goal for learner everywhere, since it is obvious that no students, anywhere, will have their teachers to accompany them throughout life” (p.73).
2.3 Learner autonomy from different perspectives

The present research adopts Benson’s (2007) categorisation in which learner autonomy is interpreted from four perspectives: psychological, technical, socio-cultural, and political-critical.

The \textit{psychological perspective} considers learner autonomy as a capacity or qualities of learners themselves. Holec’s definition of learner autonomy has remained the most representative: autonomy is “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (1981, p. 3). Later, Little (1991) saw learner autonomy as “capacity.” He added a psychological dimension that is often absent in definitions of autonomy. He argued that “autonomy is a capacity - for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action” (1991, p. 4). He emphasized the link between learner autonomy and freedom, adding that freedom was never absolute; rather it was “conditional” and “constrained” because as social beings, our independence and dependence were inter-balanced. Interdependence is a feature of autonomy. Benson (2001) defined autonomy as learners’ capacity to take control over their own learning. Several scholars have associated learner autonomy with learners’ qualities such as their stance towards the world, their desire to learn, or their meta-cognitive capacities (Breen & Mann, 1997; Candy, 1991) or their readiness/willingness to take more responsibilities in their learning (Dam, 1995; Littlewood, 1996).

The \textit{technical perspective} views learner autonomy as a ‘situation’ where learners are responsible for their learning activities (Dickinson, 1987). A learner gains autonomy when, because of a resource rich environment, he can select what, when, and how to achieve his targets. Most of the studies adopting this perspective have been conducted
in self-access learning centres, and they have demonstrated that authentic materials and personalised learning activities can foster learner autonomy (Jones, 1995; Koyalan, 2009). These studies focus on the preparation and organization of learning activities as well as technical support and consultation services provided in each learning environment.

The socio-cultural perspective views learner autonomy as a socially-shaped construct (Smith & Ushioda, 2009) which is built during the learner’s negotiation with his environment. As a member of a community, an individual needs to deal with matters, people, and relationships on a daily basis. His behaviour is influenced by cultural and social norms and values. Learner autonomy is acquired through the execution of all the processes needed to manage oneself within the society. This perspective acknowledges the impact of both personal and situational attributes in the formation and development of learner autonomy. Research from a sociocultural perspective focuses on providing learners with contextual choices, dialogic negotiations, interactive activities, and critical reflection as autonomy promoting practices (D. Little, 2009; Sinclair, 2009).

The political critical perspective views learner autonomy as a desire for more access, agency, and power in the community. Autonomous learners are described as those who have power to control their learning situation, have choices in learning activities, and are free from oppressive forces. Research from the political critical perspective focuses on creating opportunities to give learners more power to decide and to empower them with the freedom to choose their learning process (Pennycook, 1997).

All four perspectives share some common characteristics. They see autonomous learners as ones who take a proactive role in their learning, generating and reflecting on
ideas as well as availing themselves of learning opportunities rather than reacting to teachers and their learning environment. Learner autonomy is a multifaceted concept which can be interpreted differently in different contexts and even with different individuals (Balcikanli, 2010; Victoria Chan, 2001; Lamb, 2004; Sakai, Takagi, & Chu, 2010). Little (1991) argued that autonomy in learners could “take numerous different forms, depending on their age, how far they have progressed with their learning, what they perceive their immediate learning needs to be, and so on” (p.4).

This current research adopts the socio-cultural perspective as one major component in forming its working definition. The framework for the study’s definition is formed from three components including Benson’s socio-cultural perspective, a Confucian Heritage Culture, and Hofstede’s theory about national cultural dimensions. The last two components will be further discussed in this chapter. Learner autonomy is defined in the present research as the learners’ ability to take responsibility of their own learning under the guidance of and with the support from teachers.

2.4 Approaches to fostering learner autonomy

This section discusses six approaches to fostering learner autonomy as proposed by Benson (2001). The role that teachers play in each approach is highlighted.

2.4.1 Resource-based approach

The resource-based approach emphasises independent interaction between learners and learning materials and resources to foster learner autonomy. Once learners are provided with a rich source of learning materials and have a good interaction with these resources, they will be able to direct their learning process (Benson, 2001). Some
examples of the ideal material types involve guided self-discovery tasks based on authentic data, activities for pairs and groups with checklists and guidelines for self and peer evaluation provided, and learner-generated materials (Sheerin, 1991). Another example of resource-based approach is the use of self-access centres.

Jones (1995) set up a self-access centre for English language students whose culture and upbringing might predispose them against autonomy. Learner participants were English language students in the Foreign Languages Centre at Phnom Penh University (Cambodia). A practical experimental intervention was designed to set up a new self-access centre which focused on collaboration and group work among learners, not individual learning. The results indicated that more and more students were involved in self-access and they found it was a helpful way to improve their English. Teachers took sample self-access materials to their regular classes and students’ self-assessment led to individual consultation with teachers.

Gardner (2007) looked for signs of increasing complexity in students’ own working definitions of the meaning of self-access learning and awareness of autonomous learning. The participants were 30 second year science major students at the University of Hong Kong. He included a self-access component in the course. Students were positive about the self-access learning component.

Self-access centres are beneficial to learners in facilitating autonomy. However, in order for them to be successful, a number of factors should be carefully considered. These include learners’ profiles, available resources and materials, and the learning environment. Moreover, learners should be guided in how to use the centres effectively.
It is here that teachers can support their students in using self-access centres to develop independent learning.

**2.4.2 Technology-based approach**

This approach focuses on independent interaction with educational technologies. Typical applications of this approach are computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (Klaus, 2012; Milton, 1997) and computer mediated communication (Ankan & Bakla, 2011; T. T. Dang & Robertson, 2010). These technologies enhance learner autonomy in the way that they offer learners control over learning content and opportunities for collaboration and that they stimulate interactions among learners, between learners and teachers.

Dang and Robertson (2010) investigated the impacts of the employment of a web 2.0 Learning Management System (LMS) in an EFL course and found that the LMS component supported students to initiate their learning. The authors argued that it should be the educators’ responsibility to provide adequate facilitation for suitable knowledge generation and that EFL educators needed to take advantage of students’ electronic social behaviours for educational purposes.

In a similar manner, Ankan and Bakla (2011) examined the use of blogs as a way to promote learner autonomy. Four points of reference (decision-making, independent action, critical reflection, and detachment) were investigated. The authors tested the use of blogs on 17 EFL students and found out that while the students were able to make independent decisions, they were also challenged by the unknown technology and their own limited language proficiency. They demonstrated that teachers’ guidance plays a significant role in their students learning a language in an autonomous way.
2.4.3 Curriculum-based approach

The curriculum-based approach emphasises the negotiation between teacher and students. Learners’ expectations of the course, their reactions to a syllabus (materials, assessment and course organisation), and their comments should be considered. Based on this analysis, together with compromises from both teacher and learners, a curriculum that enhances learner autonomy could be structured.

One example of this approach was seen by Chan’s study that explored students’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in Hong Kong in 2001. Participants were 20 second year English major students at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Chan (2001) argued that there should be a balance between teacher-centredness and learner-centredness in classroom practice. He also proposed two guiding principles for the design of autonomy-oriented classroom activities. First, there should be room for student involvement and a wide range of learning conditions and group activities to stimulate motivation and interest. Second, teachers can support learner autonomy by adopting and adapting their teaching or teaching materials (textbooks, handouts, worksheets, etc.) to their students’ needs.

2.4.4 Classroom-based approach

The classroom-based approach places an emphasis on learners’ cooperative learning (Benson, 2001). Negotiations between teachers and learners over the setting of goals, the learning process, evaluation and assessments are fundamental. For example, Miller and Ng (1996) researched peer assessment as one way to get students involved in their own learning and to develop learner autonomy. Peer assessment, it was argued, could turn passive recipients into active participants in a language program. The first benefit is
fairer assessment (assessment from classmates, not from teachers). Peer assessment can also improve students’ understanding and attitudes towards being evaluated. Finally, it is likely that students can develop their self-regulation capacity in the process of peer assessing. Results indicated that peer assessment did lead to positive outcomes in terms of autonomy enhancement. However, in order to realise the benefits of this activity, students needed guidance in designing and implementing assessment techniques, as well as dealing with critical feedback from their peers.

Another classroom-based possibility is the use of portfolios because they act as an alternative method of assessment to traditional exams. According to Benson (2001), portfolios helped improve self-directed learning, critical self-awareness, self-confidence, self-assessment skills, and a friendly relationship between the teacher and students. In order for a classroom-based approach to work effectively, teachers need to understand and be committed to the concept of learner autonomy, be prepared to commit to the required training for learner autonomy, and to integrate daily self-assessment and peer-assessment activities.

2.4.5 Learner-based approach

The learner-based approach emphasises training learners to develop skills and strategies in order to take greater control over their learning. Researchers have focused on learners’ metacognitive knowledge and skills (Dislen, 2011; Yu, 2006) and motivation (Spratt, Humphreys, & Chan, 2002). Yu (2006) named three integrated factors including motivation, learners’ metacognitive knowledge, and the learning environment, as leaving impacts on learner autonomy in the Chinese EFL context. Yu argued that
learner autonomy depended on teacher autonomy and that teachers must be aware of the three factors to help learners to develop their autonomy.

Spratt, Humphreys and Chan (2002) reported that the relationship between motivation and learner autonomy was a controversial one in terms of which came first. This relationship was found to “be dynamic and operate in different directions depending on the kind of motivation involved” (Spratt et al., 2002, p. 245). The authors concluded that “motivation is the key factor that influences the extent to which learners are ready to learn autonomously, and that teachers might therefore endeavour to ensure motivation before they train students to become autonomous” (p. 245).

Sakai, Takagi and Chu (2010) examined what students in Japan and Taiwan thought about learner autonomy with regard to learning English, what aspects would separate female students from male students in their attitudes toward English learning, and how students would like to be involved in class management. Findings indicated that students were willing to act more autonomously but they did not have enough opportunities in teacher-centred classes. The researchers concluded that teachers should give students more choice in the selection of textbooks and materials, classroom activities, and homework.

### 2.4.6 Teacher-based approach

The teacher-based approach emphasises the role of the teacher and teacher education in promoting learner autonomy (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). The assumption behind this approach is that teachers’ beliefs about learner autonomy have a significant influence on their commitment to learner autonomy. These include beliefs about age, the effectiveness of independent study, the ability to complete tasks alone, making choices
about ways to learn, opportunities to learn both in and outside the classroom (without a
teacher), giving choice and control in the classroom, language level, learner confidence,
culture, collaborative learning, teacher assistance, motivation, and the ability to self-
evaluate. The promotion of learner autonomy depends on the promotion of teacher
autonomy (D. Little, 2007; Nakata, 2011). In other words, there is interdependence
between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy in fostering learner autonomy.

2.5 Cultural issues in relation to learner autonomy

2.5.1 Learner autonomy and culture

Both language and education fit within a culture. Culture is inextricable from language.
Like autonomy, ‘culture’ is a multifaceted and controversial concept. In research on
learner autonomy, culture is often defined as a national or ethnic culture.

Promoting learner autonomy in different contexts is the subject of much debate.
Pennycook (1997) remarked that “Promoting autonomy in language learning (…) needs
to take into account the cultural contexts of the language learners, to open up spaces for
those learners to deal differently with the world, to become authors of their own worlds”
(p. 53). For some scholars, autonomy is a “Western trend unsuited to Eastern contexts”
(V. Chan et al., 2002, p. 1). For others, autonomy is important for all learners
(Littlewood, 1999).

The idea of learner autonomy emerged in Western cultures where individualism is
valued. When attempts to implement learner autonomy in other contexts have
encountered difficulties, these difficulties are often seen as the result of cultural
differences between the West and other communities.
2.5.2 Culture traits and their influences on teaching and learning English in Vietnam

English is now the global language. People of different cultures teach and learn English in different ways. Language and culture cannot be separated (Lewis & McCook, 2002; C. T. Nguyen, 2011; Palfreyman & Smith, 2003). Ballard and Clanchy (1997) argued that “different cultural traditions do embody different attitudes to knowledge” (p. 9). An individual’s attitudes and behaviours are influenced not only by his personalities but by culture as well. This could explain the variety of English in the world like Singlish (English spoken by people in Singapore). Similarly, Pennycook (1997) proposed that a certain language needed to be understood within a particular context in which it was used.

In teaching and learning English, both Vietnamese teachers and learners are challenged by cross-cultural differences. Vietnamese culture has been described as villagers’ cultures (N. T. Tran, 1994) or rice culture in which family relations and hierarchy are emphasized. Education in Vietnam traditionally is characterized as teacher-centred, book-centred with a significant focus on the grammar-translation method of teaching (H. V. Dang, 2006; T. T. Dang, 2010; Littlewood, 1999; T. C. L. Nguyen, 2008; Trinh, 2005). The long period under Chinese domination has left many influences in Vietnamese culture. The most influential one is Confucianism. Despite the introduction of Western influences into Vietnam when the French colonised the country and more recent Western influences that have come with globalisation, Confucian moral philosophy remains the guiding principle in Vietnamese people’s attitudes and behaviours.
A range of perspectives for conceptualising these impacts from the West and from China has been proposed. Littlewood, for example, suggested three perspectives including collectivism and individualism, attitudes to authorities, and motivational orientation. These perspectives acted as the foundation for his cross-cultural study of East Asian and European students’ attitudes towards learning English (Littlewood, 2001).

In an earlier study, Hofstede (1991) established four dimensions of cultures which are named “power distance”, “individualism – collectivism”, “masculinity – femininity”, and “uncertainty avoidance”. This four-dimensional model of differences among cultures is used to explain why people from different countries and cultural groups think and behave differently. Because these dimensions were developed as the result of a study in the West done by a Westerner, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) agree that these dimensions are “Western-biased.” They later added a fifth dimension called “long-term versus short-term orientation” which was generated from a study done by Chinese researchers from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Although there has been criticism of Hofstede’s model of cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2002; McCoy, 2003; McSweeney, 2002), his work has proved to be useful in predicting typical cultural features of a certain country or community (Mohammed, White, & Prabhakar, 2008).

The impact of Confucianism on Vietnamese culture, especially in the culture of teaching and learning, is reflected in all five dimensions of Hofstede’s model (P. M. Nguyen et al., 2005). Therefore, these dimensions are applied as a frame for discussion in this study.
Power distance

This dimension has been discussed in many studies on cross-cultural influences on education (Littlewood, 1999; P. M. Nguyen et al., 2005). It can be used to explain the stereotypical image of the “passive” and “obedient” East Asian learners. Power distance is “the extent to which less powerful members of institutions expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 1991, p. 28). Vietnam, influenced by the Confucian heritage culture, scores high on the Power Distance Index, which means that there is a high degree of inequality in the society (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In terms of educational practices, this high score suggests that there is a significant gap between the power level of teachers and that of students. Teachers have more power and receive respect and obedience from students.

There have been studies showing that Eastern learners, including Vietnamese learners, are characterized as surface learners who often rely upon rote learning and have passive learning style (Holliday, 1994; Subramaniam, 2008). More recent publications have produced similar findings (V. C. Le & Barnard, 2009; H. T. T. Phan, 2009, 2010; Truong, 2013; Utsumi & Doan, 2008). Generally, Vietnamese learners expect teachers to be the powerful leaders in the classroom (C. T. Nguyen, 2011; T. N. Nguyen, 2012). Central to pedagogical practices in Vietnam is the traditional view of the teacher-student relationship.

Perhaps the cultural value that exerts the strongest impact on the teacher-student relationship is the acceptance of power and authority. Students avoid making the teacher lose face (Littlewood, 1999). “Face” here refers to others’ self-image and feelings (T. N. Nguyen, 2012). Like other cultures influenced by Confucianism, challenging and
questioning teachers are generally avoided in Vietnam. Students are expected to behave morally, to come to class regularly, to listen to teachers attentively, to take notes carefully, and to memorize notes.

The teacher-student relationship can be stronger than that between parents and children (Ashwill & Thai, 2005). Students are reluctant to challenge their teachers because of Confucian respect for teachers. Teachers’ answers are always correct. The teacher is the major source of knowledge. Not only responsible for students’ intellectual life, teachers also are considered responsible for their moral life as well. This teacher-student relationship can inhibit students’ creativity (K. D. Nguyen & Mcinnis, 2002). Vietnamese students are often contrasted with their Western peers who are often characterised as willing and free to challenge and argue with their teachers. In Vietnam, argument is not as important as listening and understanding everything the teachers explain in class.

English language teachers are supposed to provide students with knowledge about English and develop students’ English levels in the most effective way. However, scores and certificates are more important than competence itself. Students’ failures in examinations are viewed as a face-losing incident for teachers. Classroom interactions are largely one-way, either between the teacher and an individual student or between the teacher and the whole class. Interruption, argument, seeking clarification and challenging will not be found in a typical English language class.

**Individualism versus Collectivism**

“Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her
Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede, 1991, p. 51).

Like power distance, collectivism is a Confucian feature in East Asian countries. Vietnam is a collectivist society in which maintenance of social harmony and avoidance of confrontations and conflicts among people are desired (Hofstede, 1991). In teaching and learning practices, a class is regarded as a “family” where harmony should always be maintained not only between teachers and students but among students as well. This is different from western individualist societies where individual voices are encouraged to be heard.

This cultural dimension helps explain why Vietnamese children are expected to take their opinions from others and to accept what is best for the group. Arguing to defend their own ideas is a strange concept. Even the choice of study area and occupation is a group decision rather than an individual decision. Decisions about tertiary education and future career usually are made by the whole family.

Vietnamese consider community benefits before individual ones. This sense of belonging also makes them feel safe if their ideas are similar to those of the community. Vietnamese learners usually want their opinions to merge with those of their classmates and feel uncomfortable “standing out.” This cultural trait explains a common complaint about learners in East Asian classrooms: students are too quiet and reluctant to contribute to discussions. There is a disinclination to openly express one’s views (Ramsay, 2005).
Masculinity versus Femininity

On this dimension, Vietnam is categorised as a feminine society in which “emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 120). However, it is also argued that Confucian values relating to masculinity and femininity dimensions can be found in some key features of education (P. M. Nguyen et al., 2005). Although Vietnam has been labelled a feminine society, it also has masculine characteristics in education including “praise for excellent students”, “competition in class, trying to excel” and “failing in school is a disaster” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 142). These features appear to contrast with some collectivist characteristics in education, for example, affirming that groups’ success is more important than individuals’ success. A competitive approach in education can be dated back to the time of the imperial examination and the belief that education is the fastest path to a higher socio-economic status.

A fear of failure is common in Vietnamese society. Vietnamese students want high marks. Getting a low score is a painful experience because it declares an inferior status in comparison with other classmates more than a marker of incompetence.

Uncertainty avoidance

Avoiding uncertainty is defined as “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations” (Hofstede, 1991, p. 113). According to Hofstede and Hofstede’s (2005) findings, the countries influenced by Confucian Heritage Culture differ in terms of the levels of uncertainty avoidance.
It was reported that Japan and Korea were in the top twenty-five, Taiwan in the middle and China, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Singapore at the bottom of the list of seventy-six countries. It was observed that students from strong uncertainty avoidance countries “expect their teachers to be the experts who have all the answers” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 179). Chinese and Vietnamese students fit this category (C. T. Nguyen, 2011; P. M. Nguyen et al., 2005; T. N. Nguyen, 2012). Students with weak uncertainty avoidance “despise too much structure” and “like open-ended learning situations with vague objectives, broad assignments, and no timetables at all” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 179). This does not reflect most Vietnamese learners. Rather, they are seen as precision-oriented, with a low tolerance of ambiguity.

Vietnamese learners share the features of students from strong uncertainty avoidance countries. They view their teachers as the source of knowledge. They are worried about generating an answer or a solution which is different from the one provided by the teachers. In other words, they are worried about ambiguity. Even if they are encouraged or motivated to discover new things, they still tend to depend on teachers for the final answer. They prefer detailed and unambiguous instructions and step-by-step guidelines for learning (P. M. Nguyen et al., 2005).

Vietnamese teachers also wish to avoid uncertainty. They feel comfortable and confident by strictly following the textbooks and lesson plans in their teaching practices. They prefer a concrete-sequential and linear approach. Variations to lessons without preparation are normally avoided.
Long-term versus Short-term orientation

This orientation is defined by Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, p. 210) as “the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards - in particular, perseverance and thrift.” This dimension is also described by the term Confucian dynamism. The positive end of this orientation is “a dynamic orientation toward the future” while the negative end of the orientation is “a static orientation toward the past and the present” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 210).

In Vietnam, gaining entrance to a good university is the ultimate goal for many students because university degrees are seen as a way to success, that is, a socially and economically better life.

In summary, using Hofstede and Hofstede’s (2005) framework of five cultural dimensions which explain differences between nations, this section has examined the extent to which cultural traits, especially Confucian cultural values, influence the practices of teaching and learning English in Vietnam. Although there have been concerns about the viability of this framework and the validity of generalizations about countries, there is usefulness in using the framework to describe the characteristics of Vietnamese students and teachers.

Considering the feasibility of fostering learner autonomy in the Vietnamese educational context, these characteristics could be viewed as a mixture of advantages and disadvantages. It has been argued that East Asian learners, including Vietnamese learners, are not inherently passive. Rather, they are bounded by their socio-cultural contexts (Littlewood, 2001; T. N. Nguyen, 2012; T. T. Tran, 2013b). This argument has also been supported by several studies into learners’ readiness for autonomy in East
Asian contexts, including Hong Kong and Malaysia. These researchers argue that students are ready to take more responsibility for their own learning (H. W. Chan, 2011; Victoria Chan, 2001; V. Chan et al., 2002; Thang & Alias, 2007).

2.6 Learner autonomy from the teachers’ perspective

There has been little research on language teachers’ perspectives on the meaning of autonomy. It is well established in the teacher education literature that teachers’ beliefs influence their instructional choices (Borg, 1998; Woods, 1996). It is also acknowledged that an understanding of teachers’ perceptions needs to be an integral part of initiatives that promote change in what teachers do (Wedell, 2009). While it appears that most students hold positive views about learner autonomy (Balcikanli, 2010; H. W. Chan, 2011; Victoria Chan, 2001; Ho & Crookall, 1995; Jones, 1995); teachers are more cautious (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; V. Chan, 2003).

A major project called “Learner Autonomy: The Teachers’ Views” was conducted in six countries in Europe including Belorussia, Estonia, Malta, Netherlands, Poland and Malta (Camilleri, 1999). The teachers’ views fell into different categories. While the data showed an encouraging statement by Maltese teachers in favour of promoting learner autonomy in schools, their younger colleagues (also in Malta) appeared to be more sceptical. A similar caution was also observed in Slovenia when the quantitative analysis showed that “for the majority of questions there was a strong tendency towards choosing the middle category of Partly” (p. 25). There is an interesting notion that in these countries, the education system is centralised with textbooks and syllabuses being written and prescribed centrally by one educational body. Teachers’ resistance to learner autonomy may be linked to the conditions beyond their control. There was a tendency
for teachers to question the possibility of implementing learner autonomy in areas that depended on decisions by higher authorities, for example, course materials or course objectives.

Teachers’ comments on cultural contexts that may challenge the development of learner autonomy were identified in Hong Kong and Japan (V. Chan, 2003; Nakata, 2011). V. Chan (2003) investigated teachers’ perceptions of their own role and responsibilities, their perceptions of their students’ decision-making abilities, how they viewed learner autonomy, and how often they encouraged their students to carry out different autonomous activities in and outside class. One conclusion was that there were many factors in the pressured study environment in Hong Kong that hindered learner autonomy. Because teachers’ beliefs are crucial components of their teaching practices, “learner autonomy in Hong Kong cannot be fully encouraged without the relevant and knowledgeable support from the teacher” (V. Chan, 2003, p. 49). The teachers generally regarded themselves as responsible for the majority of the language related-decisions even though they claimed to support student autonomy and they saw students as able to make some of these decisions. This indicated a preference for a relatively dominant teacher role and thus a less autonomous student role.

Nakata’s study (2011) showed a gap between Japanese EFL teachers’ perceived importance of student autonomy and their actual use of strategies for promoting learner autonomy. Nakata demonstrated teachers’ lack of readiness to promote learner autonomy. He concluded that “many EFL high school teachers, while understanding the importance of autonomy, are not as yet fully ready for promoting it in their learners and have not achieved the full characteristics of language teacher autonomy to a high degree” (p. 908).
Similar findings were found in a study by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) in Oman. The authors investigated English teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding learner autonomy. The teachers, in theory, supported learner autonomy. They associated learner autonomy with learner choice. However, they were more cautious in assessing the extent to which learners could be involved in course decisions. Borg and Al-Busaidi, like V. Chan (2003) and Nakata (2011), pointed to institutional factors such as an overloaded curriculum or limited resources that impede learner autonomy. They also pointed to learner factors (such as lack of motivation and lack of skills for independent learning) and to teacher factors (such as a lack of teacher autonomy or low expectation of what learners can achieve) as impediments to learners’ autonomy.

This review of teachers’ perceptions of learner autonomy shows that many teachers are “sitting on the fence.” In theory, they are in favour of learner autonomy. In practice, they are confused about the extent to which they can or should empower their students. A number of factors constraining learner autonomy were examined. The socio-cultural context of learning emerged as a significant factor, particularly in countries like Vietnam where teachers traditionally are expected to be in control in the classroom.

2.7 Learner autonomy in Vietnam

Despite being in vogue for more than two decades in international research, the concept of learner autonomy is quite new in Vietnam.

There have been some investigations of learner autonomy in Vietnam (Trinh, 2005; Nguyen, 2009). Applying a curriculum-based approach, Trinh (2005) examined the context and the quality of teaching English in secondary and ELT programs in higher education in Vietnam. This examination showed that students “lack autonomy in
learning English” and that “their communicative competence is far from satisfactory” (p. 69). He defined learner autonomy as a self-regulating ability, including three dimensions of planning, monitoring and regulating processes. He then modified the curriculum and used a task-based learning approach, providing the participants with learning choices to enhance their attitudes towards and level of learner autonomy. As a result, data analysis focused on the effects of the curriculum and pedagogical innovation. He implemented and then measured the effects of an adapted curriculum on participants’ self-regulation, intrinsic motivation and attitudes to autonomous learning. The expected effect on self-regulation was not observed. Intrinsic motivation on the post-test was found to be even lower than that on the pre-test. The attitudes to autonomous learning decreased.

Nguyen (2009) defined learner autonomy as learner self-initiation and learner self-regulation. He used an exploratory approach to understand learner autonomy from Vietnamese teachers’ and students’ perspectives. While Western teachers often are regarded as facilitators, their Vietnamese colleagues are usually regarded as the only correct source of knowledge (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). While Western students are often said to be active and independent, Vietnamese are stereotypically described as passive and obedient learners. They often work in big groups of twenty or thirty rather than in smaller groups (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). Thus, their understanding of learner autonomy may indicate dimensions other than those that have been suggested in the literature (Dang & Robertson, 2010).

Developing a locally-defined construct of learner autonomy has been addressed to a certain extent by Dang (2012). He investigated learner autonomy in EFL in the higher education sector in Vietnam. Study One (exploring students’ perceptions of learner
Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam

autonomy) used a questionnaire to 562 students in four universities. The analyses identified four dimensions of learner autonomy: Monitoring learning processes, Goal-setting and evaluating learning, Using ICTs in learning, and Initiating learning opportunities. These dimensions appeared to be interrelated but perceived at different levels. Study Two (using the revised version of the questionnaire in Study One) investigated the relationship between perceptions and performance of learner autonomy with 247 students in one university. The online learning management system integrated in the course provided additional information on students’ engagement. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain more insights into the mediating factors on their autonomous learning behaviours. Statistical analyses showed that students’ perceptions and performance of learner autonomy were positively correlated with each other at the beginning of the course, but this relationship is not confirmed at the end of the course, probably due to examination constrains. Other analyses suggested that preference, motivation and attitude prominently contributed to the shaping of students’ autonomous learning behaviours in the offline learning environment. Students’ performance of learner autonomy in the online mode was likely mediated by technological competency and goal orientations.

Dang (2012) was successful in forming a construction of learner autonomy from students’ perspective. It is, however, not sufficient to look at autonomy from the students’ perspective only in such a traditional education system like Vietnam where the teachers still hold the authority. Teachers’ perceptions of learner autonomy need to be investigated too.

Lecturers’ perspectives on learner autonomy have been investigated in recent research by Nguyen (2014). The study employed a mixed method approach aiming to collect
data on teachers’ beliefs of learner autonomy and the association between their perceptions and their teaching behaviours. In the study, 188 EFL teachers completed the survey in the first phase of the study. The second phase was in-depth interviews with four EFL teachers. It was concluded that teachers lacked understanding of learner autonomy and there were mismatches between their beliefs and their actual teaching.

Research by Phan (2015) is the most recent publication in the area of Vietnamese higher education. Using a qualitative case study approach at a university in Vietnam, both teachers’ and students’ understanding of learner autonomy and their perceptions of pedagogy designed to foster learner autonomy were examined. Data were gathered through two rounds of interviews and classroom observations. Findings contributed a theoretical and pedagogic justification for encouraging learner autonomy in language learning. Exploration of government policies and examination of three EFL classes confirmed that learner autonomy and language acquisition were mutually supportive.

There has been little research to date focusing on the links between the cultural context of Vietnam and conceptions of learner autonomy. There has been limited research using large data samples that investigate teachers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in Vietnam. It can be argued that there is a disconnect between the Vietnamese tradition of teacher-centred classrooms and government directives to enhance learner autonomy. The present study will focus on Vietnamese EFL lecturers’ attitude to learner autonomy and the extent to which they feel they can, or they want to, implement learner autonomy in their tertiary level classes.
2.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has explored the literature on learner autonomy. Research on learner autonomy in different contexts and countries reports different findings due to different socio-cultural, linguistic, educational and institutional factors involved in the studies. Most studies have been conducted in Western countries where socio-cultural contextual factors tend to support learner autonomy. Many studies have focused on teachers and students majoring in English. More research on learner autonomy in non-Western countries would expand the research findings.

To date, there has been only limited research on learner autonomy in Vietnam. Existing studies have not focused on the influence of socio-cultural factors on learner autonomy.

In the next chapter, details of the design of the current study to investigating teachers’ perception of learner autonomy in EFL classes in universities in Vietnam will be presented.
Chapter Three  
RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

Chapter One has placed the current study in the local context – teaching and learning English at the tertiary level in Vietnam. Chapter Two has presented a review and analysis of the formation and development of learner autonomy as well as the cultural issues which affect the application of learner autonomy in Vietnam. This chapter describes the methodology used in the current study to answer the research questions proposed in Chapter One.

The chapter starts with a consideration of the ethical issues involved in this study. It then provides a justification for the convergent (or parallel or concurrent) mixed methods design. The research employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection that included surveys to lecturers, individual semi-structured interviews with lecturers, and classroom observations. The lecturers of classes observed were also interview participants. With each type of instrument, the chapter provides a justification for its use, and then describes the content construction, data collection procedures, and the participants. Sampling and data analysis of the study are described.

3.2 Ethical considerations

This research project was approved by the University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), Australia with the code H-2013-0122; and ethical principles were followed. The fieldwork for this study was carried out in Vietnam from September to November, 2013. The process of recruitment of participants is detailed here.
The English Faculties of universities specialising in non-English majors were purposefully selected as research sites because the targeted participants were lecturers teaching English to non-English major students. As noted in Chapter Two, the majority of participants in previous studies in the field have been English major students or teachers of English to English major students. Investigation into lecturers who are teaching English to non-English major students will bring different insights and to the field. Originally, English faculties of nine universities in Hanoi, Vietnam were chosen, based on their high rates of non-English major enrolment. The researcher approached the Dean or Vice-Dean of each faculty by email to seek their approval for the project to be carried out. Five departments of five universities responded with agreement. The other four departments replied with apologies for not being able to participate due to a number of reasons such as requirements for lecturers to take part in a series of professional training courses within the timeframe of the fieldwork.

Data collection procedures, in the end, were conducted in five universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. Approval from each faculty’s leaders to conduct the research was obtained prior to the delivery of all research instruments. Full details of the ethics procedure can be found in Appendix 3A.

Prior to seeking informed written consent, all participants were provided with information and consent packages inviting them to participate in the project. A full package included information about the purpose of the study, method of data collection, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, level of risk, and the right of participants to withdraw from the study without any prejudice or judgement. There was no consent form for the survey because lecturers were free to choose whether they wanted to complete it. Prior to participation in interviews and observations, participants
were asked to sign a written consent form. Because the main focus of classroom observations was lecturers’ behaviour and use of strategies to encourage learner autonomy, consent from students in classes observed was not required.

Participants’ real names were not used in any scripts of interviews or observations. The only persons to have access to the original interview transcripts and observational field notes were the researcher and her two supervisors.

All the participants understood that their participation in the study was voluntary. They could withdraw from the study at any time. They understood that their personal information would not be revealed in any way, and their responses were only used for the study. They knew that no information that might lead to the identification of any participants would be included in the thesis or any publications that emerged from the thesis.

Lecturers did not need to identify themselves when completing the survey. If they agreed to an interview, their personal details needed to be included in a written consent form so the researcher could approach them to arrange for interviews. However, participants were assured that their personal information was de-identified for data collection, data analysis and the writing up of the thesis.

In the interviews, conversations were relaxed, and this helped the participants feel comfortable expressing their opinions. In classroom observations, as a nonparticipant observer, the researcher sat inconspicuously at the back of the classroom.

All information collected was kept locked in a secured cabinet in the researcher’s personal office at the University of Newcastle, Australia. After the degree is awarded,
the data will be kept in a lockable cabinet in the supervisor’s office for at least five years. Only the project supervisor, co-supervisor, and the researcher have access to the data. The documents will then be destroyed in accordance with the University of Newcastle requirements for destructions of confidential information.

This study was considered to pose minimal risks to the participants. The survey, the recorded interviews and classroom observations were all conducted in Hanoi, Vietnam. All the interviews took place at the participants’ university at a time which was of best convenience to both the researcher and the interviewee. The interviews were also conducted with extra consideration of noise level of surrounding environment.

Confidentiality and privacy of participants was ensured through de-identification of data. Audio files of the interviews were destroyed after they had been transcribed. The researcher also made clear of the possibility that participants might experience some level of discomfort while participating in the research (for example having their teaching observed). These risks were carefully and openly discussed with interested participants before the written informed consent forms were signed and returned. All these measures and procedures have managed any potential risks associated with the proposed study.

3.3 Mixed methods design

The mixed methods design is a widely used research approach (Bryman, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2006). It has been defined in a number of ways. Generally, mixed methods research involves collecting, analysing, and combining both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study to understand a research problem. “The basic assumption is that the uses of both quantitative and qualitative methods, in combination,
provide a better understanding of the research problem and question than either method by itself.” (Creswell, 2012, p. 535)

The complexity of the construct of learner autonomy calls for a multiple approach design rather than a single set of data. This approach should increase the level of confidence in answering the research questions. A combination of different data sets can capture more details of the situation being investigated (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2011). Especially for a multi-dimensional construct like learner autonomy in language education, a mixed methods approach can result in a more informative picture than either approach alone (Hubbard, 2005). The quantitative data provided a large number of responses while the qualitative data allowed analysis of specific aspects of the local learning situation that contributed to lecturers’ perceptions of learner autonomy. This combination of data sets complements each other, allowing the researcher to produce a comprehensive response to the research questions (Johnson, Onwuengbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010).

In general, mixed methods researchers adapt a sequence of data collection for their studies by using convergent (or parallel or concurrent) or sequential approaches or some combination of both (Creswell, 2012). In the current study, a survey was distributed first to lecturers. At the end of the survey, lecturers were asked to leave their contact details if they would agree to participate in a subsequent individual interview. They then would be contacted by the researcher to arrange a suitable time for a recorded interview. The interview participants were selected (based on convenient and purposeful sampling) from the lecturers who had done the survey and given their consent to be interviewed. At the end of each interview, participants were again asked if they would agree for their English classes to be observed by the researcher.
Interviews took place after the surveys (anonymous) were returned. Classroom observations occurred after the interviews. Hence, the study employed the convergent mixed methods research design. The convergence of quantitative findings from a large number of lecturers and in-depth interviews and observations with a smaller numbers of lecturers should provide a comprehensive picture of lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy. There has been little previous use of a convergent mixed methods research in examining teachers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy. As discussed in Chapter Two, teachers’ voices have rarely been heard regarding learner autonomy. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) used a questionnaire in their research on teachers’ beliefs about learner autonomy in Oman. Chan (2003) used a survey and follow-up interviews to explore Hong Kong teachers’ opinions about learner autonomy. Those studies’ outcomes were teachers’ reports of how they encouraged learner autonomy. There was no observation of their behaviour. There was observation of lecturers in a Vietnamese study by Nguyen (2014). She applied the mixed methods research design but only four lecturers were involved in interviews and classroom observations. The larger sample of the current study should provide more generalizable results.

One challenge in using the mixed methods research design is how to analyse both quantitative and qualitative data (Bryman, 2007; Yin, 2006). Lack of integration between quantitative and qualitative components may produce related studies rather than a single study (Yin, 2006). Bryman (2007) suggested that by bringing the two sources of data together, clearer insights could be gained. Do the qualitative and quantitative contradict or complement each other? The final discussion integrated the three data sets (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Triangulation of data sources (survey,
classroom observation, individual interviews) should enhance the study’s reliability and validity.

The mixed methods research design is a strength of the current study. Responses from a large number of lecturers gave a general overview of their attitudes towards learner autonomy. However, it was not known what they did in their classrooms. The in-depth interviews with individual lecturers could help to explain why they behaved as they did in their classrooms. Results of surveys, classroom observations, and interviews are provided in Chapters Four, Five, and Six respectively.

Figure 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate the convergent parallel mixed methods research design applied in the current study.

*Figure 3.1 Convergent parallel mixed methods research design employed in the current study*
**Figure 3.2 Data collection sequence employed in the current study**

### 3.4 Survey

#### 3.4.1 Justification for survey design

The research instrument used to gain quantitative data in this study was a survey. Survey designs are defined as “procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or a population of people to determine the attitudes, opinions, behaviours, or characteristics of the population” (Creswell, 2012, p. 376). Surveys are a popular research instrument in education for several reasons. First, it is efficient in terms of researchers’ time, efforts and financial resources (Dornyei, 2003). Second, it proves “fit for purpose” to identify important beliefs and attitudes of individuals (Creswell, 2012). Third, it is fast and straightforward in data processing, especially with the support of modern computer software (Creswell, 2012; Dornyei, 2003).

In the current study, the researcher generated a survey to explore lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the context of teaching English as a foreign language in Vietnam. Survey items were constructed from the literature reviewed and from previous studies in the field. A survey was chosen as an instrument because it enabled the
researcher to collect a large amount of data given limited time and resources. Moreover, respondents did not need much time to work out how to express their opinions (Dornyei, 20017). Most lecturers have a heavy workload in the Vietnamese higher education sector (H. P. Le, 2008; Treven, Treven, & Zizek, 2011; Varvogli & Darviri, 2011). Many would not have the time to participate in an interview (Burns, 2000; Connolly, 2007).

There are limitations in the use of surveys (Gillham, 2000). Questions may lead to misunderstanding or respondents may provide unclear or doubtful answers. However, the current survey was carefully worded and test piloted to minimize shortcomings.

3.4.2 Survey construction

The construction of the survey took some time because “designing good survey instruments is a challenging and complex process” (Creswell, 2012, p. 385). The quantitative investigation seeks answers to all five sub-questions elaborated from the key research question:

(1) *What are lecturers’ interpretations of learner autonomy in the context of EFL education at the tertiary level in Vietnam?*

(2) *What are lecturers’ perceptions of their responsibilities and students’ responsibilities in the process of learning English?*

(3) *What are lecturers’ perceptions of students’ abilities to act autonomously?*

(4) *What are teachers’ perceptions of the supportive and constraining factors for learner autonomy in English learning at the tertiary level in Vietnam?*
(5) How should teachers act to promote learner autonomy as a means of improving the quality of EFL teaching at the tertiary level in Vietnam?

Given that the lecturers are all competent English users, their perceptions and attitudes were elicited by means of an English-medium survey.

There were two parts to the survey. Part A with five items was designed to collect demographic information about the lecturers: their number of years of experience as an EFL lecturer, their highest qualification, their gender, and their most taught English programme, and whether their qualifications include a specialisation in EFL teaching.

The main part of the survey – part B – consisted of five sections. The researcher identified various aspects of learner autonomy, through reviewing the literature, to develop five sections in the survey. The survey was adapted from previous surveys in the field (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; V. Chan, 2003), taking into consideration the socio-cultural contexts of the research. Each section was broken down into a number of items.

The surveys used as the basis for the current survey were employed in contexts other than Vietnam. To enhance the survey’s reliability and validity, it was proof-read and piloted by 15 Vietnamese lecturers of English currently completing PhDs in Australia. The survey was either sent to them via email or directly in person. The researcher asked participants of the pilot study to mark any problems they could find on the survey, such as poorly worded or vague statements, or items that did not make sense. Creswell (2012) emphasized that valid questions could enable participants to provide meaningful answers and that they showed respect to participants by taking their genders, classes, and cultural needs into consideration.
After the pilot study, items were removed or reworded to make the final survey. Particularly, 12 items were removed from section one (which originally consisted of 33 items). Several confusing items in other sections were re-worded.

In the final version, section one containing 25 statements addressed themes relevant to learner autonomy. There were two subscales in section two with 13 items addressing lecturers’ views about their own responsibilities and 13 items addressing lecturers’ views about their students’ responsibilities in various aspects of English learning. Section three with seven items explored lecturers’ views of students’ abilities to act autonomously (e.g., identifying their strengths and weaknesses in learning English). Section four with 10 items investigated lecturers’ perceptions of the factors which may facilitate or challenge the implementation of learner autonomy (e.g., the current curriculum and textbooks). There were two subscales in section five with eight items addressing lecturers’ assessment of strategies for promoting learner autonomy (e.g., helping learners to set up their own learning goals), and eight items rated their use of these strategies in their teaching. Table 3.1 summarises the content of the survey.
Table 3.1

Summary of the survey categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interpretations of learner autonomy</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Attitudes towards lecturers’ responsibilities</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Attitudes towards students’ responsibilities</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Attitudes towards students’ abilities</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Affecting factors on learner autonomy</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Strategies to foster learner autonomy - degree of importance</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Strategies to foster learner autonomy - Frequency of use</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Likert-type response scale was used in the survey. This type of scale helps ease the work-load of participants and it can ensure an overall view of the focus of the research (Hinkin, 1995). Likert-type scales can vary in the number of scale points or descriptors. The current study chose to use a scale of four points ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, agree, to strongly agree corresponding with 1 to 4 points. There are several reasons why balanced scales should be used. First, respondents with a particular viewpoint might not be happy with a series of statements all asserting a contrary position. By providing an even number of scale points (without the middle neutral point), respondents are expected to carefully consider whether they are slightly more favourable or unfavourable towards a certain statement (Johns, 2005). The survey is provided in Appendix 3B.
3.4.3 Data collection procedure

Quantitative data were collected from English faculties of five public universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. The five universities have three common characteristics. First, they have the largest number of the target population (lecturers currently teaching English to students whose majors are not English). Second, their student enrolment rates are high. Third, the researcher had connections with lecturers of those universities.

The Dean or Vice-Dean of each faculty was initially approached by the researcher via email to have an appointment. The researcher then met each Dean or Vice-dean in person to explain the project and provide him or her with an invitation letter and information sheet.

Given the time and resource constraints of the researcher and the fact that each lecturer has a different teaching schedule, it was impossible for the researcher to meet each lecturer face to face to deliver the survey. The researcher distributed the survey with help from administrative staff. Each lecturer was given a package including an invitation/information letter, a survey, and a consent form. Lecturers were asked to return the completed survey and the signed consent forms (to be interviewed and to be observed teaching) in a designated locker in the staff meeting room within one week.

3.4.4 Participants

The targeted population was EFL lecturers currently teaching English to students whose majors were not English. With the help of administrative staff, the survey was delivered to 355 EFL lecturers at five universities in Hanoi. Of these, 269 EFL lecturers returned their completed survey, which produced a response rate of approximately
75.8%. Once cases with invalid responses were removed, there were 262 valid responses.

3.5 Semi-structured individual interviews

3.5.1 Justification for choice of semi-structured interviews

The interview is a major tool which can help the researcher to “get close to an individual’s perspective” (Kayrooz & Trevitt, 2005, p. 110). The current study employed semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. This kind of interview allows flexibility (Burns, 2000) and encourages participants to express their views freely. An open-ended response to a question enables interviewees to create the options for responding as well as permit them to describe detailed personal information (Creswell, 2012).

The researcher’s choice of individual interviews with lecturers was influenced by accessibility to academic staff at higher institutions in Vietnam. It was impractical to schedule a focus group interview with lecturers because of their varying teaching timetables. In addition to methodological benefits, individual face-to-face interviews created the best opportunity for lecturers to express their opinions without being worried whether their ideas might differ from others. “Face-saving” plays a critical role in social communications in Vietnam. People try not to offend others or disagree with others directly, especially with those who are superior in terms of seniority. This “hidden rule” is applied in academic life. Focus group interviews might not be effective in obtaining information because lecturers might not be comfortable to express their ideas in the presence of other lecturers or to disagree with colleagues.
The in-depth semi-structured interviews with individual lecturers proved to be a sensible choice of research instrument to gain deep insights into lecturers’ thoughts and beliefs regarding learner autonomy. They allowed lecturers to share their ideas with openness and confidence.

3.5.2 Interview questions

Interview questions were designed to explore lecturers’ understanding of learner autonomy, factors affecting learner autonomy, and lecturers’ ideas about how to develop this capacity in classrooms. The interview questions were adapted from V. Chan’s (2003) study.

The combination of fixed predetermined questions and probing questions in semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to compare the information gained in later data analyses (Kvale, 2007). The flexibility and natural flow of conversation occurred in the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Given that interview participants were competent English users, interviews were conducted in English. The researcher is Vietnamese and so was able to observe appropriate cultural behaviours during the interviews. Interview questions were all tested prior to the interviews to enhance their validity.

There were 12 questions in three sections of the interview.
Table 3.2

Summary of the interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Number of main questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Interpretations of learner autonomy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Factors affecting learner autonomy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Promoting learner autonomy in practice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The full interview protocol is produced in Appendix 3C.

3.5.3 Data collection procedure

Lecturers returned their completed anonymous survey. Some also provided a consent form to participate in individual interviews and class observations. There were 28 lecturers chosen from 98 lecturers who consented to be interviewed. The researcher contacted those 28 lecturers either in person or via telephone or via email to arrange an interview place and time. The interviews were conducted in several places including meeting rooms or empty classrooms or faculty common rooms depending on their accessibilities and level of noise of the surrounding environment. The interviews were audio recorded with the consent of participants. The researcher used two digital recorders, an IPhone 4 and a SONY recorder, simultaneously to record the interviews. In the end, 28 high sound-quality interviews, with each one lasting from 30 to 70 minutes, were recorded.
3.5.4 Participants

Of the 262 survey respondents, 98 gave their consent to participate in interviews. However, due to limited time and resources, the researcher applied a purposeful sampling to choose interview participants from five universities. Selection of lecturers for interviews was based on 1) lecturers’ availability; 2) number balance among universities; 3) gender balance; and 4) variability in terms of age, years of experience and degree gained in Vietnam or overseas. Those lecturers who gave consent to be interviewed but were not selected were thanked for their willingness to participate.

The participants’ years of teaching experience ranged from 3 to 15 years. The majority of them were under 35 years old (23/28), 4 lecturers fell in the 35-40 years old range, and only one lecturer was in the 40-45 years old range. Among them, 26 were female and 2 were male.

3.6 Classroom observations

3.6.1 Justification for the choice of classroom observations

Another instrument for qualitative data collection employed in the current study was classroom observation. Ethnography studies “the meaning of the behaviour, the language, and the interaction among members of the culture-sharing group” (Creswell, 2009, p. 69). It accepts that human behaviour occurs within a context. A classroom never stands in isolation from larger cultural and social conditions. Educational activities take place against a background of premises, interests and values concerning what it means to be a student or teacher, and what constitutes worthwhile knowledge and learning. “Academic tasks are accomplished with prior presuppositions, beliefs, and
anticipations. Inevitably, these perspectives are shaped within larger social and political contexts. These relationships need to be examined as part of the classroom” (Burns, 2000, p. 394). Observing lecturers in class was an appropriate method to gain information about lecturers’ behaviours and teaching practices. Classroom observations enabled the researcher to observe lecturers’ behaviours and teaching strategies. Each observation lasted two hours (the average length of an English lesson at universities in Vietnam).

3.6.2 Focus of classroom observations

Classroom observations were carried out to answer sub-questions 2, 3 and 5. Classroom observations enabled the researcher to see EFL classes in operation. To what extent do lecturers encourage learner autonomy? How do students react to teachers’ behaviour? The purpose of observation was as follows: 1) to have an overview of physical details of a classroom; 2) to investigate EFL teachers’ behaviour; 3) to investigate the extent to which teachers allowed their students to act autonomously; and 3) to explore the teaching strategies that lecturers used to encourage their student autonomy. There were eight teaching strategies investigated. A full classroom observation protocol is shown in Appendix 3D.

3.6.3 Data collection procedure

In each classroom observation, the researcher acted as a non-participant observer who took field notes without becoming involved in classroom activities. Both descriptive and reflective field notes were recorded. Descriptive field notes recorded the settings and resources of the classrooms, descriptions of learning activities and descriptions of what lecturers did. Reflective field notes record the researcher’s thoughts and opinions.
relating to the key themes that emerged during the observation (for example the popular type of teaching strategies or typical reaction of students in some certain situations). Extended reflective filed notes were made after each class observation (Creswell, 2012). When observing lecturers’ use of teaching strategies, the researcher noted down their frequencies rating from 1 to 5 points including “not observed” (score 1), observed rarely (score 2), observed occasionally (score 3), observed often (score 4) and observed throughout (score 5).

3.6.4 Participants

At the end of each interview, the participant lecturer was asked whether he or she would agree for the researcher to observe one of their classes. If yes, then he or she was required to sign a written consent form for observations to take place. Among 28 interview participants, 20 lecturers agreed for the researcher to observe their classes. Of the 28 interview participants, 20 consented for the researcher to observe their classes. All were female and under 35 years old.

3.7 Data analysis

3.7.1 Survey

Data gained from the survey were entered by the researcher into a statistical software package, SPSS version 22. The results are reported in Chapter Four.

3.7.2 Interviews

The researcher transcribed all the interviews. There were 28 completed transcripts of all the interviews, in English. To check the reliability of the data, the researcher listened
to each interview and checked its written transcript at the same time. As the interviews were conducted in English, the researcher did not need to translate them. The analysis process of qualitative interview data included three steps.

First, to reduce validity and reliability threats, the researcher sent the completed transcripts (see appendix 3E for a sample) to the participants for clarification.

Second, interview transcripts were screened carefully, which allowed the researcher to become familiar with the data as well as gain a general understanding of the data. At the same time, the researcher analysed each interview to understand lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy by identifying key words and phrases used by each participant. These words and phrases were highlighted in different colours.

Third, the transcribed data collected from interviews were loaded into NVivo software (NVivo version 10) to be categorised. The responses were subjected to content analysis through which common themes were identified and categorised. Processes of coding and categorising were applied. Coding is a critical step in analysing qualitative data, especially when a constant comparative approach is involved and is defined as how the investigator defines what the data is (Gibbs, 2002). Coding functions in NVivo (Nodes) were applied to label segments of information. To reduce the overlap and redundancy of codes, the researcher double-checked by taking list of all codes and referring back to the transcripts, circled or highlighted the quotes that support the nodes. Codes were then reduced into themes.
3.7.3 Classroom observations

The classroom observational field notes were written in English by the researcher. They were first screened so that the researcher could gain a general understanding of what had happened in each classroom. In the next step, observational field notes were analysed manually by cutting and pasting to generate common themes.

The analysis of the qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations added depth to the analysis of the quantitative data from the survey. The three data sets were analysed separately with initial discussion in the results sections (presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six). The findings from the three data sets were then brought together in Chapter Seven to provide answers to the research question: “What are lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in EFL context in Vietnam?”

Convergent parallel mixed methods design proved to be a suitable method for the current research. Information gathered came from different types of data. The survey, on one hand, could generate data from a large number of participants; on the other hand, could not provide an in-depth understanding of the lecturers’ attitudes. Interviews and classroom observations could offset the drawback of the quantitative research instrument. Individual face-to-face interviews allowed for more thorough answers from lecturers. However, interviews only provided information which might have been changed to provide the perspective the interviewee want the researcher to hear. Thus, classroom observations were needed to gain a direct view of what lectures actually did in their classrooms regarding learner autonomy, not just what they said they had done.

Figure 3.3 illustrates how data can be triangulated to answer the research question.
Figure 3.3 Convergence of data sources in the current study

3.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has described the mixed research approach employed in the current study. It has also justified for the choice of data collection instruments: survey, in-depth semi-structured individual interviews, and classroom observations. The use of multiple data sources should enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. The data gathered are presented in the following three chapters.
Chapter Four RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three has introduced types of data collection instruments (survey, interviews and classroom observation) and explained how the data were gathered and would be analysed. It has justified the use of the parallel mixed methods. This chapter reports on the quantitative findings from the survey. The data were collected through a survey to 262 lecturers in five universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. All five universities are public universities. The survey is shown in Appendix 3B.

The participants were lecturers teaching English to non-English major students. The purpose was to gain an overview of lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy from a large sample. In subsequent chapters survey results will be discussed together with the qualitative results and findings from interviews and classroom observations so that a comprehensive understanding of lecturers’ views on learner autonomy can be obtained.

4.2 Demographic information about survey participants

The following section describes the demographic information of participants.

Years of experience

The number of years of teaching experience ranged from several months to more than 25 years of service. The group of lecturers with largest proportion was those with from 5 to 9 years of teaching experience (34.7%). There was 89.7% of participants with 14-year experience or less. One respondent did not indicate his or her experience.
Table 4.1

**Years of experience of the survey respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Valid Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent Cumulative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid 0-4</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>89.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>96.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>98.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>99.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Highest qualification**

Of the 262 respondents, the numbers of lectures obtaining their highest qualifications as bachelor, master and doctorate degree are respectively 87, 170 and 4, accounting for 33.2%, 64.9% and 1.5 %, respectively. The EFL lecturers with master degrees composed the largest group. One participant did not indicate his or her highest qualification.
Table 4.2

**Highest qualification of the survey respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest qualification</th>
<th>Valid Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>98.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>99.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>262</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gender**

Of all the respondents, 237 (90.5%) were female and 25 (9.5%) were male

Table 4.3

**Gender of the survey respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Valid Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>262</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most taught English programme at universities

There were five respondents who did not indicate the English programmes they were most involved in at their universities. The most taught English programme was General English (56.1%) followed by Business English (27.1%).

Table 4.4

Respondents’ most taught English programme at universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English programme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English for Specific Purposes</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General English</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business English</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International tests</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(IELTS/TOEFL/TOEIC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>98.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Missing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Specialisation in EFL teaching

The majority of EFL lecturers involved in the study (87%) possessed a specialisation in EFL teaching included in their qualifications. The other 13% were not trained to become a professional EFL lecturer.

Table 4.5

Respondents’ specialisation in EFL teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialisation in EFL teaching</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>87.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Results of Section 1 – Lecturers’ attitude to learner autonomy

The second section of the survey investigated lecturers’ attitudes towards the concept of learner autonomy. There were 25 items. There were four Likert responses available; ranging from “strongly disagree” (scored 1) to “strongly agree” (scored 4).

The means and standard deviations for each of the 25 items are shown in Table 4.6.
Table 4.6

Descriptive statistics for the 25 items in section 1 (n=262)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone.</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher.</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>.707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>It is harder to promote learner autonomy with proficient language learners than it is with beginning language learners.</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>It is possible to promote learner autonomy with both school-age language learners and with adults.</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence.</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would.</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all cultural backgrounds.</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the activities they do.</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centred classrooms.</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners the opportunity to learn from each other.</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Learner autonomy implies a rejection of traditional teacher-led ways of teaching.</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13 Learner autonomy cannot develop without the help of the teacher.  
2.53 .69

14 Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can decide how their learning will be assessed.  
2.90 .61

15 Learner autonomy is a concept which is not suited to non-Western learners. (reverse coded in analyses)  
3.11 .71

16 Cooperative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy.  
3.20 .58

17 Promoting autonomy is easier with beginning language learners than with more proficient language learners.  
2.14 .66

18 Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials.  
2.87 .64

19 Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy.  
3.34 .61

20 Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy.  
3.23 .73

21 The ability to monitor one’s learning is central to learner autonomy.  
3.07 .64

22 Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.  
3.48 .62

23 The teacher has an important role in supporting learner autonomy.  
3.16 .58

24 Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner.  
3.48 .57

25 To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.  
3.30 .53
A Principal Component Factor Analysis was conducted to extract possible factors for examination (see Appendix 4A). Results indicated that there was one distinct factor that included the ten items. These items are shown in Table 4.7. After inspection of the items, it was decided to form a scale using the ten items and to label the scale “Positive attitude to learner autonomy.” A reliability test was conducted for this scale. The Cronbach’s α coefficient was 0.84, suggesting a robust scale. The scale mean was 3.29 (standard deviation = 0.38) on a four-point scale. This mean score suggests that Vietnamese lecturers in general support the concept of learner autonomy.

Table 4.7

**Items in Positive attitude to learner autonomy Scale (n=262)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Positive attitude to learner autonomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all cultural backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners the opportunity to learn from each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cooperative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The ability to monitor one’s learning is central to learner autonomy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The teacher has an important role in supporting learner autonomy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Independent samples T tests were conducted to explore whether there were significant differences in lecturers’ positive attitude towards learner autonomy by sex or by specialisation in EFL teaching. Results indicated that there were no significant differences between female and male lecturers or between lecturers with or without a specialization in EFL teaching. In addition, using analysis of variance techniques, there were no significant differences between lecturers of different years of experience, different qualifications, or the English program in which they were working in the different universities.

4.4 Results of Section 2 - Lecturers’ attitude to their own responsibilities and their students’ responsibilities for learner autonomy

In section 2 of the survey lecturers were asked to respond to each of 13 items item twice: first, rate their own responsibilities for initiating learner autonomy, and second, rate the responsibilities of their students to initiate learner autonomy.

The instructions were as follows: *When you’re teaching English classes, who has the responsibility for the following activities? Please respond to each item twice: to rate your responsibility and then to rate the responsibility of your students.*

Responses were made using a four point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (rated 1) to strongly agree (rated 4). Table 4.8 shows lecturers’ views on their own responsibilities for initiating learner autonomy.
**Table 4.8**

*Lecturers’ responsibilities for initiating learner autonomy: means and standard deviation for each item (n=262)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>I (the lecturer) should be responsible for…</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26a</td>
<td>making sure students make progress during lessons</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27a</td>
<td>making sure students progress outside class</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28a</td>
<td>stimulating students’ interest in learning English</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29a</td>
<td>identifying students’ weaknesses in English</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30a</td>
<td>making students work harder</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31a</td>
<td>deciding the objectives of the English course</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32a</td>
<td>deciding what students should learn next in English lessons</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33a</td>
<td>choosing what activities to use to learn English in English lessons</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34a</td>
<td>deciding how long to spend on each activity in class</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35a</td>
<td>choosing what materials to use to learn English in English lessons</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36a</td>
<td>evaluating students’ learning</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37a</td>
<td>evaluating the course</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38a</td>
<td>deciding what students learn outside class</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.9 shows lecturers’ views on students’ responsibilities for initiating learner autonomy.

### Table 4.9

**Lecturers’ views on students’ responsibilities for initiating learner autonomy**

*(n=262): means and standard deviations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>My students should be responsible for...</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26b</td>
<td>making sure they make progress during lessons</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27b</td>
<td>making sure they progress outside class</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28b</td>
<td>stimulating their interest in learning English</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29b</td>
<td>identifying their weaknesses in English</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30b</td>
<td>making themselves work harder</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31b</td>
<td>deciding the objectives of the English course</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32b</td>
<td>deciding what they should learn next in English lessons</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33b</td>
<td>choosing what activities to use to learn English in English lessons</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34b</td>
<td>deciding how long to spend on each activity in class</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35b</td>
<td>choosing what materials to use to learn English in English lessons</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36b</td>
<td>evaluating their learning</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37b</td>
<td>evaluating the course</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38b</td>
<td>deciding what they learn outside class</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To answer the research question, “Who is responsible for initiating learning autonomy in different aspects of learning: lecturers or students”, a comparison between Lecturers’ Mean and Students’ Mean was carried out using dependent-measures t-tests. The means are shown in Table 4.10.
Table 4.10

Means and standard deviations for lecturers’ ratings of responsibility for initiating learner autonomy (n=262)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Responsibility for the following:</th>
<th>Lecturers Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Students Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26 a-b</td>
<td>To make sure students make progress during lessons</td>
<td>3.05 (.51)</td>
<td>3.00 (.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pair 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 a-b</td>
<td>To make sure students progress outside class</td>
<td>2.55 (.68)</td>
<td>3.27 (.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pair 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 a-b</td>
<td>To stimulate students’ interest in learning English</td>
<td>3.27 (.61)</td>
<td>3.14 (.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pair 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 a-b</td>
<td>To identify their weaknesses in English</td>
<td>3.27 (.60)</td>
<td>2.97 (.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pair 4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 a-b</td>
<td>To make them work harder</td>
<td>3.21 (.58)</td>
<td>3.2 (.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pair 5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 a-b</td>
<td>To decide the objectives of their English course</td>
<td>3.22 (.61)</td>
<td>3.04 (.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pair 6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 a-b</td>
<td>To decide what they should learn next in your English lessons</td>
<td>3.24 (.59)</td>
<td>2.68 (.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pair 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 a-b</td>
<td>To choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons</td>
<td>3.35 (.56)</td>
<td>2.65 (.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pair 8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 a-b</td>
<td>To decide how long to spend on each activity in class</td>
<td>3.36 (.57)</td>
<td>2.47 (.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pair 9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 a-b</td>
<td>To choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lessons</td>
<td>3.33 (.59)</td>
<td>2.54 (.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pair 10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 a-b</td>
<td>To evaluate their learning</td>
<td>3.37 (.58)</td>
<td>2.91 (.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pair 11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 a-b</td>
<td>To evaluate the course</td>
<td>3.30 (.55)</td>
<td>3.12 (.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pair 12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 a-b</td>
<td>To decide what they learn outside class</td>
<td>2.65 (.71)</td>
<td>3.35 (.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pair 13)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To compare lecturers’ attitudes towards responsibility for initiating learner autonomy, a series of paired-samples t tests was conducted. There were 13 pairs in total. Table 4.11 shows the results for the t-tests.

Table 4.11

Results of paired samples t-tests for lecturers’ ratings of responsibility for initiating learner autonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 (26 a-b)</td>
<td>1.406</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>.161 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2 (27 a-b)</td>
<td>-13.447</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>.000 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 3 (28 a-b)</td>
<td>4.062</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 4 (29 a-b)</td>
<td>6.373</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 5 (30 a-b)</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>.848 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 6 (31 a-b)</td>
<td>3.591</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 7 (32 a-b)</td>
<td>9.873</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 8 (33 a-b)</td>
<td>14.058</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 9 (34 a-b)</td>
<td>16.343</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 10 (35 a-b)</td>
<td>14.837</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 11 (36 a-b)</td>
<td>9.984</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 12 (37 a-b)</td>
<td>4.483</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 13 (38 a-b)</td>
<td>-12.848</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001: ns=not significant)
There were only two items (Responsibility for making sure students are making progress and making students work hard) where the lecturers saw themselves and their students having relatively equal responsibility. For the other nine items, lecturers indicated that they had the major responsibility for these activities. They included the following activities:

- deciding the objectives of the English course
- stimulating students’ interest in learning English
- identifying students’ weaknesses in English
- deciding the objectives of the English course
- deciding what activities students should use to learn English in class
- deciding how long to spend on activities in class
- deciding what materials are to be used in English class
- evaluating students’ learning
- evaluating the English course

It is notable that the lecturers saw themselves as responsible for initiating learner autonomy in all in-class activities. Given lecturers’ relatively high endorsement of learner autonomy in the Positive attitude to learner autonomy Scale, there appears to be something of a contradiction here. Though lecturers indicate that they support learner autonomy, they still want to control what happens in the classroom.

This attitude towards lecturer control of what happens in classrooms might be explained by a cultural trait which still deeply affects the teacher-student relationship in Vietnamese classrooms: the power distance. The teacher has always been considered as superior in the teacher-student relationship, especially in the classroom context. He or
she must be “more powerful” than the students in the class. As such, it is understandable why lecturers thought that they should be more responsible than their students in various activities inside the classroom. This power distance is not so pronounced outside the classroom. Lecturers believed that outside the classroom, initiating learner autonomy should be the students’ responsibility, not theirs. In accordance with this finding, it might be that to boost learner autonomy in learning English at the tertiary level, students should be initially “empowered” from out-of-class activities. Further discussions of these findings will be presented in Chapter Seven.

4.5 Results of Section 3 - Lecturers’ ratings of students’ ability to act autonomously

Table 4.12 shows the means and standard deviations for lecturers’ ratings of their students’ ability to act autonomously in seven areas. The Likert response scale had four points ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Table 4.12

*Lecturers’ ratings of students’ ability to be autonomous (n=262)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>In general, my students are able to:</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Identify their needs</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Identify their strengths</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Identify their weaknesses</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Monitor their progress</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Evaluate their learning</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Learn cooperatively</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Learn independently</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is notable in Table 4.12 is lecturers’ lack of confidence in their students’ ability to undertake these activities. In the Likert response scale, a score of 2 represented “disagree” and a score of 3 represented “agree.” The mean scores for each of these abilities were all less than 3.0. Only students’ ability to learn cooperatively came close to a mean of 3.0.

Given the socio-cultural context of the study, it is not so surprising why lecturers thought their students had greater ability to learn cooperatively than to learn independently. As a Confucian-heritage country, it is common in Vietnam that people are comfortable working in groups. They like to work with and to agree with those around them. There is less inclination to work alone. This inclination to work together can be traced to a cultural characteristic of Vietnam, a preference for acting collectively.

4.6 Results of Section 4 – Lecturers’ assessment of factors affecting learner autonomy

From an analysis of the literature, ten factors that have been proposed to have an effect on learner autonomy were included in this section.

Table 4.13 provides the means and standard deviations for lecturers’ response to the 10 factors. The Likert response scale had four points ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).
Table 4.13

Lecturers’ assessment of factors affecting learner autonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Do you think the following factors enhance learner autonomy?</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Current EFL teaching approach</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Current learning styles of the students</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Current curriculum and textbooks</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Current ways of assessing students</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Current learning environment</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Current resources</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>National and institutional policies on English language education</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Vietnamese socio-cultural context</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Current teachers’ teaching load</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Current students’ learning load</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is notable that the mean scores for lecturers’ responses to each of the factors lie between 2 (disagree) and 3 (agree) on the four point Likert scale. Inspection of these items suggests that they lacked specificity. For example, what was meant by “current learning environment”, “current learning styles of students”, or “current learning styles of students”? It is likely that lecturers were not sure what were meant by items worded in these rather vague ways. In retrospect, these factors were not described sufficiently well in the survey items. As a result, the results for this section of the survey will not be discussed further in this study. Lecturers’ perceptions of these factors will be revisited in the analysis of data from individual interviews and classroom observations.
4.7 Results of Section 5 - Lecturers’ ratings of strategies to promote learner autonomy

Section five investigated lecturers’ attitudes towards eight strategies that have been shown to foster learner autonomy. First, lecturers rated how important they considered these strategies to be using a four point Likert response scale ranging from 1 (not important at all) to 4 (very important). Second, lecturers indicated how frequently they used these strategies using a four point Likert response scale ranging from 1 (Never/ almost never) to 4 (always/ almost always). Means and standard deviations for these items are shown in Table 4.14.
Table 4.14

Means and standard deviations for lecturers’ responses to teaching strategies which could foster learner autonomy: degree of importance and frequency of use (n=262)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>How important do you think each strategy is?</th>
<th>Degree of importance</th>
<th>Frequency of use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How often have you actually used this strategy in your teaching practice?</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Help students to identify their strengths and weaknesses in learning English</td>
<td>3.43 (.54)</td>
<td>2.80 (.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Help students to set up their learning goals</td>
<td>3.46 (.54)</td>
<td>2.80 (.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Helps students to decide what to learn outside class</td>
<td>2.99 (.67)</td>
<td>2.35 (.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Help students to evaluate their progress</td>
<td>3.27 (.51)</td>
<td>2.71 (.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Help students to stimulate their interests in learning English</td>
<td>3.54 (.51)</td>
<td>3.04 (.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Help students to learn from peers, not just from the lecturers</td>
<td>3.45 (.55)</td>
<td>3.00 (.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Help students to be more self-directed in learning English rather than waiting for the lecturers to give directions.</td>
<td>3.51 (.53)</td>
<td>2.93 (.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Encourage students to give opinions about what to learn in the classroom.</td>
<td>3.23 (.66)</td>
<td>2.69 (.87)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.14 shows that lecturers rated seven of the eight strategies between 3 (important) and 4 (very important). Only the strategy *Help students to decide what to learn outside class* was rated just less than 3 (M=2.99). In terms of frequency of use, lecturers rated six of the strategies between 2 (occasionally) and 3 (frequently), rated one strategy at 3 (*help students learn from their peers not just from the lecturer, M=3.0*) and rated one strategy above 3 (*help students to stimulate their interests in learning English, M=3.04*). This last strategy, *help students to stimulate their interests in learning English*, could be considered a strategy that all teachers of English might use even if they were not encouraging their students to become autonomous learners. It could be concluded, then, that though lecturers acknowledged the importance of these strategies that encourage students to be autonomous in their learning, they were not strategies that they used frequently in their classrooms.

The internal consistency of all the constructs scales is shown Appendix 4B.

### 4.8 Discussion of the survey

The analysis of the survey data shows lecturers are theoretically in favour of encouraging autonomy in their students. Perhaps this theoretical support comes from government initiatives, based on Western approaches to teaching and learning that seek to change practices in Vietnamese universities. However, when asked about who takes responsibility for classroom activities that are likely to enhance learner autonomy, the lecturers indicate that it is their responsibility to control what happens in the classroom. It is likely that firmly established notions, derived from Confucian values that permeate Vietnamese society, about the role of teachers and the role of students have influenced lecturers’ responses to the survey.
In Chapter Five and Chapter Six, data gathered from interviews and classroom observations will provide further understanding lecturers’ ideas about learner autonomy in their classrooms.

4.9 Chapter summary

Data from survey generated an overall picture of lecturers’ attitudes to learner autonomy. What was lack from this picture were the actual facts of what lectures had been doing to support learner autonomy in the classroom. There are still some points which need to be further investigated into. So far what lecturers said has been collected and analysed. However, are their opinions and attitudes aligned with their real teaching practices? What have lecturers been doing in their classes regarding supporting learner autonomy? How do classroom conditions and other contextual factors affect their strong support to learner autonomy expressed through the results of the survey and interviews? Those missing information would be addressed in the next chapter in which data from classroom observations is analysed to gain findings and conclusion. The findings from classroom observations in Chapter Five will provide more insights into these questions.
Chapter Five  

RESULTS OF CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter Four, the findings of the survey were analysed. The quantitative results covered the lecturers’ views on learner autonomy including their interpretation of learner autonomy, their attitudes towards their own responsibilities and their students’ responsibilities for promoting learner autonomy, their opinions about the students’ abilities to act autonomously, and their reactions to several teaching strategies which are believed to promote learner autonomy. In order to gain a more complete understanding of lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy, it was important to investigate what lecturers did in the classroom. In this chapter, classroom observation was employed to seek for more evidence to triangulate the data gathered from the survey. As discussed in Chapter Three, the classroom observations were conducted by using an observation protocol (see Appendix 3D) to record field-notes.

5.2 Observed lessons

Twenty lecturers gave their consent for one of their English classes to be observed. Among them, 7 lecturers were from university A, 5 lectures from university B, 4 lecturers from university C, 2 lecturers were from university D, and 2 lecturers from university E. Each participant was coded with an abbreviation and a number to assure confidentiality. For example, UA-L1 means Lecturer number 1 from university A. After the lecturers’ consent forms to be observed were received, the researcher contacted each lecturer via phone or email to confirm observation times. All the lecturers who agreed for their classes to be observed were female.
The researcher spent two months visiting classes at five universities in Hanoi. The duration of each lesson at all five universities was approximately 2 hours. Table 5.1 provides a summary of the lessons observed.

**Table 5.1**

*Information about participating lecturers in classroom observations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of lecturer</th>
<th>Skill/Course</th>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Class size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UA-L1</td>
<td>Listening + Reading</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA-L3</td>
<td>Presentation skill</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA-L5</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA-L6</td>
<td>Listening + Reading</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA-L7</td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA-L9</td>
<td>Listening + Reading</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA-L10</td>
<td>Presentation skill</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UB-L11</td>
<td>Integrated 4 skills</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UB-L12</td>
<td>Integrated 4 skills</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UB-L13</td>
<td>Integrated 4 skills</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UB-L14</td>
<td>Integrated 4 skills</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UB-L15</td>
<td>Integrated 4 skills</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UC-L16</td>
<td>Integrated 4 skills</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UC-L17</td>
<td>Integrated 4 skills</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UC-L18</td>
<td>Integrated 4 skills</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UC-L19</td>
<td>Integrated 4 skills</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UD-L20</td>
<td>Listening + Reading</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UD-L22</td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UE-L25</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UE-L26</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At university A, D and E, English courses were constructed basing on English skills or components including Listening, Speaking (Presentation skill), Reading, Writing and Pronunciation, with different core textbooks for each skill and component. At university B and C, integrated skill lessons were applied. At these two universities, only one core textbook focusing on all skills and components was used. The undergraduate courses at five institutions enabled the researcher to observe the nature of the teaching-learning environment, frequency of each teaching strategy which had been identified in the literature as a means of fostering learner autonomy, and the general responses of the students.

These elements were recorded in the classroom observation protocol. Teaching activities were recorded in accordance with the timeline of the lesson. One purpose of the classroom observation was to triangulate the findings of the survey and findings from interviews with lecturers.

5.3 Findings from classroom observations

5.3.1 Classroom conditions

There were three major findings of classroom conditions from observations of 20 English classes at five universities: 1) a traditional classroom arrangement; 2) lack of equipment and resources; and 3) large class size.

*Traditional classroom arrangement*

All the classes observed had a traditional setting with the lecturer’s table in front of the class, two columns of desks for students and each column containing from six to eight rows. The students’ desks are designed for two to four students sitting together. Because
the areas of the classrooms were limited, it was almost impossible to change this setting. This arrangement made it hard for students to communicate with others, and as result, interactions among students were limited. In addition, students sitting at the far-end rows appeared to be focused on activities other than those lecturers assigned them to do, for example, chatting, eating, and playing games on smart phones. Perhaps they were confident that lecturers could not identify what they were doing. Below are two examples extracted from the fieldnotes:

**UA-L6’s lesson (1.00pm-1.30pm):** The lecturer kept explaining in detail about conflicts in Business Negotiation and how to resolve them. The class was quiet with some students taking notes of what the lecturer was talking about. Some students did not do anything at all but sit silently either looking at the lecturers or looking down on the textbook opened on the table. The first two rows were left blank. The six students in the last two rows (furthest from the blackboard) appeared not to be paying attention to the lecturer at all. They were either playing games on their mobile phones or chatting with friends nearby in Vietnamese.

**UE-L25’s lesson (4.25pm to 4.45pm):** It was a listening lesson and the topic was “Marketing.” The lecturer controlled the CD player for the class to complete the listening tasks in the textbook. Students of the first rows focused on the listening track. Most of the students in the last three rows were trying to finish the homework for their following class. They totally ignored the listening tasks. The lecturer did not recognise this.
Obviously this classroom arrangement limited the communication between lecturers and students. Only five lecturers moved from the board to the far-end rows of the classroom. Other lecturers stayed near the board or moved just from their table to the board. This setting also appeared to place constraints on communication among students. It was hard for students to get out of their seats and move around. Only two lecturers allowed their students to move around in class for certain activities. It was observed that, for most of the class time, teacher-student and student-student interactions were limited.

**Lack of equipment and resources**

Most of the classrooms were equipped with fans, lights, and a CD player. Among 20 classes observed, there were only seven equipped with projectors and screens. Lecturers explained that they needed projectors and screens for their students to present. It appeared that, in a rich-resource environment that contained projectors and screens, students were more interested in what was going on than in classroom that lacked this equipment. They paid attention to visual teaching aids like pictures, real items, or handouts.

Extracts from two classes observed showed the difference between a poorly-equipped classroom and a better equipped one with projectors, big screens and posters.

**UA-L10’s lesson (3.30pm to 4.40pm):** It was a presentation skill class. Students had been grouped before, with each group consisting of 4 to 5 students. Each group had been assigned to prepare a 30-minute presentation on a certain topic (the lecturer allowed students to choose one topic from a list of 20 topics). Today was performance day. Students presented with visual aids like a projector, a big screen, handouts, pictures, photos, and posters. Most of the
audience students were interested in the presentations with attention paid in the screen. They were eager to pose questions at the end of each talk. There was a high level of students’ involvement in the activity.

UA-L3’s lesson (9.50am to 11.00am): Two student groups presented in front of the class. Each student had a piece of paper in hand and normally they read from that. There was neither projector in the class nor any kind of visual aids to attract the audience. Many listeners appeared confused or not interested in the presentations. Some chatted in Vietnamese. There was usually a long silence when presenters invited audience to ask questions. There was only one question for the first group and two for the second group. Listeners appeared to lose track of the talk because there were no visual aids to help remind them of the presentation.

In all the classes observed, most students used poor quality photocopies of books. They were not inviting to look at. In Vietnam, where the copyright is regularly violated, it is easy and cheaper to have a photocopy of a book. The prices of original books are unaffordable to most students, even in a big city like Hanoi.

Students’ interest in the lesson appeared to be affected by classroom resources. Visual aids have been shown to enhance language teaching (Brinton, 2001; Mannan, 2005). A classroom with poor resources may explain in part why many students were not interested in the lessons.
Large class size

Except for classes of university C where the class sizes were under 30, all other classes observed contained 30 to 50 students. It was almost impossible for lecturers to remember students’ names or their competency in English. They also failed to give attention to individual students in their teaching. In the interviews many lecturers indicated that large class size was one reason leading them to a more teacher-centred teaching approach.

5.3.2 Frequency of lecturers’ using teaching strategies to enhance learner autonomy

One of the targets of classroom observations was to find out how and how often lecturers used teaching strategies designed to enhance learner autonomy in their teaching practice. Findings from the surveys confirmed that lecturers supported these strategies in promoting autonomy in students. However, lecturers also indicated that they did not employ these strategies often in their teaching practices.

Each teaching strategy was coded for efficient presentation of data. The observation scores presented in Table 5.2 indicate the frequency of lecturers’ use of each teaching strategy. The scores were calculated based on a five-point rating scale with 1 “not observed”, 2 “observed rarely”, 3 “observed occasionally”, 4 “observed often”, and 5 “observed throughout”. It also provides the means and standard deviation for the frequency data on teaching strategies observed.
Table 5.2

*Means and Standard Deviations for the frequency of use of teaching strategies (n=20)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching strategies</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping students to identify their strengths and weaknesses in learning English</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping students to set up their learning goals</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping students to decide what to learn outside class</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping students to evaluate their progress</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping students to stimulate their interest in learning English</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping students to learn from peers, not just from teacher</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping students to be more self-directed in learning English</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging students to offer opinions about what to learn in the classroom</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The frequency of lecturers’ use of teaching strategies to enhance learner autonomy was quite low, although there were differences in the frequency of each strategy used. This finding fits with the findings from the survey. The teaching strategy with the highest mean score was *Helping students to learn from peers, not just from teachers* (M=3.65). This finding was consistent with one finding from the survey, that is, lecturers supported students’ learning cooperatively.

Through observation, the strategy *Helping students to learn from peers, not just from teachers* was used. All the lecturers who were observed set up pair work or group work in various classroom activities. Here is an example.
UB-L14’s lesson (1pm-1.30pm): The lesson started with a debate between two groups of students. The topic was “Advantages and disadvantages of becoming a manager.” Each group was assigned by the lecturer to debate the advantages or the disadvantages. The lecturer supported each group with specific advice. She also answered all the questions from students about vocabulary or grammatical structures. Students were observed to use both English and Vietnamese within their group. One representative student from each group was asked to give a presentation in front of class, describing their group discussion. The lecturer wrapped up the activity with comments and feedbacks regarding the content of the talks. She led the debate smoothly and ended it with encouraging comments for both groups.

This kind of group work was observed in 15 of the 20 classes observed. Pair work was even more popular regardless of the content of the lesson. Students generally seemed to be positively involved in these activities. Usually there were some students who dominated and shy students who seemed to “hide in the crowd.”

Some lecturers assigned their students to peer-check or peer-edit others’ work including writing tasks, individual presentations, or group presentations. Some typical examples were taken out from observation notes.

UB-L12’s lesson (8.30am to 9.05am): Students had been asked to write an essay at home. The lecturer collected the essays from students, and then distributed those pieces of writing to the class. Each student now had one essay from one of his or her classmates. Students then were given 20 minutes to carefully read and check and write the remarks for the essays they had in hand. The lecturer was
observed to enthusiastically move around the class and address students’ questions while they were checking the essays. The lecturer reminded students to write their names as peer editor on the essays. She then collected all the essays again and confirmed that both the original writers and the peer editors would be assessed and graded.

This lecturer made effort to help her students learn from their classmates, not just from herself. By doing this, she at the same time reduced her workload in checking and editing the students’ writing pieces.

Another extract illustrates how a lecturer encouraged her students to learn from their friends in class.

**UC-L18’s lesson (1.50pm to 2.15pm):** It was a gap-filling activity about cinema. Students were asked to choose from a list of 20 words to fill in 15 gaps. They were given 10 minutes to do the activity and then another 10 minutes to swap their answers with the friend who was sitting next to them. Pair discussion was encouraged by the lecturer. She then finished the activity by going slowly through each sentence with the whole class.

In activities where individual or group presentations were observed, lecturers frequently asked students for opinions, ideas, and comments from students in the audience. However, it was also observed that students were generally not so active in giving their opinions about friends’ performances. In some classes, when there was silence after the question “Are there any comments for the presentation please”, lecturers asked individual students to give feedbacks. In those cases, the students always had something to say about the presentations.
The strategies with second highest mean scores were helping students to decide what to learn outside class (M=3.00) and helping students to stimulate their interest in learning English (M=3.05). These elements also emerged in the surveys. While lecturers felt uncomfortable with giving students choices in the classroom, for example, the length of a learning activity or the way to conduct a certain activity, they appeared more willing to allow choice in students’ out-of-class learning.

**UE-L26’s lesson (2.00pm-2.15pm):** *It was an essay writing lesson. Students were guided through how to brainstorm and write down reasons for doing certain activities. The topic of today’s lesson was “why do you want to work for multinational companies”. The lecturer wrote on the blackboard seven websites in which students could find information on several worldwide multinational companies. Students were asked to search for information from those websites and prepare a detailed description of one company including its structure, its brand names and slogans, advantages and disadvantages of working for that company. This description was the students’ homework.*

**UD-L22’s lesson (9.40am to 11.40am):** *It was a pronunciation lesson. Through the lesson, the lecturer kept reminding students to do more practice on their own at home. She suggested a few books for students to strengthen their pronunciation. She also suggested several television channels where students should practise listening for correct pronunciation. At the end of the lesson, she guided students on how to practise at home and required them to record a 2-minute presentation as homework. Students were free to choose the topics they wanted to talk about.*
The observations revealed that extra-curriculum activities were lecturers’ tool to stimulate students’ interest in learning English. In classrooms with more extra-curricular activities or materials such as games, songs, extra worksheets, students were more eager to learn.

In the following two observations, students’ interest in English was stimulated in one lesson but not stimulated in the other. These two lessons were generally similar in content, in the proficiency of students, and in the physical conditions of the classroom.

**UB-L11’s lesson (9.05am to 9.50am):** The topic of the module was “money”. The lecturer first asked the students to work in pairs or in groups of three to discuss money using wh-questions. The class became more cheerful. After that, the students were asked to fill in the blanks in the handout of a song lyric. The song was “Money money money” by ABBA. All the students were interested in listening to the song and completing the lyrics. The grammar section of today’s lesson was about present perfect and present simple tenses. After explaining grammatical rules, the lecturer conducted “Domino game” in which groups of students were asked to connect two separated clauses in a correct sentence. Each group was given two sets of clauses which had prepared before by the lecturer. Most of the students were interested in the games and tried to be the first group to have all the correct sentences.

**UB-L14’s lesson (1pm to 1.30pm):** The topic of the module was “Money.. The lecturer conducted the activities in the exact order as it was in the textbook. She first gave students 10 minutes to complete the “Vocabulary about money” section in the book. Then she asked whether there was a volunteer to answer.
Nearly all the students kept quiet and no hands rose. She needed to call on one student to read out a sentence. The class then finished the listening and grammar tasks in the book. Students silently did what the lecturer asked them to do. Some seemed unsure of what to do. When the lecturer asked whether students had any questions about new vocabulary or grammar, no voice was heard.

The strategy with the lowest mean score was Encouraging students to offer opinions about what to learn in the classroom (M=1.25). This result fitted with lecturers’ responses in the survey, that they the ones who control classroom-related activities. There was no observation of lecturers asking students’ opinions about what to do in the classroom or allowing students to take the initiative.

To conclude, there was little evidence in any classroom of lecturers encouraging learner autonomy. There was some evidence of lecturers attempting to increase students’ interest in their work. Though this behavior has been associated with encouraging learner autonomy, it is possible that lecturers who tried to increase students’ interest in their work were not doing this as a means of increasing their autonomous learning.

5.4 Discussion of the observations

Classes are teacher-dominated

Lecturers in the higher education section in Vietnam are instructed by the government that they need to shift their teaching into a more learner-centred approach that will foster learner autonomy (Hayden & Lam, 2009). However, classroom observations in the current study indicated that the teacher-centred approach still dominated.
A teacher-centred approach is common in Vietnam because this approach fits the socio-cultural context. In Vietnam there is a high respect for teachers. How is it possible to develop learner autonomy in the Vietnamese context?

Findings from survey and classroom observation revealed that even though lecturers showed a positive attitude towards learner autonomy, their methods of teaching were teacher-centred.

Lecturers were observed to use a teacher-centred approach and students were used to this approach. Vietnamese learners traditionally do not make decisions about on what to learn because it is set by the institution guide, the faculty curriculum, and the lecturers (T. T. Dang, 2010; T. C. L. Nguyen, 2009). Students in the classrooms observed could generally be characterised as quiet and passive. They did not often raise questions in class and tried to fit in with the other occurred in the classes. It was noted that students did not point out lecturers’ errors that occurred occasionally in class. Students did not want their lecturers to lose face.

**Little evidence of lecturers’ supporting learner autonomy inside classrooms**

There appeared a disconnect between lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy and their teaching practices. One major finding from the survey was that lecturers believed it was their responsibility to foster learner autonomy. In the survey, lecturers showed a positive attitude towards learner autonomy. Despite this, there was little evidence of lecturers supporting learner autonomy in their classes.

Among the eight strategies that have been identified as promoting learner autonomy, *Helping students to learn from peers, not just from the teachers* was used most often in
the English classroom. There was evidence of pair-work and group-work, peer-editing, and peer comments. Students seemed to be motivated to learn in classes where extra activities or worksheets were used.

5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter presents the findings from observations of 20 classrooms in five universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. The classrooms were set out in a traditional manner, resources generally were poor, and classes were very large. The majority of the lecturers observed were similar in their teaching practices, that is, teacher-centred approaches with the occasional inclusion of teaching practices that would be expected to promote learner autonomy.

The findings in this chapter support the survey findings in Chapter Four. Lecturers theoretically endorsed learner autonomy. However, there was little evidence of learner autonomy in practice, as evidenced by the observational data presented in this chapter. What factors may explain this disconnection between theory and practice? The individual interviews with lecturers, examined in Chapter Six, provide some answers to this question.
Chapter Six  RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter Five, the findings of classroom observations were analysed and discussed. In this chapter, in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with lecturers are examined. An interview protocol (see Appendix 3C) was employed to collect lecturers’ responses. These interviews explored lecturers’ perceptions of the concept of learner autonomy, their thoughts about how learner autonomy can be encouraged, and descriptions of what occurs in the classrooms.

As noted previously, in Vietnam, the terms “lecturers” and “teachers” can be used interchangeably. The symbol […] shows that there is one or more sentences omitted in the extracts.

6.2 Participants

This part of the study involved 28 lecturers from English departments of five public universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. There were 10 lecturers from university A, 5 from university B, 4 from university C, 5 from university D, and 4 from university E. Of the 28 lecturers, there were 9 with a Bachelor degree. The rest had a Master degree, either from a Vietnamese university or from overseas. There were 12 lecturers with one to five years of teaching experience, 12 lecturers with six to ten years of experience, and four with more than ten years’ experience. Only two participants were male.

All the lecturers were interviewed individually for approximately 30 to 70 minutes. All interviews were conducted in English because the participants were lecturers of English and capable of expressing their ideas smoothly and precisely in English. Each
participant was coded with an abbreviation and a number to assure confidentiality. All lecturers were encouraged to express their opinions without worrying if their answers were “right” or “wrong”.

Interviews were digitally recorded and verbatim transcribed. All transcripts were sent to the 28 interviewees to check that the transcription was an accurate record of the interview.

Table 6.1 provides information about participants.
Table 6.1

Interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>No. of informants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of years of experience</th>
<th>Degree</th>
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</table>
6.3 Findings of the interviews

6.3.1 Lecturers’ interpretation of learner autonomy

The first part of the interview was designed to answer the first research question: “What are lecturers’ interpretations of learner autonomy in the context of EFL education at the tertiary level in Vietnam?” The following sections elaborate on the participants’ ideas of the following: definitions of learner autonomy; the importance of learner autonomy in English learning; and lecturers’ role in developing learner autonomy.

6.3.1.1 Lecturers’ definitions of learner autonomy

The interview participants were asked to define learner autonomy. Most participants said they were uncertain whether their definitions were “right” or “wrong.” Generally, it could be said that the variations in lecturers’ understanding of learner autonomy occurred in the five universities.

a) Learner autonomy as capacity of the learner themselves

Approximately one third of the participants (9/28) defined learner autonomy as a capacity of the learners themselves. Several key words and phrases such as “take responsibility”, “activeness”, “readiness” and “self-awareness” were repeated.

I think that learner autonomy means the students are very active in their learning styles, their learning strategies. They are not people who just do things they are told to do. And they are not totally dependent on the teachers’ instructions or the syllabus or the textbook. They have their own ways of learning the subject. (UA-L3)
To some lecturers, learner autonomy was the ability or the willingness of the learner to take more responsibility for their learning. Students should be more independent and able to figure out their own way to learn effectively. They would be able to achieve their learning goals with less dependence on the teachers.

Following is a typical definition:

*As far as I am concerned learner autonomy focuses on the autonomy of the learners, that is, their readiness, their self-responsibility of their own learning, and their self-awareness of their goals as well as the activities that best help them in improving their English proficiency.* (UC-L19)

Some linked learner autonomy with “self-confidence” and “accept the risk of being wrong” (UA-L10). Others associated learner autonomy with “the activeness to raise their voice and their ideas, to ask to acquire knowledge and even give feedback to the teachers, and the classroom becomes student-centred” (UA-L8). Generally, these lecturers placed the responsibility on their students’ capacity. Whether or not the students were autonomous depended on the students themselves. Autonomous learners are those who attempt to manage their behaviours and modify the environment to achieve their learning goals.

**b) Learner autonomy as learners’ freedom to choose**

There were five lecturers who defined learner autonomy as the freedom of the students to choose. They should be able to choose everything related to their own learning, including learning objectives, materials, activities, forms of testing and assessment, and even choose the lecturers they want to teach them. Students would have the power to
control their learning situation, have choices in learning activities, and be free from oppressive forces.

_in my opinion, learner autonomy means that the learner has certain freedom over their learning so they can decide what to learn, when to learn and even the way they learn. And also in some ways they themselves can assess or evaluate their learning. So, I think in general the autonomy here means freedom over learning, and it also means that the students can be responsible for themselves and for their studying._ (UA-L5)

_[...] when the word “autonomy” comes to my mind the first thing I think of is the things that students can do by themselves – everything they can do themselves, like, they can have the right to think, to give their own answers or their own opinions, or the right or the opportunities for them to express their own feelings, their own opinions, their own ideas without any limitation or barrier from anything else like from teachers or from the curriculum or anything. So students have things like power as well. Autonomy here also means the power students have in the lessons. Basically, that’s what I understand from the word._ (UE-L26)

In the above extracts, autonomy was associated with “power” and “freedom.” These lecturers also associated learner autonomy with students being more responsible, an overlap with the definitions in first group. However, the most important features of learner autonomy were more freedom and more choices. Students should have a voice in deciding matters related to their learning. Ideas of learner autonomy among these lecturers echoed definitions of learner autonomy from the political-critical perspective
Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam

(Benson, 2007) in which learner autonomy is viewed as a desire for more access, agency, and power.

c) Learner autonomy is learners’ ability to take responsibility for their learning and this ability is initiated and supported by the teachers

The largest proportion of lecturers (10/28) defined learner autonomy as learners’ ability to take responsibility. Lecturers enabled students to achieve autonomy.

*Learner autonomy happens when lecturers apply the learner-centred approach and you empower your students with as much freedom as possible in their learning [...]*. If you want them to be active users of it (English), you have to give them a certain degree of freedom in which they can be really flexible in using the language, put themselves into the situation where they feel 100% comfortable. And in that sense, that is the empowerment I am talking about. *(UA-L6)*

Many lecturers indicated that there would be no learner autonomy without lecturers’ willingness to give power to the students. Classrooms should then gradually shift from teacher-centred to learned-centred.

*Learner autonomy means teachers give the students authority to decide whether they learn or do not learn to improve their language. So, they will decide whether what we teach is interesting or not or how much time they will spend on learning and what resources they can use for their English study. *(UA-L9)*
The following lecturer defended the role of teachers in generating learner autonomy.

*Learner autonomy is achieved when the learners have the chance to do something for themselves to improve their learning and their knowledge. Of course, I think that they also need some guidance from the teachers. That means the teachers may give them more space for their self-study or we may give them some advice on how to study effectively by themselves. Even though the term is learner autonomy, still they need guidance and advice from lecturers.* (UC-L16)

One lecturer from University D defined learner autonomy as students’ “independence in learning with the lead or with the instructions of the lecturers or the freedom under the guidance of the lecturers.” These definitions have an emphasis on the teachers’ role in initiating and supporting learner autonomy. It was interesting to note that these lecturers were at pains to limit the degree of students’ independence from lecturers. Students with autonomy should be independent “with the lead or with the instructions of the lecturers”; they should be free but this freedom should be “under the guidance of the lecturers” (UD-L24).

Some lecturers indicated that learner autonomy was something which was given to the students by the teachers. Learner autonomy was activated by the lecturers, not by the students.

*When students are given autonomy they feel that teachers respect them; they have grown up or become mature [...] They will be motivated to study and study better. And also, when they are given autonomy, they have to take responsibility for their study. So, they have to find ways to study effectively and to improve their English proficiency.”* (UA-L1)
Like those in the first group who saw learner autonomy as an attribute of the learners, lecturers in this group stressed students’ ability to take charge. However, lecturers of this group spoke of the importance of the learning situation in enhancing learner autonomy. The conditions in which autonomy flourished had to be created by lecturers.

*d) Other ideas*

The rest of the lecturers (4/28) viewed learner autonomy from perspectives other than those already mentioned.

Learner autonomy was viewed as students’ awareness of their learning goals.

*Learner autonomy happens when students first know why they have to learn English. And then they have their own ways of learning English and they know how to learn by themselves and to continue studying even when they don’t have any English classes. Once they have a specific goal in learning, they will learn better. (UC-L18)*

Learner autonomy was also viewed as students’ positive attitudes towards English language learning, as a high level involvement of students in class activities, and as students’ ability to learn effectively by themselves at home.

**6.3.1.2 Importance of learner autonomy**

All participants confirmed the importance of learner autonomy and all of them endorsed learner autonomy in teaching and learning English as a foreign language. There were five general explanations for the usefulness of learner autonomy.
a) The study process should be life-long

Lecturers believed that learner autonomy was significant in English learning. The action of “learning” or “studying” was not restricted only to school or university settings.

Of course, it (learner autonomy) is very important in English language learning in particular and in any other learning in general. Because the students do not only study at school, and do not only learn for 12 years or 15 years. They have to study their whole lives. So if they don’t know how to self-study and they have no interest in their study, so they will have very limited ability to study for the rest of their lives. (UA-L10)

Graduation was not the end of students’ learning. Some viewed graduation as the starting point of “another” learning process in which the learners would have to learn by themselves, without teachers, without curriculum and textbooks, without restrictions like class time or order of tasks in a certain lesson. They must know how to initiate, regulate, and monitor their own study. They will be assessed by society not by their teachers.

It (learner autonomy) is very important not only in English learning but also in any kinds of learning because in our society they (students) have to learn all their lives, without teachers. The teachers now just tell them how to fish ... not to give them fish to eat one day. So they must have the ability to study by themselves. In English learning now, they have a lot of resources apart from teachers in classroom. If they have the ability of learning by themselves, they can study at home through the internet or TV or newspapers or any other kinds
of resources. And not only during university but also in the later years, they can also enhance and improve their English ability. (UC-L17)

This approach could be justified as one lecturer indicated: “… it is especially important for university students because they cannot go to the classes all the time and all their lives” (UC-L18).

b) Learners are the ones who know what is best for their study

Some lecturers noted that students were the ones who know what is best for them. If they could take advantage of what they know about themselves, for example, their strengths and weaknesses or their proficiency level, then they could perform better.

Students must know what they have to study first. I mean they first should be aware of their proficiency. For example, I used to teach a class with three levels mixed: beginner, elementary, and intermediate. For those who are just at beginner or elementary level, they need to study more and they have to know their weaknesses to catch up with other students in class. [...] So they need to be aware of what their weaknesses to improve their study. And then they need teachers to help them in class. (UA-L2)

Another lecturer said that learner autonomy helped increase the relevance between what lecturers taught and what students need to learn. When students were encouraged to learn what they wanted to learn, this activated their motivation.

I believe if you promote learner autonomy in class, it increases the relevance between what you teach and what the students need. If there’s a high level of relevance, the content of the lesson comes naturally to the students’ attention,
which boosts students’ involvement in class. And the more they do, so the less we have to do. (UA-L6)

Teaching should be tailored to students’ needs, based on their unique features like age, gender, preferences, and proficiency. Lecturers in this group agreed that because students know best about themselves, they also know what is best for their study.

c) Learning in class is not enough

Some lecturers indicated that learning in class is not enough because of time constraints. The knowledge transmitted from teachers to students is limited. The class environment does not provide students with good opportunities to communicate in English. In all five universities, students had from six to eight periods of English classes per week. Each period lasted for 45 minutes. Lecturers in the current study were teaching students not majoring in English. The students undertook foundation English lessons during the first two years of their university studies.

I think learner autonomy is particularly important in English learning because learning English is about learning a language. I mean it is all about communication. So studying in the class is never enough. They have to try to practise the four skills. And they need to practise communicating in their real lives so that they can make the best use of their English learning. (UA-L3)

I think it’s very important in English learning firstly because the schedule at the university doesn’t provide learners much time to study in class. So they have to study, self-study at home. [...] The scheduled time is not much especially at
higher education or at university level. The length of the English curriculum itself means you have to study outside class more. (UC-L17)

Apart from the time constraints, some lecturers also pointed out that teachers’ knowledge was limited and that “what the teachers give is not enough” (UB-L12). Moreover, for communication in English to occur successfully, “learning with and from peers only is not enough” either (UE-L28). These limitations of classroom study means that students should be autonomous learners if they want to speak English well.

d) Learner autonomy leads to better learning outcomes

According to some lecturers, autonomous learners had better results than those who sat in class and did what they were told to.

Learner autonomy is very important in my opinion because it can enhance students’ learning, students’ motivation and lead to more effective learning or more successful results. (UD-L22)

Several lecturers supported learner autonomy for its effectiveness in English learning. Learner autonomy brought academic success.

It is obvious that learner autonomy is extremely important in English learning. And there are a lot of reasons for me to say that. Well, I think I can kick off by saying that learner autonomy is important because it helps the students to study effectively not only English but other subjects of other fields. (UB-L11)
e) Lecturers’ workload could be reduced

Some lecturers held positive attitudes towards learner autonomy because they believed that the more autonomous their students were, the less work was required of them. While they needed to invest less time and effort in preparing lessons, conducting classes, and assessing the students, the quality of teaching and learning English was retained.

*Of course, learner autonomy is very important because it reduces my workload. It makes my students feel more confident and more satisfied in their learning.*

(UA-L6).

*AI It is now no longer the time of the teacher-centred class. It is time to shift to the student-centred one. And it means that the teachers’ talking time should be reduced and the students’ talking time should be increased.* (UB-L14)

6.3.1.3 Role of lecturers

The participants were asked “Do you think that students' learning more autonomously means that teachers are less important?” The vast majority of lecturers (26/28) believed that learner autonomy did not mean that teachers would become less important. Lecturers considered that they had a role in encouraging learner autonomy. This finding supports the survey finding where lecturers indicated that they had responsibility for developing learner autonomy. Even when students learn autonomously, they still need guidance from teachers. Most of the participants believed that no matter how autonomous students were, teachers were essential in terms of giving instructions, giving guidance, and constructive feedback. It was lecturers’ understanding that
autonomy was something that was initiated by teachers. One lecturer gave the metaphor of the pairing of visitor and guide: “The teachers will take a role of a guide and the students are like visitors. Without the guide, they will easily get lost”. (UE-L27)

One lecturer disagreed about the usefulness of learner autonomy.

_I don’t think so. Because the students must learn autonomously according to how we instruct them to do. So the role of the teacher is also very important. If we do not instruct them to learn, I think they cannot learn well. It is difficult to promote learner autonomy in the non-English major students. We have to do a lot of things to force them to learn autonomously._ (UB-L15)

In the lecturer’s opinion, students were not experienced or knowledgeable enough to make good choices. They needed teachers to guide their learning.

_When the students learn autonomously, the role of the teachers is still very important because the teachers at that moment will become the guide. [...] When the students choose a certain kind of activity or textbook, or a centre for studying, then the teachers are the ones who are capable of giving good advice for them to make a better choice._ (UB-L11)

Lecturers should be very involved especially at an early stage when they needed to “activate” autonomy in their students. Their workload would become heavier with their attempts to help their students become more autonomous. If they wanted the students to learn more outside class time, they themselves must work harder to prepare lessons, to find extra-curricular learning materials and activities, and to assess the students’ extra work. Many lecturers said if they did not check students’ out-of-class activities, the
students would not do them.

*I think even when the students are more autonomous, the teachers have more work to do. [...] You have an intention in your mind. You know what you want or the road that the students should go. You let them choose a direction [...] If you just want to test the thing that you assign them to do, it's much easier because then their task is limited. However when you tell your students “Well you can use any resources, that’s your choice, that’s your freedom”, this means that you the lecturer have to read more and to do more work in order to assess the students’ ability. In a way, I think learner autonomy means more work for the teachers”. (UA-L8)*

The more students learned on their own, the more help and guidance from teachers they needed to make that independent learning effective.

*I think that the ways the teachers instruct may be different but they are still very important. Because when the students learn more autonomously, they may come across some difficulties that both the students and the teachers were not aware of during the lesson in the class. So, they can call their teachers or email to the teachers to ask for advice and to show them their problems. [...] This kind of communication is rare in the traditional teaching approach in which the teachers just talk and talk while the students just listen and listen and take note, and then they go home and nearly forget everything. If students are aware that they have to study more at home, they have more things to ask the teachers. And I think in this sense, the role of the teachers is even more emphasised. (UA-L3)*
Most lecturers commented that whether or not their students became autonomous learners depended on what the lecturers did, especially in the early stages when students were still displaying a passive approach to learning that they acquired in high schools. Lecturers should be the ones who encouraged.

*Guidance from the teachers is very important, especially in the beginning when students learn to study autonomously. When the students get more experience, may be teachers become less important but definitely not at the beginning. Teachers are always necessary. My job will be harder at the beginning but when the students are better at learning autonomously, my job will become less stressful.* (UA-L10)

Most lecturers agreed that students were unsure how to proceed at the beginning of their studies: “The students don’t actually know what to do. That is the reason why at the beginning of the road, the teachers are more important, especially for the first-year and second-year students” (UD-L20).

Many lecturers mentioned changes in their roles. They were not, and should not be, the most important source of knowledge. Their role should change from “knowledge transferrers” to “knowledge facilitators.”

*In the past, teachers were supposed to provide everything for the students to learn. But now with easily accessible technology the students can study from other sources like the computer, internet or other things like that. The role of the teachers is to help the students, to guide the students how to get involved in certain aspects, not only teaching but guiding the students. Teachers are not less important but they take on different roles in the class. We teachers used to*
be just teachers, but now we are guides or facilitators. We not only just teach but also facilitate the students’ learning process. (UD-L21)

As noted previously, some lecturers said that a change in the role from the traditional teacher to facilitator for their students implied a heavier workload. Some lecturers confirmed their willingness to do more to support learner autonomy.

Yes, I am very happy with a more important role because I also want to have changes in teaching. When the students have academic problems, they will have a variety of questions. Some questions are very challenging and I have to search a lot of references so that I can answer them. [...] It improves my teaching as well. So, I am very happy with that. (UA-L3)

However, some lecturers expressed their uncertainty about change. Lecturers pointed to a number of constraints to changing the traditional organisation of classes: large classes to teach, more time and money required, poor infrastructure at their institutions, and a heavy workload. One lecturer stated: “The classes are too large. Teachers cannot focus on each student to help them improve their ability in studying autonomously” (UA-L10).

The teachers need more materials and we must update them frequently. We have to pay for that from our own pocket. We try to use technology in classes. But at the moment it is still very difficult. Only a few classrooms have the projector system, and as you can see, the audio system is out of order in many rooms. We have to bring our own equipment. (UE-L4)
One lecturer complained about the heavy workload: “… in Vietnam, teachers have too much workload. Even when you want to change, with the time limit and the work pressure, teachers like me just come back to the formal old routine.” (UA-L9)

When asked whether their colleagues in the faculty could be willing to take steps in enhancing learner autonomy, most lecturers expressed uncertainty. They were not sure whether their colleagues would feel comfortable with heavier workloads. Some participants said it would be more challenging for senior lecturers to change.

I am not sure about other teachers in my faculty. If the teachers are traditional or senior ones they might not want to change, if change mean they have to work more. They will hesitate. Sometimes they don’t want to lose face because they might not be able to answer the students’ questions. They may not be happy with that. (UE-L28)

While emphasising the significance of teachers in supporting learner autonomy, lecturers also believed that the students also have no less important a role. In their opinions, learner autonomy should be activated by the teachers; however, the whole long process of enhancing autonomy in students should be a two way one in which both teachers and students needed to change and adapt.

If the students’ attitude towards learning is bad, then even though the teachers are very good teachers, it’s difficult to enhance learner autonomy. The other way round, if students’ attitude is good, then they will still try to study even though they are not told to do so by the teachers. And for the teachers’ role, I think it’s very important because even when the students are very hard-working and willing to study, if teachers do not show them how to learn, the students
might then follow the instructions and read the textbooks and do nothing more.

(UA-L3)

Only two lecturers thought that teachers would become less important when students learn in a more autonomous way. They both believed that this change was desirable because students would not have teachers to help them when they graduated.

I am afraid, to some extent; teachers are becoming less important than they were in the past. Because the learners now have many sources to learn from: the internet, online, or distance courses. They can even learn English from their smart phones. They don’t necessarily have to go to class and they don’t have to spend much time in classes either. So I think the teachers will become less important with the increase of learner autonomy. (UC-L19)

6.3.2 Factors affecting learner autonomy

In the second part of the interview, lecturers were asked to give their opinion on factors which may affect the promotion of learner autonomy. There were six factors that emerge in the literature: 1) curriculum and textbooks; 2) students’ approaches to learning; 3) teaching approaches; 4) testing and assessment; 5) work load; and 6) socio-cultural context.

6.3.2.1 Curriculum and textbooks

In all the universities in the current study, the English curriculum, syllabus and textbooks were pre-determined by the Faculties of English. Students were not involved in the process of designing the curriculum and choosing textbooks. Of the 28 lecturers interviewed, 15 reported that they were quite happy with the current English curriculum
and course books in terms of enhancing learner autonomy. There were nine who thought that the curriculum and textbooks were limiting learner autonomy, and there were four who believed that the curriculum and textbooks were not key factors. Lecturers from all five universities held differing attitudes towards this factors and differing attitudes also existed among colleagues of the same faculty.

At university A, the current English curriculum and textbooks had been in use for seven years without any changes through the time. At university B, lecturers were invited to meetings to review and revise the curriculum and change the course books every year. At university C, the current English curriculum and textbooks had been in use for two years and were supposed to change soon. At university D and university E, it had been four years since they changed to the current curriculum and textbooks.

For those who believed that the current curriculum and course books supported learner autonomy, they presented two main reasons: the course books provided lecturers and students with a lot of activities to do inside and outside classroom; and the curriculum and textbooks were up-to-date and in line with the communicative language teaching approach.

*The new textbooks are very good ones. They really enhance learner autonomy because there are a lot of options for the teachers. I can give you one example of one course book “More Reading Power”. It is for reading but there are a lot of suggestions in the book which I find very interesting and I have applied some. (UB-L13)*
This quote is aligned with lecturers’ definitions of learner autonomy: autonomy meant more choices for the students. For many lecturers, a course book with a wide variety of choices given to teachers and students could help to develop learner autonomy.

Some lecturers expressed their positive attitude towards the curriculum and textbooks in terms of promoting learner autonomy because of their updated content and their communicative approach.

*Generally speaking, our textbooks favour learner autonomy because we have the students’ book and the workbook. Students also have things to do at home. That textbook also has a website designed for it. The learners may enter the website to do more exercises and find out more words or more structures related to the lessons in class. (UC-L16)*

Lecturers who indicated that the current English curriculum and textbooks did not enhance learner autonomy gave two reasons for their response: the textbooks were out-of-date; and the curriculum and textbooks were irrelevant to students’ needs and interests.

As noted, the English curriculum and the textbooks in four of the five universities had been in use for several years. This made them somewhat obsolete. Some lecturers said that the old-fashioned course books demotivated their students. Students nowadays can access new up-to-date information every hour. It was not surprising that they were not interested in learning “old” content.

*Our textbooks were selected in 2007. They are six years old now, with a lot of obsolete information. And students are bored when they read them. So there are*
several issues concerning curriculum and textbooks, but changing them would entail lots of financial and human problems, so we need to do that step by step.

(UA-L4)

Another concern with the curriculum and textbooks was their irrelevance to the students’ levels and desires. It was a factor which limited learner autonomy. Because students of all the universities were not majoring in English, their English levels varied significantly. They were supposed to learn basic general English in the first two years. Students of universities A, D and E then could continue their English learning in the last two years. In these last years, the English courses were designed to support their majors, for example, English for business contracts at university A or English for finance and banking at university D. Students of university B and C studied English in the first two years only. Before these students graduated, they must get a certificate of B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference CEFR (equivalent to IELTS 4.5).

The problem, according to the lecturers of university A, D and E, was that the English curriculum and textbooks for the first year and second year students were major-oriented. For example, at university A where business and economics were the most popular majors, the content of textbooks for the freshmen and the sophomores was business English. Lecturers thought that irrelevant because the students at that stage had no prior business experience. Lecturers of universities A, D and E said that students of the first and the second year should have been equipped with basic foundation English to prepare them better for the “English for majors” courses later.
Right from the beginning, the students are asked to study business English. That could be a challenge for many students. [...] They don’t have the background knowledge in English and they just get lost and they lose the direction and they don’t feel motivated to learn English. I normally teach third year and fourth year students and many of them cannot make a correct sentence. About half of the students in one class like the textbooks while half of them who are less competent don’t find it useful. Many think that the content is not authentic even though I have tried to convince them that it’s really something that they would use in enterprise organizations. Not relevant. Too challenging. Boring topics. (UA-L9)

Some lecturers indicated that it would be ideal if students could be involved in the process of designing and deciding curriculum and textbooks because students should know what could motivate them. Others thought that designing curriculum and choosing textbooks were complicated processes involving multiple factors. Students were not experienced enough to be consulted during this process. A small number of lecturers thought that advanced students should be consulted about these matters. Several lecturers said they did try to get students involved in making changes to the syllabus and the schedule of the lessons. This initiative did not work because students were not used to giving such kind of comments and suggestions.

Actually when I started teaching here I used to give the students the curriculum and the schedule of the class. I wanted them to put more thought into them so that the learning content and the activities are more suitable for them. I wanted to build a lesson plan to meet the need of the students, with the support of the
students. In the end I realised that it was very difficult to do it here because my students were not used to being consulted like that. (UA-L4)

For some, the curriculum and the textbooks were not important factors in learner autonomy. Four lecturers said that whether or not learner autonomy could be enhanced depended on them, not on the curriculum or the textbooks.

As a teacher, we can easily modify the syllabus or the textbooks. So I think textbooks and curriculum are not the matter here. They are the skeleton and we can modify them. We can do whatever we like to ensure that the students can do the final test successfully. (UA-L1)

The current course books possibly do not enhance learner autonomy. However it depends a lot on the teachers - the way the teachers make use of the book. I am trying to “change” the books in the way that can enhance learner autonomy. I used to adapt the content and change the organisation of all chapters of a book to make it better organised for the students to follow. So I think it depends on the teachers. (UD-L23)

In brief, lecturers held both positive and negative opinions about the influence of the curriculum and textbooks.

6.3.2.2 Students’ approaches to learning

Lecturers were asked to talk about their students’ approaches to learning English. Of the 28 interviewees, 14 complained about their students’ passive approach to English learning, seven believed that their students were active, and seven the numbers of active
and passive students were about equal. These variations in response occurred in lecturers’ opinions of all five universities.

Lecturers said students were passive in the classroom. Vietnamese students were comfortable with the traditional way of learning – the learning approach they used in their 12 years of primary and secondary education. This traditional learning approach was characterised by students’ rote learning, heavy dependence on the teachers, and being afraid of making mistakes. Students were reluctant to raise questions, to correct their teachers, or to give feedback on teachers’ teaching or the syllabus. These students did not want to be considered “different” from their peers.

Most of my students often need teachers’ guidance. They need to be spoon-fed all the time. They are afraid of making mistakes. I believe that to be autonomous in study and in many other things, people need to be self-confident and they need to accept the risk of being wrong. For many students, being wrong and making mistakes is something very terrible. They prefer to keep silent and do all the things that the teachers ask them to do because they think that the teachers are always right. (UA-L10)

The second feature of students with a passive approach was they were not happy, or even reluctant, when they were offered more choices. This “empowerment” aroused their anxiety.

The way that they learn is hindering their autonomy because even when you want them to be more autonomous, they are just not used to that way of thinking and doing. So they’re really reluctant when we give them more autonomy. (UA-L9)
One lecturer said that Vietnamese students are generally hard-working and studious, however, “sometimes being hard-working prevents them from being creative” (UD-L20).

One lecturer recalled a situation in which giving students freedom to choose did not work as she had hoped.

> When I first started teaching here about four years ago, I did not check attendance because I believed that students would attend class for learning, and if they did not want to learn, then they did not need to come. I did that for the first two semesters of my teaching career. And I realised that it was very difficult in Vietnam to do that. Many students simply stopped coming to class (UA-L4).

Finally, students were seen as too test-oriented and score-oriented. English was not their major. That explained why many students lack motivation in learning English. Many considered English as an easy and unnecessary subject which could not do much to increase their final Grade Point Average (GPA) after four years of university study.

> And another thing is that students place much importance on their scores. They tend to study for the sake of gaining high results in the tests. There is no curiosity for knowledge in many students. They are too afraid of having not good grades at the end of the term. They seem to be very conservative. (UE-L28)

In contrast, one fourth of the lecturers expressed their positive attitudes towards the students’ approach to English learning. First, the students behaved well in activities which required cooperation like pair-work or group-work. This finding was consistent
with one finding from survey, that lecturers acknowledged their students’ ability to learn cooperatively.

*I think my students’ learning approaches can enhance autonomy. Generally speaking, they are very active. They do more than what I ask them to do. For example, in group work or pair work, they are very active. They talk a lot in a class. For me, as long as they talk in English, it is good. They can sometimes learn without my instructions. (UA-L2)*

Second, students appeared to be more open and more demanding than previously. As students became more accustomed to Western values, like individuality and freedom to speak their minds, it was easier for them to talk in class. An increasing proportion of tertiary students were becoming more critical of their teachers and their University programs.

*Generally, students at our university are active. They are eager to be involved in classroom activities. I can say the students’ approaches to English learning are encouraging autonomy. They are less afraid than in the past to say what they think about the teachers. They are more open in sharing personal ideas. (UD-L21)*

Finally, the students with active learning approaches were more independent. They were in contrast to “traditional” students who came to class to sit down and do what lecturers told them to do.

*Many of my students have become more active in finding other knowledge sources such as the internet. I see that some students are more interested and*
some care about learning on their own. Some ask me questions like what books they should use for self-study at home. (UB-L14)

A quarter of the lecturers could not decide whether their students used traditional or modern approaches to learning. There were active and passive students in every class they taught.

All the lecturers agreed that the number of “active” students would continue to increase.

### 6.3.2.3 Teaching approaches

Lecturers were asked whether they thought their English classes were more teacher-centred or more learner-centred. Fifteen of the 28 could not decide. Sometimes the classes were more teacher-centred; sometimes they were more learner-centred. The teaching approach adopted depended on many factors.

The most frequently cited ones were class size, the students’ proficiency, the teaching load, the courses or the skills they taught, and cultural features. Eleven lecturers said that their classes were teacher-centred most of the time, and only two said their English classes were more learner-centred. However, all the lecturers indicated that they were in favour of the learner-centred approach. This approach was their priority in future teaching. However, there was a transition process from teacher-centred classes to learner-centred one and that it took time for this process to finish successfully.

Whether classes were more teacher-centred or learner-centred depended on a variety of factors. Some said that students’ English proficiency influenced how they conducted their classes. In classes where students’ general level of English was high, teachers
applied a learner-centred approach. If students’ English levels were low, they must instruct from the front and do most of the talking during the class.

*It depends on the classes. There are two kinds of classes at our university: high quality and normal, based on students’ scores on their University Entrance Exam. For the high-quality classes, it is more learner-centred because their English is better and they can express themselves. The students are more independent. In normal classes where students are at lower levels of English, the teachers have to explain much more, so the time lecturers spent on controlling the class becomes more. I mean the teachers’ talking time becomes more than the students’ talking time. That contributes to more teacher-centred classes.*

(UA-L8)

Another factor was class size. All the lecturers agreed that the current English class size was large and this made their workload heavy. A typical English class had from 40 to 50 students, which was too crowded for the lecturers to pay attention to individual learners. A large class prevented them from employing interactive activities. It was easier for them to use a teacher-centred approach. Attempts to teach in a more learner-centred manner would cost lecturers more time and even more financial resources.

*I always try to get students involved more in the classroom. I am teaching 7 classes; it’s like 21 hours a week. It’s a lot of teaching with preparation and exam grading. I think a learner-centred classroom helps the lecturers a lot actually. However to make it more student-centred, the lecturers needs to put in a lot of preparation, more time to prepare the lessons. The students themselves also need time to get used to the new approach.* (UA-L4)
The lecturers’ workload was a factor that led to a teacher-centred class. Over-stretched lecturers did not need to spend so much time in preparing the lessons and organising extra activities.

Practically, I have to say my English classes are teacher-centred because the students always follow all of my instructions. And without my instructions, without my encouragement, they will not do anything. [...] Of course, I want my English classes to be more learner-centred. But it requires much energy, time and even money because we have to spend time searching for documents, and changing the syllabus as well. To make it a learner-centred class, I might have to buy more books to prepare for my lesson. I might have to register for some online courses to provide more practical and authentic materials to my students. (UA-L7)

The teacher-centred approach made sense when classes were large and lecturers had heavy workloads. With smaller classes and smaller workloads, lecturers would be more likely to try learner-centred approaches.

In other countries where teachers, especially university lecturers, have a moderate amount of classes every week, they definitely have more time and more energy to do things that they wish to do, like preparing more carefully for the lessons. They can be more energetic in the lesson than us who normally have up to 30 hours of teaching, let alone the time spent at home to prepare lesson plans or to correct students’ writing. [...] If the workload could be half, I am sure that all lecturers would be more willing to apply the learner-centred approach. (UE-L26)
Some lecturers said that whether their classes were more teacher-centred or learner-centred depended on the skills they taught. A more teacher-centred class would be more suitable for receptive skills like listening and reading while a more learner-centred approach would be more suitable for skills like writing and speaking.

*It depends on the input that I want the students to take up. If it is new knowledge and I consider that it is difficult, I will be the person who explains most of the time. However, if the lesson is suitable for the level of the students, I will hold activities that students can become involved in and they can work in groups to find the answers for themselves.* (UB-L14)

Another factor which was consistently mentioned by the lecturers was socio-cultural features of teaching and learning in Vietnam. Students have long been accustomed to being told what to do, that teachers should always be at the centre of the class. Lecturers also are used to taking the superior role in the class. Learner-centred approach could be seen as “lowering” their role in teaching. One lecturer said that “… it is hard for the teachers to share the controlling power within the class and the idea of students partially controlling the class might seem offensive to those teachers” (UA-L6).

*I think the learner-centred class is still a dream for Vietnamese teachers. Most of the classes are more teacher-centred because students do not have the habit of saying what they think or showing the teachers their real opinions. Most of the time, they are scared of making mistakes. Besides, some teachers feel that if they let the students do what they want, it is likely to be the wrong thing. The teachers themselves are afraid of students making mistakes too. The classes now are becoming more learner-centred. But still, we lecturers are not really ready.*
because we still feel that the students are not ready to be completely autonomous. (UD-L20)

6.3.2.4 Testing and assessment system

Lecturers held both positive and negative views towards the assessment system in terms of fostering learner autonomy. Lecturers who held negative attitudes by far outnumbered those with positive attitude, with 20 lecturers saying that the current assessment system hinders the development of learner autonomy. Each university had a different assessment system. The assessment system was determined by the faculty. There were both progress tests and final achievements tests at the five universities. The typical score structure is 10\% for attendance, 30\% for the mid-term test, and 60\% for the end-of-term test. This ratio slightly varied among five universities.

Lecturers asserted that the assessment system constrained learner autonomy in three ways: learning and assessment were not in parallel; there were too many testing components; and the test items were mostly of the “closed” type.

A common comment made by lecturers was that learning and assessment were not matched. The final test was a proficiency test like the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) or the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication). It was not a test of the learning goals of the course. For example, at university A, the final test was a TOEIC test. There were no components in the English curriculum that was taught relating to the TOEIC test. As a consequence, students lacked motivation in their English courses because what was studied in the courses did not prepare students for the final test. As noted, a characteristic of Vietnamese students
is that they are score-oriented and test-oriented. Students tended to ignore classes that did not contribute to a high score in the final test.

The final test is very different from what students have learnt. In this way, I think the testing and assessing system is constraining learner autonomy. You can imagine that they have only one test (TOEIC) which accounts for 60% of the overall results at the end of the semester. Who can say that they have been trying their best during the whole semester? We cannot say so. And if we cannot monitor their efforts during the whole semester, then we fail to see what they are weak at and what they are good at. (UA-L8)

Some lecturers said that the assessment system had too many components that were not synchronised and systemized. The four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing were tested, and within each skill, the structure of 10% attendance, 30% mid-term, and 60% final were applied. This practice resulted in a lot of sub-scores.

I don’t think that the system favours learner autonomy. There were so many components in it. And the problem is that we do not have a common basis on which we grade the students. We lack a framework or just to keep it simple, a descriptor. If we give a detailed description, students know exactly their grade at a certain level of performance. In that way, we ensure learner autonomy because it is the students who actually decide their grades, not the teachers. The teachers are simply the ones who convert students’ performance into the grades. We have not yet synchronised the system. (UC-L19)

Another drawback of the system which made lecturers believe that it was a challenge to enhancing learner autonomy was the fact that most of the tests currently used consisted
of only closed questions like multiple-choice test items. The closed test items were thought to limit learner autonomy.

For non-English majors, we just include only grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension in the final test. The test questions are only multiple-choice one. This leaves students with no space or chance to develop their autonomy. (UB-L11)

Eight lecturers said that the assessment system could promote learner autonomy because students were given freedom to choose test questions.

For some courses, like presentation skills or writing, we do give the students opportunities to have their own choices of topics to prepare a presentation or to write an essay. They are also encouraged and guided to manage the tasks when and where most convenient to them. (UE-L25)

### 6.3.2.5 Work load

As previously noted, workloads for English lecturers are high. Lecturers may not be always available to provide their students with resources or help to solve students’ problems in learning.

All the lecturers commented on their large workloads and said workloads impacted negatively on their support for learner autonomy.

I am not only teaching ESP but I am also teaching the general English, and I am not only teaching writing but I am also teaching presentation, and even pronunciation. So I have to use different materials. Teachers really don’t have
much time to prepare so they just come to the class, follow the textbooks, tell the students what to do, lecture for a while, and get the students to do exercises. That’s the way we do it. If you give them more autonomy it means more work for you. So it’s better for you to constrain that autonomy. (UA-L9)

Limited time is really a problem for most of Vietnamese teachers, to be honest. The teaching load is one factor that may discourage the teachers to become more willing to help students to be autonomous. I have eight classes a week. It’s really hard for me to give the students extra activities. For example, in a writing class how can I just ask them to write more? I don’t even have time to check their writing. It’s very hard. (UD-L20)

It appears that lecturers tend to associate “supporting learner autonomy” with “more extra-curriculum activities.” Activities should be checked by lecturers. If they were unable to check them, then the assignment is worthless.

6.3.2.6 Socio-cultural context

When asked, lecturers tended to narrow the socio-cultural context down to several features. Of all the 28 lecturers interviewed, 21 lecturers thought that the socio-cultural context hindered the development of learner autonomy; six thought the context had a positive influence on learner autonomy, and one thought that socio-cultural context neither hindered nor enhanced learner autonomy.

The socio-cultural features which lecturers indicated a negative effect on learner autonomy were a high respect for teachers, students’ attitudes towards learning, and students’ approaches to learning. In Vietnam, like in any Confucian-heritage country,
teaching is considered a noble career. Respect for teachers has created generations of students who always waited to be told what to do by the teachers and generations of the teachers who always try to avoid losing face. All the lecturers indicated that the deeply-rooted idea that “teachers are always right” was a significant barrier to learner autonomy, even at the tertiary level.

_I am afraid that the socio-cultural context in our country does not encourage learner autonomy. It is the students’ belief for the whole 12 years of primary and secondary school that the teacher is a perfect model and they should always follow the teacher’s instructions. They do not think that the teacher can be wrong. They do not want to check if the teacher’s answer is right or wrong. They do not know how to improve themselves, how to learn, if they do not have a good teacher._ (UC-L18)

Not only were students used to following teachers’ instructions, the teachers were used to having the superior role in the class and controlled in all learning activities.

_If I give out a wrong solution, the students might correct me in a well-behaved manner and I will check it again. However if they correct me in an offensive way, it makes me lose face. Then I would be reluctant to change my answer. This illustrates an important cultural value: teachers’ attempt to keep face and avoid losing face in any circumstance._ (UC-L17)

Vietnamese students’ learning tends to influenced by many factors other than what they want to learn. A student will take a university course not because he is interested in the course but because his family thinks he should do the course or because it is a desirable university to attend.
Many students study for other people, not for themselves. They study so their parents will be proud of them. They study for their teachers to gain professional recognition. That explains why they do not want to study anything outside the classroom because they themselves do not find satisfaction in that. Some students make every effort to get high scores or high grades, to have a highly-respected degree or position in society. Those things are viewed to bring honour to the whole family. It takes a lot of time for students to realise that studying should be for themselves. (UA-L3)

Lecturers were quite pessimistic when describing how their students were learning English. Words and phrases like “passive”, “no hand raised”, “sit silently” and “do exactly what teachers tell them to do” were repeated many times. Even when lecturers created more opportunities for students to exercise their autonomy, many of them felt uncomfortable because they were so accustomed to following everything their teachers said.

Vietnamese students are still passive. In the classroom context, the students expect the teachers to tell them what to do. They just want to do exactly what the teachers tell them. Even when we want to give them more freedom, they do not like the idea because they are afraid they will get lost. They will have to do more research and find their own way, find the information by themselves. They are unable to take advantage of that “freedom.” (UA-L9)

Many lecturers indicated that there were educational changes favouring learner autonomy. More lecturers and educators were sent abroad to study for higher degrees
and when they came back, they became more willing to adapt more “modern” teaching approaches.

_I do think that in modern life, we are changing our teaching methods and students are changing their approaches to learning. We give more freedom and choices to our students to study outside class with things like portfolios, home assignments at different levels, or group projects. We are trying to adapt our teaching and learning English towards a more learner-centred nature and learner autonomy will then be improved._ (UC-L16)

One lecturer noted that individuality is now more widely accepted.

_I see that the society accepts individuality in a more tolerant way. It is fine for the students to express themselves. And as long as they feel free in doing so, they will be more active in class. When people accept differences among individuals, students might believe that their teachers will be more open to their way of thinking. Students then will be willing to share, and what matters in student-centred classes is the students’ willingness to take the leading role in learning._ (UE-L27)

The importance placed on final grades may support learner autonomy because students are hard-working and competitive.

_Students pay so much attention on final results of a test; they become very exam-oriented in learning. However, at the same time, this attention makes them hard-working and competitive to get high grades._ (UB-L14)
Another socio-cultural feature that arose in the interviews was collectivism. Some lecturers said it encouraged students to perform better in classroom activities.

*When I was a primary student, the habit of studying in groups or pairs was already popular. The teacher normally grouped one good student with a less competent student ... I think it enhanced learner autonomy by forming the habit of learning cooperatively. We learn from more knowledgeable persons, we learn from peers. In high schools we still formed groups. We normally stayed in the classroom to solve lots of English tasks together.* *(UB-L11)*

On the other hand, some lecturers said that collectivism did not encourage learner autonomy.

*In Vietnam, collectivism is highly appreciated - the idea of a group, the work of a group, the effectiveness of a group. It hinders autonomy in the sense that it discourages students to learn by themselves, to create something just for themselves, not for the group. Good or bad, it is the work of the entire group. So group members have less motivation to contribute. Some lecturers may say that collectivism encourages the cooperation. I don’t think so. Vietnamese people tend to blame others when working in groups [...] Collectivism may enhance learner autonomy if all members of a group know how to work cooperatively.* *(UC-L17)*
6.3.3 Teaching practices to support learner autonomy

In the final part of the interview, the participants were asked “What have you done to support learner autonomy in your English classes”. All lecturers confirmed their favourable attitudes towards learner autonomy and claimed that they had used one or more teaching strategies or activities to foster autonomy. Lecturers’ teaching practices to support learner autonomy fell into four main categories: Pair work and group work; extra tasks to do outside class time; two-way consultation with students; and giving students choices in learning.

6.3.3.1 Pair work and group work

Most of the lecturers regarded pair work and group work as a powerful tool to enhance learner autonomy. Through cooperation, students would know more about their own strengths and weaknesses. At the same time, they could learn from their peers.

*I divide the class into some small groups and I ask them to work with their partners to do some activities like giving feedback on a passage or a news article from the internet that I prepared for them. The questions are like “what do you think about this” or “what do you learn from this article?” Students need to be very responsible for themselves. (UA-L2)*

Pair work or group work allow more time for communication between members. The students’ speaking time could therefore be increased which was beneficial for their communicative competence.

*I also try to encourage speaking so they have real communication and I like them to practise in pairs or in groups so that they can have more time to speak*
to each other. I often let them do group presentations. And for group presentation, they can do the topic that they like to present. And then, they can work in a small group and do the work by themselves in the group. Of course, during the time they prepare for the presentation, they can ask for my opinion. I will give them advice. And then, they can do it by themselves. So, I think they also have freedom. And they are responsible for the presentation. (UA-L5)

In collectivist societies like Vietnam, strong relationships are fostered and people take responsibilities for fellow members in their groups. Vietnamese students tend to perform better when they are with companions.

6.3.3.2 Extra tasks outside classroom

There were a large variety of extra tasks outside classroom that lecturers assigned their students. The most popular tasks were portfolios, projects, diaries, study notes, blogs, and online programs. Many lecturers believed that “… without out of class learning tasks there would be no learner autonomy” (UB-L13)

Following were lecturers’ comments about tasks students completed outside the classroom.

Blogs

I have created a blog for each class of mine. Students are encouraged to contribute to the blog. It could create real-life communication so students don’t have the feeling that studying English is not necessary in everyday life. They talk, chat and connect with each other in English. And on that website we can share the experience of learning English and then suggest good materials for the
students to self-study. And we also have peer reviewing and peer learning online. (UA-L10)

**Portfolios**

I have implemented the writing portfolio that lasts from the beginning to the end of the semester. Each week students write, and then the writing pieces are peer-checked. Then they hand in their writing and also the writing of their friend that they check. And then I check again their writing and also evaluate their correction for their friends. At the end of the semester, they have a writing portfolio. (UC-L17)

**Projects**

I usually ask my students to do book review projects. The students select a book and then make plan of reading, how many words to read in a day, and then they have to measure their reading pace as well, how many words per minutes they have to follow. I think that activity is very interesting and it really enhances learner autonomy. (UA-L3)

**Diaries/Study notes**

I ask my students to have study notes on which they keep track of the session that they are learning. They have to fill in the content of the session either during that session or at the end of the course. But I believe that at the end of the day when they look at the study notes, they feel like they were the teacher. They are free to deliver anything that is related to the lesson. My students can decide what to take in and what to throw away because there will be something that you
teach that the students know already. If they find any content interesting, they will put it in the note. So, in every little thing they do I’ve been trying to give them a sense of freedom. (UA-L6)

**Online programs**

At the moment, I am using an online program to help the students study at home. This program is applied to the first year students who are studying pronunciation at the moment. Its purpose is to change the method of teaching and to help students access a new method of learning. I want to combine the traditional teaching and online teaching. I mean blended learning and teaching. And after 4 weeks employing this program, I could see that my students are making progress in pronunciation. (UD-L22)

### 6.3.3.3 Two-way consultation between lecturers and students

Two-way consultation between lecturers and students occurred. Lecturers gave advice and suggestions on extra learning materials or resources and students gave feedback about the course to lecturers. Many lecturers said that students should be involved more in making decisions such as the length or the order of classroom activities and materials to explore in and outside class.

I encourage them to be more active in learning. At the beginning of every semester, I often ask my students to write down their strengths and weaknesses, their needs and wants for the course so that I can read what they write and I can figure out what kind of thing should be focused in a particular class. Then I would adapt my teaching basing on the information. (UC-L16)
6.3.3.4 Giving students more choices

Giving more choice to students was considered an effective way of supporting learner autonomy.

I let my students choose what to study next. For example, when I teach general English with the textbook *New Cutting Edge*, I will ask my students to choose whether to start with vocabulary or listening or grammar not in the order that they appear in the textbook. Or I will ask them whether they want to play games or they want to listen to a song and I will give them some songs or some games related to the lesson. I have a large collection of activities, games and songs so my students have many things to choose from. (UB-L11)

Students’ reactions to these outside-classroom activities varied. Some were happy and motivated. Some felt that they were forced to do unnecessary things outside the curriculum. This attitude discouraged several lecturers from implementing learner autonomy enhancing practices.

I used to be very enthusiastic in making my students more autonomous and implemented many extra activities. I do not do that anymore because I feel a little bit bored and disappointed with the students’ attitudes and reactions. Two years ago I normally took the students outside, for example, to go to the museum or go to the American Centre for speaking with foreigners or for reading lots of English materials. Or I designed some activities for them to do at home: grammar work, speaking or listening. I made them listen to something in VOA. Some were quite interested, but some were not. So now I do not have any kind
of dedication or contribution to promote student autonomy. Now I just teach what’s in the syllabus and in the textbook. (UB-L15)

6.4 Discussion of the interviews

The chapter has presented findings from interviews with lecturers. These findings have confirmed and extended the findings from the survey and the classroom observations.

Lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy

The survey data showed lecturers generally in support of learner autonomy. The interview data reinforced this support of learner autonomy.

Figure 6.1 summarizes lecturers’ justification for learner autonomy.

![Diagram of Vietnamese lecturers’ justification of learner autonomy]

*Figure 6.1 Vietnamese lecturers’ justification of learner autonomy*
Research on learner autonomy has produced a number of reasons (philosophical, pedagogical, practical, and social) to support its use. Figure 6.2 illustrates the reasons why learner autonomy should be endorsed in education. The figure has been adapted from Cotteral (1995) and Benson (2001).

**Figure 6.2 Justification for learner autonomy, adapted from Cotterall (1995) and Benson (2001)**
It is useful to compare the reasons to support learner autonomy in Figure 6.2 and the reasons given by the lecturers during the interviews. Some lecturers indicated that learning should be a life-long process, some said that students themselves know what they need to learn, and some lecturers indicated that students must learn for themselves outside the classroom because class time is so limited.

**Lecturers’ perceptions of their role in fostering learner autonomy**

More than half of the lecturers considered that learner autonomy was students’ ability to take charge of their learning. This ability must be activated and nurtured by lecturers. Learner autonomy then is the result of a combination of students’ abilities and lecturers’ support.

Lecturers’ support of learner autonomy could be manifested through lecturers’ guidance of students’ learning. This included lecturers’ willingness to empower students in choosing the textbooks, tasks to do, learning activities inside and outside the classroom, and even lecturers to teach. Learner autonomy is something that is initiated by lecturers. Students then were enabled to use their personal capacity to monitor their learning. This seemed to be a unique feature in the way Vietnamese lecturers interpreted the concept of learner autonomy. This finding was aligned with a finding in the survey: lecturers had primary responsibility for initiating learner autonomy.

**Lecturers’ perceptions of challenges to promoting learner autonomy**

Findings from interviews revealed a number of challenges to learner autonomy as perceived by the lecturers. The challenges could be categorised in four groups.
a) Professional training and development

Lecturers themselves were trained in a traditional teaching-learning environment. They were not trained to include learner autonomy in their teaching. Many lecturers, when asked to define the concept of learner autonomy, expressed uncertainty about whether their answers were right or wrong. There was little on-going professional development for lecturers from all five universities. When asked whether the lecturers had discussed learner autonomy at the faculty or university level, lecturers expressed they did not often have professional workshops or seminars. Learner autonomy was something new to them.

b) Working conditions

Lecturers’ working conditions seemed to work against learner autonomy: large classes, poor resources, and heavy workload. Individual attention to students seemed infeasible in a class with approximately 50 students. Insufficient resources appeared to be another hindrance to learner autonomy. This finding was consistent with the result from classroom observations. Apart from a large amount of teaching hours in class, Vietnamese lecturers, like academics around the world, also need to engage in research. Pham (1999), in a study investigating socio-cultural factors constraining success in tertiary English language training programs in Vietnam, concluded that teachers of English worked like teaching machines.

Fifteen years later, the higher education section has not changed much. According to a survey at 14 universities in Vietnam, the problem areas are low salaries, too many teaching hours, and little support for research projects (Anh, 2014). While the official workload required by the Ministry of Education and Training is 10 to 12 hours per
week, a typical lecturer of English in Vietnam does more work to supplement the modest salary.

The data gathered from interviews indicated lecturers’ contention that their heavy workload was a constraint to developing learner autonomy.

c) Socio-cultural factors

There were a number of socio-cultural factors perceived as challenges in developing learner autonomy. The traditional teacher-student relationship was mentioned frequently. Respect for teachers has resulted in teacher-centred classrooms.

6.5 Chapter summary

The interview results showed lecturers’ attitudes to learner autonomy. How did they understand the term? How did they encourage student autonomy if they thought it was desirable? What factors made it difficult for them to encourage learner autonomy? Many of the findings from interviews have been consistent with findings from the survey and classroom observation. Chapter Seven consolidates the findings from the three sources of data.
Chapter Seven  

DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

Chapters Four, Five and Six have presented findings and the initial discussion of the findings from the survey, the interviews, and classroom observations. Results indicate consistence in the three sets of data. This chapter consolidates the findings. Triangulation has produced comprehensive insights into lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context at the tertiary level in Vietnam. Five major discussions of the findings will be presented in this chapter.

7.2 Lecturers’ endorsement of learner autonomy

Learner autonomy has long been endorsed by scholars in the field (Benson, 2001; Cotterall, 1995). Vietnamese lecturers also held positive attitudes towards learner autonomy. Findings from the survey and interviews confirmed this. Five attitudes towards learner autonomy came from the analysis of the interviews. First, the learning process is life-long. Second, time for learning in class is limited. Third, learners are the one who know what is best for themselves. Fourth, learner autonomy should lead to better learning outcomes. Fifth, lecturers’ workload should be reduced with more learner autonomy.

Why were lecturers in support of learner autonomy? Findings from classroom observations revealed that, despite lecturers’ support for learner autonomy, their practices of transforming learner autonomy from a “concept” to “reality” were very limited. Learner autonomy is a notion imported from the West. The current researcher argues that there are two main reasons to explain lecturers’ support of the concept. The
first reason is that lecturers are influenced by policies emerging from the Government and MOET. The second reason is the Government’s push to send EFL lecturers overseas for higher degrees.

As discussed in Chapter Two, there is increasing recognition of the importance of English in initiatives for international integration by Vietnam. However, current English language education in Vietnam is far from satisfactory. Limited English competence is the biggest challenge for university graduates in particular and young Vietnamese workers in general to join the globalisation process.

It is notable that the education system in Vietnam, higher education included, is controlled centrally. Centralised planning and decision-making are dominant characteristics of the system. Teachers are expected to turn policies and documents from theory into their teaching practices. It could be argued that lecturers’ endorsement of learner autonomy, to some extent, has been influenced by governmental guidelines and requirements.

Changes in teacher training could also be a reason for lecturers’ positive attitude towards learner autonomy. From 2000, thousands of lecturers have been sent by the Government to study abroad in prestigious institutions (T. T. M. Nguyen, 2014). Those endeavours have resulted in a generation of lecturers who are familiar with Western approaches to educations. More and more lecturers have been trained internationally and have completed post-graduate degrees in Western countries where student-centred practices are popular.
7.3 Reconceptualisation of learner autonomy in the local context

The conceptualisation of learner autonomy by Vietnamese lecturers is different from that of the West. A revisit of four different perspectives on learner autonomy in Western culture is presented in Figures 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3.

Figure 7.1 Learner autonomy from psychological perspective in Western-based culture

Figure 7.2 Learner autonomy from technical perspective in Western-based culture
Learner autonomy has been viewed as a social process situated in specific political, societal, and cultural conditions (Dam, 1995; D. Little, 2007; Palfreyman & Smith, 2003). Re-contextualising learner autonomy is beneficial in the sense that it responds to cultural situations and reframes the concept in light of the local teaching and learning environment. Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in the current study demonstrates that there has been a reconceptualisation of learner autonomy from the lecturers’ perspective.

Learner autonomy, in Vietnamese lecturers’ understanding, is defined as students’ ability to take charge of their own learning, but this ability is initiated and developed with the support of the teachers. The emphasis placed on the role of teachers marks the difference between the locally-constructed definition and the definitions of learner autonomy from Western sources. Figure 7.4 illustrates Vietnamese lecturers’ conceptualisation of learner autonomy.
Western scholars usually view learner autonomy as a learner’s attribute which is initiated by the learner. Vietnamese lecturers view learner autonomy as a personal attribute which must be developed by teachers. The development of learner autonomy cannot occur without teachers’ support. Learner autonomy in Vietnam can be described as restricted or conditional.

In this study, learner autonomy is defined as *the learners’ ability to take responsibility for their own learning under the guidance and with the support of the teachers.* This definition is framed by a combination of socio-cultural constructivism theory, Confucian Heritage Culture features, and Hofstede’s theory about national cultural dimensions (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). This definition aligns with the findings of the research.
Referring to a definition of learner autonomy given by one lecturer, learner autonomy was described as students’ “activeness to raise their voice and their ideas, to ask to acquire knowledge and even to give feedback to the teachers” (UE-L27). The word “even” should be highlighted. Giving feedback and comments to teachers, which is common in Western countries, was something special and brave in Vietnam.

It was also interesting to note lecturers talking about the need “to force students to learn autonomously”. This viewpoint could be viewed as odd in Western contexts. However, in a country where teachers have dominated classrooms and students have high respect for teachers, this attitude is not surprising. Even though teachers have become more open and students have become more active, the result of the development of science and technology, educational change still requires the initiative of teachers.

Lecturers argued that, without their support, students could not achieve learner autonomy. Lecturers saw themselves as playing a crucial role in students’ autonomy. The survey results support this finding. Lecturers confirmed that they should be more responsible than students in classroom activities.

The conclusion from the interview data was strongly in line with the conclusion withdrawn from the survey analysis. In other words, lecturers in the near future have to be prepared to take up their new role – taking initiative in fostering learner autonomy in their students (D. Little, 1994, 1995; T. N. Nguyen, 2012).

### 7.4 In-class and out-of-class learner autonomy

In a study reported in 2008, classroom communication skills as presentations, discussion and group work were rarely found (T. T. Nguyen, Dekker, & Goedhart,
2008). However, data gathered from classroom observation in the current study showed improvement. Pair work and group work were observed in almost all classes investigated. Presentations and group discussion also occurred. A number of strategies were observed, including pair work, group work, extra tasks for students to do outside class time, two-way consultation with students, and giving students more options in how they learned.

Having said that, the nature of the teacher-student relationship observed in the current study generally remained one of teachers controlling all activities. Students did what lecturers asked them to do. Learner autonomy was rarely observed.

There appeared to be two types of learner autonomy, in-class autonomy and out-of-class autonomy. Teachers were more in support of learner autonomy outside class time. This conclusion was consistent with survey findings: lecturers were more willing to “let go” their power outside the classroom. This might be explained by a power distance in the teacher-student relationship when they are out of the classroom context. When asked about teaching strategies they used to promote learner autonomy, many lecturers mentioned students’ out-of-class learning.

Given this situation, it might be effective to initiate learner autonomy in activities outside classroom, especially in the early stages of improving learner autonomy. Lecturers agreed that students should be more responsible for their learning outside class time. Lecturers faced a conflict in fostering learner autonomy: they wanted to keep traditional practices and they wanted to encourage learner autonomy. A pedagogy which focuses on improving students’ autonomous learning behaviour outside class might be a culturally appropriate one.
7.5 Learner autonomy: the encounter between Confucius culture and Western culture

All the interviewees confirmed their endorsement of learner autonomy and their role in helping their students to become autonomous. In classrooms, however, there was little evidence of learner autonomy. This mismatch can be traced to a number of socio-cultural factors. Lecturers have not been guided or trained to encourage learner autonomy. They are confused about how to do this.

The cultural context has a strong impact on how lecturers and students reacted to the concept of learner autonomy. The current study has made use of Hofstede’s model of natural cultural dimensions (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). While the Confucian heritage remains prominent in Vietnamese education, changes to more modern educational approaches imported from the West are occurring.

*The first dimension: power distance*

Vietnam, like other Confucian Heritage Culture countries, scored high on the Hofstede’s Power Distance Index. Hierarchy is important in maintaining social stability. In the education realm, there is an *unequal* relationship between teachers and students. Teachers are the only source of knowledge and are models for correct behaviour. According to the Vietnamese Education Law issued in 1999, the first criterion for a teacher is to be of “good moral quality, ethically and ideologically” (Vietnamese Assembly, 1999).

Learner autonomy, from a Western perspective, means working in a social constructivist environment in which students can take charge of their own learning.
They may know more than the teacher and they may question the teacher. Asking questions is regarded as desirable (Al-Harthi, 2005; Liu, Liu, Lee, & Magjuka, 2010). Teachers and students work together to create a learning community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The teachers’ role is discussion facilitator and is seen as just one source of information among others (Lock, 2006).

Findings from the interviews revealed that such approach was not acceptable in Vietnamese classes. Lecturers would feel offended if students challenged them in a disrespectful way. Also, Vietnamese students were reluctant to question lecturers, especially in public. Some lecturers stated that many students were not happy with “more freedom”, “more choices”, and “more power”.

Power distance affects Vietnamese education in two ways. First, students still regard their teachers as the main source of knowledge. This discourages them from turning to other knowledge sources. Second, high power distance might support learner autonomy. If lecturers create an autonomy-supportive classroom, Vietnamese students will be expected to move in that direction.

The second dimension: individualism versus collectivism

Vietnam, with a low score on the Individualism Index (20), is a collectivistic society in which offence leads to shame and loss of face. Losing face implies personal damage and it should always be avoided (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In collectivist classes, harmony is considered to be of ultimate importance. Confrontations and conflicts should be limited as much as possible.
From the Western approach, students with autonomy are expected to challenge each other’s conclusions. Achieving personal goals is important. In the education context, Western students generally are comfortable with conflicts. It is through the process of dealing with conflicts in learning that learner autonomy can be fostered. A highly collectivistic culture can hinder learner autonomy. Lecturers’ interviews reflected this cultural trait. In lecturers’ eyes, many students were scared of losing face. They did not want to make their personal ideas or contributions knowns. They felt more comfortable working in groups. Both lecturers and students wanted to “… try to keep face” (UC-L17) and to avoid topics of potential conflict. If a conflict is sensed, individual learning needs must be sacrificed to meet the group’s learning interests.

It should also be noted that collectivism could also bring benefits to learner autonomy in the way that students could exercise their interdependence and collaborative learning. Learner autonomy does not mean learning alone. It can mean learning in cooperation and focusing on interdependence, not only on independence.

**The third dimension: masculinity versus femininity**

Gender roles were not mentioned at all in the interviews. Lecturers’ preference for males or females was not observed in any of the classrooms observations. As such, it will not be further elaborated.

**The fourth dimension: uncertainty avoidance**

Uncertainty avoidance is defined as the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations. This ambiguity leads to anxiety and different cultures develop different ways to deal with this anxiety. Vietnam, with a score
of 30 on this dimension, has a low preference for avoiding uncertainty. In the education field, the score does not seem to reflect the nature of teaching and learning. For thousands of years, Vietnamese students have been influenced by Confucianism and traditional exams with a focus on memorising a huge amount of information. In addition to a lot of rote learning, Vietnamese students have also been characterised as quiet, shy, and lacking critical thinking skills (H. V. Dang, 2006; T. T. Dang, 2010).

Western societies value critical and reflective thinking skills which are features of an autonomous learner. Students are expected to learn actively and construct new knowledge based on their prior knowledge. They construct knowledge through interactions with others. The main characteristics of the courses dominated by Western teaching pedagogy are as follows: courses tend to have open curriculum that include multiple sources for course content; student-centred learning is encouraged; assessment tasks focus on evaluating the learning process and learning skills; and learning is meant to encourage individualism and self-development (Al-Harthi, 2005; Liu et al., 2010).

These characteristics were not in evidence in the current study. Students were described as passive, expecting teachers to tell them everything they need to know. They were comfortable with structured learning, specific objectives, detailed tasks, and clear instruction. The students were found to be with high uncertainty avoidance.

Analysis of the surveys, interviews, and observations points to English courses at Vietnamese universities dominated by a Confucian teaching pedagogy. Courses usually have a fixed or closed curriculum with limited space left for lecturers and students to exercise autonomy. Teacher-centred learning and teaching dominates the course. Students’ individual learning goals have to be sacrificed to satisfy the learning goals of
the whole class. Assessment tasks are mostly summative, rather than formative. Students are focused on getting high marks rather than developing their competence in English.

 Apparently, learning tasks which aim to foster learner autonomy could not always be well-structured with precise objectives and all other relating details available. Autonomous students are expected to be open to new ideas, free thinking and are willing to take risks. An analysis of data indicated an absence of those qualities among students, according to Vietnamese lecturers.

**The fifth dimension: short-term orientation and long-term orientation**

This cultural dimension describes the way each culture maintains the values of the past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future. Normative societies with low scores on this dimension (favouring short-term orientation) prefer to preserve traditions while holding suspicious attitudes to social change. Pragmatic societies with high score (favouring long-term orientation) encourage change as a way to prepare for the future.

Influenced by Confucianism, Vietnam favours a short-term orientation though there are signs of a shift a long-term orientation. The ability to adapt traditions to changed conditions might bode well for learner autonomy. According to the interviews participants, the traditional values in education are still dominant.

Large classes at Vietnamese institutions can be seen as a factor reducing learner autonomy. Lecturers stated that their classes normally consisted of 30 to 50 students. If
promoting learner autonomy means more attention given on each individual student to help foster their independence, a typical English class is not ideal by any means.

Table 7.1 highlights ways in which a Confucian-based culture and a Western-based culture would operate differently in an educational context.
Table 7.1

**Approaches to education in a Confucian-based culture and a Western-based culture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Confucian Culture</th>
<th>Western Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General ideas</strong></td>
<td>Social hierarchy, social harmony, and interests of family members and community</td>
<td>Equality, personal freedom, individuality, and objective thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power distance</strong></td>
<td>High power distance, unequal teacher-student relationship, teacher seen as absolute authority</td>
<td>Low power distance, equal teacher-student relationship, teacher seen as facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individualism vs.</strong></td>
<td>Collectivism, social obligations, avoid conflicts, prioritize group’s interests</td>
<td>Individualism, encourage dialogues and interaction, prioritize individual’s interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Masculinity vs.</strong></td>
<td>Feminism, appreciate modest behaviours and cooperation in learning</td>
<td>Masculinity, appreciate assertive behaviours and attempts at excelling in learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uncertainty avoidance</strong></td>
<td>Strong uncertainty avoidance; value well-structured and transparent learning environment, appreciate learning which is pre-sequenced by the teacher; value detailed feedbacks, explicit grading criteria and specific learning materials from teacher</td>
<td>Weak uncertainty avoidance; value open curriculum that includes multiple sources and perspectives; value activities that foster critical and reflective thinking skills rather than rote memorisation and repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short-term vs. long-term orientation</strong></td>
<td>Short-term, normative virtues, prefer to preserve traditions</td>
<td>Long-term, pragmatic virtues, prefer to change to prepare for future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7.2 summarizes lecturers’ attitudes towards learning autonomy through the lens of Hofstede’s model.

**Table 7.2**

*Interview participants’ attitude to learner autonomy analysed in terms of Hofstede’s model*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Lecturers’ attitudes</th>
<th>Applications to pedagogy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>Emphasized lecturers’ role</td>
<td>Students cannot be autonomous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>without teachers’ support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism vs.</td>
<td>Students tend to avoid conflicts</td>
<td>Popular use of pair work, group work and other learning activities which require a team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivism</td>
<td>and perform better in groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity vs. Femininity</td>
<td>(Not evident in the data)</td>
<td>(Not observed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance</td>
<td>Students focus on academic results, prefer to be guided step-by-step by lecturers</td>
<td>Score-oriented syllabus with limited space for students to exercise their autonomy; students are prepared for exams rather than work on their competency in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term vs. long-term orientation</td>
<td>Students stay with traditional learning approach: rely too much on lecturers.</td>
<td>Closely follow the textbooks as extra-curriculum activities are not always possible given the heavy work load and large class sizes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The notion of learner autonomy came from Western research. It is becoming apparent that many researchers have underestimated the role of socio-cultural context in fostering learner autonomy. The analysis of the lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy supports the argument that for learner autonomy to be applied successfully in a Confucius culture country like Vietnam, adaptation and modification to the construct must be researched into.

In addition to psychologically-based cultural factors, other impediments to learner autonomy were identified in the current study. These included poor classroom conditions, lecturers’ heavy workload, obsolete curriculum and textbooks, and an out-of-date assessment system. Even though learner autonomy is lauded by education leaders and policymakers, there have been no guidelines for how to change current teaching and learning practices. To date, lecturers have been left with own interpretation and own implementation of the concept. This is an example of borrowing pedagogical imports with little investigation into the local context where the imported value is to be adopted.

Vietnamese educational authorities, under pressure to improve the quality of the Vietnamese workforce, have been examining international pedagogical approaches which are believed to enhance English language education. Western teaching and learning practices, like learner autonomy, have been encouraged in Vietnamese higher institutions. By adopting Western practice, Vietnamese education could progress quickly (Walker & Dimmock, 2002).

The concept of learner autonomy does not sit comfortably in the local context in terms of both cultural values and difficult infrastructure conditions. It challenges the role of
the teachers and may lead to their losing face. Even though many lecturers have had the opportunity to study abroad, a large proportion has been trained in Vietnam where learner autonomy is not considered.

A reconceptualised notion of learner autonomy should be introduced into Vietnam. The reconceptualisation of lecturers and their implementation of learner autonomy has been summarised in Figure 7.5.
Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam

Figure 7.5 Learner autonomy from an “imported” pedagogy to Vietnamese teaching practices
7.6 Proposed model to foster learner autonomy

The reconceptualisation of learner autonomy from a Vietnamese perspective proposed in the current study has generated a proposal to foster learner autonomy in the local context.

Stage 1: Initiating opportunities for learner autonomy

Lecturers could facilitate learner autonomy by paying attention to students’ current English competency and then provide guidance according to their level of English competency. Lecturers may ask students to set up their own study goals and plan their own learning. Each student should be encouraged by the lecturers to produce a detailed learning plan with long-term and short-term learning goals. Lecturers could encourage students to share their plans and goals. Classroom activities should be linked to students’ goals.

Stage 2: Selecting resources

Apart from the core textbooks which cannot be changed, lecturers have freedom to provide extra learning materials for students. Students have access to a large quantity of English online resources like internet webpages or online learning program. The lecturers’ role here is selecting materials, counselling, organizing and trying to tie the content of those materials with the teaching content in the curriculum. Lecturers can design extra communicative activities which can be used both inside and outside class. Lecturers could involve students in the selection and preparation of learning resources.
Stage 3: Selecting teaching strategies

Teaching strategies which could boost students’ cooperative learning would suit Vietnamese students. Students can learn from peers as well as learning from lecturers. Pair work, group work, group presentations or portfolios are examples of strategies which are encourage learner autonomy. In addition, students should be asked to give their reaction to strategies introduced by their lecturers.

Stage 4: Practice inside and outside class

Learner autonomy, eventually, requires lecturers’ gradual withdrawal of their power. Lecturers should be aware of their changing role: from sole knowledge provider to facilitators, coordinators, and organisers. Opportunities to practise English and to learn how to solve language problems should be handed to students in a gradual process. In the current local context, it is argued that such a process should be initiated from out-of-class learning activities.

Stage five: Monitoring progress

EFL lecturers should encourage students to keep track of their learning in learning reports that would require answers to these types of questions: How I am doing? Should I change my study habits? Is my work good enough to submit? What might I do differently next time? Completing learning reports should be modelled at first by lecturers. Students can self-monitor their learning as well as reflect their strength and weaknesses in learning English.
Stage six: Assessment

An autonomous learner is capable of assessing his or her learning. They also can receive feedback from lecturers and peers. While lecturers’ assessment could be traditional with examinations and grades, self-assessment and peer-assessment could foster learner autonomy. Students can be encouraged to reflect on their marks and what these marks tell them about their competency in English. Peer-assessment might reduce lecturers’ heavy workload and large classes.

The six steps in the model shown in Figure 7.6 form an iterative cycle that builds on itself.
Figure 7.6 A proposed model to foster learner autonomy from lecturers’ perspective
7.7 Chapter summary

This chapter presents a convergence of findings from the survey, the interviews, and the classroom observations. The final chapter, Chapter Eight, produces a set of recommendations for the stakeholders in EFL education in universities in Vietnam. It points to the contribution of the research project, and concludes with suggestions for further research in the field.
Chapter Eight

CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis by proposing a list of recommendation for the implementation of learner autonomy in the EFL context in universities in Vietnam. The contribution and the limitations of the study are noted. The chapter finishes with suggestions for further research in the area.

8.2 Recommendations

8.2.1 Recommendations for policymakers

Firstly, learner autonomy should be applied in a socio-culturally appropriate way in Vietnam. Lecturers were endorsed the inclusion of this concept in teaching and learning English. Learner autonomy, however, was resisted at a practical level. Learner autonomy is at odds with traditional Vietnamese teaching and learning practices.

Given fundamental sociocultural differences, it is dangerous to import a way of teaching and learning that does not fit well with the socio-culture context and expect it to be implemented in its original form. A teaching and learning approach is only effective when both lecturers and students are willing to implement it with confidence. Data analysis revealed that Vietnamese lecturers were happy to accept the idea of learner autonomy but there was little evidence of its use in practice.

Policymakers are encouraged to take an “ideological” attitude to educational reforms and pedagogical innovation. An “ideological” attitude acknowledges the cultural diversity around the world and rejects the notion of universally appropriate ways of
teaching and learning. An “autonomous” attitude to educational reform assumes that a pedagogy which is effective in one socio-cultural context also works in a different context (Hinkel, 1999). That some practices associated to learner autonomy are incompatible with those found in the traditional Vietnamese teaching and learning does not mean that learner autonomy is locally impossible. It is advisable to investigate aspects of learner autonomy which fit with local sociocultural factors. Those aspects could then be utilised in the local context without entirely changing the classroom etiquette.

In the case of learner autonomy, there are also a number of features which align with Vietnamese approaches to education. High respect for teachers could mean that once teachers implement a teaching strategy, students are likely to accept it. Lectures can introduce the concept of learner autonomy to students and devise ways in which learner autonomy is enhanced. Greater learner autonomy can be integrated into local pedagogical values and practices without threatening deep-rooted belief systems. Policymakers should take a cautiously eclectic approach. Such an approach should be results of well-informed pedagogical choices and thorough inspection of all the socio-cultural attributes concerned.

Secondly, Vietnamese policymakers should pay attention to lecturers’ heavy workload and low salaries. A heavy workload is a major barrier to lecturers’ supporting learner autonomy in their teaching practices. Lecturers need time to focus on each class and each individual student. Lecturers of English often do out-of-class teaching or extra private teaching to make up for their low official incomes (Anh, 2014). There is a necessity to reduce lecturers’ workload to allow sufficient time for them to devote to students as individuals.
More generally, policymakers should pay more attention to lecturers’ conditions. Lecturers reported that they were unhappy with their heavy workload, obsolete textbooks, irrelevant testing and assessment system, and poor resources. Their classroom practice, however, revealed that most of the lessons were more or less adapted and invested to make them appropriate to specific groups of students in terms of their backgrounds or English proficiency. This indicated that lecturers, though fully aware of what might discourage them in enacting learner autonomy, tried to figure out their own solutions. By listening to lecturers’ ideas and opinions, policymakers could sustain their efforts and devise more effective ways to help them. If lecturers are allowed more say over the English language education policies influencing what happen in their classrooms, they could change their practices to accommodate more learner autonomy in their classes.

8.2.2 Recommendations for institutions

First, there should be ongoing professional development to enrich lecturers’ knowledge of ways to encourage learner autonomy. A large proportion of the interview participants expressed uncertainty and confusion about how to implement autonomy. As learner autonomy is a concept which has been “borrowed” or “imported” from Western societies, it has embedded in it cultural values from the West. This can be confusing. Sources of confusion must be addressed in the professional development program.

Professional development programs could be conducted in different ways and at different levels. For example, universities could financially support lecturers’ attendance at international, national and regional conferences. At the institutional level, international research initiatives could investigate learner autonomy in Confucian-based
cultures. Overseas guest lecturers or scholars could be invited and recruited to participate. All those activities could help lecturers to understand how learner autonomy can be encouraged in non-Western contexts.

Universities could create communication platforms where lecturers of English share their experiences and effective teaching strategies to develop learner autonomy. They could be at the national or regional level. Different locations might provide different perspectives on fostering learner autonomy in English classrooms. Professional networks focusing on supporting learner autonomy might then be created. At the faculty and university level, ongoing workshops should be hosted so that lecturers can exchange theoretical and practical ideas on learner autonomy.

Second, universities should upgrade their infrastructure and resources. Poor teaching conditions hinder limit learner autonomy. Low number of computers with internet access is a major restriction to learner autonomy. There have been studies investigating how computer assisted language learning (CALL) can facilitate the development of learner autonomy (Crystal, 2013; Levy & Hubbard, 2005). A limited supply of reading materials also restricts Vietnamese students’ ability to learn independently (T. H. T. Pham, 2011). A good environment for learner autonomy is a rich-resource one. With a limited supply of materials, students become overly dependent on teachers and explicit instruction. A shortage of textbooks, teaching materials, teaching equipment, and self-access centres makes improving learner autonomy a challenging task for all stakeholders in the education system.

Universities need to modify classroom layouts, fittings, and furnishings to enable more active learning to take place. Flexible desks, comfortable chairs, and settings suitable
for group discussion and collaboration are essential. Improvements in classroom
decoration, lighting, projectors, online screens, and whiteboards should occur.

Third, universities in Vietnam should have a long-term strategic plan to downsize the
English classes. The current sizes of the English classes were reported to be
constraining learner autonomy. Lecturers found their large classes challenging in giving
their students individual attention which is crucial in supporting learner autonomy.
Higher education institutions are therefore to be urged to design and construct a step-by-
step plan targeting at smaller English classes.

8.2.3 Recommendations for lecturers

Learner autonomy should be gradually introduced into English classes. Sweeping away
traditional teaching practices like the teacher-centred nature of classes and the related
nature of teacher-student relationship would be counter-productive. Out-of-class
autonomy seems an appropriate way to begin the long process of promoting learner
autonomy. Students working cooperatively in class should be encouraged.

First, more homework should be given to students. Their ability to work independently
should be enhanced. Present conditions in classes are not conducive to learner
autonomy. Lecturers seem to reluctantly offer their students the power to decide in the
class time. With more open out-of-class learning tasks assigned, students have more
time to exercise their autonomy. In addition, by carefully choosing and delegating
quality homework to the students, lecturers are at the same time practising their support
for learner autonomy without confronting themselves with beliefs in their authoritarian
power in classes.
Second, students’ ability to learn cooperatively should be encouraged both in and out of classes. Learning tasks which focus on students’ ability to learn cooperatively appear to suit students’ preference for working together (Vietnam has been described as a collectivist culture). Cooperative learning can enhance learner autonomy. Lecturers should use group activities including pair work, group work, group portfolios, group presentations, and group projects.

Third, lecturers should prepare themselves for a shift in role from knowledge transmitter to learning facilitator. Learner autonomy does not mean learning without teachers. Rather, it entails a change in the way students perceive teachers and a change in the way teachers perceive themselves. Lecturers should be willing to guide students in their learning rather than transmitting knowledge in textbooks to students. It is impossible, and not necessary, to change the teacher-student relationship which has been deeply influenced by the Confucius culture. It is advisable for the lecturers to be more friendly, open and responsive to students’ criticism.

8.2.4 Recommendations for students

Students should understand that they are preparing for careers after university. The “old” learning approach, characterised as “passive learning,” should change to more “active learning” and “independence”. Lecturers in the current study complained that their students were unwilling to become more active learners even if encouraged to do so. Students are therefore strongly recommended to firstly acknowledge lecturers’ support by cooperative attitudes towards lecturers’ attempts in fostering their autonomy both in and out the classrooms.
Secondly, technology applications should be used as a pathway to learner autonomy. As noted, a rich-resource environment is a good environment for learner autonomy (Benson, 2001; Levy & Hubbard, 2005). Too much dependence on lecturers hinders students’ autonomy. Internet webpages, online education programs, distance learning, and so on should be available to students, provided that these sources are carefully selected. In this process of using technology to enhance learner autonomy, lecturers can provide students with guidance and support.

8.2.5 Recommendation for primary and secondary schools

Promoting learner autonomy is a long process which requires initiatives at the school level. Students do not become autonomous learners as they enter university. Schools should enhance students’ autonomy from an early age as primary and secondary students. Failing to nurture learner autonomy from an early stage in the primary and secondary schools would result in tertiary students who stay passively in the university classes in exactly the way they do in their school-age period. If critical thinking and independent learning are supported in schools, learner autonomy could flourish in higher education.

Figure 8.1 shows the recommendations to policymakers, tertiary institutions, lecturers, students, and schools.
Figure 8.1 Summary of recommendations to promote learner autonomy
8.3 Contribution of the study

The current study is one among the first studies aiming at a locally-constructed definition of learner autonomy. Learner autonomy is an “imported” concept from the West. How do Vietnamese EFL lecturers understand the concept? In the Vietnamese context, it appears that teachers are exerting more influence on learner autonomy than in Western contexts. Given the paucity of knowledge about learner autonomy in Vietnam, this study adds substantially to our understanding of the implementation of learner autonomy in Vietnamese higher education institutions.

The findings from the study have identified important issues in the promotion of learner autonomy in universities. The recommendations of the study provide policymakers, university administrators, lecturers, and students with a framework to enhance learner autonomy in learning English at the tertiary level in Vietnam. The study provides important insights for educators and policymakers in Vietnam to review the EFL education at universities. The EFL curriculum and the testing and assessment system in Vietnamese higher education sector needs to be modified so as to better implement and foster learner autonomy as a supporting factor for better English performance outcomes.

Methodologically, this study used a mixed-methods design with both qualitative and quantitative data collection, especially the use of classroom observations. Most previous studies on learner autonomy in Vietnam have used a quantitative approach only. Use of in-depth interviews with a large number of participants and classroom observation adds depth to the current study. Lecturers’ opinions and ideas (indicated in the survey and the interviews) were triangulated with their classroom behaviour.
An important contribution of the current study is its practical implications for policymakers. It shows the danger of applying imported pedagogy from the West without taking social and cultural differences into consideration. Applying Western-developed ideas into the context of Vietnam without detailed and well-designed guidance from the top is likely to result in failure.

The current study has focused on lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in higher education in Vietnam. Its findings, however, may have implications for the higher education sectors in other Asian countries, especially those who share a Confucian heritage.

8.4 Limitations of the study

There were some limitations in the current study. First, the research is limited in scope in that it explores lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in a small number of universities in northern Vietnam. All the data were gathered in five universities located in one major city in Vietnam. Thus, the findings cannot be generalised to other contexts.

Second, data from in-depth interviews and classroom observations were gained from lecturers who volunteered to take part in these activities. To what extent are their responses and behaviours representative of the wider population of EFL lecturers in Vietnam? Often lecturers who consent to participate in interviews or have their classes observed are those who are more enthusiastic and confident lecturers. However, it should also be noted here that there was strong consistency between the findings from interviews, classroom observation, and the survey.
Third, learner autonomy was investigated from lecturers’ perspectives only. What would emerge from an examination of students’ attitudes to autonomy?

### 8.5 Suggestions for further research

The current research is cross-sectional and exploratory, with data collected from five universities in one city in Vietnam. There should be further research on lecturers’ attitude to learner autonomy in more universities from different regions of the country.

Further research could develop a model or an appropriate pedagogy to enhance learner autonomy for teachers’ professional development either during their preparation as teachers or in in-service activities. It is important to note that such a model is missing in current EFL teacher training programs.

Third, learner autonomy should be investigated from students’ perspectives. Findings from students could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the attitudes towards learner autonomy in Vietnamese higher education.

Finally, it might be useful to consider learner autonomy at the tertiary level in Vietnam from a broader policy perspective. Why have the Vietnamese Government and its Ministry of Education and Training put such a stress on learner autonomy, even though they have not issued any models for teachers to use in their classroom practices?

### 8.6 General conclusion

This study was an investigation into lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy and how these attitudes were manifest in their teaching practices. Overall, lecturers held positive attitudes to fostering learner autonomy. However, they did not use strategies to
make use of learner autonomy in their classrooms. The underlying reasons for the gap between lecturers’ endorsement of learner autonomy and their limited use of it include lecturers’ and students’ adherence to traditional teaching and learning approaches, lack of time and resources, a centralised curriculum and assessment regime with a heavy focus on examinations.

Having said that, there were ways (including out-of-class learning and students’ willingness to learn cooperatively) in which lecturers could at least begin to enhance learner autonomy. Pedagogical change, especially when it comes from Western sources, should only be implemented when it is grounded in an understanding of local sociocultural attitudes and practices.
References


Dang, H. V. (2006). *Constructions of an Active Language Learner in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teacher Education in Vietnam*. (Doctor of Philosophy), University of South Australia, Australia.


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Klaus, S. (2012). *Learner autonomy and Virtual environments in CALL*: Taylor and Francis Publisher.


Appendix 3A. Ethics Approval and Related Documents

3A1. Certificate of Approval

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Notification of Expedited Approval

To: Chief Investigator or Project Supervisor
    Doctor Jennifer Archer

Co-Co-investigators / Research Students:
    Associate Professor Shen Chen
    Ms Nhung Bui Thi

Re: Protocol:
    Investigating university lecturers' attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam

Date:
    23 May 2013

Reference No.:
    H.2013.0122

Date of Initial Approval:
    23 May 2013

Thank you for your Response to Conditional Approval (minor amendments) submission to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) seeking approval in relation to the above protocol.

Your submission was considered under Expedited review by the Ethics Administrator.

I am pleased to advise that the decision on your submission is Approved effective 23-May-2013.

In approving this protocol, the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) is of the opinion that the project complies with the provisions contained in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007, and the requirements within this University relating to human research.

Approval will remain valid subject to the submission, and satisfactory assessment, of annual progress reports. If the approval of an External HREC has been “noted” the approval period is as determined by that HREC.

The full Committee will be asked to ratify this decision at its next scheduled meeting. A formal Certificate of Approval will be available upon request. Your approval number is H.2013.0122.

If the research requires the use of an Information Statement, ensure this number is inserted at the relevant point in the Complaints paragraph prior to distribution to potential participants. You may then proceed with the research.

Conditions of Approval

This approval has been granted subject to you complying with the requirements for Monitoring of Progress, Reporting of Adverse Events and Variations to the Approved Protocol as detailed below.

PLEASE NOTE:
In the case where the HREC has "noted" the approval of an External HREC, progress reports and reports of adverse events are to be submitted to the External HREC only. In the case of Variations to the approved protocol, or a Renewal of approval, you will apply to the External HREC for approval in the first instance and then Register that approval with the University’s HREC.

- Monitoring of Progress
Other than above, the University is obliged to monitor the progress of research projects involving human participants to ensure that they are conducted according to the protocol as approved by the HREC. A progress report is required on an annual basis. Continuation of your HREC approval for this project is conditional upon receipt, and satisfactory assessment, of annual progress reports. You will be advised when a report is due.

- **Reporting of Adverse Events**

1. It is the responsibility of the person **first named on this Approval Advice** to report adverse events.
2. Adverse events, however minor, must be recorded by the investigator as observed by the investigator or as volunteered by a participant in the research. Full details are to be documented, whether or not the investigator, or his/her deputies, consider the event to be related to the research substance or procedure.
3. Serious or unforeseen adverse events that occur during the research or within six (6) months of completion of the research, must be reported by the person first named on the Approval Advice to the (HREC) by way of the Adverse Event Report form (via RIMS at https://rims.newcastle.edu.au/login.asp) within 72 hours of the occurrence of the event or the investigator receiving advice of the event.
4. Serious adverse events are defined as:
   - Causing death, life threatening or serious disability.
   - Causing or prolonging hospitalisation.
   - Overdoses, cancers, congenital abnormalities, tissue damage, whether or not they are judged to be caused by the investigational agent or procedure.
   - Causing psycho-social and/or financial harm. This covers everything from perceived invasion of privacy, breach of confidentiality, or the diminution of social reputation, to the creation of psychological fears and trauma.
   - Any other event which might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.
5. Reports of adverse events must include:
   - Participant's study identification number;
   - date of birth;
   - date of entry into the study;
   - treatment arm (if applicable);
   - date of event;
   - details of event;
   - the investigator's opinion as to whether the event is related to the research procedures; and
   - action taken in response to the event.
6. Adverse events which do not fallwithin the definition of serious or unexpected, including those reported from other sites involved in the research, are to be reported in detail at the time of the annual progress report to the HREC.

- **Variations to approved protocol**

If you wish to change, or deviate from, the approved protocol, you will need to submit an Application for Variation to Approved Human Research (via RIMS at https://rims.newcastle.edu.au/login.asp). Variations may include, but are not limited to, changes or additions to investigators, study design, study population, number of participants, methods of recruitment, or participant information/consent documentation. **Variations must be approved by the (HREC) before they are implemented** except when Registering an approval of a variation from an external HREC which has been designated the lead HREC, in which case you may proceed as soon as you receive an acknowledgement of your Registration.

**Linkage of ethics approval to a new Grant**

HREC approvals cannot be assigned to a new grant or award (i.e those that were not identified on the application for ethics approval) without confirmation of the approval from the Human Research Ethics Officer on behalf of the HREC.

Best wishes for a successful project.
Professor Allyson Holbrook
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

For communications and enquiries:
Human Research Ethics Administration
Research Services
Research Integrity Unit
The Chancellery
The University of Newcastle
Callaghan NSW 2308
T +61 2 492 18999
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Human.Ethics@newcastle.edu.au


Linked University of Newcastle administered funding:

<table>
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<th>Funding project title</th>
<th>First named investigator</th>
<th>Grant Ref</th>
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Appendix 3A2. Information Statement for Faculty

Information Statement for Faculty

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

Associate Professor Shen Chen
School of Education, Faculty of Education and Arts
The University of Newcastle
University Drive, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia
Phone: (+61) 2 4921 6705
Shen.Chen@newcastle.edu.au

INFORMATION STATEMENT FOR HEAD OF FACULTY

Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam

HREC Number: H-2013-0122

Dear…..,

We seek your permission to allow your staff to participate in the research project identified above which is part of Bui Thi Nhung’s studies at the University of Newcastle supervised by Associate Professor Shen Chen and Dr Jennifer Archer from the School of Education, Faculty of Education and Arts at the University of Newcastle.

Why is the research being done?

The purpose of the research is to investigate the attitudes and behaviours of lecturers who are teaching English at the tertiary level. The research is focused on efforts in the Vietnamese higher education sector to promote the teaching and learning of foreign languages in general and English in particular. Part of the dilemma in Vietnam, as in other Asian countries, is how to encourage students to be more independent in their learning.
Who can participate in the research?
Participants of the project are lecturers in your Faculty who are currently teaching English to non-English major students.

What choice do lecturers have?
Participation in this research is entirely their choice. Only people who give their informed consent will be included in the project.

What will lecturers be asked to?
The lecturers of your Faculty are asked to complete a questionnaire. All documents are attached to this letter. In addition, a smaller number of lecturers will be asked to participate in individual interviews with the researcher. The researcher will also ask a small number of lecturers to allow her to observe their classes. The questionnaire should take about 20 to 30 minutes to complete. The interviews are approximately 20 minutes long and will be audio-recorded. The observation should last the length of an English lesson.

Bui Thi Nhung will be observing the lecturers, not the students. She will take steps to minimise any disruption to students’ learning. She requests that students in classes to be observed are advised, in advance, that this will be happening (either via student email or another method of alerting them) and invited to contact her if they have queries or concerns.

What are the risks and benefits of participating?
There are no risks in participating in the research project. Lecturers may not benefit directly from the research. They can email the researcher asking to be provided with a report of the study once it is finished. It is anticipated that the results of the study will be of benefit to English lecturers in the future. The researcher intends to devise strategies lecturers can use to enhance autonomy in their learners.

How will privacy be protected?
Data will be stored in the researcher’s individual locker at the Faculty of English for Specific Purposes at Foreign Trade University in Vietnam. When the researcher returns
to Newcastle, the data will be locked in a secured cabinet in the researcher’s personal office at the University. After the degree is awarded, the data will be kept in a lockable cabinet in the supervisor’s office for at least 5 years. Only the project supervisor, co-supervisor and the researcher have access to the data.

Participants’ privacy and confidentiality will be respected in this research. No individuals or universities will be identified in any reports and publications.

**How will the information collected be used?**
The project is the foundation of a PhD thesis. It is expected that research articles and conference presentations will be generated from the thesis. Individual participants or individual universities will not be identified in any reports arising from the project. The results of the research will be summarised in a project report. If you would like to have a copy of the report, please email the researcher.

**What would you be asked to do?**
If you are happy for your staff to participate in the study, please complete and return the Consent Form to the researcher Bui Thi Nhung via email (nhung.buithi@uon.edu.au) or send it to the following address:

Bui Thi Nhung, Faculty of English, Foreign Trade University, 91 Chua Lang St, Dong Da, Hanoi.

Should you agree to participate, you are asked to distribute information about the research to eligible lecturing staff within your Faculty for their consideration. You are also asked to arrange access to your Faculty meeting room as a venue for interviews.

**Further information**
If you would like further information please contact the researcher, Bui Thi Nhung, email address: nhung.buithi@uon.edu.au or telephone: (+61) 450 918 246, or the principal supervisor, A/Professor Shen Chen, email address: Shen.Chen@newcastle.edu.au or telephone (+61 2) 4921 6705.

Once Bui Thi Nhung has received your consent, she will send you multiple copies of the information sheet, questionnaire, consent form, and a box for completed
questionnaires and completed consent forms for interviews and/or classroom observation.

Thank you for considering this invitation.
Yours sincerely,

PhD student
Bui Thi Nhung
Faculty of Education and Arts
The University of Newcastle
Email: nhung.buithi@uon.edu.au
Phone: (+61) 450 918 246

Principal Supervisor
A/Professor Shen Chen
Faculty of Education and Arts
The University of Newcastle
Email: Shen.Chen@newcastle.edu.au
Phone: (+61 2) 4921 6705

Complaints about this research
This project has been approved by the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval No. H-2013-0122.
Should you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which the research is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to the Human Research Ethics Officer, Research Office, The Chancellery, The University of Newcastle, University Drive, Callaghan NSW 2308, Australia, telephone (02) 49216333, email Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au.

Complaints or queries about this research could be directed to the local contact below:
Mr Pham Gia Tri, Dean, Faculty of English for Special Purposes – Foreign Trade University
91 Chua Lang St, Dong Da, Hanoi, Level 3 Building B
Phone: +84 438356800 (ext. 555)
Email: phamgiatri@gmail.com
Appendix 3A3. Information Statement for Lecturers

Information Statement for Lecturers

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

Associate Professor Shen Chen
School of Education
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The University of Newcastle
University Drive, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia
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Shen.Chen@newcastle.edu.au

INFORMATION STATEMENT FOR EFL LECTURERS

Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy
in the EFL context in Vietnam

HREC Number: H-2013-0122

You are invited to participate in the research project identified above which is part of
Bui Thi Nhung’s PhD studies at the University of Newcastle supervised by Associate
Professor Shen Chen and Dr Jennifer Archer from the Faculty of Education and Arts.

Why is the research being done?

The purpose of the research is to investigate the attitudes and behaviours of lecturers
who are currently teaching English at the tertiary level. The research is proposed in light
of on-going efforts in the Vietnamese higher education sector to promote the teaching
and learning of English. Part of the dilemma in Vietnam, as in other Asian countries, is
how to encourage more independence in students’ learning.
The research is part of Bui Thi Nhung’s doctoral thesis.
Who can participate in the research?
If you are a lecturer who is teaching English to non-English major students at a university in Hanoi, you are invited to be a participant in the research.

What choice do you have?
Participation in this research is entirely your choice. Only those people who give their informed consent will be included in the project. Whether or not you decide to participate, your decision will not disadvantage you.

If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw from the project without giving a reason and have the option of withdrawing any data which identify you. However, if you choose to participate in the anonymous questionnaire, please note that you will not be able to withdraw your data once the data have been analysed and included in the thesis.

What would you be asked to do?
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire about your attitudes towards learner autonomy. The questionnaire is in English. We hope you will complete and return the questionnaire to a designated box in the Faculty’s Meeting Room within two weeks.

In addition, you are invited to participate in a recorded individual face-to-face interview with the researcher. The interviews will be conducted in English, out of the class time, on campus, and at a time that suits you. The interview recording will be transcribed by the student researcher. You can request to review and edit the transcript should you wish to do so.

You are also invited to allow the researcher to observe you teaching an English class and for the researcher to take notes during observations. The focus of the observation will be your teaching strategies. Do you make use of teaching strategies that enhance autonomy in your students?
A package containing the questionnaire and the consent form (for the interviews and observation) will be put in your Faculty mailbox. If you choose to participate by returning the questionnaire, you are not obligated to agree to be interviewed or to be observed.

**How much time will it take?**
The questionnaire should take from 20 to 30 minutes to complete. The interviews are approximately 20 minute long and will be audio-recorded. The observation will be the normal length of an English lesson.

**What are the risks and benefits of participating?**
There are no risks in participating in the research project. You will not benefit directly from the research.

We hope the findings of the study will be of benefit to EFL teachers in Vietnam. The researcher intends to provide a set of appropriate strategies lecturers can use to enhance learner autonomy in Vietnam.

**How will your privacy be protected?**
Data will be stored in the researcher’s individual locker at the Faculty of English at Foreign Trade University in Vietnam. When the researcher returns to Newcastle, the data will be locked in a secured cabinet in the researcher’s personal office at the University. After the degree is awarded, the data will be kept in a lockable cabinet in the supervisor’s office for at least 5 years. Only the project supervisor, co-supervisor and the researcher have access to the data.

Participants’ privacy and confidentiality will be respected in this research. No individuals will be identified in any reports or publications.

**How will the information collected be used?**
The project is the foundation of a PhD thesis. It is expected that research articles and conference presentations will be generated from the thesis. Individual participants will not be identified in any reports arising from the project.
The results of the research will be summarised in a project report. Participants wishing to obtain the results are invited to contact the researcher via email.

**What do you need to do to participate?**

Please read this Information Statement and be sure you understand its contents before you consent to participate. If there is anything you do not understand, or you have questions, contact the researcher.

If you would like to participate, please complete and return the anonymous questionnaire to the designated box in your Faculty’s Meeting Room within two weeks. If you also would like to participate in the interviews and/or observation, please indicate your option(s) in the consent form and return it to the above-mentioned box. The researcher will contact you to arrange a time convenient to you for the interview and/or observation.

**Further information**

If you would like further information please contact the researcher, Bui Thi Nhung, email address: nhung.buithi@uon.edu.au or telephone : (+61) 450 918 246, or the principal supervisor, A/Prof. Shen Chen, email address: Shen.Chen@newcastle.edu.au or telephone (+61 2) 4921 6705.

Thank you for considering this invitation.

Yours sincerely,

**PhD student**

Bui Thi Nhung  
Faculty of Education and Arts  
The University of Newcastle  
Email: nhung.buithi@uon.edu.au  
Phone: (+61) 450 918 246

**Principal Supervisor**

A/Professor Shen Chen  
Faculty of Education and Arts  
The University of Newcastle  
Email: Shen.Chen@newcastle.edu.au  
Phone: (+61 2) 4921 6705
Complaints about this research
This project has been approved by the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval No. H-2013-0122.
Should you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which the research is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to the Human Research Ethics Officer, Research Office, The Chancellery, The University of Newcastle, University Drive, Callaghan NSW 2308, Australia, telephone (02) 49216333, email Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au.

Complaints or queries about this research could be directed to the local contact below:
Mr Pham Gia Tri, Dean, Faculty of English for Special Purposes – Foreign Trade University
91 Chua Lang St, Dong Da, Hanoi, Level 3 Building B
Phone: +84 438356800 (ext. 555)
Email: phamgiatri@gmail.com
Appendix 3A4. Consent form for Dean of Faculty

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

Associate Professor Shen Chen
School of Education
Faculty of Education and Arts
The University of Newcastle
University Drive, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia
Phone: (+61) 2 4921 6705
Email: Shen.Chen@newcastle.edu.au

Consent Form for Dean of Faculty

Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy
in the EFL context in Vietnam

Associate Professor Shen Chen                    Ms. Bui Thi Nhung
Project Supervisor                        Research Student

HREC Number: H-2-13-0122

I grant the researcher permission to approach lecturers of English at my faculty about participating in the study. Participation may include one or more of the following:

1. Completing an anonymous questionnaire.
2. Attending an individual face-to-face interview.
3. Allowing observation of an English class.

I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement, a copy of which I have retained.

I understand that all personal information will remain confidential to the researchers. I have had the opportunity to have questions answered to my satisfaction.

Print Name: _________________________________________________________________
Name of Faculty and University: _______________________________________________
Address of University: ___________________________________________________________
Faculty Contact Details: _________________________________________________________
Signature: ___________________________  Date: ________________________________
Appendix 3A5. Consent Forms for Lecturers (Interviews)

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

Associate Professor Shen Chen
School of Education
Faculty of Education and Arts
The University of Newcastle
University Drive, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia
Phone: (+61) 2 4921 6705
Shen.Chen@newcastle.edu.au

Consent Form for Lecturers

Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam

Associate Professor Shen Chen
Project Supervisor
Ms. Bui Thi Nhung
Research Student

HREC Number: H-2013-0122

I ……………………………… (agree / do not agree) to be interviewed.

I understand that I can review and edit the transcript of my interview.
I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement, a copy of which I have retained.
I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.
I understand that all personal information will remain confidential to the researchers.
I have had the opportunity to have questions answered to my satisfaction.

Print Name: _____________________________________________________________
Name of Faculty and University: ___________________________________________
Signature: __________________________ Date: ________________________________
Email / Phone number: ___________________________________________________
Appendix 3A6. Consent Form for Lecturers (Observations)

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

Associate Professor Shen Chen  
School of Education  
Faculty of Education and Arts  
The University of Newcastle  
University Drive, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia  
Phone: (+61) 2 4921 6705  
Shen.Chen@newcastle.edu.au

Consent Form for Lecturers

Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy  
in the EFL context in Vietnam

Associate Professor Shen Chen  
Ms. Bui Thi Nhung  
Project Supervisor  
Research Student

HREC Number: H-2013-0122 

I ……………………………… (agree / do not agree) to allow Bui Thi Nhung to observe one  
of my English classes and to take observation notes.

I understand that I can review and edit the transcript of my interview.  
I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement, a copy  
of which I have retained.  
I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to  
give any reason for withdrawing.  
I understand that all personal information will remain confidential to the researchers.  
I have had the opportunity to have questions answered to my satisfaction.

Print Name:  
Name of Faculty and University:  
Signature: ______________________ Date: ______________________  
Email / Phone number:  

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Appendix 3B. Survey

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

Associate Professor Shen Chen
School of Education
Faculty of Education and Arts
The University of Newcastle
University Drive, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia
Phone: (+61) 2 4921 6705
Shen.Chen@newcastle.edu.au

Project title

INVESTIGATING UNIVERSITY LECTURERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEARNER AUTONOMY IN THE EFL CONTEXT IN VIETNAM

Instruction:

- It should take about 25 minutes to complete the survey.
- Please respond to the survey at a time and place convenient to you.
- Please return the completed survey to the designated box in your Faculty’s Meeting Room within two weeks.
The goal of the study is to investigate the development of learner autonomy in English language teaching and learning at tertiary level in Vietnam. Participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time. You will not be identified in any report of the study. There are no right or wrong answers here - we are interested in your views about learner autonomy. Thank you for your cooperation. It will take about 25 minutes to complete this questionnaire. Please tick in the square to indicate your answers.

**Part A. Background information**

Please tell us about your background.

1. Years of experience as an English language teacher (Tick ONE)
   - 0-4  
   - 5-9  
   - 10-14  
   - 15-19  
   - 20-24  
   - 25+  

2. Highest qualification (Tick ONE)
   - Bachelors  
   - Masters  
   - Doctorate  
   - Other  

3. Gender (Tick ONE)  
   - Male  
   - Female  

4. At the university, in which English programme are you most involved?  

5. Do your qualifications include a specialisation in EFL teaching?  
   - Yes  
   - No  

**Part B. Please tick in the square to indicate your answers.**

**Section 1: Interpretations of Learner Autonomy**

Please give your opinion about the statements below by ticking ONE answer for each. The statements do not refer specifically to your current teaching position. In answering, consider your experience as a language teacher more generally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.</td>
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<td>3. Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher.</td>
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<td>4. It is harder to promote learner autonomy with proficient language learners than it is with beginning language learners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>5. It is possible to promote learner autonomy with both school-age</td>
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<td>language learners and with adults.</td>
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<td>6. Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy</td>
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<td>than those who lack confidence.</td>
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<td>7. Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more</td>
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<td>effectively than they otherwise would.</td>
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<td>8. Learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all cultural</td>
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<td>backgrounds.</td>
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<td>9. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in</td>
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<td>the activities they do.</td>
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<td>10. Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centred</td>
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<td>classrooms.</td>
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<td>11. Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give</td>
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<td>learners the opportunity to learn from each other.</td>
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<td>12. Learner autonomy implies a rejection of traditional teacher-led</td>
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<td>ways of teaching.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Learner autonomy cannot develop without the help of the teacher.</td>
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<td>14. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can decide how their</td>
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<td>learning will be assessed.</td>
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<td>15. Learner autonomy is a concept which is not suited to non-Western</td>
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<td>learners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Cooperative group work activities support the development of</td>
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<tr>
<td>learner autonomy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Promoting autonomy is easier with beginning language learners</td>
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<td>than with more proficient language learners.</td>
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<td>18. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own</td>
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<td>learning materials.</td>
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<td>19. Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy.</td>
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<td>20. Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner</td>
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<tr>
<td>autonomy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. The ability to monitor one’s learning is central to learner autonomy.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
22. Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.

23. The teacher has an important role in supporting learner autonomy.

24. Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner.

25. To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.

Section 2. Responsibilities

When you’re teaching English classes, who has the responsibility for the following activities? Please respond to each item twice: to rate your responsibility and then to rate the responsibility of your students.
Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam

31. To decide the objectives of their English course?  
   Teacher? □ □ □ □ □  
   Students? □ □ □ □ □

32. To decide what they should learn next in your English lessons?  
   Teacher? □ □ □ □ □  
   Students? □ □ □ □ □

33. To choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons?  
   Teacher? □ □ □ □ □  
   Students? □ □ □ □ □

34. To decide how long to spend on each activity in class?  
   Teacher? □ □ □ □ □  
   Students? □ □ □ □ □

35. To choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lessons?  
   Teacher? □ □ □ □ □  
   Students? □ □ □ □ □

36. To evaluate their learning?  
   Teacher? □ □ □ □ □  
   Students? □ □ □ □ □

37. To evaluate the course?  
   Teacher? □ □ □ □ □  
   Students? □ □ □ □ □

38. To decide what they learn outside class?  
   Teacher? □ □ □ □ □  
   Students? □ □ □ □ □

Section 3. Students’ abilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your students in general are able to:</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39. Identify their needs</td>
<td>□</td>
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<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>40. Identify their strengths</td>
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<tr>
<td>41. Identify their weaknesses</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>42. Monitor their progress</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>43. Evaluate their learning</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>44. Learn cooperatively</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>45. Learn independently</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 4. Factors affecting learner autonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you think the following factors enhance learner autonomy?</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46. Current EFL teaching approach</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>47. Current learning styles of the students</td>
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<tr>
<td>48. Current curriculum and textbooks</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. Current ways of assessing students</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. Current learning environment</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>51. Current resources</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>52. National and institutional policies on English language education</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>53. Vietnamese socio-cultural context</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>54. Current teachers’ teaching load</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>55. Current students’ learning load</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Section 5. Teaching strategies

For each statement:

a. First say how important you think each strategy is.

b. Then say how often you have actually used the strategy in your teaching practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of importance</th>
<th>Frequency of usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not important at all</td>
<td>Not important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never/almost never</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Always/almost always</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

56. Help students to identify their strengths and weaknesses in learning English

57. Help students to set up their learning goals

58. Help students to decide what to learn outside class

59. Help students to evaluate their progress

60. Help students to stimulate their interest in learning English

61. Help students to learn from peers, not just from the teacher

62. Help students to be more self-directed in learning English rather than waiting for the teacher to give directions

63. Encourage students to offer opinions about what to learn in the classroom
Appendix 3C. Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Project Title: Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam

HREC Number: H-2013-0122

Start time of interview _______________ End time of interview _______________
Date of interview _______________ Venue of interview _______________
Interviewer __________________________ Participant __________________________

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

- Thank the interviewee for agreeing to the interview.
- To increase rapport and make the interview go smoothly, the researcher will switch language use (English or Vietnamese) to communicate easily with each participant.
- The primary focus of the interview is the participant’s attitudes towards learner autonomy. In particular, the participant is asked to express their opinions regarding the following:
  1. What are his/her interpretations of learner autonomy in the context of EFL education at the tertiary level in Vietnam?
  2. What are his/her perceptions of the encouraging and constraining factors for learner autonomy in English learning at the tertiary level in Vietnam?
  3. How should he/she act to promote learner autonomy as a means of improving EFL teaching at the tertiary level in Vietnam?
- Ask the interviewee if he/she has any queries before the interview begins.

II. LECTURER’S INTERPRETATIONS OF LEARNER AUTONOMY

1. Could you briefly define the term “learner autonomy” in English language learning?
2. Do you consider learner autonomy important in English learning? Why/Why not? In what ways?
3. Do you think that learning autonomously means that teachers are less important in learning?

4. Do you think that your English classes are teacher-centred or learner-centred?

III. LECTURER’S PERCEPTIONS OF ENCOURAGING AND CONSTRAINING FACTORS FOR LEARNER AUTONOMY

5. What do you think of the current EFL teaching approach at university? Does it enhance or constrain learner autonomy?

6. What do you think of your students’ current learning styles? Do these styles help or hinder learner autonomy? In what ways?

7. Do you think that the current curriculum and textbooks in your faculty are enhancing learner autonomy? Why/Why not?

8. Does the current testing and assessment system in your faculty help or hinder the development of learner autonomy? In what ways?

9. Do Vietnamese cultural values help or hinder the development of learner autonomy? In what ways?

IV. LECTURER’S SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTING LEARNER AUTONOMY

10. Have you done anything to encourage your students to become more autonomous in or outside the classroom? If yes, could you please explain in more detail? What have been the outcomes of your actions?

11. Are you planning to implement any strategies designed to enhance learner autonomy in your English classes?

12. Do you and your colleagues discuss ways of enhancing students’ autonomy? If you do, please explain how this occurs.

V. CLOSING

- Thank the interviewee for his/her time and participation.
- Ask the participant if s/he has any questions.
Appendix 3D. Observation Protocol

Classroom Observation Protocol

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name of University __________________________________________
Name of Lecturer _______________________________________________
Topic of Subject _______________________________________________
Student Number _____________________             Year _______________
Student Attendance _____________________________
Observer _______________________ Date of Observation _____________
Start time ______________________ End time _______________________
General description of the classroom setting, content and purpose of the lesson:
…………………………………………………………………………………………..
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II. OBSERVATIONS

Codes for Learner Autonomy Enhancing Strategies

SW: Helping students to identify their strengths and weaknesses in learning English
LG: Helping students to set up their learning goals
OC: Helping students to decide what to learn outside class
EP: Helping students to evaluate their progress
SI: Helping students to stimulate their interest in learning English
LP: Helping students to learn from peers, not just from teacher
SD: Helping students to be more self-directed in learning English rather than waiting for the teacher to give directions
OW: Encouraging students to offer opinions about what to learn in the classroom
OTH: Other (please describe)
1. Class Observation Record of Identifying Major Learner Autonomy Enhancing Strategies Used Through English Teaching Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Teaching Activities</th>
<th>Strategies Used</th>
<th>Reflective Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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## 2. Ratings of Using Frequency of Each Teaching Strategy

The numbers stand for the following items:

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<th>3</th>
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<td>observed rarely (once or twice)</td>
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<td>observed occasionally (3-4 times)</td>
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<td>observed often (&gt;50%)</td>
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<td>observed throughout (&gt;75%)</td>
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Appendix 3E. Interview transcript sample

Interviewer: This is the interview with Ms… an English lecturer of University…

Thank you so much for coming to the interview today. I highly appreciate your help. I must tell you first that the primary focus of the interview is your personal viewpoint towards learner autonomy. So please just feel free to speak out what you think because there are no right or wrong answers here. I firstly would like to know your understanding about learner autonomy – your own interpretation of the term learner autonomy. Could you please briefly define the term learner autonomy in English language learning in your own opinion in a few sentences please?

Interviewee: Okie, so when the word “autonomy” comes to my mind the first thing I think of is the thing that the students can do by themselves – everything they can do themselves like they can have the right to think, to give their own answers or their own opinions or the right or the opportunities for them to,.. uhm.. how can I say, to…express their own feelings, their own opinions, their own ideas without any limitation or barrier from anything else like from teachers or from the curriculums or anything. So the things that they students have things like power as well. Autonomy here also means the power students have in the lessons. Basically, that’s what I understand from the word.

Interviewer: Thank you. Do you consider learner autonomy important in English language learning?

Interviewee: Absolutely yes.

Interviewer: In what way?
Interviewee: Absolutely yes. But if I have to say in what way then it can be quite vague and it’s unclear. But generally I think that it is important because in language they need to learn the language skills or in other words we as teachers only equip them with the tools; in other words it is a useful language. And they need to use those useful languages for their own practice. So, if they don’t have chance to …to apply it themselves, then it doesn’t mean anything. Or it’s only the language of the teacher or of the book, of the radio cassette. And it cannot become their own thing. So, they need to shift or to switch the thing they learn to or in a bigger word – it’s the theory and they need to put it into practice by themselves and nobody can do it for them. So, that’s why it’s very important.

Interviewer: Yes, it’s useful for learners.

Interviewee: And it’s even more important in other subjects.

Interviewer: Uhm, do you think that students’ learning autonomy means that the teachers are less important in learning?

Interviewee: Well, I don’t think so. Because the teacher is still very important in the class. In any case, without the teacher the class cannot happen. It’s the first reason. And, another reason is that giving students the opportunity to do themselves doesn’t mean that the teacher has fewer burdens because they still need to keep an eye on what the students are doing, and the efficiency or the effectiveness of what they are doing as well. So, in other words, they have even more burdens because they need to control the practice of the students. So, maybe it’s harder, more difficult and more challenging for the students.
Interviewer: Many teachers also share that idea with you. So you even say that the teachers become more important; there are more things to do.

Interviewee: Hum, I think so.

Interviewer: Are you willing to get that kind of burden?

Interviewee: Well, if…provided that it will bring good effects and good performance among the students then I don’t mind to do so.

Interviewer: Yeah, it’s great.

Interviewee: Because what we are doing, what we are trying our best is for better, hum, how can I say….for better competency and better skills among the students. And that’s the utmost goal or objective. We do whatever we can to achieve that.

Interviewer: Yes, the reason why I asked you that question is some lecturers shared with me that there’s a teaching load. Sometimes, most of the time prevents them from being more creative, from being, how can I say, more cautious in promoting their students’ autonomy. Do you think that teaching load is also one factor that may hinder the development of learner autonomy?

Interviewee: Yes, I may agree with that because if …I can also see that difference in Vietnam and in other countries when teachers, especially university teachers have to teach a very moderate amount of lessons. They may…they will definitely have more time and more energy to do other things that they wish to do like preparing more carefully for the lessons. Or they can even be more energetic in the lesson, in one lesson than those who have to teach more lessons than them. I mean that the energy or the
power, the strength of each person is limited. And it is invested in this area in one activity then it is, how can I say, it is lesson than for others, other areas. Workload is one important factor I think. If we just have to, probably, the workload is half instead of too many lessons as now. And I am sure that they are more willing to do so.

Interviewer: How many lessons per week now are you responsible for? Approximately how many hours of lecturing English classes?

Interviewee: Ok, I am assigned to be in charge of, let me see, 6 or 7 classes. Then it makes up to 21 periods and each period accounts for 45 minutes. So, we can say it approximately 18 or 20 hours per week. That’s physically teaching, being at class. It means also with the time for the preparation, lesson plan and also marking the papers. And all together it can add up to, I don’t know but maybe 30 or 40 hours per week.

Interviewer: Yeah, it’s quite heavy workload actually for the university lecturers. Now let’s think of your English classes, generally, do you think they are more teacher-centred or more learner-centred?

Interviewee: I may say that it’s not too teacher-centred nowadays which means that it has been a shift from the traditional one to a more modern one to the student-centred learning. Because I can see that in the class now not only in my class but also in other teachers’ classes, students have more time for peer work, individual work and group work. They don’t only listen to what the teacher says and they also have the opportunity to give their own opinion. And they can also give some requests if they have any of what to learn or what material they can learn. I think that means it’s more student-centred.
Interviewer: Yes, if I understand you’re right. Then you’ve just shared that has been a shift from the teacher-centred to the student-centred and your classes are now also in the transition process. Is that right?

Interviewee: Yes, I think so. Because I myself also not too sure I am already in the end of the spectrum of student-centred learning. So, I can only say that it’s been a shift and it on the transition, on the transition process.

Interviewer: And it seems to be a long way, right? A long process?

Interviewee: Yes, and we can never say that it has finished because the student-centred learning itself means a lot of things. So maybe we can acquire only some aspects of that approach, not everything on the way.

Interviewer: I would like to move on to the second part of the interview in which I would like to know your perception of the factor that may affect learner autonomy, the factor that may enhance or constrain learner autonomy and the third factor that current ESL teaching approach at your university. Do you think the teaching approach a popular teaching approach now is enhancing or constraining learner autonomy?

Interviewee: Hum, well it is enhancing but maybe too more instant I suppose.

Interviewer: It’s enhancing but not so clearly.

Interviewee: Yeah, not so clearly

Interviewer: Not very fast.
Interviewee: Yeah, and of course it also has some restrictions of learner autonomy. Because we can see that many teachers now are trying to implement the student-centred learning and also the student autonomy. But not all of them have a clear perception of what they are doing, what it means. So, ideally if they are asked such a thing they would say that yes I want to but maybe they are not sure of what to do to achieve that. So I may say that because of the lack of or the vague understanding, the learner autonomy is not really enhanced or promoted in a proper way.

Interviewer: Yes, do you think that you are following the CLT and the CLT seems to be very fashionable now in Vietnam?

Interviewee: CLT…

Interviewer: CLT means Communicative language teaching

Interviewee: Yes, as what we are doing at FTU at the moment and also the curriculums and the textbooks that we are applying. It is, we can see/say that we are doing/applying the CLT approach. Yes, we can say so. Because we are now focusing a lot on the communication skills of the students. Because FTU’s students are supposed to have good communication skills, especially speaking and writing skills because they are necessary for them in the future when they are working. So, I think that not only me but other teachers as well; they are doing the same thing. But it depends on the skills as well, the skills we are teaching as well. Because we are teaching listening and speaking – for those skills they are easy to apply the CLT; for writing, it’s quite difficult because it’s more like we tell them/students what to do and the students write and then they will hand in their pieces of writing; the teacher will give feedback and maybe that’s the end. So, maybe in writing it’s not very communicative.
Interviewer: Yes, I see. How about another factor your students’ learning styles. Let think of the Foreign Trade University students’ learning styles. Do these styles help promote learner autonomy or not?

Interviewee: Yes, probably, generally. Because the FTU students are known as, believed to be active students who can initiate new ideas. So I think they are part of the reason why they are more active in their own learning. But that’s only generally because only part of the students do so because they are the top students – they are/ they can be the representatives of the university, but not everyone. Some of the students are still passive and still lazy with their homework and assignments. So, I think that the learning styles also influence their performance and effectiveness of their study. Those who are active and initiative, dynamic, initiated with a lot of initiations, initiatives I mean are more likely to have better results in their study and also better control their own study than those who are not.

Interviewer: In your opinion, which factors may affect their learning styles?

Interviewee: Ah, mostly their personality and their environment, and also some other small factors like family background, family’s financial status, and….

Interviewer: How about the level of English?

Interviewee: Yes, the level of English, I forget that. Their level of English also decides their confidence. Ok, and when they are confident, they can have…hum, how can I say, they can imagine a clearer route or a clearer road they can follow in their own study. If they don’t have a good level of English or their English is not good enough, they may get lost. For those students, they really need our help.
Interviewer: In that sense, do you think that it is easier to promote learner autonomy among high-level students?

Interviewee: Yes, I suppose so. I think so, yes, yes. Because when they know where they are, what they need, and then learner autonomy can be shown more clearly.

Interviewer: Yes, another factor is the current curriculum and textbook which are new in your faculty. Do you think this factor (curriculum and textbook) is favouring learner autonomy or not?

Interviewee: Hum, the curriculum and textbook at FTU, do you mean?

Interviewer: Yes

Interviewee: I think that yes they are also giving some room for the students to demonstrate their autonomy. Yes, they do but I am not really satisfied with the curriculum in here. There should be some changes but what change should be done is a big question and here they need further research and a lot of discussion around that topic. But I only feel that it’s not good enough for the students to show their ability or at least the assessment of framework is not strict or strong enough for autonomy because all of them - the marks in assessment framework are basically on tests. Yes, they are basically on the tests and marks are given based on right or wrong answers, not really for the amount of work that the students have done during the whole semester. That’s really restrictive the ability to assess the autonomy and because it’s not assessed officially, the students will not see the necessity to do so. That’s why, for example, in my writing classes I usually use one more tool to assess, that is, practicing portfolio in which the students have to do their own homework, a piece of homework each week;
that’s weekly assignment. And then I will assess on the whole process from the beginning to the end of the semester. I will give them a mark which accounts for 20% to their writing mark. And that’s what I can do but it’s not required by the faculty and it’s also not applied by other teachers.

Interviewer: Yes, I see. You mean that teachers have flexibility in curriculum, right? And in using the textbook?

Interviewee: Yes, even the textbooks are officially listed in the list and given to the students, we can still use more materials and also some more supplementary and also recommendation for the students to study, for self-study at home. And also, we can, at our university, we have the rule, the opportunity to decide components of the total mark for each skill, except for the test at the end. So, we can still do that. It’s just the teachers are not really required and they are not told to do it on a large basis, on a large scale.

Interviewer: It depends on each teacher.

Interviewee: Yes, that’s right. So, it’s not applied or it’s not done consistently.

Interviewer: Can the students negotiate with the teachers or with the faculty about the curriculum or textbook?

Interviewee: The curriculum or textbook…hum, I would say no. They will not change the textbook just because we say so. Because it’s agreed by the whole university, agreed by the President, the Director or the Principal of the university. So, if we need or want to change anything officially like that, it needs to go through the whole procedure.

Interviewer: And it will be very long.
Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think that the teachers should have a say in designing the curriculum and textbook?

Interviewee: Yes, they should. Because we are the practitioners so we need to give some feedback to the policy makers. Or otherwise, they cannot know whether the policy is good or not. So, we should have the right to do so.

Interviewer: Not yet now. You have just mentioned the testing and assessment system. Do you think that the testing and assessment system in your faculty now has some room for the students to be involved in, to include their ideas in. Or is the testing and assessment system developing learner autonomy or not?

Interviewee: Not much. As I said before the way we assess the students is on the test only and also the attendance. But the attendance doesn’t say anything about that. It doesn’t have any mark for the performance, the effort the students made during the whole semester.

Interviewer: But you said that when you give them to do the writing portfolio you ..

Interviewee: Yes, that’s what I do but the whole system in the university is not supported or not supporting that way. That’s what I am trying to make the current assessing system more supportive for the student-centred learning but also encourage them to make more efforts to pay more efforts on their own learning. Because you can imagine if they have only one test at the end of the semester, then who can say that they are trying their best during the whole semester? We cannot say so. And if we cannot control their efforts during the whole semester, then we somehow fail to see what they
are weak at and what they are good at; and generally the system in the university – the official one is not very supportive learner autonomy. It’s just up to the teachers to decide their class activities.

Interviewer: Do you mean that they need continuous assessment during the lesson?

Interviewee: Yes, I think so. And because if you say that the learner autonomy needs to be promoted in our university, then at the moment I can see that it depends a lot on individual perception and application among the teachers.

Interviewer: It depends more on the teachers than the students, do you think so?

Interviewee: Yes, I think so. The teachers need to be the facilitator. They need to direct the whole methodology of the class, including the teaching and the learning methodology in the way that they think they should be. The students, actually, when they go to the class they cannot know what they should do in the class. They may know what they should learn/ what they should achieve or their goal; but they cannot decide how they should. Or at least if they have, it is only very unclear. And they only feel that I like it or I don’t like it. They cannot sit there and design activities for the teachers. The teachers should be the persons who do so.

Interviewer: So here we see the more important role of the teachers in promoting learner autonomy. The final factor I would like to ask for your point of view is about Vietnamese culture value. Generally, do you think the social culture context in Vietnam helps or hinders the development of learner autonomy?

Interviewee: I would say it hinders. Because I am teaching at the university level but I know very well the system at secondary and high schools, especially in literature, for
example. Let’s just say literature as a vivid example. They don’t have a lot of chances to give their own opinion. But they need to say what the teachers or the examiners think is good. So, they end up with copies and mixing all the model essays instead of giving their own essays or their own opinions. If they give their own opinions, and sometimes those opinions are quite strange or too regional to be good. And it is even strongly criticized and the students may be given/ be punished by the teacher for giving those opinions. So how can they give their own or regional ones if the whole system is like that.

Interviewer: So with that kind of system you have said even when they go to university, they are still familiar with the way that they are grown up from the childhood, is that right?

Interviewee: Yes right, so that’s why in my writing classes a lot of students are praised for writing because they think it’s okay to do so. That’s part of the culture that they can copy other people’s ideas and it’s also okay to do so and they also should do so. And they also think that they should follow a good example, good sample of some other people to be accepted. So, they don’t think that they need to come up with their regional initiatives. In that case, we cannot see their power or at least their position or autonomy in …

Interviewer: Now we come to the final part of the interview, the more practical side of the issue. Have you done anything to encourage your students to become more autonomous both inside and outside the classroom?

Interviewee: Yes, I think I may have done something; for example, the writing portfolio. And also, I can see that the students should have their own ideas, not
necessarily my ideas because that’s what they need in their future life as well. I think that, for example, in my IELTS class there are a lot of questions in which the students have to give their own opinion, their own answers or their own arguments and then they need to support their arguments in a proper way. And I also tell them that there are no right or wrong answers. Without having to say what is right or wrong, they students may feel free to give their own opinions and they are not afraid of anything. In that case, they have more autonomy in their own assignment, in their own work. And they are happy with that. As long as they can support their arguments; as long as they are reasonable in their own sayings, then it’s okay.

Interviewer: Currently, are you planning to implement any new strategy to develop your students’ autonomy?

Interviewee: Ok, I think that I may learn the strategy and the technique from you first.

Interviewer: Yes, I am happy if I can share something.

Interviewee: Because at the moment the idea about autonomy in my mind is not very clear enough. They are something like the writing portfolio or in IELTS classes; they are some of the examples that I am doing, that I can do at the moment. I don’t think that I can apply something else which is more …because first I don’t have that idea yet. And second, maybe the system in our university is not supporting…in that way. So, if there is anything that I may apply in the future I think that I am willing to do. But I need to do some more research about that first to get to know it more clearly.
Interviewer: Talking about that have you and your colleagues ever discussed ways to enhance learner autonomy or has learner autonomy become a topic in the discussion among you and your colleagues at the faculty?

Interviewee: In some but not much. I can say that on the faculty scale, there is no official discussion or no group meeting like that. I’ve just individually or personally shared that with some colleagues who are also close to me. We’ve also tried to find ways to lessen the burden of teachers by giving the students more work, asking them more to do; and we are only there to control things, supervising and facilitating; and also assess their efforts and their performance, not do anything for them in a formal way.

Interviewer: Do you think that they should be more seminars or workshops about learner autonomy?

Interviewee: Yes, there should be. Not only in learner autonomy but also in other topics to find good methodologies which, at the moment, is the weakness of my faculty.

Interviewer: How often are there seminars and workshops?

Interviewee: We can say that annually, only annually. The seminar on the faculty scale or faculty level. But even on annual scale, it’s not really regular. Because we had one last year, but this year not yet happening.

Interviewer: Definitely, there should be more.

Interviewee: Yes, there should be more frequency, or at least small group ones, not necessarily the whole faculty.
Interviewer: How long have you been teaching English?

Interviewee: Since 2006. It makes 7 years.

Interviewer: Thank you so much Interviewee for your very enthusiastic sharing. Have you got any other questions regarding the interview?

Interviewee: I think that no question but I just request that when you come up with the practical guide on autonomy methodology, autonomy promoting activities in classes, then I would like to know.

Interviewer: Yes, I am very happy to share. That’s also my wish. Thank you so much.

This is the end of the interview.
## Appendix 4A. Factor analysis procedure

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Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Investigating university lecturers’ attitudes towards learner autonomy in the EFL context in Vietnam

| Component Matrix* |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                   | 1               | 2               | 3               | 4               | 5               | 6               | 7               | 8               |
| Learner autonomy is promoted through opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone | 1.64             | .218            | -.910           | .358            | .099            | -.915           | .143            | -.144           |
| Facilitating learners in deciding about what to learn promotes learner autonomy | 3.19             | .136            | -.439           | .293            | -.134           | .054            | .134            | -.334           |
| Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher | .064             | .478            | -.290           | .206            | .118            | -.205           | -.041           | .272            |
| Risks harder to promote learner autonomy with proficient language learners than with beginning language learners | -.011            | .438            | -.300           | .249            | .364            | .207            | -.024           | -.329           |
| Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence | .364             | -.269           | .141            | .605            | .325            | .086            | .013            | -.066           |
| Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would | .623             | -.044           | .058            | .146            | .393            | -.133           | .099            | .177            |
| Learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all cultural backgrounds | .579             | -.273           | -.115           | .095            | .080            | -.067           | -.129           | .204            |
| Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have more choice in the activities they do | .391             | .157            | .393            | .123            | .320            | .175            | -.017           | -.176           |
| Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centred classrooms | .911             | .100            | .474            | .491            | .369            | -.380           | -.011           | .128            |
| Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners the opportunity to learn from each other | .645             | -.004           | .031            | .196            | .004            | -.010           | -.203           | -.131           |
| Learner autonomy implies a rejection of traditional, hierarchical ways of teaching | .164             | .540            | .207            | .113            | -.016           | -.321           | -.218           | .199            |
| Learner autonomy cannot develop without the help of the teacher | .117             | .132            | .374            | .258            | .465            | .023            | .510            | .084            |
| Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can decide how their learning will be assessed | .278             | .211            | .174            | .011            | -.492           | -.144           | -.418           | .056            |
| Learner autonomy is conceptually not suitable for non-Western learners | -.336            | .500            | .267            | .047            | .140            | .169            | -.171           | -.101           |
| Cooperative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy | .577             | .084            | .150            | -.102           | -.061           | .236            | -.492           | -.157           |
| Promoting autonomy is easier with beginning language learners than with more proficient language learners | -.315            | .604            | .018            | -.024           | .196            | .269            | -.007           | .125            |
| Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials | .578             | .367            | -.202           | -.173           | -.060           | .149            | .117            | .261            |
| Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy | .687             | .147            | .033            | .313            | .201            | .210            | .097            | .217            |
| Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy | .473             | .311            | .030            | .332            | .120            | -.406           | -.282           | -.081           |
| The ability to monitor one’s learning is central to learner autonomy | .269             | .204            | .110            | -.330           | -.224           | .014            | .190            | -.003           |
| Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated | .699             | -.205           | .104            | -.153           | .046            | -.065           | .046            | -.166           |
| The teacher has an important role in supporting learner autonomy | .569             | .079            | .281            | -.088           | -.114           | .294            | .144            | -.147           |
| Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner | .502             | -.171           | .035            | .049            | .065            | .193            | -.120           | .058            |
| To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning | .615             | .023            | .063            | -.056           | .062            | .163            | -.056           | .214            |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

* 8 components extracted.
Loadings of the ten items on one factor (scale 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Positive attitude to learner autonomy</th>
<th>Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would.</td>
<td>.622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all cultural backgrounds.</td>
<td>.579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners the opportunity to learn from each other.</td>
<td>.645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cooperative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy.</td>
<td>.577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy.</td>
<td>.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The ability to monitor one’s learning is central to learner autonomy.</td>
<td>.569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.</td>
<td>.699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The teacher has an important role in supporting learner autonomy.</td>
<td>.580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner.</td>
<td>.662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.</td>
<td>.615</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4B. Internal consistency of constructs scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive attitude to learner autonomy (10 items)</td>
<td>.845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers’ attitude to their responsibilities (13 items)</td>
<td>.904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers’ attitude to their students’ responsibilities (13 items)</td>
<td>.832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers’ attitude to students’ abilities to act autonomously (7 items)</td>
<td>.822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers’ attitude to factors affecting learner autonomy (10 items)</td>
<td>.865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers’ attitude to teaching strategies to enhance learner autonomy – degree of importance (8 items)</td>
<td>.793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers’ attitude to teaching strategies to enhance learner autonomy – frequency of use (8 items)</td>
<td>.739</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>