

Learner Autonomy: Attitudes of Graduate Students in English Language Teaching Program in Thailand

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to explore the attitudes toward learner autonomy of graduate students in English Language Teaching (ELT) international program in Thailand. Attitudes toward definition and importance of learner autonomy, important persons in a learning process, and factors promoting and hindering autonomy development were explored. This study took a form of a qualitative research design using an open-response questionnaire to collect data from 23 participants from China, Myanmar and Thailand. The data were analyzed by thematic content analysis and four themes emerged: 1) Learner autonomy as technical, psychological, and political ability; 2) Perceived value of learner autonomy; 3) Importance of teacher and student in a learning process; and 4) Teachers as a major factor both promoting and hindering learner autonomy.

Keywords: learner autonomy, attitudes, graduate students, English language teaching

Introduction

It is strongly believed that learner autonomy is a prerequisite for learning effectiveness and success as it helps students develop more critical thinking and learning responsibility (Benson & Lor, 1998). Learner autonomy is therefore recognized worldwide as a significant and ultimate instructional goal (Wenden, 1987) for individual potential development (Sinclair, 1996). Confirmed by a recent research, autonomous learning process has positive effects on English public speaking ability of undergraduate students in Thailand (Boonma, 2018). To implement autonomous learning so as to develop autonomy of learners, teachers play a crucial role. However, existing research findings (Swatevacharkul, 2009) reveal that teachers can be a hindrance of a development of autonomy of their students owing to a lack of clear understanding of learner autonomy and how to implement it effectively. Supported by Duong and Seepho (2014), their research shows that English instructors from different countries in one Thai university have had difficulties in promoting and implementing learner autonomy. Corroborated with the recent research conducted with 30 English teachers in Indonesia regarding their perceptions on autonomous English learning, there is a misconception on the notion of autonomous learning. The Indonesian teachers mistakenly defined autonomous learning as the condition that students learn without assistance and support from a teacher. Such misconception may be caused by unfamiliarity of the concept as autonomous learning in English has not yet widely implemented in Indonesian educational system (Khotimah et al., 2019). Therefore, it is necessary that English teachers should know or understand what autonomy is in order to