

Learner autonomy assessment of English language teaching students in an international program in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to assess learner autonomy of English Language Teaching students in terms of technical, psychological, political-philosophical, and sociocultural dimensions. The 19 participants were in their first semester of MA ELT, which is an international program in an international university in Thailand. Among them, there were 15 Chinese, three Burmese, and one Thai. This study employed the explanatory mixed-methods design. First, Measuring Instrument for Language Learner Autonomy (MILLA) questionnaire (Murase, 2015) was used to collect quantitative data (QUAN). Then, a semi-structured interview with five participants was carried out to gather follow-up qualitative data (Qual). The findings revealed that, on average, the students demonstrated a high level of autonomy in all four dimensions. The thematic content analysis generated four themes concerning each autonomy dimension: 1) the use of metacognitive strategies through professional goal setting 2) the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in support of autonomous learning, 3) the teacher as authority partner in a negotiable learning process, and 4) the preference for self-dependence and collaborative learning. The results of the study can be pedagogically contributive to programs similar to the study's context with regards to learner autonomy awareness and learner autonomy development.

Keywords: English language teaching; graduate students; learner autonomy assessment

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INTRODUCTION

Regarded as capacity to take charge of one's own learning in a learner-centeredness learning approach, learner autonomy is a prerequisite for effective and successful learning according to its advocates. Autonomous learners are those who are responsible for their own learning and develop critical thinking skills (Benson, 2011). Learner autonomy also contributes to a development of life-long learning as autonomous learning involving thought, conversation and decisions regarding

learning process provides learning to learn benefits (Benson, 2015).

Autonomous learning does not signify learning in isolation and autonomy is socially constructed. Help and support from teachers are, therefore, essential especially during a transition period from teacher-dependence to self-dependence. The important role of teachers in autonomy development process gives rise to a concept of teacher autonomy which is defined by Smith (2000) as "the ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge, and attitudes for oneself as a teacher in cooperation with others"