

Pre-service teachers' autonomy in English language learning

Pre-service
teachers'
autonomy

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Abstract

Purpose – The present quantitative-descriptive study aims to measure the level of English language learning autonomy of the pre-service teachers.

Design/methodology/approach – A short list questionnaire developed by Dixon (2011) was administered to 61 pre-service English teachers enrolled in Western Mindanao State University in order to measure their English language learning autonomy. Differences on the levels of English language learning autonomy across participants' gender, number of languages spoken and first language were also explored.

Findings – Results revealed that participants are highly autonomous in English language learning. Gender, number of languages spoken and first language were found to have no significant influence on English language learning autonomy.

Research limitations/implications – Results on the level of English language learning autonomy indicate that pre-service teachers are highly autonomous and, therefore, ready for lifelong learning. This implies pedagogical and instructional advantages, as they can learn and explore the language independently.

Practical implications – Since gender, number of languages spoken and first language do not significantly influence the level of English language learning autonomy, it is suggested that English teachers do not need to develop differentiated instructions and activities anymore, which will cater the three profile variables in fostering autonomous learning, as participants already exhibit a level of autonomy in English language learning.

Social implications – This would allow teachers and students to be aware of the importance of autonomy in language learning. Thus, it will prepare them to be independent and lifelong learners, as they engage themselves in the professional world.

Originality/value – As one of the Asia's developing countries, the Philippines have captured a small number of studies and contributions to autonomous learning in the field of research (Madrurnio, Tarrayo, Tupas and Valdez, 2016 as cited in Inigo, 2018). Specifically, there is no research study conducted that measures "language learning autonomy" in the Philippine's higher education much to the knowledge of the researcher. Thus, this study will be the first one to determine the level of autonomy of pre-service teachers in English language learning in the Philippine context. Furthermore, the present study also intended to determine significant differences on the level of language learning autonomy of pre-service teachers across genders, number of languages spoken and their first language.

Keywords Autonomous language learning, Learner autonomy, English language

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Autonomous learning is a broad concept that has been studied, defined and analyzed by various researchers in the field of education and language acquisition (e.g. Chou and ChanLin, 2014; Masouleh and Jooneghani, 2012; Mehdiyev, 2020; Najeeb, 2012; Qixiu, 2015; Yan, 2012). It is widely perceived as the ability to take charge of one's own learning process (Benson, 2013). Moreover, "autonomous learners" are expected to be accountable for following: their own decision-making toward the spectrum of learning, defining their individual learning



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targets, sorting-out appropriate learning content, choosing their own strategies in learning and monitoring their own progress and development (Holec, 1981 as cited in Little, 1991, p. 7). Specifically, Ivanovska (2015) provided analogous terms and ideas that can be linked to this concept to give further understanding such as “learner independence,” “self-direction” and “independent learning.” Furthermore, high levels of “motivation,” “self-efficacy,” “urge to search for meaning” and “positive attitude” are some of the characteristics of an autonomous learner (Alkan and Arslan, 2019).

In language studies, it was found that learners will never acquire a language, unless they make it a goal to learn it within and beyond classroom premises. They must utilize their own learning processes to make up for the gaps and limitations of the classroom teaching methods and to build autonomous learning within them (Hu and Zhang, 2017). Similarly, the study by Kanazawa (2020) explored various methods in advocating autonomous learning skills with the association of the self-study period and claimed that language learning indeed requires a substantial quantity of time to improve language abilities inside and outside their learning facilities. In light of the findings of the previous research, the development and promotion of “English autonomous learning ability” of university students have become an essential marker of strengthening the reform of College English education since the beginning of the 21st century (Du, 2020). Presently, fostering student-centered learning is a trend in higher education. In this connection, autonomous learning will be of service in promoting this trend in universities, as it creates a medium and opportunity where students are able to “understand their learning goals,” “develop study plans autonomously,” “apply learning strategies effectively,” “monitor learning strategies accurately” and “evaluate the entire learning process actively” (Lai *et al.*, 2015).

Ruelens (2019) posited that becoming autonomous and the stakeholders of one’s own learning processes are expected from the learners in higher education. In reality, they require assistance to increase their autonomy, and formal training assumes a significant part in this process. Educators must be able to establish, recognize and quantify autonomy in order to best foster the emergence of autonomous learning. In addition, previous research has focused on the etymological and conceptual issues involving autonomous learning; as a result, the development of scales to quantify autonomous learning has captured insufficient consideration (Deregözü, 2014). Interestingly, following a thorough examination of the literature and recent studies, various researchers have explored and designed quantitative instruments that measure autonomy such as Ruelens (2019), Deregözü (2014) and Dixon (2011).

Given all the studies and definitions, autonomous learning is undeniably a well-investigated aspect of language learning and teaching. Apparently, it is now being studied in the context of different Asian countries and regions such as Oman (Alkhoudary, 2015), China (Zhong, 2010; Gao, 2010), Taiwan (Chou and ChanLin, 2014; Lo, 2010), Malaysia Yunus and Arshad, 2014; Zulkepli *et al.* (2018), Thailand (Saeheng, 2017; Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee, 2017) and Philippines (Barnard and Li, 2016). Since culture can be a challenge to autonomous learning, the subject of “cultural suitability” was further investigated in relation to independent language acquisition in Asian countries throughout the last decade. It was stressed that the learning culture in Asia tends to have a profound impact on the performance of learner autonomy (Chan, 2003; Gan, 2004 as cited in Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee, 2017).

As one of Asia’s developing countries, the Philippines have captured a small number of studies and contributions to autonomous learning in the field of research (Inigo, 2018). Specifically, there is no research study conducted that measures “language learning autonomy” in the Philippine’s higher education much to the knowledge of the researcher. Thus, this study aimed to determine the level of autonomy of pre-service teachers in English language learning. Furthermore, the present study also intended to determine significant differences on the level of language learning autonomy of pre-service teachers across genders, number of languages spoken and their first language.

1.2 Research questions

This study sought to investigate the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the level of English language learning autonomy of Pre-service teachers?

RQ2. Is there a significant difference in the level of English language learning autonomy of Pre-service teachers in terms of

- (1) Gender
- (2) Number of language/s spoken
- (3) First language

2. Review of related literature

2.1 Autonomous learning

Autonomous learning has already been studied since the 1980s. Researchers such as Holec, Little, Cha, Benson, Bałçınanlı, Illés and Shahsavari have attempted to study and define the concept (Bekleyen and Selimoğlu, 2016). Despite the numerous definitions and studies associated with this term, it all sums up with a unified definition which pertains to “one’s responsibility and awareness of his or her learning process” (Maru *et al.*, 2021). For instance, the focused variable has been viewed in many different ways and phrases like “independent learning,” “self-direction” and “learner’s independence” are often associated with these analogous terms (Masouleh and Jooneghani, 2012). Holec (1981) has the most notable definition of autonomous learning which is abundantly cited by various authors (Chan *et al.*, 2002; Chou and ChanLin, 2014; Masouleh and Jooneghani, 2012; Mehdiyev, 2020; Najeeb, 2012; Qixiu, 2015; Yan, 2012). The term was defined as “the ability of learners to take over the responsibility of their own learning” (Holec, 1981). This implies that the learners must be accountable for the following: their own decision-making toward the spectrum of learning, defining their individual learning targets, sorting-out appropriate learning content, choose their own strategies in learning and monitoring their own progress and development (Holec, 1981 as cited in Little, 1991, p. 7). Numerous authors and researchers also defined and contributed their perspectives toward this concept. For instance, similar to Holec’s idea, “autonomous learning” was widely defined as the “ability of learners to take responsibility for their own learning” (Benson and Voller, 1997 as cited in Mehdiyev, 2020; Littlewoods, 1999 as cited in Yan, 2012, p. 1). This responsibility includes the selection of their own learning goals and objectives (Harida and Zulaihah, 2017; Littlewoods, 1999 as cited in Yan, 2012, p. 1), choosing appropriate learning content (Chan *et al.*, 2002 and Tudor, 2020 as cited in Alrabai, 2017, p. 71), set learning goals (Cotterall, 1999; Chan *et al.*, 2002, p. 506 as cited in Bekleyen and Selimoğlu, 2016, p. 2; Gardner and Miller 1996 as cited in Orawiwatnaku and Wichadee, 2017, p. 118), select strategies in learning (Littlewoods, 1999 as cited in Yan, 2012, p. 1; Chan *et al.*, 2022 and Tudor, 2020 as cited in Alrabai, 2017, p. 71), carry out self-evaluation (Littlewoods, 1999 as cited in Yan, 2012, p. 1) and assess their individual learning and academic needs. However, despite the fact that they can manage their own learning process, autonomous learners still value learning experiences within the classroom (Harida and Zulaihah, 2017).

Moreover, Crabbe (1993), elicited three arguments in defining autonomous learning, such as “ideological,” “psychological” and “economics.” (1) Ideological argument emphasizes the freedom and right of an individual to make his or her decision in learning by not being highly influenced by societal factors. (2) Psychological argument focuses on the notion that an individual learns better when they “take charge of their own learning process.” Thus, it makes one’s learning more significant, lasting and focused on his or her processes and goals.

The second argument also states that motivation increases when individuals are in-charge of their own learning. Hence, “motivated learners are successful learners.” (3) Lastly, the economic argument brought up the issue that society lacks resources in the pursuit of individual learning and instruction, as it caters to the population in different facets of learning. Thus, this inevitable occurrence requires learners to find and provide themselves with the requisites of their own learning goals and process.

Furthermore, studies in autonomous language learning specifically focused on perspectives and practices (e.g. Bekleyen and Selimoğlu, 2016; Lai *et al.*, 2015; Yunus and Arshad, 2014); attitudes and behaviors (e.g. Bekleyen and Selimoğlu, 2016; beliefs Cottoral, 1999; Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee, 2017); integration with technology (e.g. Lai, 2019; Warschauer and Liaw, 2011; Hayta and Yaprak, 2013; Kessler and Bikowski, 2010); gender differences and similarities and measuring autonomy (e.g. Murase, 2015).

The abundant number of definitions, contexts and perspectives above toward autonomous learning has brought about the emergence of its disposition as a multifaceted approach (Benson 1996, 2007 as cited in Najeeb, 2012, p. 1239). Benson (1996) proposed that autonomous learning should not be conceived as “homogenous concept” but rather see it in a variety of settings and applications. Take into account the following definitions of autonomy in literature, such as situation, ability, capacity, responsibility and right, in light of this proposition. These perspectives do not represent the exclusive meaning of the notion, nor the combination of those phrases; rather, they define autonomous learning in a distinctive manner that serves its own purposes. Multidimensionality implies that autonomy is more than just one thing and that it may not be quantifiable in a single way. Multidimensionality, therefore, indicates that a learner’s autonomy can manifest itself in different ways for different aspects (Dixon, 2011).

2.2 Autonomous learners

Autonomous learners employ a variety of approaches to regulate their own learning, including cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies. Individual learning tasks are addressed by cognitive strategies, while metacognitive strategies enable students to manage their learning, such as “planning,” “monitoring” and self-evaluation. Lastly, the process of interaction, whether with peers, teachers or experts, are done through the utilization of social strategies (White 1995 as cited in Ruelens, 2019, p. 373). In addition, the “willingness” and “motivation” of the learner to direct and govern his or her learning process is another moderating variable of learner autonomy (White 1995 as cited in Ruelens, 2019, p. 373). Autonomous learners are highly motivated, perceive self-efficacy, realize effectiveness, are inclined to meaning, possess positivism, contain the desire toward success and hold both “internal and external motivation.” In the simplest sense, “autonomous learners are the ones who decide and direct their own learning” (Alkan and Arslan, 2019).

As they direct their own learning, researchers have specified various responsibilities that autonomous learners must take over and abilities must manifest. For instance, Chan (2001:156) claimed that autonomous learners have the duty to take over their individual learning processes in accord with the following requisites: ability to set learning goals; ability to design and determine methods and techniques in learning to realize the learning goals; ability to design learning schemes; become “reflective learners”; ability to select and choose pertinent materials and resources; and realize self-assessment assessment (Chan, 2001 as cited in Bekleyen and Selimoğlu, 2016, p. 2). In addition, autonomous learners have the (1) “ability to develop and administer their own learning program”; and (2) ability to create particular aims and objectives for themselves and try to attain them by taking advantage of the opportunities within and beyond the learning facilities. This will motivate learners to realize a self-directed learning process (Gardner and Miller 1996 as cited in Orawiwatnaku and Wichadee, 2017, p. 118).

2.3 Autonomous language learning

The importance of promoting “autonomous language learning” has captured the interest and interest of various researchers and professionals in the field, since 1970s (Benson, 2013; Cotterall, 1999; Littlewood, 1996; Ter Haseborg, 2012; Warschauer *et al.*, p. 1 as cited in Sadaghian *et al.*, 2020, p. 66; Qixiu, 2015). Autonomous language acquisition occurs when students carry higher control of their own learning practices. That is, learners must have the ability to establish their individual learning targets, choose suitable content and the level of development they want to achieve in relation to that material, identify their own learning strategies and procedures and, finally, undertake self-evaluation and self-monitoring. This principle is brought upon the necessities to refine, improve and practice proper grammatical, lexical and phonological linguistic forms through an experimental process in language learning. Their selection of resources and information will be based on their own criteria and needs, as they monitor and evaluate themselves (Holec, 1981).

Moreover, as “autonomous language learners,” it is expected that they will be accountable for developing their language acquisition scheme, determine their clear learning objectives, identify goals, determine issues and drawbacks, then come up with possible solutions and employ it, respectively (Cotterall, 1999). Furthermore, Griffiths (2008) discovered that similar attributes among successful language learners are their willingness to take learning opportunities and their practical involvement with the language. Thus, autonomy has been an imperative element in language acquisition and that success in all facets of learning is in the practice of autonomous learning (Griffiths, 2008: Little, 1994, p. 431 as cited in Chan, 2003, p. 33). In light of this claim, a notion regarding the importance of autonomy in language learning, researchers came up with a notion that molding “autonomous language learners are the goal of language learning.” As a result, autonomy was identified to be an “important component of language learning” since the concept motivates learners’ learning processes, evaluate and monitor themselves, as well as allowing them to study effectively and efficiently (Benson, 2001; Cotterall, 1999; Littlewood, 1996; Ter Haseborg, 2012; Warschauer *et al.*, p. 1 as cited in Sadaghian *et al.*, 2020, p. 3).

Language instruction should aim for autonomy as a reasonable and desirable goal. Three assertions about autonomy stand out as being equally essential in theory and practice according to Benson (2013):

- (1) The notion of autonomy is based on a natural desire for students to take charge of their own education. As a result, everyone has autonomy, yet it manifests itself in varied contexts and to different extents based on the particular features of each learner and educational setting.
- (2) With the right provision and implementation of “conditions” and “preparation,” learners who do not exhibit autonomy can develop it. Access to opportunities to assume control over learning is one prerequisite for the enhancement of autonomy. Hence, the manners wherein we structure the implementation of curriculum have a significant impact on our students’ development of autonomy.
- (3) “Autonomous learning is more effective than non-autonomous learning. In other words, the development of autonomy implies better language learning.”

2.4 On measuring language learning autonomy

It is anticipated that learners in higher education will be self-sufficient and “co-owners of their learning process.” In reality, learners require assistance to increase their autonomy, and formal training plays a significant part in this process. Educators must “define,” “recognize” and “measure” autonomy in order to best promote the development of “learner autonomy.”

Many models and approaches for evaluating learner autonomy have been offered, however, they are not well suited for implementation in everyday teaching because they were primarily designed for research objectives (Ruelens, 2019). Alternately, Benson (2013) claimed that “It should be possible to quantify the degree to which learners are autonomously learning since its various features of control over learning have already widely explored and analyzed.” In light of this claim, Dixon (2011) continued, “If we seek to assist learners become more autonomous, we need to at least develop some method of measuring whether we have been successful or not.” As a result, there is a belief that a measure of autonomy would be valuable for tracking changes in learners’ autonomy levels.

Nunan’s (1997: 192 as cited in Benson, 2013, p. 65) posited two cogent reasons why autonomy must be measured. (1) The idea that autonomy is a “degree” rather than an “all-or-nothing” concept captured considerable recognition in research and literature. There are also circumstances in which learners become “more or less autonomous over time.” These aspects of addressing autonomy presuppose that we all have at least a tentative measurement scale in mind, which we should absolutely define if that is the case. (2) This second reason is more toward a research-oriented aspect. One sort of study that is regularly conducted aims to determine whether a specific learning program or activity type adheres to the development of “student autonomy.” Furthermore, some researchers certainly examine the links between autonomy and characteristics like students’ learning approaches. In all circumstances, conducting research without some sort of autonomy scale is quite problematic.

Interestingly, Dixon (2011) examined the feasibility of employing a quantifiable instrument that measures language learner autonomy and whether quite an instrument may help teachers and learners establish learner autonomy. Moreover, this study attempted to provide an instrument that can be used to quantify students’ autonomy by utilizing their autonomy-related domains and can be helpful in supporting students in their environments in order to generate discourse, allowing teachers to better support students in their autonomy growth and development. Furthermore, the information provided by the quantitative instrument utilized in this study can be used to enhance and aid teachers’ assessments of their students’ autonomy.

The autonomy-related domains mentioned above were summarized in the study of Alzubi *et al.* (2017) such as “control,” “skills,” “metacognition,” “strategies,” “confidence,” “motivation,” “social interaction,” “attitudes to learning,” “actions/behaviors” and “responsibility,” then further clustered into six categorical dimensions that were also classified into a broader categorization such as technical and psychological classification. Table 1 shows the language autonomy-related domain and areas according to Dixon (2011).

2.4.1 *Related studies.* 2.4.1.1 Autonomous language learning. Cotterall (1995) investigated learners’ readiness for autonomous learning. She asserted that, prior to any remediation, it is critical to assess students’ readiness for the behavioral adjustments and attitudes that autonomous learning requires. The data on learner views about language acquisition was gathered via questionnaire and then the clustering components in autonomous language learning were extracted using the principle of factor analysis. Six

Learner autonomy	Dimension	Areas
“Technical”	“Metacognition” and “information literacy”	“Control skills,” “metacognition,” “strategies,” “confidence,” “motivation,” “social interaction,”
“Psychological”	“Linguistic confidence,” “social comparison,” “locus of control” and “self-reliance”	“attitudes to learning,” “actions/behaviors” and “responsibility”

Table 1.
Autonomous learner model by Dixon (2011)

underlying dimensions of learner responses to the questionnaire were drawn and defined, and the researchers looked into the relationship between each element and autonomous language learning behavior. The factors that the study was able to identify are the following: "Role of the teacher," "Role of feedback," "Learner independence," "Learner confidence in study ability," "Experience of language learning" and "Approach to studying." The factors mentioned have their individual implications in autonomous learning. For instance, students who agree with the items in the first factor (Teachers' role) are teacher dependent and contradict the construct of autonomous learners. Factor 2 (Role of feedback) reveals the relevance of feedback to students is demonstrated by the items, implying that students must be able to monitor and evaluate themselves. However, it is unclear how an autonomous learner should respond to this factor because feedback might be delivered and perceived in a range of methods. Factor 3 (Learner independence) suggests that students who agree with these items are clear about their learning goals. "Without confidence in their ability to learn successfully, learners cannot develop autonomous approaches to learning." The fourth factor 4 ("Learner's confidence in study ability") claims that it has a relationship with students' academic success and supports the attributes of an autonomous learner. The fifth factor (Experience of language learning) suggests that autonomous learners must reflect on their learning experiences and achievements. And the last factor (Approach to studying) refers to the approaches and strategies that autonomous learners practice.

Studies in the different aspects of autonomous learning have also been conducted. For instance, Karatas *et al.* (2015) conducted a descriptive research study involving 183 participants from two distinct institutions in Istanbul, Turkey, to see if there was a relationship between ELT students' academic language achievement, autonomous learning and language learning orientation. According to the findings of this study, there is a considerable positive association between students' autonomy and their academic (linguistic) accomplishment. Furthermore, it was discovered that students' intrinsic motivation and their academic language achievement had a positive relationship. In summary, students who are more autonomous and intrinsically motivated obtain higher academic (linguistic) accomplishments.

Iamudom and Tangkiengsirisin (2020) investigated the differences in autonomy and language learning practices of international and "Thai public-school students in a Bangkok tutorial school." The data was collected from 200 senior high school students in a tutorial school using a learner autonomy questionnaire and the Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire. In total, 100 students came from international schools and 100 students came from Thai public schools. The study revealed that students from both institutions have a "high degree of autonomy in their learning." Thai public school students, in particular, experienced a significant amount of learner autonomy. Their willingness to learn was the highest of all the dimensions, followed by motivation to acquire language, self-confidence and the ability to learn independently. Conversely, Thai EFL students in international schools scored highly in every domain of "learner autonomy" except motivation. This means that both schools will implement, practice and encourage autonomous language learning that is tailored to their specific needs and abilities.

Additionally, more research in the pursuit of autonomous learning were conducted in the context of different Asian countries and regions such as Oman (Alkhoudary, 2015), China (Zhong, 2010; Gao, 2010), Taiwan (Chou and ChanLin, 2014; Lo, 2010), Malaysia (Yunus and Arshad, 2014; Zulkepli *et al.*, 2018), Thailand (Saeheng, 2017; Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee, 2017), Hongkong and Philippines (Barnard and Li, 2016). However, the number of studies in the list still shows that autonomous language learning in the Asian context, specifically in the Philippines, is under-researched.

2.4.1.2 Autonomous learning and pre-service teachers. Öztürk (2019) explored EFL pre-service teachers' development of learning autonomy throughout an a-week period in a Turkish

higher education setting, with a course designed specifically to develop learning autonomy among the participants. To see the effectiveness of the course implemented. Autonomous Learning Scale (ALS) developed by [Macaskill and Taylor \(2010\)](#) was used to assess the effectiveness of the course and the level of autonomy of the participants. Moreover, some data were gathered through reflection reports and interviews. The study's findings demonstrated that the participants' level of autonomy increased significantly, with a higher level of independence in their learning process. Furthermore, self-awareness and the shift of perspectives toward learning tend to influence the development of participants' autonomy. This implies that a proper course designed for the development of learning autonomy is effective.

Similarly, a study conducted by [Wulandari \(2017\)](#) focused on implementing a flipped classroom learning model in fostering autonomous language learning in English Teacher Education Study Program, Sanata Dharma University. This study aims to prepare pre-service teachers, as they will teach in the 21st-century era. Innovative learning models should be presented to pre-service teachers, in light of this claim, incorporating multiple and technological learning strategies would be effective. Thus, flipped learning or the flipped classroom is one of the learning strategies that offer "novelty and pedagogical innovation." With the use of a questionnaire consisting of close-ended and open-ended questions, discussion forum notes, reflections and observations, the findings revealed that pre-service teachers have positive perceptions of flipped classroom in fostering autonomous learning. These findings are evident in the planning, classroom engagement and self-evaluation of the participants.

Furthermore, [Nikolaeva et al. \(2019\)](#) fostered both autonomous learning and language and professional skills in a blended learning setting. Blended learning is an emerging learning strategy that integrates both face-to-face and online learning. In this study, a course called "Teaching English as a foreign language to learners with special educational needs" was developed. The study utilized two questionnaires to gather the data needed. The first questionnaire includes the demographic profiles of the participants, their English language level and expectations regarding English language skills improvement within the context of the course and the ALS ([Macaskill and Taylor, 2010](#)). The second phase of the questionnaire included sections on course satisfaction and perceived English language skills improvement at the completion of the course. Moreover, the measuring of autonomy was conducted twice from the beginning and end of the course using ALS ([Macaskill and Taylor, 2010](#)). Results revealed that blended learning can enhance pre-service teachers' English language abilities and learner autonomy. These results would help professionals in creating courses in higher education.

2.4.1.3 Autonomous learning and gender. An investigation regarding the readiness of higher education students to acquire English as a foreign language on their own that was explored by [Abdel-Razeq \(2014\)](#) utilized both questionnaires and interviews to collect data and revealed that gender and academic achievement had little bearing on students' evaluations of their capacity to engage in "autonomous learning activities." The study looked into three aspects of students' readiness for autonomous learning: (1) "learners' conceptions of their educational obligations"; (2) "learners' abilities connected to autonomous learning"; and (3) "the participants' actual autonomous English activities while learning English." In terms of the students' general conceptions of duties linked to autonomous learning, the findings revealed that the majority of the aspects pertaining to their learning were attributed to their teachers. This is not unusual, given the Palestinians' overabundance of spoon-feeding and teacher-centered educational approaches for a long period of time.

Moreover, Lu and Fan investigated the relationship between gender differences and learning autonomy. A mixed method was utilized in the study including a questionnaire and interview. Interview results showed that the generality of respondents recorded those English teachers still play an increasingly prominent role in their language learning process, although they are no longer the only dominant source, as they once were since students

currently want more varied educational experiences with a variety and wide range of resources. Moreover, in terms of quantitative data results, it was found that in an EFL educational setting, the two genders have distinct traits in the process of autonomous learning. Additionally, the investigation also revealed that there were differences between female and male students when it comes to setting goals, identifying material and assessing performance progressions, methods and techniques for learning and assessing learning outcomes. In light of these findings, the researcher presented suggestions and pedagogical implications such as (1) avoid gender bias in teaching; (2) use different teaching strategies regarding the gender difference; (3) encourage integration; and (4) create a harmonious learning environment.

The related literature and studies above indicated the perspectives, attitudes, behaviors and aspects of studies regarding autonomous learning. However, there are still language autonomy-related domains that were not mentioned as [Dixon \(2011\)](#) suggests and thus, calls for further investigation. Hence, this study focused on investigating the level of autonomy of pre-service teachers in English language learning. Furthermore, the present study also intended to determine significant differences on the level of language learning autonomy of pre-service teachers across genders, number of languages spoken and their first language.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This current study purposely employed a descriptive-quantitative research design since this generally intends to describe pre-service English teachers' level of language learning autonomy. Moreover, this study also described categorical data such as respondents' gender, number of languages spoken and first language. [Johnson \(2000 cited in Somblingo and Alieto, 2020\)](#) stated that a study can be classified as descriptive if it intends to "describe a phenomenon," which is similar to this current investigation, as it aims to characterize the level of language learning autonomy of English pre-service teachers. Thus, this study is descriptive. Additionally, since this study did not manipulate the variable of interest with any treatment or intervention ([Torres and Alieto, 2019 cited in Somblingo and Alieto, 2020](#)), the present investigation is, therefore, classified as non-experimental. Furthermore, this investigation is cross-sectional, as the data were gathered in a short period of time.

3.2 Participants

A total of 61 pre-service English language teachers enrolled in Academic Year 2021–2022 at Western Mindanao State University participated in the study. The majority of the participants were female (47 or 77%), which is a trend noticed among pre-service teachers ([Alieto, 2019; Alieto et al., 2020; Alieto and Rillo, 2018; Buslon et al., 2020; Somblingo and Alieto, 2019 as cited in Robles and Torres, 2020, p. 7](#)).

In terms of year-level distribution, the majority of the participants (19% or 31.1%) were first-year students, 27.9% or 17 of the participants were third-year students, 24.6% or 15 of the participants were second-year students and lastly, 16.14% or 10 of the participants were fourth-year students.

3.3 Research instrument

A closed-ended statement questionnaire, referred to as the Short List Scale established by [Dixon \(2011\)](#) and used in the study of [Alzubi et al. \(2017\)](#) with an overall internal reliability of 0.81 which is acceptable, was utilized to answer the questions of the current investigation. Control, skills, metacognition, strategies, confidence, motivation, social interaction, attitudes

to learning, actions/behaviors and responsibility are among the 10 domains of autonomous learning described by the proponent. After conducting factor analysis, the 10 domains were further divided into 6 categories: linguistic confidence, information literacy, social comparison, locus of control, metacognition and self-reliance.

It contains a total of 38 items, each of which is scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). The categories are not mentioned throughout the questionnaire. Hence, the statements are randomly enlisted as indicated in [Table 2](#), in order to minimize biases and keep conscious when filling out the questionnaire.

3.4 Pilot testing and reliability of the instrument

To determine the reliability of the instrument, a pilot testing was conducted on 30 non-participant pre-service English teachers. According to [Johanson and Brooks \(2009\)](#), 30 representatives from the target population is a reasonable minimum recommendation if the objective of a pilot study is to “conduct a preliminary survey or develop a scale.” The majority of the respondents were female (66.67%). Moreover, the age of the respondents ranges from 18 to 24 years old. Among the male respondents, 10% were 18 years old; 10% were 19 years old; 30% were 20 years old; 40% were 21 years old; and 10% were 24 years old. On the other hand, among the female respondents, 15% were 18 years old; 25% were 19 years old; 30% were 20 years old; 20% were 21 years old; and 10% were 21 years old.

Due to pandemic’s constraints, the survey was conducted through online dissemination of Google Forms. Before respondents were referred to the questionnaires, they were given an information sheet, consent and instructions. The questionnaire was completed in 15 min on average. Cronbach’s alpha reliability test was utilized to analyze the data, which resulted in a value of ($\alpha = 0.769$) which implies reliable or acceptable.

[Table 3](#) shows the internal consistency of the domains in the questionnaire adopted from [Dixon \(2011\)](#). In the investigation conducted by [Alzubi et al. \(2017\)](#), the overall internal consistency was 0.81, which is evidently higher than the present study. However, the overall internal consistency of the present study is still considered acceptable. Furthermore, the dimensions such as Locus of control (0.293), social comparison (0.015) and linguistic

Table 2.
Distribution of items
per category

Autonomous learner domains	Items
“Linguistic Confidence”	1, 5, 11, 15 and 22
“Information Literacy”	2, 9, 13, 19, 24, 28, 32 and 35
“Social Comparison”	3, 8 and 26
“Locus of Control”	10, 18, 23, 29 and 34
“Metacognition”	4, 7, 12, 16, 20, 25, 30, 33, 36 and 38
“Self-reliance”	6, 14, 17, 21, 27, 31 and 37

Table 3.
Cronbach’s alpha
coefficient for the
dimensions of
language learning
autonomy scale

Dimensions	N (number of items)	Internal consistency
linguistic Confidence	5	0.592
Information Literacy	8	0.604
Metacognition	10	0.724
Locus of control	5	0.293
Social Comparison	3	0.015
Self-reliance	7	0.685

Source(s): ([Dixon, 2011](#))

confidence (0.592) have the lowest internal consistency. One explanation could be due to the lesser number of items on the mentioned subscales. Similar to the study of [Alzubi et al. \(2017\)](#), these domains also got the lowest internal consistencies.

3.5 Coding procedures

In order to analyze the data, the responses from the questionnaire were coded, respectively. Specifically, in the demographic profile of the respondents which includes gender, the responses were coded as follows: 1 for male and 2 for females and for the year level, the responses were coded as follows: 1 for the first year, 2 for the second year, 3 for the third year and 4 for the fourth year. Additionally, for the first language, the responses were coded as follows: 1 for English, 2 for Filipino, 3 for Chavacano, 4 for Visayan, 5 for Tausug and 6 for Yakan.

Moreover, for the language learning autonomy scale by [Dixon \(2011\)](#), responses were coded as follows: 1 for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for uncertain, 4 for agree and 5 for strongly agree. Furthermore, reverse coding was not observed in the instrument.

3.6 Data collection

In consideration of pandemic's constraints, the survey was conducted through online dissemination of Google Forms. Before respondents were referred to the questionnaires, they were given an information sheet, consent and instructions. The questionnaire was completed in 15 min on average. In an electronic database, all legitimate answers from the respondents were collated. The data was then processed into a spreadsheet and then evaluated using statistical software.

3.7 Data analysis

Responses in the autonomy scale were tabulated as 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Interpretations of the means were presented in [Table 4](#).

3.8 Statistical tool

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to process and compute the data collected in the study. Descriptive statistics, such as mean (M) and standard deviation (SD), were used to address the first research question. Furthermore, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to statistically analyze factors such as gender, the number of languages spoken and the participants' first language.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Level of English language learning autonomy of the respondents

Responses on the English language learning autonomy shortlist questionnaire were coded and analyzed. Descriptive statistics, mean (M) and SD were employed. [Table 1](#) presents the

Range	Interpretation
4.21–5.00	Very High
3.41–4.20	High
2.61–3.40	Medium
1.81–2.60	Low
1.00–1.80	Very Low

Table 4. Autonomy scale calculated mean interpretation

analysis of the data. Included in the table are the responses of the respondents in every item of the questionnaire (frequencies and equivalent percentages), mean (M) and interpretation (Interp.) – 1.0 to 1.80 (Very Low), 1.81 to 2.60 (Low), 2.61 to 3.40 (Medium), 3.41 to 4.20 (High) and 4.21 to 5.0 (Very High).

The descriptive analysis of the data provided in [Table 5](#) shows that the respondents are highly autonomous in English language learning with a weighted mean value of 3.43 ($SD = 0.31$). The computed SD value indicates that the participants' responses are close to the mean. The data further reveals through a detailed analysis that 1.64% or 1 respondent was reported to have a low level of English language learning autonomy; 49.18% or 30 respondents were noted to have a medium level of English language learning autonomy; 47.54% or 29 of the respondents were found to have a high level of English language learning autonomy; and 1.64% or 1 of the respondents was identified to have a very high level of English language learning autonomy.

The foregoing result conforms to the findings of [Iamudom and Tangkiengsirisin \(2020\)](#) that the learners have a high level of autonomy which relates to their way of learning the English language and how they control their own learning.

Noticeably, two primary averages emerged from the six distinct categories of autonomous English language learning: low and high. While linguistic confidence ($M = 2.0$) and social comparison ($M = 2.54$) had low averages, the remaining categories such as information literacy ($M = 3.86$), locus of control ($M = 3.62$), metacognition ($M = 3.67$) and self-reliance ($M = 3.83$) gained high averages.

Linguistic confidence, which scored the lowest, suggests that generally, the respondents have concerns regarding their English abilities including grammar, listening and word-by-word understanding. Specifically, it can be supposed that the items 1 (*I do not worry if I do not understand all the grammar in a text*) which obtained an average of $M = 1.95$; 5 (*I do not worry if I do not understand all the words in a text*) with a mean of 1.95 and 15 (*When I read an English text, I do not need to understand every word in it*) with a mean of 2.30 mirrors the concerns of the respondents in terms of their grammar, vocabulary and word-for-word understanding when reading texts. The remaining items such as 11 (*I do not worry if I do not understand everything when I listen*) which obtained a mean value of 1.82 and 22 (*Every word is not important for understanding a listening text*) reflect the issues in their listening abilities. This result conforms to the findings of the study of [Alzubi et al. \(2017\)](#) stating that the students tend to have a low level of linguistic confidence contrary to its claim that the more linguistically confident the students are, the lesser they become worried and the more confident they become in using and studying the English language.

Similar to the preceding category, social comparison also gained a low average with a mean value of 2.54. This component addresses the respondents' views of English language abilities in comparison to those of others. It can be deduced from the accumulated mean score that respondents are less inclined to use other students' English language proficiency as an indicator for their self-assessment and evaluation.

The foregoing findings can be associated with the claims of [Dixon \(2011\)](#) that from the standpoint of self-concept, confidence can be considered to be a result of self-esteem, which can be inferred from reported accomplishments or favorable comparisons and feedback from others, and thus social comparison can be related to confidence. In light of the findings of the present study, both of the category accumulated low mean scores. This type of result could be used to identify strengths and weaknesses in a class, or even in individual students, and therefore can be utilized as a tool to assist teachers in fostering autonomous learning.

Information literacy came to get the highest mean score of 3.86 (High). It can be inferred from the result that the respondents tend to have the ability to retrieve and evaluate information from various resources for their own educational objectives.

#	Statements	SD		D		Responses				Sa		M	Interp	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
I. Linguistic Confidence													2.0	Low
1	I do not worry if I do not understand all the grammar in a text	3	4.9	5	8.2	6	9.8	19	31.1	28	45.9	1.95	Low	
5	I do not worry if I do not understand all the words in a text	2	3.3	7	11.5	7	11.5	15	24.6	30	49.2	1.95	Low	
11	I do not worry if I do not understand everything when I listen	0	0	5	8.2	5	8.2	25	41.0	26	42.6	1.82	Low	
15	When I read an English text, I do not need to understand every word in it	3	4.9	10	16.4	7	11.5	25	41.0	16	26.2	2.30	Low	
22	Every word is not important for understanding a listening text	20	32.8	26	42.6	9	14.8	4	6.6	2	3.3	1.95	Low	
II. Information Literacy													3.86	High
2	I know the parts of a book (index, glossary, contents, chapters)	25	41.0	30	49.2	2	3.3	4	6.6	0	0	4.25	Very High	
9	I know how to use English reference books	4	6.6	38	62.3	14	23.0	4	6.6	1	1.6	3.66	High	
13	I know how to find the information I need on the Internet	15	24.6	36	59.0	8	13.1	1	1.6	1	1.6	4.03	High	
19	I know how to find information in a library	3	4.9	29	47.5	20	32.8	8	13.1	1	1.6	3.41	High	
24	I Use real English text	5	8.2	35	57.4	18	29.5	3	4.9	0	0	3.69	High	
28	I look at causes and effects logically	7	11.5	38	62.3	12	21.3	3	4.9	0	0	3.80	High	
32	I am confident I can learn English well	12	19.7	37	60.7	10	16.4	1	1.6	1	1.6	3.95	High	
35	I change the way I write according to who will read it	20	32.8	32	52.5	6	9.8	3	4.9	0	0	4.13	High	
III. Social Comparison													2.54	Low
3	The other students are not more confident than me at speaking English	0	0	6	9.8	26	42.6	21	34.4	8	13.1	2.49	Medium	
8	The other students do not know English better than I	0	0	8	13.1	22	36.1	19	31.1	12	19.7	2.43	Low	

Table 5.
 Respondents' level of English language learning autonomy
 (continued)

#	Statements	SD		D		Responses				Sa	M	Interp	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%				
26	I think learning English is more difficult for me than for the average learners	1	1.6	8	13.1	27	44.3	21	34.4	4	6.6	2.69	Medium
I. Locus of Control												3.62	High
10	My way of learning will change	13	21.3	35	57.4	12	19.7	1	1.6	0	0	3.98	High
18	To remember vocabulary, you do not need to be talented	14	23.0	30	49.2	13	21.3	4	6.6	0	0	3.89	High
23	Memorizing answers is not the best way to learn	1	1.6	5	8.2	5	8.2	29	47.5	21	34.4	3.95	High
29	I do not learn English because I have to	7	11.5	27	44.3	18	29.5	6	9.8	3	4.9	3.48	High
34	To read, you do not need to proceed word by word	2	3.3	16	26.2	18	29.5	19	31.1	6	9.8	2.82	Medium
II. Metacognition												3.67	High
4	I am an active dynamic person	4	6.6	24	39.3	22	36.1	9	14.8	2	3.3	3.31	Medium
7	It is my job to check my work for mistakes	24	39.3	34	55.7	2	3.3	0	0	1	1.6	4.31	Very High
12	I talk to others about how I feel about learning English	5	8.2	35	57.4	9	14.8	6	9.8	6	9.8	3.44	High
16	I know techniques to help me remember vocabulary	4	6.6	36	59.0	10	16.4	9	14.8	2	3.3	3.51	High
20	I predict the content before I listen	6	9.8	20	32.8	24	39.3	10	16.4	1	1.6	3.33	Medium
25	I have changed the way I learn after thinking about it	5	8.2	37	60.7	15	24.6	4	6.6	0	0	3.70	High
30	I can describe the learning strategies I use	4	6.6	28	45.9	19	31.1	8	13.1	2	3.3	3.39	Medium
33	I fix my problems in vocabulary	9	14.8	39	63.9	9	14.8	4	6.6	0	0	3.87	High
36	My writing is better now than years ago	26	42.6	29	47.5	6	9.8	0	0	0	0	4.33	Very High
38	I choose the exercises I work on	9	14.8	21	34.4	24	39.3	6	9.8	1	1.6	3.51	High
III. Self-reliance												3.83	High
6	I can study independently	23	37.7	28	45.9	8	13.1	2	3.3	0	0	4.18	High
14	I am good at making choices	4	6.6	17	27.9	30	49.2	7	11.5	3	4.9	3.20	Medium

Table 5.

(continued)

Table 5.

#	Statements	SD		D		Responses				Sa		M	Interp
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
17	I can choose the method of learning that suits me best	11	18.0	41	67.2	7	11.5	2	3.3	0	0	4.0	High
21	I am ready to learn in unfamiliar ways	13	21.3	34	55.7	8	13.1	6	9.8	0	0	3.89	High
27	I notice how people use English	19	31.1	36	59.0	4	6.6	1	1.6	1	1.6	4.16	High
31	I organize my time for studying	7	11.5	27	44.3	16	26.6	10	16.4	1	1.6	3.48	High
37	I am good at studying on my own	16	24.6	30	49.2	13	21.3	3	4.9	0	0	3.93	High
Overall Level of English Language Learning Autonomy												3.43	High

Self-reliance followed as the second-highest category reveals that the respondents are proactive independent students. Noticeably, in this category, there are no items indicating any collaborative work or any group tasks and, therefore, emphasize independence. This suggests that the respondents are capable of working independently.

Metacognition also accumulated a high mean of 3.67 which indicates that the respondents are conscious about their learning process. Metacognition relates to the knowledge, strategies and ways of the learners in completing tasks. Specifically, item 38 (*I choose the exercises I work on*) with a mean value of 3.51 (High) addresses the control of the learners in their own learning. Benson (2001, p. 99) as cited in Dixon (2011) posited that developing learning abilities is essential, but that it is not sufficient. He emphasizes control, as a prerequisite for autonomy, the learners must be able to freely choose what they want to learn, or their learning will not be truly self-directed.

With a mean value of 3.62 (high), locus of control shows that respondents are empowered to perceive a larger view of possibilities in their language acquisition, giving them the sense that learning is under their control.

4.2 Gender differences on the level of autonomy in English language learning

To determine whether there is a significant difference on the level of English language learning autonomy across gender (male and female), the data were treated with the parametric statistical tool known as *t*-test for independent samples. The analysis is provided in Table 6.

The obtained *p*-value ($0.420 > \alpha = 0.05$) presented in Table 6 indicates that there is no significant difference on the level of English language learning autonomy between male and female respondents. Noticeably, both genders gained a “high” level of autonomy”. It can be

Variables				
Dependent	Independent	Mean	SD	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Level of English language learning autonomy	Male	3.37	0.36	0.420
	Female	3.44	0.30	

Note(s): N=61: 14 Males, 47 Females

Table 6.
Level of English language learning autonomy across gender

deduced from this result that both genders are autonomous in terms of learning English. The foregoing results do not conform to any previous studies regarding English autonomous language learning.

4.3 Difference on the level of English language learning autonomy across year level

The present study also sought to determine if the level of autonomous English language learning differs across year levels. The year levels were coded as follows: 1 for the first year; 2 for the second year, 3 for the third year and 4 for the fourth-year respondents. Moreover, to determine the significant difference on the foregoing variables, one-way ANOVA was used to statistically treat the data. Table 7 presents the results of the data analysis.

Since no studies examining English language learning autonomy and its relationship to year level have been conducted, the preceding result could be used to solely determine if there is a significant difference in English language learning autonomy of the respondents when data are grouped according to their year levels. From the data analysis shown in Table 7, it can be deduced that the level of English language learning autonomy of the respondents does not significantly differ when data are grouped according to year levels. This implies that despite the differences in the year level, respondents display high autonomy in English language learning. Thus, autonomy can exist at various year levels.

4.4 Difference on participants' levels of English language learning autonomy when grouped according to the number of languages spoken

To identify whether there is a significant difference on the level of autonomous English language learning when data are grouped according to the number of languages spoken by the respondents, the data were treated with the parametric statistical tool known as one-way ANOVA. The result of the statistical test is presented in Table 8.

Similar to the year level, the result of the data analysis provided in Table 8 shows no significant difference (p -value = 0.553) on the level of English language learning autonomy when data are grouped according to the number of languages spoken by the respondents. It can be deduced from the result that the number of languages spoken does not influence the level of autonomous English language learning. Since no studies so far have examined the

Table 7.
Result of one-way ANOVA for difference in the level of autonomy in English language learning across year level

Variables Independent	Dependent	p -value (2-tailed)	Interp
Level of language learning autonomy	Year level	0.660	Not significant
Note(s): N -61: first year (19), second year (15), third year (17), fourth year (10)			

Table 8.
Difference on the level of English language learning autonomy across number of languages spoken

Variables Independent	Dependent	p -value (2-tailed)	Interp
Level of language learning autonomy	Number of languages spoken	0.553	Not Significant
Note(s): N -61: 2 languages (4), 3 languages (32), 4 languages (22), 5 languages (3)			

probable association between autonomous language learning and the number of languages spoken; the findings will serve as a reference to whether a significant difference exists between the foregoing variables.

4.5 Difference on the level of English language learning autonomy across first languages

To determine whether or not a significant difference exists on the level of autonomous English language learning when data are grouped according to the first language of the respondents, one-way ANOVA was used. Table 9 presents the result of the analysis.

Results on one-way ANOVA presented in Table 9 show no significant difference (p -value = 0.258) on the level of autonomous English language learning when data are grouped according to the first language of the respondents. This implies that the first language of the respondents is not a factor affecting the level of English language learning autonomy. The findings do not conform to any studies since there are no research studies investigating these variables have been conducted yet. Thus, this will serve as a basis for determining significant differences on the level of autonomous English language learning when data are grouped according to the first language of the respondents.

4.6 Conclusion

Results on the level of English language learning autonomy indicate that pre-service teachers are highly autonomous and, therefore, ready for lifelong learning. This implies pedagogical and instructional advantages, as they can learn and explore the language independently. This is in relation to the claim that autonomy is an important component of language learning since this motivates learners' learning processes, evaluates and monitors themselves, as well as allows them to study effectively and efficiently (Cotterall, 1999; Littlewood, 1996; Ter Haseborg, 2012; Warschauer *et al.*, p. 1 as cited in Sadaghian *et al.*, 2020, p. 3), and that success in all facets of learning is in the practice of autonomous learning (Griffiths, 2008; Little, 1994, p. 431 as cited in Chan, 2003, p. 33).

Since gender, a number of languages spoken and the first language does not significantly influence the level of English language learning autonomy, it is suggested that English teachers do not need to develop differentiated instructions and activities anymore, which will cater for the three profile variables in fostering autonomous learning, as participants already exhibit a level of autonomy in English language learning. Thus, the right provision and implementation of conditions and preparation according to Benson (2013) is not necessary anymore, as it is only advised to individuals who do not exhibit autonomy. However, the manner wherein the implementation of the curriculum is structured has significant impact on the students' development of autonomy (Benson, 2013). Hence, the institution must sustain the practice of autonomy in a consistent and progressive manner.

Variables Independent	Dependent	p -value (2-tailed)	Interp
Level of language learning autonomy	First language	0.258	Not significant

Note(s): $N=61$: Filipino (14), Chavacano (28), Visayan (10), Tausug (7), Yakan (1)

Table 9. Difference on the level of autonomy in English language learning across first languages

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Further reading

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Pre-service
teachers'
autonomy

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