Students' ability of autonomous learning and the factors fostering learner autonomy in language learning in Nguyen An Ninh Junior High School

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ABSTRACT
Autonomous learning has played important part in language learning process since the birth of this concept. In Vietnam, there have been a lot of studies on learner autonomy at tertiary and high school levels in the past ten years. However, there have little research on students' autonomous learning in English at secondary schools. This present study has investigated secondary school students' knowledge of learner autonomy, their ability of learning English autonomously and factors fostering learner autonomy in language teaching among students. Then, the study made some suggestions for students, teachers and parents in order to help students to improve their autonomous learning ability. There were 667 students in Nguyen An Ninh Secondary school, Vung Tau City participating in the questionnaire surveys through google forms and 20 students voluntarily joined in the semi-structured interviews. The findings showed that most of the students in this school understood the concept of learner autonomy and they had the ability of learning English autonomously. In terms of factors to develop students' ability of autonomous learning, the present study revealed that students in this school highly evaluated the importance of teachers and parents as well as really willing to adjust themselves to improve their English skills and grammar in an autonomous way.

KEYWORDS: *learner autonomy, secondary students, teachers, parents*

I.   INTRODUCTION

The enhancement of students' ability of leaner autonomy in language learning among students has attracted a lot of interests from researchers, educators and teachers of language all over the world. A great many changes have been recorded in the history of language learning in regard to teaching methodology, teaching policies, teaching practices and language assessment and testing, and so forth for the purpose of promoting students' motivation as well as developing their autonomy in language learning. In the context of Vietnam where EFL teachers and students are accustomed to long-standing teacher-centered approaches, students seem to be too dependent on the teachers (Duong, 2015). As a consequence, Vietnamese students fail to master language skills as well as gain confidence to communicate in English-based contexts.

In addition, the official admission of Vietnam into World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007 and ASEAN economic community (AEC) in 2015 requires a great many efforts to overcome challenges in the economy and society, which requires communicative competence in English for the real purposes in life. More importantly, the industrial revolution 4.0 raises a new education philosophy "life-long study" allow students the rights to set their own goals, choose the content or learning method as well as self-evaluate their learning products. Therefore, autonomous learning is considered as indispensable ability of learners, especially language learners.

With the aim to raise students' awareness of autonomous learning as well as enhance their ability of learning autonomously in language learning, Ministry of Education and Training have launched a project named "Teaching and Learning of Foreign Languages in the National Education System, 2008-2020" (Decision No. 1400/QĐ -TTg, 2008) related to language teaching methodology and national English curriculum for primary, secondary, high school and university level. This means, traditional classes which put the teacher the centre of language teaching and learning have been gradually replaced by learner-centred classes where students actively participate in the learning activities to acquire the knowledge as well as assess their own performance.

As a teacher of English in Nguyen An Ninh Junior High school, one of the researchers wants to measure students' ability in autonomous learning and factors fostering learner autonomy in language learning because students in this school have obtained a lot of prizes in all subjects, particularly language learning at provincial, national and even international level. Therefore, this study endeavors to investigate any factors which help enhance learner autonomy in language learning, from which makes some suggestions to promote students' autonomous learning in EFL classrooms. Based on the research objective, the research questions are formulated as follows:

(1)   How autonomous are Nguyen An Ninh junior high school students in language learning?

(2)   What are the factors fostering Nguyen An Ninh junior high school students' learner autonomy in language learning?

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of learner autonomy

Leaner autonomy has aroused interest of researchers and practitioners in education worldwide since Holec firstly defined this term as the ability to take change of one's own learning in the late of 1980s (Benson, 2006). Until now, over the past thirty years, the idea of autonomy in learning has increasingly developed and impacted the field of language education with a lot of research carried out on international and national extent. Besides, the 21st century with the huge development of technology and the influence of social and economic factors, learner autonomy has been defined in different ways compared with definitions on the early days. In other words, notwithstanding its various definitions, learner autonomy is still considered as the most important change in approaches to language teaching and learning as Jacobs and Farrell (2003) claimed in his book.

One of the commonly used definitions of learner autonomy is "a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a social, responsible person" (Dam, Eriksson, Little, Miliander & Trebbi, 1990, p. 102). Learner autonomy is also defined in terms of "attitude towards learning in which the learner is prepared to take, or does responsibility for his own learning" (Dickinson, 1994, p. 167). Little (1991) defines learner autonomy as "a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action" (p. 4). More simply, according to Benson (2001), learner autonomy refers to "self-management of learning" or "take charge of one's own learning".

The concept of learner autonomy these days have a few changes because itfocuses on creating understanding between teachers and students (Asmari, 2013). Even the relationship between learner autonomy and gender has been put into consideration according to Tok (2011), Varol and Yilmaz (2010). There have been other studies on the effective ways of fostering EFL learner autonomy such as research done by Xhaferi and Xhaferi (2011), Lo (2010), Bayat (2010), and so on.

Despite a diversity of definitions of learner autonomy by scholars in language education (Benson, 2001), this paper focuses on the ability of learningindependently, making own decisions instudents' learning as the definition raised by Benson (2001).

The importance of learner autonomy in language learning

The significance of learner autonomy toward language learning is diverse due to the differences in various viewpoints among researchers. However, it has been proved in some studies that learner autonomy is of great importance in language learning because its advantage is to help learners to get achievements in independence and creativity at high degrees (Alonazi, 2017). According to Smith (2008), assisting students to learn autonomously is one of the educational goals for the purpose that students are able to learn more effectively and independently. Classroom time with class size is the limits of classroom activities, which prevents students from successful language learning. Therefore, students need encouraging to develop their own learning strategies and study plan in order to become autonomous within and outside the classrooms. (Harmer, 2007).

Moreover, thanks to autonomous ability in language learning, students are able to learn from their own successes and failures which help them develop their competence in the future. (Crabbe, 1993). More importantly, Umeda (2000, cited in Onozawa, 2010) claim that autonomy in education help develop a lifelong ability to deal with the fast change of society, economy and technology, promote students' ability of individual learning and enhance the variety of students' educational and cultural background. Hence, fostering learner autonomy means encouraging students "determine the objectives, to define the contens and progressions, to select methods and teachniques, to monitor the procedures of acquisition and to evaluate what has been acquired" (Holec, 1981, p. 3)

Features of learner autonomy

The study by Chan (2001) categorized characteristic qualities of autonomous learners as follows: highly motivated, goal oriented, well-organized, hard-working, initiative, enthusiastic about learning, flexible, active, willing to ask questions, and making use of every opportunities to improve their learning. The categorization of characteristics of autonomous students aimed to find the better ways to encourage them to move towards autonomy within and outside the classroom (Nunan, 1997). Whereas, Benson (2001) considers self-management and sense of responsibility in language learning as two important aspects of the nature of autonomy. According to him, three clearly interdependent aspects of autonomous learning are learning management, cognitive process and learning content.

The same as definitions of learner autonomy, features of learner autonomy and autonomous learners in language learning have variously described in some studies. However, Nunan's (1997) category is closely related to the aim of this paper as to five levels of autonomy in language learning. That is, the attempt to make learners aware of goals, strategies, and content of materials; then to get learners exposed to making choices from a variety of goals, content and strategies; next, let them set their goals, develop the content and create learning tasks; finally, to reach fully autonomous learners in order to get connected the lesson in the classroom with the outside world. That is to say, autonomous learners are able to establish "a personal agenda for learning" by determining their own plans, pace, monitoring and evaluation of their own learning process as Little (1994) and Chan (2003) mention in their research.

Factors fostering students' autonomous learning

According to some research on learner autonomy among students at different levels around the world, there have been factors which make huge influence on autonomous ability in students' learning.

The research done by Little (1989, 2007); Spratt, Humphreys, & Chan (2002) reveal that there is a mutual influence between autonomy and intrinsic motivation. In order to foster internal motivation in students' learning, it is important to support students' competent and autonomous awareness (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Other studies show that students prefer to gain the experience of being self-determined to being controlled, and only autonomy in learning can enhance motivation inside students (Little, 1989, 2007; Spratt, Humphreys, & Chan, 2002). Littlejohn (1985) confirms that students "are likely to be more enthusiastic about learning" (p. 258) or learning can be more focused and purposeful for them (Little, 1991; Dam, 1995, Camilleri, 1997) because of the idea that if students are involved in decision making processes in relation to their own language competence.

Smith's (2008) research claims that teachers' instructions of autonomous learning play a crucial part in students' language learning process. This result is competent with the one in Pu's (2009) research suggests that students require more guidance from teachers to learn more effectively in the learner-centered environment. Obviously, the focus shifted from traditional classes or teacher-centered approach into learner-centered approach require not only students' real efforts but also teachers' instructions in students' own learning process (Egel, 2009; Sakai, Takagi, & Chu, 2010; Sims, 2012; Ushioda, 1996) as the ability to "take control of one's own learning" (Benson, 2001).

Assessment and evaluation are two indispensable factors in the development of the autonomous learner. Students' performance can be assessed either individually (self-assessment) or in groups or pairs (peer assessment). Thanks to self-assessment and peer assessment, students become aware of their own progress and make decisions on what to do in the next period. This aims to increase their knowledge and competence in learning process.

The teacher may give students assessment or feedback on students' performance as the role of facilitator and counselor. However, autonomous learning means that students are responsible for their own learning, the collaboration between students and teachers are really important. Moreover, teachers should provide tools regarding to their learning in order to encourage them to learn responsibly and autonomously, orient students to the ways of learning effectively and give them positive comments in order to inspire students' in their learning process. Generally, as a leader in class activities, teachers are able to support students by respecting their opinions and feelings, providing them opportunities to choose, encouraging them to solve the problems independently, giving them detailed orientations as well as supplying them with enough time for thinking and preparing. (Lam et al., 2009; Chai et al., 2011; Chai and Gong, 2013).

Regarding parents' support, there have been some studies showing that parents are also involved with students' development of autonomous learning (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011; Choi et al., 2015). The research by Desimone (1999), Cooper et al. (2000) and Pomerantz et al. (2005) reveal that parental involvement in homework both promoted and impaired students' performance. They present that positive comments or encouragements from parents contributed to bettering students' learning result and learning attitudes. (Katz et al., 2011 ; Dumont et al., 2012, Boonk et al., 2018). According to Grolnick (1989), parental encouragement is related not only to students' problem-solving, selecting and decision-making but also honoring students' opinions, encouraging self-determination, providing them chances to make their own choices, giving them

reasonable orientations and avoiding using controlling language which make students discouraging. (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Previous studies

There are numerous studies on teachers' perceptions and beliefs of learner autonomy in the field of education all over the world such as Japan (Aoki, 2002; Aoki & Smith, 1999; Cunningham & Carlton, 2003; Mizuki, 2003; Tagaki, 2003), Hong Kong (Benson & Lor, 1998; Chan, 2001, 2003; Chan, Spratt & Humphreys, 2002; Kelly, 1996; Lee, 1996;), Thailand (Champagne et al., 2001; Dickinson, 1996), however, the number of studies on students' perceptions and beliefs of learner autonomy has been limited. Not mention to the participants which the majority of research referred to were at tertiary and high school levels, a small number of studies have investigated learner autonomy among secondary school students at public schools. Therefore, the present study fills this gap in research.

In the context of some countries in Europe where the notion of learner autonomy was born on the early days; this has attracted the interests of the researchers in recent years and made a great effect on language teaching and learning. (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 326). One of the studies was in the Turkish (2018) context which examined the perceptions of ELT students at a state university in order to clarify their understanding and attitudes toward autonomous learning. This 2018 study in Turkey also aimed at finding out ways to increase of the learners' responsibilities for their own learning. Through this study, students were expected to promote their abilities in language learning process to be an autonomous learner based on their own experiences. (Yigit & Yildirim, 2018). The study in Argentina with the participation of 95 students at university by Porto (2007) confirmed that teachers should give more opportunities for reflection and critical thinking to help students be an autonomous language learner.

In the context of Asia countries, despite the small number of studies on students' autonomous learning, those ones were worth paying attention because of their practical findings in language learning. Findings found out from the studies by Shahsavari (2014) and Parmis (2015) showed that both teachers and students perceived learner autonomy positively; nevertheless, almost teachers expressed that students' autonomous learning were closely related to teachers. Another study in Hong Kong also explored the perceptions of learner autonomy of 20 university students, teacher and learner roles in the development of learner autonomy in language learning. The results revealed that students were still dependent on the teachers in spite of their relatively good autonomous learning ability (Chan, 2001, p.505-518). The study with 219 university students in Japan addressed the differences between understanding and attitudes of learner autonomy among successful and less successful students.

In the context of Vietnam, Phan carried out a study in 2012 with both teachers and students as participants of the study. The exploration referred to tertiary level and three teaching methods such as questionnaires, interviews and observations were used to collect the data. At that time, both the teachers and students were a little bit unfamiliar with the notion learner autonomy. Other study by Nguyen (2008) investigating the ability of Vietnamese university students presented that they were motivated to carry out their own learning, but learning efforts mainly focused on covert learning in class only. The research conducted by Nguyen (2017) on 50 university students in Can Tho with two research instruments showed that students gained a higher degree of learner after participating in project-based classrooms. More importantly, project-based lessons helped to enhance students' intrinsic motivation and the roles of teachers are of great importance in instructing students' autonomous learning.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Setting:

This study was carried out at Nguyen An Ninh Junior High School in Vung Tau City – a coastal city in Southern Vietnam. Due to the break of Covid-19 pandemic, students in all schools in this city spent three months studying online through Viettel Study, Zoom, Microsoft teams and other applicationsaccording to the Official Dispatch No. 178/SGDĐT-GDTrH, issued by BRVT-DOET on February 2nd, 2020. At that time, teachers and students in Nguyen An Ninh Junior High School actively conducted a lot of online classes for the purpose of helping students to continue their learning process. During the online learning time, students showed their excitement as well as efforts in order to fulfill their lessons under the instructions of teachers of all subjects. More particularly, students in this school are especially good at English with highly-evaluated communication skills. Moreover, teachers and students at all secondary schools in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province had used the ten-year English program according to the Official Dispatch No. 809/SGDĐT-GDTrH, issued by BRVT-DOET on May 17, 2018. That is to say, the sixth, seventh and eighth graders experienced the new English curriculum with the new textbook while the old English curriculum was only applied to students in grade 9. The new English textbook for the ten-year English program required a lot of efforts for autonomous

learning, which is considered as one of the crucial skills for the development of education in the industrial revolution 4.0.

As far as students' ability of English, almost students were obliged to not only get international certificates such as Movers, Flyers, Ket or Petbut also sit in the English entrance exam in order to be admitted into Nguyen An Ninh Junior High School. At school, students had three classes with lessons in English textbooks as the planned school-year curriculum and three extra classes in the afternoon with further practices for all four English skills and language grammar. In the school year, students were encouraged to take part in English contests such as English Tests for Gifted Students, English Eloquence Contest, Internet Olympiads of English and so on. That a number of students got the highest prizes in those English contestsshowed that students' knowledge and competence of English were relatively good. By which this means students' autonomous learning ability in English may be significant. However, there were not still any research on the exploration of students' ability of learning English autonomously.

Furthermore, the quality of English teaching and learning in Nguyen An Ninh Junior High School has been increasingly upgraded in recent years. Each classis well-equipped with a computer and a projector to support the language teaching and learning. The learning aids such as cassette players, pictures, and books are always available in the library. The teachers are always active and willing to adapt to the updated language teaching and learning approach. However, the number of students in each class is a big obstacle for the opportunities of concentration and interaction. Also, secondary students seem to be quite active and need a lot of observation from teachers, which sometimes causes a lot of noise in the classroom. Obviously, not to mention the advantages, there exist some drawbacks which prevents students from learning autonomously.

Participants:

There are about 770 students in four grades in Nguyen An Ninh Junior High school participating in the survey. At first, 3 of those students conveniently selected to participate in the pilot study did the questionnaire, and those students voluntarily joined the interview then. For the main study, there were20 students from all four grades were invited for the individual interviews. There were 386 schoolgirls (57.9%) and 281 schoolboys (42.1%). Concerning the number of participants of each grade, 24.3% were students in grade 6, 28.3% were students in grade 7, 29.5% were students in grade 8 and 17.8% were students in grade 9.

With regard to international certificates students have got, there were 485students who have got International Certificates in English, accounting for 72.7% students, and 182 students (27.3%) having no certificates. In respect of learner autonomy, most of the students were always ready to learn English and joined in English contests held by Nguyen An Ninh Junior High School, BRVT-DOET or national English contests. Thus, it can be said that students in this school were willing to gain knowledge of English in all four skills as well as know how to better their English skills actively.

Instruments:

The questionnaire in this study was comprised of four parts. The first part asked about demographic information of participants such as name, gender, grade, the latest international certificate students have got.The second part explored students' understanding of learner autonomy in general. These items were designed using the five-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3- not sure, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree). The third part examined students' ability of autonomous learning in English. This part focused on three sub-variables: (1) learner independence, (2) decision-making ability and (3) psychology of learning. The first was relating to students' ability of developing their own way of learning, making a time plan to study, identifying their weaknesses in English and understanding their own needs in learning English. The second focused on students' choices about the reference books, English learning activities, learning time span as well as their willingness to search for information. The last part investigated students' ability of evaluation, reflection, monitor and stimulation in English learning process. These items were designed using the five-point Likert scale (1-never, 2-rarely, 3-sometimes, 4-usually, 5-always). The fourth parts examining factors which help develop students' autonomous language learning ability in connection with the students themselves, teachers and parents. These items were designed using the five-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3- not sure, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree).

A semi-structured interview was used in this study as a means of data collection besides the questionnaire because it explores in-depth information of research issues. The content of the interview also focused on learning practices students have done to enhance their learner autonomy in English. The individual interviews with each student encouraged them to share their thoughts on autonomous learning and ways to promote this straightforwardly. The students were labelled from T1 to T40 according to the order of interviews. To increase the validity and reliability of the instruments, the questionnaire and the interview questions were first designed in English and reviewed by an expert who has conducted a lot of research on teaching methodology. Then they were translated into Vietnamese and cross-checked between us to ensure the accuracy of the translation. Next, these instruments were piloted prior to the main study because a pilot study is known to

be able to help increase reliability, validity, and practicality of research instruments (e.g., Oppenheim, 1999; Radhakrishna, 2007; Seliger & Shohamy, 1997).

Data Collection and Analysis:
      The Vietnamese questionnaire was administered online through google forms to …..students of Nguyen An Ninh junior high school at their convenience. The students spent about 15 minutes completing the questionnaire. After that, the data collected from the questionnaire were processed by SPSS version 20 using descriptive statistics (i.e., Mean & Standard Deviation). The five-point Likert scale was interpreted as follows:
1,00 – 1,80: Strongly disagree
1,81 – 2,60: Disagree
2,61 – 3,40: Not sure
3,41 – 4, 20: Agree
4,21 – 5,00: Strongly agree
And:
1,00 – 1,80: Never
1,81 – 2,60: Rarely
2,61 – 3,40: Sometimes
3,41 – 4, 20: Usually
4,21 – 5,00: Always
      After collecting the questionnaire, the researchers conducted individual interviews with 40 students at their schools with the pre-determined timetable. The qualitative data were analysed based on content analysis. First, the researchers read and reread information put in an Excel file. Next, they coded the information to identify major themes. Finally, the researchers interpreted the significant findings.

IV. RESULTS
To answer the research questions, the data generated from the questionnaire were statistically analysed and the information collected from the semi-structured interviews were presented.
RQ1: How autonomous are Nguyen An Ninh junior high school students in language learning?
To investigate the students' ability of learning autonomously in Nguyen An Ninh Junior High School in language learning, the present study first examined students' knowledge of learner autonomy and then investigated the ability of students' autonomous learning in three aspects; namely learner independence ability, decision-making ability and psychology of learning.

Students' understanding of learner autonomy
      Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics results for particular items of students' understanding of learner autonomy. The questionnaire data analysis with respect to both percentage and Mean as well as Standard Deviation was used to explore whether students in Nguyen An Ninh Junior Secondary School understand the definition and the importance of learner autonomy or not.

Table 1: Students' understanding of learner autonomy

Items	Questionnaires	N = 96	
		M	**SD**
1	Autonomous learning means that learners are extremely responsible for their own learning process.	4.05	1.062
2	Autonomous learning means that learners have to design their own learning objectives and their best to fulfill them.	4.15	1.038
3	Autonomous learning means that learners find their learning styles themselves.	4.26	1.009
4	Autonomous learning means that learners assess their learning process themselves.	3.99	1.078
5	Autonomous learning helps build up students' critical thinking in learning.	3.75	1.095
6	Learners of all ages can develop learner autonomy with the instructions and support from the teacher.	3.91	1.141
		4.02	**1.070**

The average mean score of the second theme displayed in Table 4. 1 revealed that students relatively understood the definition learner autonomy (M = 4.02, SD = 1.070).

In responses to item 1 through 6, which asked for students' knowledge of the concept of learner autonomy, item 3 relating to their exploration of their own learning styles is at the highest position with M = 4.26, SD =1.009. Item 2 with M= 4.15, SD = 1.038at the second position displaying that learners have to design their own learning objectives and their best to fulfill them. The third position is item 1 concerning to the responsibility for their own learning process with M = 4.05, SD = 1.062. Item 5 in relation to building up students' critical thinking in learning is at the lowest position with M = 3.75, SD =1.095. Item 4 and 6 get the nearly same results with M=3.99; SD=1.078 and M=3.91; SD=1.141. After all, the mean scores of six items are in "3.41 – 4.20", which implies that most students in Nguyen An Ninh Secondary school altogether agreed with the definition of learner autonomy as discussed in Literature Review on theoretical background.

Relating to the students' responsibility of learning process, the majority of the interviewees affirmed that learner autonomy requires them to be more responsible for their own learning. S9, S16, S3 and S5 had the same idea that taking responsibility for learning is an important part which encourages students to be better at learning English. Regarding to the design in learning objectives in learning English, S5 added that this helped remind students of their purpose of learning English and always try their best to get the purpose achieved. S1 and S16 considered identifying students' learning styles are really vital because thanks to this, students know how to adjust themselves in order to feel comfortable to get access to the knowledge of English. S4, S2 and S13 confirmed that students would feel better and more confident in their language learning if they were given rights to assess their performance and evaluate their efforts and they totally understood the importance of teachers in their autonomous learning.However, some students admitted that they hadn't understood the idea learner autonomy could help them improve their critical thinking.

Obviously, qualitative data collected from 20interviews indicated that students in Nguyen An Ninh lower secondaryhad a good grasp of the definition and typical characteristics of learner autonomy in language learning.

Students' ability of learning English autonomously

The data in Table 2 showed that the overall result of students' ability of learning English autonomously.

Table 2. Overall results of students' ability of autonomous learning

Item	Content	N = 96	
		M	**SD**
1	**Learner Independence**	3.88	.945
2	**Decision-making ability**	3.71	1.039
3	**Psychology of learning**	3.93	.952
	Average	**3.84**	**.978**

As can be seen in Table 2, the ability of students' autonomous learning was divided into three groups; group 1 exploring their ability in term of learner independence, group 2 referring to the ability of making decision and group 3 investigating the ability in term of psychology of learning. The overall results with M=3.84; SD=.979 which is in "3.41-4.20"; therefore, it was noticeable that students in Nguyen An Ninh Secondary school had good ability of learning English autonomously.

The data in Table 3 revealed the result of group 1 examining the ability of learning independently. Particularly, as can be seen in the table, the result for item 1 referring to the ability of developing their own way of learning English was M = 3.66, SD =.969, whereas making a time plan to study English themselves (M = 3.57, SD =.974), identify their weaknesses in English in terms of grammar, vocabulary, four skills (M =4.03; SD =.954) and understand their own needs in learning English. (M = 4.28, SD =.884). In general, almost students in Nguyen An Ninh Secondary School were able to learn English independently regarding to the features of this ability.

Table 3. Learner independence ability

Items	Questionnaires	N = 96	
		M	**SD**
1	You can develop your own way of learning English	3.66	.969
2	You can make a time plan to study English yourself	3.57	.974
3	You can identify your weaknesses in English (grammar, vocabulary, four skills…)	4.03	.954
4	You can understand your own needs in learning English	4.28	.884
	Average	**3.88**	**.945**

Quantitative results from the interviews had the same results with about14 students expressed that they were able to develop their own way of learning English, make a time plan to study English, identify their weaknesses and understand their own needs in learning English. They expressed that they encountered a lot of difficulties in doing those activities, especially making a time plan and understanding their own needs. At first, they learnt English because they were forced by their parents; after a long time, they found learning English useful, interesting and really necessary for their future. They decided to change their way of learning and falling in love with this language. Regarding to a time plan, some students admitted failing to do this as follows.

Sometimes, I felt hard to carry out my plans to study English and I did not know what to continue. My friends kept moving forwards, so I had to think of and find out what I needed and what was better for me at that time. (S18)

The data in Table 4 revealed a particular ability of students in autonomous learning, which is the ability of making their own decisions. As can be seen in the table, the number of students confirmed that they can make choices about the reference books to build up their English ability was small(M = 3.47, SD =1.092), be ready to study in the library to search for the information for their presentation (M = 4.02, SD =1.002), decide what English learning activities to take part in to better their English skills (M =3.62; SD =1.101) and decide how long to spend their time on English learning activities (M =3.78; SD =.962). In general, almost students in Nguyen An Ninh Secondary School were able to make their own decisions regarding to the reference books, ways of learning, learning activities and learning time.

Table 4. Decision-making ability

Items	Questionnaires	N = 96	
		M	SD
1	You can make choices about the reference books to build up your English ability.	3.47	1.092
2	You are ready to study in the library or on the internet to search for the information for your presentation	4.02	1.002
3	You can decide what English learning activities to take part in to better your English skills	3.62	1.101
4	You can decide how long to spend your time on English learning activities.	3.78	.962
	Average	**3.71**	**1.039**

Quantitative results from the interviews had the same results with about 18students expressed that they were able to make choices about the reference books to build up their English ability, be ready to study to search for the information in the library or on the internet, decide what English learning activities to take part in to better their English skills and decide how long to spend their time on English learning activities. However, some students expressed as follows.

I found it difficult to choose the reference books because there are a variety of English books on display at the bookstore. I had to ask for advice from my teachers and friends. (S2)

The data in Table 5 revealed a particular ability of students in autonomous learning, called the psychology of learning. As can be seen in the table, the majority of the students doing the questionnaire confirmed that they can evaluate their own English learning (M =3.85 SD =.916), reflect on their own English learning (M =3.91; SD =987), monitor their progress in English learning (M = 3.95, SD =.930) and stimulate their interest in English learning (M = 4.03, SD =.978). In general, almost students in Nguyen An Ninh Secondary School were able to make their own decisions regarding to the reference books, ways of learning, learning activities and learning time.

Table 5. Psychology of learning

Items	Questionnaires	N = 96	
		M	SD
1	You can evaluate your own English learning.	3.85	.916
2	You can reflect on your own English learning.	3.91	.987
3	You can monitor your progress in English learning.	3.95	.930
4	You can stimulate your interest in English learning	4.03	.978
	Average	**3.93**	**0.952**

Quantitative results from the interviews had the same results with about 16 students expressed that they were able to evaluate their own English learning, reflect on their own English learning, monitor their progress in English learning and stimulate their interest in English learning. Besides, there were also some opinions as follows.

Evaluating and assessing my performance or my ability is not as easy as I think. I always had a feeling of not fulfill my job. Luckily, my teachers gave me some criteria in order to have better evaluation and I felt better and more confident in my psychology of learning. (S7)

Research question 2: What are the factors fostering Nguyen An Ninh junior high school students' learner autonomy in language learning?
To answer this question, the present study explored three aspects which made a great influence on students' autonomous learning ability; such as students themselves, teachers and students.

Table 6. Factors fostering Nguyen An Ninh junior high school students' learner autonomy in language learning

Items	Questionnaires	N=667	
		M	SD
1	I believe that I will ultimately learn English very well.	3.58	.978
2	I think hard work is the key point to learn English well.	3.89	1.135
3	I think I should set up a study plan of learning English and strictly follow it.	4.22	.794
4	I think I should spend more time on English learning activities to build up my weaknesses.	4.14	.786
5	I think good instructions from the teachers help me know how to set my goals and how to fulfill it.	4.13	.824
6	I think good motivation in the lessons makes me more confident in myself and my ability	4.19	.840
7	I think positive feedback from the teachers help me understand my strengths and weaknesses in English.	4.31	.829
8	I think good orientation from the teachers help me find the best way of learning English	4.09	.881
9	I think good motivation from parents make me more confident in my English ability.	4.16	.900
10	I think good instructions from parents help me fulfill my goals more easily.	3.77	.980
11	I think my parents' beliefs on my English ability strengthen my determination in learning English.	3.88	1.087

As can be seen in Table 7, item 1 to item 4 referred to the internal motivation inside each student in fostering their ability of learning English autonomously. Most of the students strongly agreed that they needed to set up a study plan of learning English and strictly follow it (M=4.22; SD=.794). The second highest score was M=4.14; SD=.786 confirming that the majority of the students wanted to spend more time on English learning activities to build up their weaknesses. The result of item 2 was M=3.89; SD=1.135 expressing that they agreed with the idea that hard work is the key point to learn English well. Though the result of the belief in their English competency after all was M=3.58; SD=.978; it was still in "3.41-4.20" which meant the students agreed with the idea that they will ultimately learn English very well.

Regarding the roles of teachers in developing students' autonomous learning in language teaching, item 5 to item 8 received higher results. Item 7 referring to positive feedback from teachers had the highest score (M=4.31; SD.829); this meant that the students strongly agreed with this idea. Good instructions from the teachers, good motivation in the lessons and good orientation from the teachers also received high results; namely M=4.13; SD=.824; M=4.19; SD=.840 and M=4.09; SD=.881. The results revealed that most of the students highly appreciated the roles of teachers in fostering the learner autonomy in language teaching.

In relation to the roles of parents, most of the students agreed that they needed good motivation from parents (M=4.16; SD=.900); parents' beliefs in their English ability (M=3.88; SD=.980) and good instructions from parents (M=3.77; SD=1.087). The result expressed that parents played important part in enhancing students' autonomous learning, in which good motivations from parents was the highest score.

When being asked about those factors; the interviewees expressed that teachers were of great importance towards their autonomous learning in English because the teachers gave good advice to help them adjust themselves in a better way. Besides, students highly appreciated positive feedback and motivation that teachers gave them because those ones inspired them to try more and be more creative. Some students presented that their teachers inspired them a lot in their autonomous language learning. Relating to the roles of students themselves in language learning, some students revealed that actually they believed in their effort in autonomous learning; but they did not want to speak it out. They wanted to do it and adjust their language learning secretly until they got the prizes or success. Moreover, they claimed that they needed more practice to get higher scores and more patience as well as arrangements scientifically and reasonably. Some of them

disclosed that they were too busy with different subjects as well as extra classes, so they did not follow the study plan strictly as planned. As about to the roles of parents in their autonomous learning, students said that parents could motivate them to be more autonomous by giving praises or expressing beliefs on their ability instead of shouting or being angry with them. About more than ten students believed in the instructions of their parents which could help them fulfill their goals more easily and effectively.

V. DISCUSSION

Students' understanding of learner autonomy

As the result presented above, the students in Nguyen An Ninh Secondary School had a relatively good understanding of the notion learner autonomy in language learning. The investigation into students' knowledge of learner autonomy were divided into six sub-variables including their comprehension of responsibility for their own learning process, the ability of designing own leaning objectives and efforts to obtain those ones, the ability of finding their own learning styles, assessing their learning process, building up their critical thinking in learning and the roles of teachers in their own autonomous learning. The results were compatible with the finding presented in some studies done by Yigit & Yildirim (2018); Porto (2007); Shahsavari (2014); Parmis (2015); Chan (2001) and Nguyen (2017). However, the difference in the findings of this present study was at the level of students. Because students in this study were at secondary level, the concept of learner autonomy seemed to be difficult for them to understand in a more profound meaning scale. More importantly, at the age of 12 to 15 years old, students seemed to be easy to forget what objectives they had just made; therefore, the learning objectives are short-term and easy to get in order to make them more focused on their own learning.

Students' ability of autonomous learning

Relating to students' ability of autonomous learning, the present study explored three aspects of learning process; namely, the ability of independent learning, decision-making and psychology of learning. In term of independent learning ability of students, four sub-variables put into research were students' ability of developing their own ways of learning English, making a time plan, identifying weaknesses in their English and understanding their own needs of leaning English. The result revealed that students developed their own way of learning English themselves though they were sometimes confused how to do it. However, they admitted that they had to try so many times to find the better way to learn each English skill such as watching English videos, films, listening to English songs, reading English newspapers, chatting on the phone with foreigners or attending one-by-one English course, and so on. Students were able to make a time plan for their English study and wrote it in the timetable to follow this every day. Because of their studying time at school and extra-classes, they sometimes could not carry out the plans in a proper way. Besides, finding strength and weaknesses in their knowledge and skill is not an easy task for the students when they explained that they did not know the exact criteria for the evaluation. Therefore, this is also a difficult part for them if there are no instructions from the teachers.

Factors in fostering students' autonomous learning in English

The presented above revealed that there were three factors making great influence on students' ability of learning English autonomously; namely, students themselves, teachers and parents. The qualitative and quantitative results showed that those factors played important part in enhancing learner autonomy in English learning among students of Nguyen An Ninh Secondary School.

In connection with the internal motivation from students themselves in autonomous learning, the present study presented that students had optimistic beliefs in themselves in English learning and always tried their best to finish their study plans despite obstacles they encountered in their learning process such as limited time and extra classes. Besides, the findings revealed that students in Nguyen An Ninh Secondary totally understood the importance of English to themselves; therefore, learning English well became more purposeful and they study English in a more enthusiastic way. That is why they totally supported the idea of finding more reference materials as well as spending more time on English activities to improve their skills and knowledge of English. This was partly compatible with the findings in some research by (Little, 1989, 2007; Spratt, Humphreys, & Chan, 2002).

Relating to the roles of teachers in fostering students' ability of learning English autonomously, the findings of this present study were not different from those in other previous research by Smith (2008), Pu (2009) and Sims (2012). The roles of teachers in giving careful instructions and good advice as well as inspiring students' English learning have been mentioned in a great many research; especially in learner-centred classrooms. Furthermore, assessment and evaluation from teachers helped students adjust themselves more quickly and effectively. Obviously, teachers with good guidance and right-time compliments, positive feedback contributed to the motivation and creativity of students in English learning as well as in the development of their learner autonomy in English learning. (Lam et al., 2009; Chai et al., 2011; Chai and Gong, 2013).

Regarding the roles of parents in developing students' autonomous learning, the present study also presented that parents could motivate them by giving good advice on how to make a study plan and how to carry out it effectively, giving positive comments on what they have done and showing their beliefs in students' ability of learning English. These findings were the same as those in some research by (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011; Choi et al., 2015). In addition, the findings wanted to raise a voice to parents that giving students opportunities to make their own choices, giving them orientations and avoiding using the controlling language in order not to discourage them in English learning. (Deci & Ryan, 2012)

VI. CONCLUSION

In general, the results gained from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews indicate that students in Nguyen An Ninh Secondary Schools had comparatively clear understanding of the concept of learner autonomy. More importantly, the results revealed that students are able to learn English autonomously and their autonomous learning in English will be more effective if teachers and parents are those who can inspire them with good motivation, good instructions, reasonable orientations and positive feedback.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study made some suggestions to teachers and parents to help them improve their ability of learning English autonomously. That is, teachers and parents could motivate them to enhance the ability of autonomous learning in English by giving good orientations, careful instructions, positive feedbacks and beliefs as well as good compliments. To students, those are the inspirations and encouraging factors for them to be more confident in maintaining and developing their autonomous learning ability of English.

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