Readiness for Autonomy in English Language Learning: The Case of Indonesian High School Students

Andrzej Cirocki [a], Syafi'ul Anam [b, *], Pratiwi Retnaningdyah [b]

[a] *University of York, UK*

[b] *Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia*

A B S T R A C T

The notion of learner autonomy has attracted the close attention of scholars, teachers, policy makers and researchers in various countries. In Indonesia, while its scope remains limited, learner independence is one of the highlights of the current curriculum. The purpose of this study was threefold: to investigate how Indonesian secondary school students conceptualized the construct of learner autonomy; to ascertain the extent to which students were motivated to learn English; and to estimate how ready they were to participate in the teaching-learning process as autonomous learners. The study employed a mixed-methods approach and recruited 391 participants – EFL students and teachers – from urban and suburban schools, classified as state and private institutions. The data were collected using questionnaires and focus group interviews. The findings revealed that many students were not familiar with the concept of learner autonomy. They also had fairly low motivation to learn English and generally were not ready to act as autonomous learners, lacking the typical skills and competences. The results indicate that Indonesian students need to be trained in planning their learning process, setting objectives and taking a more active role in negotiating the teaching-learning process.

Keywords: readiness for learner autonomy; independent learning; EFL learners; secondary schools; motivation

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* Corresponding author: Department of English, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia
Email address: syafiul.anam@unesa.ac.id

Introduction

Learner autonomy has become a buzzword in language education. Although it has existed as a theoretical concept since the 1980s, broadly defined as learners' ability to take charge of their own learning, only in the past two decades has it been considered a desirable goal in the teaching-learning process in many countries. As a result, learner autonomy has now become a more practical and empirical notion; the concept not only comes in many guises in the classroom, but also links with the theories and pedagogies of lifelong, experiential and technology-enhanced learning that are influencing educational policies and classroom instruction globally (Armitage et. al, 2012; Kohonen, Jaatinen, Kaikkonen, & Lehtovaara, 2014; Lai, 2017).

It is important to note that the development of learner autonomy is a gradual and complex process (Benson, 2011; Blidi, 2017). Its complexity stems from a number of factors, including attitudes, beliefs, motivation, personality and culture (Chen & Li, 2014). This means that fostering learner autonomy in the classroom will likely vary from country to country and have different requirements regarding timespan, as well as degrees of support. The successful development of learner autonomy also depends on the curriculum and how explicitly its objectives and pedagogical approaches promote the concept (Little, 2000).

In Indonesia, the term *learner autonomy* does not appear in the educational discourse. The concept is either implicitly embedded in government documents or substituted by synonymous terms. It is encouraging, though, that it does exist at the conceptual level and efforts are made to foster it in the classroom. For instance, the Decree (number 20/2016) issued by the Minister of Education and Culture emphasizes that graduates at all education levels must be able to "think and act critically, productively, independently, and collaboratively" (Kemdikbud, 2016, p. 1). Likewise, the *Guidebook for the Implementation of 21st Century Skills in the 2013 Curriculum in High School Level* (Kemdikbud, 2017) lists religiosity, nationalism, independence, cooperation, and integrity as desirable features of learners. It is underlined that the purpose of the teaching-learning process is to promote critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, creativity, innovation and collaboration among students (Kemdikbud, 2017) – all aspects closely connected to learner autonomy.

The current study was stimulated by formal and informal conversations with secondary school EFL teachers during continuing professional development workshops in Indonesia. Being aware of the curriculum objectives, and the role of learner autonomy in that curriculum, these teachers made two observations: students' motivation to learn English was rather poor and they tended to prefer teacher-centred learning environments, demonstrating low levels of autonomy. As a result, a mixed-methods study was designed. Its purpose was threefold: (1) to explore how Indonesian secondary school students conceptualized the construct of learner autonomy, (2) to ascertain the extent to which these students perceived themselves to be motivated to learn English, and (3) to estimate the degree to which these students perceive themselves to be ready to participate as autonomous learners.

Literature Review

Learner Autonomy and the Autonomous Learner

Learner autonomy has been defined in many ways, showing that this concept means different things to different people. For example, Holec (1981, p. 3) defines learner autonomy as the "ability to take charge of one's own learning." Interestingly, Littlewood (1999) perceives learner autonomy as a two-level concept, comprising proactive and reactive autonomy. The former

enables learners to specify objectives, decide on methods and strategies and evaluate the learning process. The latter – lower order autonomy – and a preliminary step towards proactive autonomy, helps learners to organize their resources independently to achieve the goals they set. Little (2004, p. 69), building on Holec's definition, clarifies that learner autonomy, apart from "[taking] responsibility for determining the purpose, content, rhythm and method of (…) learning, monitoring its progress and evaluating its outcomes," additionally rests on "the development and exercise of a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action." The last definition is extremely important as it emphasizes the psychological dimension.

All these definitions bring new perspectives. Of course, to offer a full picture, more definitions would need to be listed, yet it is not possible due to the limited space in this article. Given this difficulty in selecting from competing definitions, it seems more helpful to conceptualize learner autonomy in terms of a set of independent learner characteristics. The most recent and, to the best of our knowledge, most complete profile of an autonomous language learner has been provided by Cirocki (2016, pp. 29-30). As he argues, autonomous learners:

- have an intrinsically-motivated approach to learning the target language, which they regard as a means of communication;

- make cogent decisions and assume responsibility for their own learning;

- set realistic individual targets for themselves as well as regulate their behaviour with regard to previously formulated goals;

- negotiate the syllabus, making decisions on course content, materials and assessment;

- estimate personal strengths and weaknesses and choose their own learning tasks with reference to previously set objectives;

- identify what has already been discussed in the classroom as well as know when, how and why they learn new information and what available resources will aid foreign language learning;

- are able and willing to adapt to new learning contexts;

- select and implement appropriate strategies to make full use of their environment, negotiating between their own wants and the needs of other classroom members;

- manage their foreign language learning experience, systematically monitor their progress and critically evaluate outcomes;

- become fully involved in collaborative practices, seeking guidance from peers and language teachers alike, if need be; and

- reflect on their learning experiences so they can decide what to do next.

Empirical Studies on EFL Learners' Readiness for Learner Autonomy

This section presents studies that sought to investigate English language learners' readiness for autonomy. This has two purposes: to set the scene for the current study described, and to make clear how it contributes to knowledge and research in TESOL.

Six studies were selected for analysis (Table 1). Empirical projects specifically focusing on English language learners' readiness for autonomy are scarce. The chosen studies represent a wide range

of contexts, including Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, Turkey and Ukraine. They are not without limitations, however. As Table 1 shows, five out of six studies were conducted among university students, whereas the sixth was carried out in a foundation year programme. Most of the educational institutions involved were public universities; the only exception was the project in Thailand, where the data were gathered at private universities. Given the relatively strong preference for quantitative designs, the six studies' samples were generally disappointing. Only the Malaysian and Thai studies can be regarded as large-scale, with big cohorts.

Table 1
Empirical Projects Investigating Readiness for Autonomy

Study	Country	Population	Methods	Level of Education
Chan (2001)	Hong Kong	20 students	mixed	Tertiary
Thang & Alias (2007)	Malaysia	756 students	quant	Tertiary
Swatevacharkul (2008)	Thailand	155 teachers 380 students	mixed	Tertiary
Yıldırım (2008)	Turkey	103 students	quant	Tertiary
Sönmez (2016)	Turkey	100 students	quant	foundation year
Khalymon & Shevchenko (2017)	Ukraine	45 students	quant	Tertiary

Another reason for selecting these studies was that they investigated learners' readiness for autonomy from diverse angles. For example, Chan's (2001) study looked into Hong Kong learners' attitudes and perceptions of language learning, teacher and learner roles, and learners' learning preferences, and perceptions of learner autonomy. The Hong Kong cohort of students displayed several autonomous behaviours, including clear learning objectives, preferred learning styles and positivity about the learning process.

Thang and Alias (2007) explored Malaysian students' inclinations towards teacher-centredness and autonomous learning, learners' ability to use computers and how they felt about using technology while learning English. The findings showed that the independent learners sought the freedom and responsibility to make decisions about their learning. As in Chan's study, the learners demonstrated individual preferences for learning styles and believed peer evaluation enhances language proficiency.

Swatevacharkul's Thai project (2008) analyzed learner autonomy in terms of willingness, motivation, capacity and self-confidence to learn autonomously. The statistical analyses indicated that willingness, motivation and capacity were considered high, whereas self-confidence was merely moderate.

Yıldırım (2008) researched Turkish learners' perceptions of teacher and learner responsibilities, their opinions about their own abilities to act autonomously, and the frequency of autonomous language learning activities. Yıldırım's project suggested a significant relationship between students' perceptions of their own and their teachers' responsibilities. In most cases, the students expressed willingness to share responsibility with their teachers. The students perceived themselves as capable of acting independently and showed signs of autonomous behaviours by engaging in out-of-class activities.

Sönmez (2016) examined motivational aspects of English language learning in Turkey, learners' use of metacognitive strategies and engagement in out-of-class activities, and examined perceptions of teacher and learner responsibilities. The results revealed that only some

participants were highly motivated, and only some were positive towards autonomous learning. However, a larger group admitted to using metacognitive strategies to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning.

The last project, conducted by Khalymon and Shevchenko (2017), studied Ukrainian learners' perceptions and beliefs in four domains: willingness to take learning responsibilities, self-confidence to learn autonomously, motivation to learn English, and the capacity to learn autonomously. The findings rated readiness for autonomy as moderate. However, motivation to study English and willingness to take responsibility both achieved high scores.

In the Indonesian context, very few studies related to learner autonomy have been published (e.g., Bradford, 2007; Lamb, 2004; Lengkanawati, 2017; Yuliani & Lengkanawati, 2017). None was specifically designed for English language learners' readiness for autonomy, nor the secondary level of education, probably because the concept is relatively new in this context. This gives the current study significant importance as it attempted to fill the gaps in the research presented in Table 1. In particular, unlike most of the projects above, it focused on secondary education. It employed a mixed-methods approach and involved a large number of participants. The participants were EFL students and teachers from two different teaching contexts: urban and suburban schools. The main focus, however, was on secondary school students and their readiness for autonomy. The teacher cohort was mainly needed to validate the veracity of the student data. Lastly, the study sought answers to three research questions. The first was: How do Indonesian secondary school EFL students conceptualize *learner autonomy*? As motivation is a key factor influencing readiness to learn independently (Chan, Spratt, & Humphreys, 2002), the second question was: To what extent do Indonesian secondary school EFL students perceive themselves to be motivated to learn English? The last question asked: To what extent do Indonesian secondary school EFL students perceive themselves to be ready to participate as autonomous learners in the teaching-learning process?

Method

Using a mixed-methods approach, the study adopted a sequential explanatory design, in which the data were collected in two successive phases; the qualitative phase findings helped explain and interpret the quantitative phase results (Creswell, 2003). Employing a synthetic interpretative methodology resulted in a better understanding of the issues. The combined methodology allowed both analysis and exploration.

Participants and Sampling Procedure

The participants (*N*=391) were EFL students and teachers from secondary schools in East Java, Indonesia. They were divided into two groups. The first group consisted of students (*n*=361; 92%) enrolled in the 12th grade. There were 127 (35%) male and 234 (65%) female participants. The students, all Indonesian, came from urban (*n*=184; 51%) and suburban (*n*=177; 49%) schools. These schools were further subdivided into state (*n*=193; 53%) and private (*n*=168; 47%) institutions.

 The second group consisted of EFL teachers (*N*=30) from the same schools. All the teachers were Indonesian. There were 13 (43%) male and 17 (57%) female participants. The teachers taught at urban (*n*=14; 47%), suburban (*n*=16; 53%), state (*n*= 14; 47%) and private (*n*=16; 53%) schools.

All participants were invited to take part in this study through their schools. The school principals were briefed about the study and returned signed consent forms to the principal researcher. In both stages – quantitative and qualitative – the participants were recruited using simple random sampling, where every participant had an equal chance of being selected (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008). Consequently, *n* items were selected by Microsoft Excel. This particular procedure was chosen to minimize sampling bias and ensure generalization of the research findings.

Data Collection

Two instruments were employed for data collection: a questionnaire and a set of focus group interviews. The questionnaire was prepared in the participants' native language – Bahasa Indonesia – and distributed among 361 students and 30 teachers. It consisted of closed-ended questions, some borrowed from or modelled on those used by Chan (2001), Chan, Spratt and Humphreys (2002), and Thang and Alias (2007). The three instruments were considered essential as their design had considered both significant empirical findings and intense debates about learner autonomy in the field.

All the questionnaire items were arranged into four sections and labelled as follows: students' dependence on teachers (used here interchangeably with *teacher-centredness*), students' abilities, students' motivation and students' capacity to plan. Sections 1-3 were measured on a multi-item Likert scale, each consisting of 15 items as opposed to Section 4, which was measured on a single-item Likert scale. The keys to averages were 1.9 or lower = low, 2.0-2.9 = medium, 3.0-4.0 = high and 2.49 or lower = low, 2.5-3.49 = medium, 3.5-5.0 = high, respectively. The four sections, underpinned by theory, research and practice regarding learner autonomy, offered a profile of an autonomous learner, thus becoming a useful tool for assessing learners' readiness for independent English language learning.

The purpose of the focus group interview was to explore the themes generated by the questionnaire. Both students (*n*=20) and teachers (*n*=15) participated in groups of four or five. The interview, conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, was based on open-ended questions and used a variety of probes (e.g., explanatory, focused, drawing out) to gain as accurate data as possible. This phase allowed participants not only to produce discourse with emotional reactions and true-to-life, vibrant anecdotes, but also place these "personal stor[ies] within a wider educational and societal context" (Bold, 2012, p. 6). The focus group interview was most advantageous, for it encouraged "greater honesty, spontaneity, involvement, and thoroughness of responding" (Kerr, Aronoff, & Messe, 2000, p. 181).

Data Analysis

The two instruments produced a large body of data. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (i.e., Mann-Whitney U test and t-test). Both inferential statistics were used to examine whether students' motivation and readiness for autonomy differed significantly according to such variables as gender, school location and school types. The rationale for using the two different inferential statistical tests was that the dependent variable (students' motivation) in the second research question was represented by ordinal data measured through a single five-point Likert item, while the dependent variable (readiness for autonomy) in the third research question comprised continuous data collected using a multi-item Likert scale.

By contrast, the qualitative data were recorded, transcribed and labelled with codes. For the sake of clarity and accurate reporting, all interviewees were given individual codes. For example, (FG2, S4) and (FG2, T2) stand for (focus group 2, student 4) and (focus group 2, teacher 2),

respectively. All the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding to identify and analyze themes in the dataset.

Results

This section presents the empirical findings that answer the three research questions. Each of the three questions is discussed under a separate heading.

EFL Students' Conceptualization of Learner Autonomy

As the qualitative data showed, learner autonomy was conceptualized in a very simplistic way. For the majority of the interviewees, this concept was completely new or unknown. Those participants that seemed familiar with the notion equated it with being "able to work independently" (FG1, S2; FG3, S3) "of the teacher" (FG2, S4; FG4, S3), and usually "outside school" (FG5, S1). Defining autonomy as an ability to work independently of teachers, the participants were "certain that it [could] be fostered" (FG5, S3) in the teaching-learning process. As a result, they acknowledged the importance of teachers who could "train students to become autonomous" (FG2, S5). In the interviewees' responses, autonomous learners were described as motivated, curious, ambitious, hard-working and active.

EFL Students' Self-reported Motivation to Learn English

The literature review has shown that motivated language learners are more prone to engage in autonomous learning practices. In this study, the self-reported motivation of EFL students was also measured and described as fairly low – 184 participants rated themselves as unmotivated to learn English.

The level of their motivation was analyzed in terms of gender and school location and type. No significant differences were observed regarding gender (z=-.418, p=.67, r=.02) or school type (z=-.428, p=.67, r=.02). A significant difference, however, appeared in school location (z=-2.458, p=.01, r=.13). The higher scores belonged to urban schools (n=184, Md=4), suggesting that their students could have been more motivated than students in suburban schools (n=176, Md=3).

The participants' self-rated motivation for learning English was further correlated to the data received from their EFL teachers. In their questionnaire, these teachers were asked to describe their students' motivation using the same scale in order to obtain a more objective picture. The scores in the student cohort (Md=3) were the same as in the teacher group (Md=3), suggesting that the students' perceptions tallied with their teachers' observations.

The student participants' somewhat optimistic responses were also observed in the focus group interview stage. Quite a few student participants regarded themselves as motivated learners. They stated that they wanted to learn English because "it is an international language" (FG1, S4; FG2, S1; FG4, S2), "it helps to get a decent job" (FG2, S3), "English is essential in the 21st century" (FG5, S4), and a good command of "English enables young people to study abroad" (FG3, S2) or "locally [but] at top universities" (FG2, S1). The student interviewees also added that their "teachers [were] good at motivating students" (FG1, S1; FG3 S1). For example, EFL teachers chose "suitable methods and materials" (FG3, S2) and "remind[ed] students of the importance" (FG2, S3) and "benefits of knowing English in the 21st century" (FG2, S4). However, it must be clarified that not all student participants thought in the same way. Some bluntly said that their

"English lessons [were] boring" (FG1, S4; FG4, S4; FG5, S3). The latter group of interviewees came from urban state schools, reproaching their teachers for over-focusing on "grammar and text memorization" (FG4, S4), and not promoting "speaking skills" (FG1, S4; FG5, S3). Some participants ascribed the latter issue to "a low level of [oral] English [proficiency among] teachers" (FG4, S4).

The teachers' responses were more balanced and resembled the results from the questionnaire. For instance, they said that "some students [were] motivated" (FG1, T2; FG2, T4; FG3, T5), whereas "other[s] … [were] not" (FG1, T3; FG2, T1; FG3, T3). They confirmed that motivated students learnt English for very much the same reasons as described by the students themselves. The unmotivated students, on the other hand, very often described "English classes [as] unattractive" (FG1, S4; FG5, S3). These students were learning "English because [they] ha[d] to" (FG4, S4) – "English [was] a compulsory subject" (FG4, S4; FG5, S3). Another reason why they had to learn English was "the end of school exam" (FG1, S4; FG4, S4), which they had to pass in order to graduate.

EFL Students' Readiness for Learner Autonomy

Having measured the level of motivation among the participants, it was time to focus on the participants' readiness for autonomy. It was analyzed from three different perspectives: (1) students' dependence on teachers, (2) students' competence to act autonomously, and (3) students' capacity to make plans concerning autonomous learning outside school.

Regarding the first perspective, the findings showed a medium level of teacher dependence. As the data revealed, 257 (71.2%) participants demonstrated a medium level of dependence, whereas 99 (27.4%) participants showed high dependence. Only 5 (1.4%) participants appeared to be autonomous learners. The data further revealed that, in some situations, participants were more dependent on teachers than in others (Table 2, descending order).

Table 2
Participants' Dependence on Teachers in the Teaching-learning Process

	Items	M	SD
14.	I prefer my teacher not to involve me in reflecting on the activities I have done, as such activities have nothing to do with learning English.	3.07	0.69
3.	I prefer my teacher to give me activities to work on (either on my own or with my classmates), telling me the exact steps I should take to complete them.	3.07	0.58
15.	I prefer my teacher to tell me precisely what to do without asking me to take action or control a situation (take the initiative).	3.00	0.83
1.	I prefer my teacher to explain everything to me without asking me questions and testing my thinking.	2.90	0.89
13.	I prefer my teacher not to ask me to help him/her to select activities or texts to work on in the classroom because I do not have sufficient knowledge.	2.83	0.75
11.	I prefer my teacher to assess my work on his/her own without asking me to make any judgements.	2.77	0.73
6.	I prefer my teacher to control my learning; I am not good at working on my own.	2.73	0.87
12.	I prefer my teacher to assess my classmates' work on his/her own without asking me to make any judgements.	2.73	0.69
4.	I prefer my teacher to nominate me to talk about my interests.	2.70	0.91
7.	I prefer my teacher to nominate me to express my views in the classroom.	2.70	0.84
2.	I prefer my teacher to pass knowledge to students who quietly listen to his / her presentation / explanation.	2.60	0.62
5.	I prefer my teacher to tell me what my mistakes are without asking me to identify them on my own.	2.57	0.86
9.	I prefer my teacher to give me regular feedback on my work and tell me how to improve things.	2.23	0.94
8.	I prefer my teacher to be around as I do not feel confident of learning on my own.	2.00	0.45
10.	I prefer my teacher to create opportunities where all the activities can be completed with him/her in the classroom, and thus no homework is set.	1.97	0.72

The teacher-centredness variable was also examined in respect to the participants' gender, their school location and school type. In the first case, male participants (*M*=2.82, *SD*=.28) scored higher than female participants (*M*=2.77, *SD*=.35), and thus were more dependent on teachers. Regarding the participants' school location, state school participants (*M*=2.81, *SD*=.32) were less dependent on teachers than their peers from private schools (*M*=2.76, *SD*=.35). In the last case, the urban schools' participants (*M*=2.82, *SD*=.38) obtained higher scores, indicating less dependency on teachers among participants from suburban schools (*M*=2.76, *SD*=.26). Overall, no statistically significant differences were found in relation to these three variables. The results were *t*(359)=1.401, *p*=.16, effect size=.005; *t*(359)=1.840, *p*=.07, effect size=.009; and *t*(359)=1.240, *p*=.22, effect size=.004, respectively.

To obtain a fuller account of the participants' dependence with regard to the 15 specific aspects of the teaching-learning process, the students' responses were compared with the data collected from their teachers. As in the previous case, the scores in the student cohort (*M*=2.79, *SD*=0.33) were slightly higher than in the teacher group (*M*=2.66, *SD*=0.32). It can therefore be inferred that the student participants considered themselves more independent as learners than their teachers find them.

The second perspective was the participants' capacity to act autonomously. The data showed that, on average, the participants fell into a medium-level category. More specifically, 0.8% (*n*=3) of the participants demonstrated a low capacity for independent behaviours, 59.3% (*n*=214) displayed medium capacity, and 39.9% (*n*=144) had a high capacity for independent action. Table 3 lists 15 areas of the teaching-learning process in descending order and describes the extent to which the participants could perform them, demonstrating autonomy.

Table 3
Participants' Capacity to Act Independently

	Items	*M*	*SD*
15.	reflect on my learning	3.00	0.79
10.	identify strengths in my learning	2.93	0.64
13.	decide on what to learn next in my English course	2.87	0.78
12.	plan my learning	2.87	0.68
1.	suggest activities/exercises for class work	2.87	0.68
11.	identify weaknesses in my learning	2.80	0.71
5.	select learning materials for class work	2.80	0.66
6.	select learning materials for home study	2.80	0.61
9.	evaluate my course	2.80	0.61
7.	assess my own learning	2.73	0.78
8.	assess my classmates' learning	2.73	0.69
14.	take the initiative in the classroom	2.73	0.64
4.	set learning objectives outside class	2.70	0.88
3.	set learning objectives in class	2.70	0.84
2.	suggest activities/exercises for home study	2.53	0.57

The capacity for autonomous action was also analyzed by gender, school location and type. The analyses revealed statistical differences regarding gender and school location. In the former case (*t*(359)=-2.174, *p*=.03, effect size=.013), female respondents (*M*=2.92, *SD*=.28) scored higher than male respondents (*M*=2.85, *SD*=.35), whereas in the latter (*t*(359)=-3.778, *p*=.000, effect size=.04), urban school participants (*M*=2.84., *SD*=.35) came before those from suburban schools (*M*=2.96, *SD*=.24). No significant differences (*t*(359)=1.455, *p*=.15, effect size=.006) were found in the results from state (*M*=2.92, *SD*=.31) and private (*M*=2.87, *SD*=.30) schools (*M*=2.87, *SD*=.30).

The next step was to compare the students' responses with the data gathered from teachers. Again, the results from students ($M=2.90$, $SD=0.31$) were slightly higher than those from teachers ($M=2.79$, $SD=0.45$). This seems to imply that the students perceived themselves to be slightly more ready to act autonomously than their teachers thought they were.

The focus group stage also provided interesting data, revealing several contradictions between the quantitative and qualitative stages. For instance, most interviewees stated that they could "identify strengths and weaknesses in [their] learning" (FG1, S1; FG2, S3; FG3, S4), which did not entirely agree with the quantitative data. They further explained that "the strengths and weaknesses [told them] where exactly [they were] in [their] learning" (FG4, S1) journey. Some declared themselves ready to "make suggestions regarding materials" (FG2, S4) and "activities for class work" (FG4, S1), but a similar number of participants did not support this point of view. For instance, one participant said that "[he] would not dare to make any suggestions as teachers always decide[d] on what happen[ed] in the classroom" (FG5, S2). Only two participants mentioned the importance of reflection in the learning process, at the same time admitting their engagement in it. However, according to the statistical analysis, this item seemed to be the top option, implying that the participants were ready to act as reflective learners.

The interview stage further showed that the student participants did not demonstrate several typical autonomous learner behaviours. This observation was confirmed by the questionnaire data as well as teacher interviews. Most student participants were not ready to "set learning objectives" (FG1, S2; FG2, S4; FG3 S1; FG1, T2; FG2, T5; FG3, T4), "take the initiative in the classroom" (FG3, S3; FG1, T4), or "assess [their] own and others' learning" (FG5, S2). These three items appeared to be "very difficult for Indonesian students" (FG1, S2; FG3, T4) as they seemed not to be sufficiently "promoted by the current curriculum" (FG3, T4). Critical assessment, or evaluation, was "especially problematic for Indonesians" (FG1, S2) as "it is culturally bound" (FG1, T2; FG3, T2).

The last perspective was the student participants' ability to plan for autonomous learning outside school (Table 4, descending order). Their abilities were quantified, and the findings were categorized as: low-level ($n=89$, 24.7%), medium-level ($n=222$, 61.5%) and high-level ability ($n=50$, 13.9%). Overall, the participants displayed a medium-level ability to make plans for autonomous learning.

Table 4
Plans for Autonomous Learning

	Plans for autonomous learning	*M*	*SD*
4.	listening to English songs (including MTV)	3.37	1.10
12.	playing English games (e.g., computer, online)	3.27	1.14
11.	watching English films (e.g., cinema, YouTube, etc.)	3.13	1.25
1.	learning from reference materials (e.g., grammar books, dictionaries)	2.93	0.78
13.	learning English with a friend/a group of friends	2.70	1.21
2.	reading English books (e.g., short stories, novels, comic books)	2.70	1.18
15.	attending private English courses/lessons	2.67	1.12
14.	attending English language extra-curricular activities (e.g., conversation club)	2.60	1.19
9.	writing texts in English (e.g., mobile messages, blogs, tweets, etc.)	2.50	1.22
5.	speaking English with your friend(s)	2.37	1.07
10.	watching English TV (e.g., BBC, CNN, National Geographic)	2.30	1.15
3.	reading articles from English newspapers or magazines	2.13	0.90
7.	communicating with foreigners in English using social media such as Skype, WhatsApp, etc.	1.97	1.00
8.	seeking opportunities to practise English face-to-face with foreigners	1.63	0.56
6.	using English with your family members	1.50	0.94

The collected data revealed significant differences in two variables: gender ($t(359)$=1.969, p=0.05, effect size=.01) and school location ($t(359)$=6.440, p=.000, effect size=.10). The male group (M=3.02, SD=.49) scored higher than the female group (M=2.9, SD=.60), while urban schools (M=3.12, SD=.58) obtained higher scores than suburban institutions (M=2.75, SD=.49). There were no significant differences ($t(359)$=.573, p=.57, effect size=.0009) in the results from state (M=2.96, SD=.48) and private (M=2.92, SD=.65) schools.

The focus group interviews produced hardly any data regarding plans for autonomous learning outside school. In general, the participants made it clear that they "[had] not made any plans" (FG1, S4; FG2, S2; FG4, S2) before and "[had] no immediate ideas of what activities they could [commit themselves to]" (FG2, S2). When probed, a few participants stated, rather hesitantly, that they "plan[ned] to improve [their] speaking skills" (FG1, S4; FG5, S3) because "they [were] not practised at school" (FG5, S3) and they knew that "successful communication in English [was] very important" (FG1, S4) and "will improve [their] life in the future" (FG5, S3).

Discussion

The first research question focused on how Indonesian secondary school EFL students conceptualized learner autonomy. As the data showed, the students had a very limited knowledge of the concept and defined it as a learner's capacity to work independently of the teacher. Although this definition is reflected in the literature (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991), it is somewhat simplistic. It is clear that secondary school students do not have, and are not expected to have, a thorough, theoretical background knowledge about learner autonomy, yet in the current study, it was hoped that the students would be able to relate to it more by seeing it through their own learning experiences. Disappointingly, this did not materialize, which encourages further exploration of the Indonesian context to find out why learner autonomy exists there in such a narrow scope.

Learner autonomy conceptualization in Indonesia may be a challenge for many in the educational context because important policy documents hardly ever use the term. These documents, on the other hand, do promote critical thinking, collaboration, communication, learning strategies, critical and creative types of thinking, and reflection (Kemdikbud, 2016, 2017). These are characteristic features of autonomous learners, yet the term *autonomous learner*, as with *learner autonomy*, does not exist in key documents. Such an approach is difficult to understand, especially now that learner autonomy is not only a buzzword in language education debates worldwide, but is also actively promoted in the classroom under that name in many teaching contexts. To heighten Indonesian EFL teachers' and students' awareness, it is important that this notion be included in official documents and used in educational discourse.

The second research question concentrated on the extent to which the students were motivated to learn English. The gathered data showed that the level of motivation was fairly low. Many of the teenagers did not feel motivated to learn English despite its global reach. Since motivation and autonomy are closely related, lack of motivation could have been one of the factors preventing students from becoming autonomous.

It must be stressed here that intrinsic motivation is crucial in language learning (Ghanbarpour, 2014; Rahimi & Karkami, 2014), and so too in the process of developing learner autonomy (Oxford, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ushioda (1996, p. 40) asserts very confidently that "without motivation, there is no autonomy," for "autonomous learners are by definition motivated learners" (Ushioda, 1996, p. 2). Dörnyei and Csizer (1998) corroborate Ushioda's position,

emphasising that high levels of motivation increase the possibility of students being involved in autonomous learning. The link between autonomy and motivation has also been confirmed by Borg and Alshumaimeri (2017), Chan, Spratt and Humphreys (2002), Fukuda, Sakata and Takeuchi (2011), and Liu (2012), to name a few. Motivation is also closely related to language achievement. This is a very important message for the Indonesian context. It is essential that schools first invest into increasing intrinsic motivation in their students.

The last research question asked: To what extent do Indonesian secondary school EFL students perceive themselves to be ready to participate as autonomous learners in the teaching-learning process? As the analysis in the previous section showed, secondary school students were not quite ready to act as independent learners. This conclusion, disappointing though it is, supports earlier sources, including Cheng (2000) and Maulana, Helms-Lorenz, Irnidayanti and van de Grift (2016). However, the findings in the current study take issue with Lamb's (2004) and Swatevacharkul's (2008) projects, which somewhat complicates the present situation, and thus begs further research.

There are various reasons why the students were not ready to act autonomously. Firstly, according to the gathered data, they seemed to depend too much on their teachers, appearing to prefer top-down approaches to instruction where teachers told them what exact steps to take to complete classroom activities. They preferred not to take action and control classroom situations themselves. They "dislike[d] being asked questions" (FG2, S3) and their "thinking being tested" (FG4, S2). They also preferred "teachers to make judgements" (FG1, S1) or evaluative comments for them as opposed to "being actively engaged in self- and peer assessment" (FG3, S4).

Such dependence very likely has its roots in the culture of the Indonesian educational system, which is collectivist in nature (Maulana, Helms-Lorenz, Irnidayanti, & van de Grift, 2016; Uchida & Ogihara, 2012). Life in the classroom resembles the hierarchical society outside school, where subservience to those in authority or of higher status is required. As a result, students strictly follow whatever their teachers say, convinced there is only one best solution to a given problem – the teacher's option. It can therefore be inferred that students in the current study were not accustomed to and probably very often did not know how to question and negotiate classroom processes. Similar observations were made in Thang and Alias's (2007) study. Ng's (2009) and Phuong-Mai's (2008) research, on the other hand, disclosed that the issue may be closely related to the long-standing problem of many Asian teachers – lack of confidence in student-centred approaches to teaching.

The data further revealed that the students were not ready to set learning objectives and select learning materials for class work or home study, which is directly related to the specificity of the Indonesian system of education. In order to teach students how to do this, it is essential that they be engaged in syllabus negotiation. Negotiated syllabuses are frequently used in programmes focusing on learner autonomy development. They are organized around the shared ideas, choices and decisions made by both teachers and students in the classroom (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000; Nation & Macalister, 2009). Such decisions are a consequence of reciprocal understanding between teachers and students of how to run a particular course and what materials, activities and assessments to use to satisfy learners' needs (Watkins, Carnell, & Lodge, 2007). As the literature further emphasizes, negotiated syllabuses also bring collaborative learning and learner-centredness into the language classroom, both desirable in the Indonesian context.

Finally, the collected data showed that the students did "not carefully plan [their] learning" (FG1, S4; FG2, S2) processes, which questions their responsibility for their own learning. Needless to say, autonomous learners are fully involved in planning and organising learning (Cirocki, 2016; Flowerdew & Miller 2005; Little 2006). They know what they want to do and when to do it. They

very often learn by self-set deadlines. They also plan activities outside regular classes. The latter was observed in Sönmez's (2016) study, whose participants reported to engage in extracurricular activities to become more independent learners. This, unfortunately, contradicts the findings in the present study.

In order to take full ownership of their own learning, Javanese students must understand that planning is a thinking skill that enables them to develop strategies to reach their goals. It is vital that both parents and teachers train teenagers to plan effectively. Naglieri and Pickering (2010, p. 2) suggest that teachers: (1) teach students that a plan is a way to do something, (2) encourage students by asking: *What is your plan?* or *Did you use a plan?*, (3) teach students that a plan is also important in social situations outside the classroom, (4) remind students that a plan requires thoughtful examination of the problem, not rapid task completion, and (5) teach students to examine each problem carefully and always with a good plan.

It is important that students plan and attend out-of-school activities to develop autonomy (Richards, 2015). When students themselves decide to participate in such activities, they are likely to continue with them for a long time. These activities will usually be determined by their interests and needs. Teachers should not only encourage their students to commit themselves to such activities, but also capitalize on them. Chan, Spratt and Humphreys (2002, p. 256) specified that "teachers seeking to promote autonomous behavior in the form of outside-class activities may have more immediate success if they build on those that students already engage in, rather than on those activities which would require students to change their attitudes or behaviour."

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was threefold: (1) to investigate how Indonesian secondary school EFL students conceptualized *learner autonomy*, (2) to ascertain the degree to which these students perceived themselves to be motivated to learn English, and (3) to examine the extent to which these students perceived themselves to be ready to participate as autonomous learners in the teaching-learning process. The study employed the sequential-explanatory design to gather extensive data. It showed that the students had a very limited knowledge about learner autonomy. Their self-reported motivation for learning English was rather low-level and suggested that most students were learning English because they had to. Last but not least, the study indicated that they were not yet ready to act independently, lacking various skills and competences typical of autonomous learners. As a matter of urgency, the students must learn to plan the learning process, set objectives and actively negotiate classroom processes, to name but a few.

Since the current study is rather limited in scope, it is not possible to draw any discernible conclusions for the field. We believe, however, that the study has provided enough evidence to make several recommendations for action in East Java. The recommendations are aimed at policy makers, teacher educators, classroom practitioners and educational researchers.

Firstly, it is advisable that policy makers explicitly promote two terms in educational documents: *learner autonomy* and *autonomous learners*. This will raise awareness among teachers, students and parents. Also, it is vital that new policies introduce compulsory professional development training for school principals and superintendents regarding learner autonomy development at different levels of education. The training should combine theory and practice so that the participants deepen their theoretical understanding of learner autonomy and engage in thorough pedagogical practice. Only then will principals and superintendents be able to effectively monitor how their teachers foster learner autonomy in the classroom.

Secondly, it is important that teacher educators place special emphasis on learner autonomy in pre- and in-service teacher education. The more exposure to the concept, the better. Learner autonomy must be introduced from three different perspectives: theoretical, empirical and practical. The last is extremely important as it will guide classroom instruction. For this reason, teachers must be shown exactly how to successfully develop autonomy among students.

Thirdly, it is vital that EFL teachers promote learner autonomy regularly. They should try diverse approaches to ensure that students' interests, needs and differences are all considered. It is advisable that teachers include negotiated syllabuses in their practice so students are fully engaged in decision-making processes.

Finally, it is recommended that educational researchers continue researching learner autonomy in the EFL classroom. It would be particularly useful if future studies took into account some of the limitations of the current project. For instance, future research should be based on larger samples as well as different types of schools, and from a range of Javanese provinces, to ensure more generalizable findings. Future studies could also include more instruments to gather more comprehensive data. Finally, secondary school students' parents and policy makers should be invited to participate in research to present their own perspectives on learner autonomy, its importance, and ways of its development in the classroom and outside school.

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Andrzej Cirocki, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Language Education at the University of York, UK. His research interests relate to Teaching English as a Foreign Language, EFL teacher education and professional development, and developing learner autonomy. In addition to being author of numerous publications, he is editor-in-chief of *The European Journal of Applied Linguistics and TEFL*.

Syafi'ul Anam, Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer of English Education at Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia. He used to be an English language teacher at senior high schools and private universities in Surabaya. His research interests include assessment, self-efficacy, and self-regulation in language learning.

Pratiwi Retnaningdyah, Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer of English Literature at Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia. Her research interests revolve around gender and identity, literacy as social practice, and literature in ELT. She is currently involved in the national school literacy movement to foster reading practice among students.