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LEVELS OF LEARNER AUTONOMY IN ONLINE LEARNING AMONG INDONESIAN EFL TERTIARY STUDENTS

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Abstract: In the 21st century, promoting learner autonomy has become a central objective in education, especially in the context of language learning. Encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning is believed to enhance their motivation and engagement in learning English. One increasingly popular tool that supports this goal is the English Online Platform, which facilitates autonomous learning by offering easily accessible resources and opportunities to improve English proficiency. Although many studies on learner autonomy have been conducted in Indonesia, most have focused on conventional classroom settings, with relatively few addressing autonomy in online learning contexts. This study investigated the readiness of Indonesian EFL undergraduate students for autonomous learning in online English courses and examined whether their perceptions of autonomy differed by gender or year of study. Data were obtained from 164 English education students across seven higher education institutions in three provinces in Indonesia through an online questionnaire. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that students demonstrated moderate to high levels of autonomy across the four dimensions: self-control, self-reflection, self-interaction, and self-motivation. Among the dimensions, self-reflection was rated the highest, which indicates that students strongly perceived themselves as reflective learners who could assess their performance and articulate reasons behind their successes and failures, while self-interaction was the lowest, suggesting their limited confidence in online communication and collaboration. While gender did not significantly affect students' perceptions, differences were noted based on years of study. The study offers implications for EFL teachers and higher education institutions in the Indonesian context.
Keywords: *readiness; learner autonomy; online English language learning; Indonesian EFL tertiary students.*

INTRODUCTION

The rise of online learning post-COVID-19 has shown its potential to transform education in the long term. Driven by advancements in technology and the shifting preferences among learners and educators, online learning is likely to continue beyond the pandemic (Mhlanga, 2024). Research highlights that online learning platforms have created unprecedented opportunities for students to engage with resources outside traditional classroom settings, including flexible access to educational materials unrestricted by time and location, access to up-to-date relevant materials along with opportunities to interact with experts, peers, and native speakers, and extensive knowledge resources available in various formats (Anderson, 2008; Barua & Lockee, 2024; Najjar et al., 2025). Recent research highlights learners' dependency on technology. They not only extensively use technological resources but also recognize the vital role these tools play in helping them attain their learning goals. This recognition arises from the various range of resources technology provides, which contribute significantly to their language learning process (Hildayati & Melani, 2023). More recent studies further indicate that contemporary online learning environments foster stronger student engagement through interactive learning management systems, gamified features, and collaborative digital tools that make learning more dynamic and participatory (Subiyantoro et al., 2024; Vo & Ho, 2024).

However, the increasing integration of technology into education has also introduced new pedagogical challenges. While online learning offers flexibility and accessibility, it demands greater responsibility from learners to take charge of their own learning progress (Alanoglu et al., 2025; Li & Wu, 2023). One key challenge is learner autonomy, which is essential for academic success. Effective online learning depends on learners' ability to manage their learning processes, direct their studies, and practice effective time management without supervision, which require a high level of self-discipline and initiative (Bonilla et al., 2025; LaTour & Noel, 2021; Yu, 2023). In recent studies, these abilities are increasingly conceptualized within the framework of self-regulated learning, which encompasses learners' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning activities in online environments (Zheng & Xiao, 2024).

Learner autonomy, defined as the capacity of learners to manage their own learning, aligns with lifelong learning theories and pedagogies that influence global educational policies and classroom practices (Armitage et al., 2012; Holec, 1981). Research highlights that learner autonomy improves the quality of learners' language acquisition, helps them make the most of learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom, enhances their engagement in learning activities, and contribute to improved language proficiency (Chen, 2023; Putri, et al., 2025). Despite these benefits, autonomy remains a complex construct influenced by cultural, contextual, and institutional factors that shape how learners assume responsibility for their learning (Amalo & Petraki, 2024; Salman & Bataineh, 2025).

In the Indonesian context, exploring learner autonomy in online education is crucial, particularly due to its diverse educational landscape, which includes disparities in technology access, varying levels of English proficiency, and different cultural perspectives on education (Lamb, 2004; Susanti et al., 2023). Research indicates that traditional classroom settings in Indonesia tend to be teacher-centered, with limited opportunities for students to practice autonomy. This traditional approach may influence students' ability to cope with the demands of online learning, which often requires a higher degree of self-regulation and independent learning (Cirocki et al., 2019; Sulistiyo, 2016). While online learning offers flexibility and wider access, Indonesian students may face unique challenges in exercising autonomy in such environments. Recent studies further confirm that Indonesian learners in online settings often struggle with time management, motivation, self-monitoring, and dependence on teacher guidance, although digital platforms can also support the development of autonomy when combined with effective scaffolding and structured learning design (Susanti et al., 2023; Nurdin et al., 2025; Chakim et al., 2026).

Although many studies on learner autonomy have been conducted in the Indonesian context, the majority of these studies have primarily focused on traditional classroom settings. Few studies have explored learner autonomy in the online class platform (e.g. Febriana et al., 2022; Hildayati & Melani, 2023; Rahmasari et al., 2025; Warna et al., 2025). Moreover, these few studies had different focus from the present study. While these studies offered valuable insights into Indonesian EFL students' experiences and strategies in online English language learning environments, they provided only limited understanding of students' readiness are to engage autonomously in online environments across different institutions. Additionally, given the diverse range of educational institutions in Indonesia, these few previous studies represent only a limited number of studies.

To address these gaps, the present study assessed the readiness of tertiary Indonesian EFL students for learner autonomy in online learning contexts. It employed a multi-dimensional framework of learner autonomy proposed by Adanır and Gülbahar (2023), which includes four interrelated dimensions: self-control, self-reflection, self-interaction, and self-motivation. This framework is aligned with Zimmerman's (2000) self-regulated learning model, which views learning as a cyclical process of planning, performance, and reflection, and with Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, which emphasises the role of intrinsic motivation and perceived competence in sustaining autonomous behavior.

The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for students, EFL teachers, policymakers, and curriculum designers to enhance autonomous learning strategies and improve online learning experiences. Thus, this study attempted to answer the following research questions: (1) What are students' perceptions of their autonomy in the online English language learning? (2) Are there statistically significant differences in students' perceived autonomy based on gender? (3) Are there statistically significant

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differences in students' perceived autonomy based on years of study?

Despite the widespread acknowledgment of the significance of learner autonomy in education, there is a lack of agreement on its exact definition. Holec (1981) defined learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's learning" (p. 3), which stresses learners' control over objectives, content, methods, and evaluation. In line with this, Littlewood (1999) distinguished between *proactive autonomy*, where learners take initiative in planning and performing learning tasks, and *reactive autonomy*, where they act independently with given structures. Both perspectives emphasize the importance of learners taking behavioral and decisional control over learning processes, which align with Zimmerman's (2000) notion of forethought and performance control in self-regulated learning.

Benson (2001) further expanded the concept by identifying three key dimensions of learner autonomy: the management of learning, the control of cognitive processes, and the freedom to determine learning content. These dimensions integrate the cognitive, behavioural, and motivational aspects of self-directed learning. Another vital dimension is self-motivation, which keeps learners engaged and persistent in autonomous learning journey. Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory underscores that intrinsic motivation – driven by autonomy, competence, and relatedness – is essential for sustaining long-term learning. Similarly, Ushioda (2011) argued that motivation in autonomy is not simply an internal drive but also a relational process shaped by learners' identities and goals. Nunan (1997) proposed a five-level model, from awareness to transcendence, that describes how learners gradually take charge of their learning.

Recent studies continue to conceptualize learner autonomy as a multidimensional construct closely associated with self-regulated learning, self-directed learning, and learner agency (Gupta et al., 2024; Kharroubi & ElMediouni, 2024). For example, autonomy develops through the interaction of intrapersonal, behavioral, and contextual dimensions, highlighting the importance of agency and reflective decision-making in educational settings (Gupta et al., 2024). Likewise, learner autonomy is both a personal capacity and an ongoing learning process shaped by metacognition, social interaction, and self-management (Kharroubi & ElMediouni, 2024). In technology-enhanced environments, learner autonomy has also been linked to students' use of AI tools, self-efficacy, metacognitive strategies, and self-monitoring, suggesting that autonomy increasingly involves the ability to manage digital resources independently (Zhang, 2025). Therefore, rather than a single fixed concept, learner autonomy is now widely understood as learners' capacity to intentionally regulate, direct, and sustain their own learning within supportive social and technological contexts (Gupta et al., 2024; Kharroubi & ElMediouni, 2024; Zhang, 2025).

As technology continues to advance, autonomy in language learning increasingly relies on technological tools, including the internet. Recent research into autonomous language learning highlights this dependency on technology among learners. The literature suggests that the concept of readiness for online learning has continuously evolved, in response to advancements in technology, pedagogical approaches, and educational contexts (Tang et al., 2025). Online learning readiness refers to the extent to which learners are prepared for online learning based on their technical skills, learning attitudes, and motivation, as well as their ability to engage effectively in the online learning process, including technical proficiency with communication devices, communication skills, and the capacity to interact with teachers and peers; it is also considered as a complex construct involving digital literacy, self-directed learning, learner control, and motivation that enable successful participation and achievement in online learning (Polat, 2024; Reyes-Millán et al., 2023; Vo et al., 2024).

As online learning has become more dominant, many studies have been conducted to explore key determinants of online learning readiness. Previous studies have consistently identified several important dimensions of online learning readiness, including self-directed learning, motivation, learner control, communication skills, and technological self-efficacy (Smith, 2005; Smith et al., 2003; Kırmızı, 2015; Buzdar et al., 2016). Among these factors, motivation has been reported as a strong contributor to student satisfaction in online learning, whereas self-directed learning has been found to be a significant predictor of academic success (Kırmızı, 2015). In addition, Buzdar et al.'s (2016) study revealed students demonstrated relatively higher readiness in self-directed learning and motivation for online learning. However, they showed lower preparedness in computer/internet self-efficacy, learner control in an online context, and online communication self-efficacy.

More recent studies have further expanded this perspective by emphasizing that online learning readiness is increasingly linked to digital competence, self-regulation, and learner confidence. For example, Reyes-Millán et al. (2023) found that students with stronger prior digital skills and greater use of institutional learning resources demonstrated better critical thinking, problem-solving, and time organization skills in online environments. Similarly, Lee et al. (2026) reported that online learning readiness significantly mediated the relationship between self-efficacy and course satisfaction. In addition, Dello Stritto et al. (2023) validated a revised readiness instrument consisting of self-regulation efficacy, locus of control, communication efficacy, and technology efficacy, highlighting the multidimensional nature of readiness in contemporary education. These findings indicate that online learning readiness is not only an individual characteristic but also a dynamic construct influenced by technological skills, motivation, and institutional support.

METHOD

This study used a quantitative approach, specifically a survey design. According to Cohen et al. (2018), surveys are used to collect data at a specific point in time, enabling the description of the current situation, establish standards for comparison, or examine connections or correlations among particular events. To implement this design, an online survey was conducted using a Google form questionnaire. Utilizing an internet-based survey presents several benefits, such as cost-effectiveness, the ability to reach broader and more extensive populations and samples effortlessly, overcoming geographical and time limitations, as well as the flexibility to complete the survey at respondents' convenience (Cohen et al., 2018).

This study involved 164 students enrolled in the English Education Study Program across seven institutions of higher education in three different provinces in Indonesia. Four of the institutions were Islamic institutions of higher education and the other three were general universities. The participants were between 18 and 23 years of age, consisting of both males and females. These students span across various academic years, ranging from the first to the fourth year.

For participant selection, this study employed convenience sampling, where the individuals were chosen based on their availability or accessibility (Cohen et al., 2018). This method facilitated data collection from a diverse range of institutions and regions. However, it also presented certain limitations. Specifically, the sample may not represent the broader population of Indonesian EFL students. Differences in institutional characteristics, regional contexts, and levels of digital exposure could also have influenced participants' responses. Moreover, since participation was voluntary, there was a possibility of self-selection bias, as students with stronger motivation or more positive attitudes toward online learning may have been more likely to take part. Therefore, the findings were interpreted with caution by acknowledging that they captured the perspectives of those who were accessible rather than offering generalizable conclusions for all Indonesian EFL learners.

To collect the data, a questionnaire adapted from Adanir and Gülbahar (2023) was used. This questionnaire assesses learner autonomy in online learning across four dimensions: self-control, self-reflection, self-interaction, and self-motivation. The construct validity of this questionnaire was verified, and its adequacy of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was calculated using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test. A Bartlett's test result below 0.05 indicates the data are appropriate for factor analysis, while KMO values range from 0 to 1, with higher values suggesting greater suitability (KMO $\geq$ 0.6 indicates low adequacy, KMO $\geq$ 0.7 medium adequacy, KMO $\geq$ 0.8 high adequacy, and KMO $\geq$ 0.9 very high adequacy). In the present study, the questionnaire scored 0.00 on Bartlett's test and 0.89 on the KMO measure, indicating very high adequacy. The questionnaire also showed strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .93, meeting Kline's (1999) criteria for high reliability. The questionnaire was scored on a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree' (Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, and Strongly Agree = 5). Before being distributed to the participants for data collection, the questionnaire was carefully translated into Bahasa Indonesia and then reviewed by a bilingual expert in English language education to ensure both linguistic accuracy and conceptual equivalence of the items. To ensure understanding and to evaluate the time required for completion, two students were given the translated questionnaires to read and complete. To assess comprehension, layout, and completion time, a pilot test was conducted with two students representing the target population. While this

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small-scale pilot was not intended to establish statistical validity, it helped ensure clarity and usability of the instrument prior to the main administration. The combination of validity and reliability from the original study, expert validation, and careful translation procedures further supports the suitability of the adapted instrument for use in the Indonesian EFL context.

In this research, an online survey was conducted using Google forms to gather data. The choice of this method was based on its advantages, such as ease of contact and accessibility, as highlighted by Cohen et al. (2018). As the participants spread over seven institutions of higher education in three different provinces, the researchers contacted potential participants by themselves as well as with the help of colleagues in each institution to facilitate access. To ensure voluntary participation, the researchers provided a clear explanation of the study's purpose and procedures at the beginning of the online questionnaire. Participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential and would be used solely for research purposes. Participation was entirely voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time without any consequences. Prior to data collection, informed consent was secured from all participants before they proceeded to complete the questionnaire. The link to the Google Form was distributed via WhatsApp, along with an introductory message that described the study and its objectives—to better understand students' perceptions of learner autonomy in online English language learning. Participants were also encouraged to provide honest and thoughtful responses to ensure the reliability of the data.

The link of the questionnaire in the Google forms was sent via WhatsApp. The researchers also informed the potential participants that the study aimed to better understand students' perceptions of learner autonomy in online English language learning. Additionally, the researcher requested the participants to provide honest responses to the questionnaires.

The analysis of data involved both descriptive and inferential statistics employing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics specifically utilized the percentages derived from students' responses, which provided a comprehensive description of their perceived autonomy in the online learning. To simplify the analysis, 'Strongly disagree' and 'Disagree' scales were combined to represent disagreement, while 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree' are combined to represent agreement. Additionally, a Mann-Whitney U test was employed to examine possible differences in students' perceptions based on gender.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' perceptions of their autonomy in the online English language learning

Table 1 presents students' perceptions of their autonomy in online English language learning, specifically regarding self-control. The results show that students generally perceived themselves as having a moderate to high level of self-control in online learning, with mean scores ranging from 3.13 to 4.09. The highest mean score (M = 4.09) was *checking deadlines of course tasks*. Similarly, *regularly following lessons* (M = 3.91) and *doing homework on time* (M = 3.77) received relatively high scores. Conversely, the lowest mean scores were *reviewing materials before class* (M = 3.13) and *repeating lessons after class* (M = 3.15), which highlight students' limited engagement in proactive learning strategies that require self-motivation and initiative. In other words, the data suggest a pattern in which students demonstrated greater control in task completion and adherence to deadlines than in self-initiated learning behaviors such as reviewing materials before the class.

Table 1. *Students' perceptions of their self-control*

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
8	I take care to complete all the reading and homework given in the relevant week before entering the class.	3.63	0.84
4	I regularly follow my lessons and homework during the online learning process.	3.91	0.82
13	I do homework and activities given after the virtual classroom on time.	3.77	0.87
12	I repeat my lessons after virtual classroom.	3.15	0.83
7	I review the teaching materials and content before joining the virtual classroom.	3.13	0.82
5	I often check the deadlines of course tasks.	4.09	0.86
6	During my online learning process, I keep the distracting devices (telephone, television, etc.) turned off.	3.38	0.98

19	I act in accordance with the study plan I have made myself in the online learning process.	3.53	0.85
18	I manage my time well in the online learning process.	3.66	0.83
29	I have a clear plan for managing my time effectively for studying online and other activities.	3.49	0.85
30	I actively seek out opportunities to enhance my online learning, even if it requires extra effort.	3.54	0.86

Table 2 displays students' perceptions regarding their self-reflection in online learning. The findings indicate generally positive perceptions, with mean scores ranging from 3.13 to 3.92. The overall pattern shows that while students demonstrated confidence in their independent learning abilities and adaptability, their reflective engagement and motivation toward distance learning remain moderate. The highest mean scores are found in *accessing learning resources easily in the Internet environment* (M = 3.92, SD = 0.84) and *learning better in flexible learning processes* (M = 3.91, SD = 0.84). Likewise, relatively high means for *taking responsibility for their own learning* (M = 3.84) and *setting goals and making decisions* (M = 3.79) indicate a solid sense of learner responsibility and goal-setting awareness. Moderate means are found for items related to *self-evaluation* (M = 3.66), *improving digital literacy* (M = 3.58), and *using free time effectively for online learning* (M = 3.57). These results suggest that while students engaged in reflective and constructive practices, their behaviors were not yet consistent. The lowest mean score (M = 3.13) is associated with *the positive effect of distance on learning motivation*, which indicates that students may still find it challenging to stay motivated without face-to-face interaction.

Table 2. *Students' perceptions of their self-reflection*

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
27	The distance of the learning process positively affects my desire to learn.	3.13	0.95
28	I can shape my online learning process in line with my personal expectations.	3.48	0.86
1	I think I have the ability to learn with the online learning method.	3.56	0.91
26	I think I learn better in a more flexible learning process.	3.91	0.84
23	I can improve my digital literacy competencies in the online learning process.	3.58	0.93
20	I evaluate myself to learn better.	3.66	0.85
3	I make good use of my free time in acquiring new information through online learning.	3.57	0.76
21	I can take responsibility for my own learning.	3.84	0.78
2	I make my own decisions and set goals for my learning process.	3.79	0.78
25	I can easily access the learning resources I need in the Internet environment.	3.92	0.84

Regarding self-interaction, as displayed in Table 3, students' perceptions are generally moderate, with mean scores ranging from 3.20 to 3.64. The highest mean score (M = 3.64, SD = 0.87) is *communicating with instructors and friends outside of the virtual classroom.* This shows that students tend to feel more at ease interacting beyond the formal class environment. Meanwhile, *collaborative work* (M = 3.20, SD = 1.06) and *communication within the virtual classroom* both with peers (M = 3.30, SD = 1.05) and instructors (M = 3.30, SD = 1.04) received lower mean scores, indicating that students may experience hesitation when engaging in real-time, structured online interactions.

Table 3. *Students' perceptions of their self-interaction*

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
11	I communicate comfortably with other students in the virtual classroom.	3.30	1.05
10	I communicate comfortably with my instructor in the virtual classroom.	3.30	1.04
9	I can easily ask my questions in the virtual classroom.	3.36	1.00
14	I communicate with my instructor and friends outside of the virtual classroom.	3.64	0.87
24	I have no difficulty conducting collaborative work in the online learning process.	3.20	1.06

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Table 4 focuses on students' perceptions of their autonomy in online English language learning regarding self-motivation. Students' perceptions are generally moderate to high, with mean scores ranging from 2.96 to 3.87. The highest mean score (M = 3.87, SD = 0.79) is for *learning course content from different sources*, followed closely by *enriching the online learning process through different resources* (M = 3.85, SD = 0.80) and *using different audio-visual materials* (M = 3.70, SD = 0.87). In contrast, the lowest mean score (M = 2.96, SD = 1.02) is *learning without an instructor's guidance*, which indicates students' difficulty in sustaining motivation when learning independently.

Table 4. *Students' perceptions of their self-motivation*

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
16	I try to learn course content from different sources by reaching different audio-visual materials.	3.70	0.87
15	I try to learn course content from different sources by reaching open educational resources (OERs) such as e-books, journals and scientific articles, online communities, etc.	3.87	0.79
17	I enrich my online learning process by reaching different resources.	3.85	0.80
22	In the online learning process, I can learn without an instructor's guidance.	2.96	1.02

Table 5 summarises students' overall perceptions of learner autonomy across four dimensions, with mean scores ranging from 3.36 to 3.64 and relatively low standard deviations (0.17–0.43), suggesting consistent responses among participants. Among the dimensions, self-reflection showed the highest mean (M = 3.64, SD = 0.24), followed by self-motivation (M = 3.60, SD = 0.43), self-control (M = 3.57, SD = 0.29), and self-interaction (M = 3.36, SD = 0.17). This pattern indicates that students viewed themselves as more capable of reflecting on their learning and sustaining motivation than in managing their learning behaviors or engaging interactively. Although the mean differences are small, the slightly higher standard deviation in self-motivation (SD = 0.43) suggests some variation in how students regulate their motivation. Overall, the findings point to a moderately high level of perceived autonomy, with reflective and motivational aspects standing out as the strongest areas of students' autonomous learning.

Table 5. *Students' overall perceptions based on each dimension*

Dimension	Overall Mean	SD	Rank
Self-control	3.57	0.29	3
Self-reflection	3.64	0.24	1
Self-interaction	3.36	0.17	4
Self-motivation	3.60	0.43	2

Differences in students' perceived autonomy based on gender

Mann-Whitney U tests were performed to examine whether there were any differences in students' perceived autonomy based on gender. The results showed that the perceived autonomy level of female students (Mean rank = 83.78, n = 129) was not significantly higher than that of male students (Mean rank = 77.79, n = 35), U = 2092.500, z = -.662, Sig. = .508 (p>.05), two-tailed.

Table 6. *Mann-Whitney U test results of the differences in students' perceived autonomy regarding gender (N=164)*

	Perceived Autonomy
Mann-Whitney U	2092.500
Female mean rank	83.78
Male mean rank	77.79
z-score	-.662
p-value	.508

Differences in students' perceived autonomy based on years of study

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) using SPSS version 24 was conducted to examine if there are differences in students' perceived autonomy based on years of study (See Table 6 and Table 7).

Table 6. *ANOVA test results of the differences in students' perceived autonomy regarding years of study (N=164)*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.428	3	.809	3.150	.027
Within Groups	41.123	160	.257		
Total	43.551	163			

Table 7. *Multiple comparisons test results of the differences in students' perceived autonomy regarding years of study (N=164)*

(I) Year of Study	(J) Year of Study	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Year 1	Year 2	-.10273	.09668	.713	-.3537	.1483
	Year 3	-.13677	.10320	.548	-.4047	.1312
	Year 4	-.50709*	.16745	.015	-.9418	-.0724
Year 2	Year 1	.10273	.09668	.713	-.1483	.3537
	Year 3	-.03405	.10320	.988	-.3020	.2339
	Year 4	-.40436	.16745	.078	-.8391	.0304
Year 3	Year 1	.13677	.10320	.548	-.1312	.4047
	Year 2	.03405	.10320	.988	-.2339	.3020
	Year 4	-.37032	.17130	.138	-.8150	.0744
Year 4	Year 1	.50709*	.16745	.015	.0724	.9418
	Year 2	.40436	.16745	.078	-.0304	.8391
	Year 3	.37032	.17130	.138	-.0744	.8150

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As seen in Table 6, the results of the test show that there was a statistically significant difference in students' perceptions between groups ($F(3, 160) = 3.150$, $p = .027$). Furthermore, post hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test (Table 7) indicated that there was a significant difference in perceived autonomy between Year 1 and Year 4 (Mean Difference = -0.50709, Sig. = 0.015). The confidence interval does not include 0 ([-0.9418, -0.0724]), confirming the significance. Additionally, there was a notable but not statistically significant difference between Year 2 and Year 4 (Mean Difference = -0.40436, Sig. = 0.078). The results also revealed that the differences between other year pairs (e.g., Year 1 vs. Year 2, Year 1 vs. Year 3) were not statistically significant (p-values > 0.05).

The first research question aimed to investigate students' perceptions of their autonomy in the online English language learning. The results showed that the majority of respondents did not consistently agree with most of the items related to four aspects of learner autonomy. Specifically, only a small proportion of the items received support from the majority of the respondent. In other words, the students appeared to exhibit high autonomy only in several areas. In the self-control component, only 3 out of 11 statements were agreed by the majority of the respondents, including checking the deadlines of course tasks, following lessons, and regularly completing homework and activities on time. However, some statements were rated by relatively small percentages of the respondents. These include reviewing materials before class, repeating lessons post-class, and keeping distracting devices turned off. These results suggest challenges in maintaining sustained engagement with course content, a concern also noted by Artino (2008) and Volya et al. (2025), who found that students often prioritize immediate tasks over review activities. One possible explanation may stem from students' habitual dependence on the guidance provided by their teachers, a habit deeply rooted in Indonesia's long-standing teacher-centred educational tradition (Suyanto & Jihad, 2013). In such system, students are often rewarded for compliance and accuracy rather than for independent thought. As a result, they tend to view learning success as something shaped by external control instead of their own self-regulation. When this mindset meets the demands of online learning, which requires initiative and self-management, many students struggle to maintain the metacognitive discipline needed for consistent engagement.

In autonomous learning, self-control plays a crucial role in the context of online education. It refers to learners' ability to plan, regulate, and

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carry out learning activities despite difficulties and challenges. In online learning environments, self-control is closely associated with self-regulated learning, persistence, and goal achievement (Hidayatullah & Csíkos, 2025). The low perceptions among the students in their self-control skills, as revealed in the present study, align with the idea that many learners struggle to effective self-regulation in online settings (Jansen et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2023; Yu, 2023). In the Indonesian context, the low perceptions of self-control skills among students can be attributed to several factors. Indonesian education has traditionally emphasized teacher-led instruction and face-to-face interactions, which may leave students poorly-prepared for the self-directed nature of online learning. Additionally, technological disparities, including inconsistent access to reliable internet and digital resources, can hinder students' ability to engage fully with online platforms, which further impact their self-regulation skills.

Regarding self-reflection, most respondents felt they learn more effectively in a flexible learning environment and can take responsibility for their learning, make decisions, set goals, and easily access necessary resources. These findings are in line with the literature showing flexibility, access, and student agency are key facilitators of autonomous learning. For example, the systematic review by Faza and Lestari (2025) identified goal-setting, planning, monitoring, and reflection as essential self-regulated learning processes in digital settings. According to Adanır and Gülbahar (2023), self-reflection involves learners assessing their performance, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and offering self-explanations for their successes and failures. Within the framework of learner autonomy, self-reflection is a crucial metacognitive skill that allows students to monitor and regulate their learning. It encourages them to take ownership of their learning, set realistic goals, and adjust their strategies as needed. Recent studies have emphasized that self-reflection and metacognitive regulation significantly contribute to self-regulated learning, learner engagement, and academic success in online and blended learning environments (Paethrangsi et al., 2024). However, this study identified concerns regarding the impact of distance learning on students' motivation and their ability to tailor their learning processes to meet personal expectations. This aligns with previous research indicating that in online and distance mode, students struggle to maintain engagement (Oportus-Torres et al., 2024).

The finding regarding self-interaction revealed a dominance of neutral responses. This suggests that the students were unsure about their engagement in virtual communication. This could reflect uncertainty or a lack of strong feelings about their ability to engage effectively in these environments. The prevalence of neutral responses suggests that students may be unsure about their experiences with self-interaction in virtual classrooms. This could be due to varying levels of familiarity with online learning platforms, the quality of interaction facilitated by these platforms, or individual differences in self-regulation. The ambivalent responses of the students may also stem from cultural and educational factors rooted in the local context. Culturally, Indonesia's collectivist orientation emphasises harmony, group belonging, and respect for authority, which may limit students' comfort with independent or self-directed interaction in online spaces (Susilawati, 2025). In such contexts, students often rely on teacher guidance and peer collaboration rather than initiating self-expression or reflective engagement, which are central to self-interaction. Pedagogically, the traditional teacher-centred approach that dominates Indonesian classrooms (Suyanto & Jihad, 2013) may not adequately prepare students for the autonomy and self-regulation required in virtual learning environments. Many students are still adapting to online platforms where interaction is mediated by technology rather than direct social cues, reducing opportunities for immediate feedback and emotional connection (Kohnke & Zou, 2021). Building connections and fostering a supportive environment in online learning is crucial as it forms the basis for a profound and significant educational journey (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005). Previous research has identified learning interaction and social presence as critical factors that influence learning engagement and outcomes. The success of students in online learning environments is influenced by their interactions with teachers and peers (Guo et al., 2022; Lim, 2023). Garrison and Anderson's (2003) Community of Inquiry framework highlights the importance of social presence in online learning environments. They argue that effective communication is a critical component for developing social presence and fostering a sense of community among students, which can lead to improved learning outcomes. Recent research continues to support this view, demonstrating that social presence enhances student engagement, satisfaction, and motivation in online learning

contexts (Lim, 2023; Shehzad & Charles, 2023; Suryanto et al., 2024).

As for self-motivation, the students demonstrated a proactive approach by actively seeking out and utilizing OERs and various enriching resources and audio-visual materials, yet their confidence in learning independently without instructor guidance is very low. The findings indicate a complex relationship between students' proactive engagement with OERs and their self-confidence in independent learning. The students' lack of confidence could stem from an over-reliance on structured learning environments with the instructor's presence. This suggests that while students are motivated to seek out and use resources, they may struggle with the absence of direct guidance, which is critical in the transition to fully autonomous learning (Palfreyman & Benson, 2019). These results suggest a need for targeted interventions that focus on building self-efficacy and self-regulatory skills in the context of online autonomous learning. Zimmerman (2002) highlights the necessity of structured support and scaffolding to develop autonomous learning skills, as students often require guidance to build confidence in self-directed learning. In other words, in the context of online learning, this means that while students may have access to a wealth of resources, they still benefit from instructor guidance to help them navigate and make effective use of these resources.

The Mann-Whitney U tests revealed no significant gender differences in students' perceived autonomy. This indicates that both male and female students reported similar levels of autonomy in online learning environments. The similarity in perceptions between genders suggests that educational interventions aimed at enhancing autonomy can be applied broadly without gender-specific adjustments. However, ANOVA results indicated a significant difference in perceived autonomy across different years of study, suggesting that students' autonomy perceptions vary as they advance through their academic journey. The post-hoc test further revealed that Year 1 students perceived their autonomy significantly lower than Year 4 students. This finding aligns with the notion that suggests that as students gain more experience and confidence, their sense of autonomy tends to increase (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The progression through the years of study likely contributes to the development of self-regulation and autonomy, as students become more adept at managing their learning and responsibilities independently (Zimmerman, 2002).

CONCLUSION

Learner autonomy is central to success in online language learning, yet this study showed that many students still faced challenges in exercising it effectively. The findings contribute to an understanding of how Indonesian EFL students perceived their autonomy in online learning. Overall, the students demonstrated moderate to high levels of autonomy. This indicates a developing but not yet fully established capacity for independent learning. While some respondents supported the concept of learner autonomy, there was significant variability in the overall perceptions and readiness. Most respondents did not consistently agree with the items across the four aspects, suggesting potential gaps in their preparedness or understanding. The finding further showed that gender does not significantly influence autonomy, while years of study do. This highlights that factors such as experience may play a more crucial role in shaping students' attitudes toward learner autonomy in online contexts.

These results highlight the need for deliberate pedagogical and institutional strategies aligned with specific weaknesses observed. These findings call for targeted pedagogical and institutional interventions aligned with the specific weaknesses observed. For instance, to address students' low self-interaction, teachers can design structured, low-stakes collaborative activities, such as peer discussion forums or project-based group work, that promote meaningful online engagement without overwhelming students. To strengthen self-regulation, teachers might incorporate reflective journals or digital learning logs to help students monitor progress and set attainable goals. Teachers should also explicitly teach online interaction and collaboration skills, provide clear guidelines for self-study and incorporate activities that encourage self-direction. It is important for teachers to create supportive learning environments that empower students to take initiative and manage their learning processes. Additionally, regular feedback can further develop students' self-efficacy and motivation for autonomous learning.

Higher education institutions should take strategic steps to support the development of learner autonomy among students. This can include revising curricula to include elements that foster self-directed learning and align with the demands of online education. Institutions should

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also provide training programs for both students and teachers to enhance their understanding and implementation of learner autonomy principles. By addressing these areas, institutions can create a more supportive environment for autonomous learning and improve students' overall English language learning outcomes.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. First, the use of convenience sampling, which relied on participants' availability and accessibility, limits the generalizability of the findings. As it focused on a limited number of higher education institutions located in just three provinces of Indonesia, the results may not fully represent the diverse characteristics of Indonesian EFL learners across different regions and institutional contexts. To enhance the study's representativeness and strengthen the external validity of the findings, future research should use more systematic sampling and include a broader range of universities from various geographical areas in Indonesia.

Second, the assessment of students' preparedness for online learner autonomy was based exclusively on their perceptions obtained through questionnaires. Relying solely on self-reported data may not fully capture the complexity of students' autonomous behaviors. Employing additional data collection methods, such as interviews, observations, and learning diaries could provide deeper insights into the true nature of learner autonomy in online settings.

Finally, given that autonomy perceptions varied significantly by years of study, longitudinal research tracking students' attitudes toward autonomy from entry through graduation could provide valuable insights into how students' autonomy develops over time. This approach would clarify how experience and academic exposure shape learners' readiness for autonomy. Qualitative studies, such as interviews or focus groups, could provide in-depth insights into the factors influencing students' autonomy, such as challenges they encounter, strategies they find helpful, and the role of instructional support. This data could help clarify specific barriers students face in online environments and reveal effective strategies that foster autonomous learning.

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