

Readiness for Autonomy Among CFL Learners: A Malaysian Perspective

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Abstract—Learner autonomy is paramount in 21st-century education, representing a crucial qualification for lifelong learning. In the area of Chinese as a second/foreign language (CSL/CFL), it is also an important objective of curriculum instruction. However, there is a dearth of empirical research on learner autonomy in a wide range of cultural contexts and distinct domains of language use, especially in the context of CFL. This study aims to scrutinize the readiness for autonomy of CFL learners within the Malaysian settings. The research utilized a quantitative approach to analyze the data. A closed-ended questionnaire survey was conducted with 600 participants. Specifically, the data were synthesized through descriptive statistical analysis to concretely consider the respondents' readiness for learner autonomy in terms of perception of responsibility, assessment of ability, and engagement in the activities in Chinese learning. Findings indicated that Malaysian CFL learners demonstrated a medium readiness for autonomy in Chinese learning. While participants exhibit a relatively high perception of responsibility for autonomous learning, their ability to assess autonomy in decision-making within Chinese learning is somewhat unsatisfactory. Additionally, they express less enthusiasm about engaging in autonomous learning activities inside and outside the classroom. The current study illuminates theoretical and practical dimensions concerning the readiness for autonomy in Chinese learning among Malaysian CFL learners. Moreover, it is anticipated to offer implications for further studies on autonomy development among CFL learners in analogous contexts.

Index Terms—readiness, learner autonomy, CFL, Malaysian context

I. INTRODUCTION

The notion of learner autonomy has been around for almost forty years, and studies conducted on it have come from various academic fields. As academics acknowledged the value of the "student-centred" paradigm in language instruction, nurturing learner autonomy has also become the ultimate goal of education (Benson, 2007). Concurrently, autonomy is fundamental to developing lifelong learning competencies (Badak & Şenel, 2022; Gavrilyuk, 2015). Learner autonomy is one of the essential attributes for students to face the challenges of the 21st-century educational landscape (Khairallah, 2020). As a result, many scholars, policymakers, and front-line instructors are now concerned about developing learner autonomy (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000; Ismail et al., 2020). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that the perception and implementation of learner autonomy differ across diverse cultural and educational contexts (Gremmo & Riley, 1995; Littlewood, 1999; Benson, 2001; Yıldırım, 2008; Khalymon & Shevchenko, 2017; Şenbayrak et al., 2019; Win, 2022).

In CFL, Sheng and Zhang (2021) emphasized fostering learner autonomy. They argued that students must possess a strong sense of autonomy and persistent willpower to attain proficiency in Chinese. In 2014, Han Ban and the Confucius Institute Headquarters in China published the International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education (ICCLE), declaring that the overall objective of ICCLE is to facilitate learners in acquiring knowledge and skills in the Chinese language. Simultaneously, the curriculum aims to reinforce the purpose of language learning, foster the

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capacity for autonomous and collaborative learning, develop effective learning strategies, and ultimately achieve comprehensive language proficiency. In essence, autonomous learning is one of the crucial goals of teaching Chinese as a foreign or second language.

The Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB 2013-2025) underscores the importance of developing autonomous language learning to enhance learners' language proficiency. However, there has been limited study of learner autonomy in CFL in Malaysia, even though Chinese is considered second only to English as an important international language (Cheong et al., 2019). Malaysian authorities proactively engage universities to provide more opportunities for students to learn foreign languages to become proficient in a third language, such as Chinese, Arabic, French, Spanish, and others. Several public universities have recently introduced Chinese language courses, substantially increasing the number of CFL learners in universities (Tan et al., 2015).

Considering all the arguments above, this study aims to investigate the level of readiness for autonomous learning among CFL undergraduates in the Malaysian context. The empirical investigation in this study intends to address the research gap on learner autonomy in CFL under the Malaysian context. Moreover, it also seeks to provide insights into improving curriculum design and teaching methods for Chinese teachers and informing policymakers on issues such as the development of teacher autonomy, student autonomy training, and language education policy-making. Additionally, it anticipates enriching the results of empirical research on learner autonomy in Malaysia.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Learner Autonomy*

The academic definition of learner autonomy still needs to be more conclusive. Holec first defined *autonomy* in language education as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec, 1981, p. 3). His definition was the most influential and cited in the subsequent literature. Similarly, according to Benson (2011), learner autonomy is the capacity to take control of one's learning. Furthermore, Little (2004), building on Holec's definition, further clarified that learner autonomy not only includes "taking responsibility for determining the purpose, content, rhythm, and method of learning, monitoring its progress, and evaluating its outcomes," but it should also involve "the development and exercise of a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action" (p. 69).

In addition, some other scholars have argued that autonomy is an attitude in which learners take responsibility for their learning (Benson, 2005; Dam, 1995; Littlewood, 1996; Scharle & Szabó, 2000; Wenden, 1991). According to Dickinson (1995), learners' attitudes towards making decisions on their own are essential for the development of autonomy. However, some researchers have pointed out that defining learner autonomy solely regarding autonomous capacity and attitudes is incomplete (Reinders & White, 2011). Because learners can do something but do not put it into practice, such autonomy is meaningless to learners (Candy, 1991; Hedge, 2000; Wenden, 1991). As Wenden (1991) stated, autonomous learners possess the skills and attitudes necessary to manage their learning process effectively. They can also implement the actions associated with these skills and attitudes.

Based on the above discussion, it is evident that there is no consensus on the definition of learner autonomy due to the complexity of its internal elements. Nonetheless, it can be seen that the concept of learner autonomy primarily involves the learner's attitude, ability, and behaviour in taking control or responsibility for their own learning (Benson, 2005; Thavenius, 1999; Wenden, 1991; Dam, 1995; Hedge, 2000; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Littlewood, 1996; Reinders & White, 2011).

B. *Related Studies on Readiness for Learner Autonomy*

Many researchers have emphasized that being informed about students' degree of readiness for autonomy is a prerequisite for developing autonomous learning ability. Readiness for autonomy refers to learners' perceptions of responsibility and their actual autonomous language-learning practices (Cotterall, 1995; Scharle & Szabo, 2000; Chan et al., 2002; Chan, 2003). Cotterall (1995) argues that "before any intervention occurs, it is necessary to gauge learners' readiness for the changes in beliefs and behaviour which autonomy implies" (p. 1). He defines autonomy readiness as the learner's beliefs and experiences regarding their readiness for autonomous behavioural change. Understanding the readiness for learner autonomy not only provides guidance and a foundation for curriculum development, textbook revision, classroom practice, and teacher training (Chan et al., 2002; Yıldırım, 2012) but also enhances learner autonomy and learning effectiveness (Ho & Crookall, 1995; Chan, 2003; Little, 1995; Scharle & Szabo, 2000).

Early empirical studies of learner autonomy readiness mainly focused on Western cultural circles. At the turn of the century, Chan (2001) conducted a groundbreaking study on the perception of learner autonomy among 20 tertiary students in Hong Kong. The study's findings indicated that English language learners in Hong Kong have a degree of autonomy in language learning and are aware of the roles of the teacher and themselves in their learning. The study also showed that students had positive attitudes towards autonomous learning. This study pioneered the study of learner autonomy in a "non-Western" context. Subsequent studies have further confirmed that "non-Western" learners exhibit their characteristics in terms of autonomous learning.

Recently, as the learner-centred pedagogical concept gains recognition and development, many researchers have shown a growing interest in exploring learner autonomy readiness across diverse cultural contexts. Khalymon and Shevchenko (2017) conducted a study examining the readiness of prospective teachers of English as a second language

in the Ukrainian context to foster learner autonomy. The study's findings revealed a moderate overall level of autonomy among students. Notably, learners demonstrated a high willingness to assume responsibility for their learning. However, their ability and confidence in autonomous learning were at a medium level. Similarly, Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee (2017) carried out a study with 160 English language learners in Thailand. The findings revealed a high level of belief in autonomous language learning among the learners, while their actual behavioural performance in autonomous learning was moderate.

However, another survey on learner autonomy readiness in Turkish English language preparation programs utilized a questionnaire administered to 250 EFL university students. Results indicated that students were more inclined to recognize the power and authority of their teachers, concurrently expressing a readiness to assume responsibility for their learning (Şenbayrak et al., 2019). Likewise, Win (2022) conducted an empirical study in Myanmar on the perception of learner autonomy among English majors at a local public university. Findings revealed that students believed teachers should primarily be responsible for their in-class learning, while they should take charge of their out-of-class and private learning. Surprisingly, their participation in in-class autonomy was low, and though their out-of-class autonomy was notably higher, it still remained at a low level. Another is a study of learner autonomy readiness among "non-English major" undergraduates in Vietnam. Results indicated that students tended to share responsibility and had some confidence in their ability to learn autonomously. However, they were not active enough in extracurricular autonomous language learning activities (Nguyen & Habək, 2022).

In Malaysia, very few studies have been conducted on the autonomy of ESL learners. These studies have revealed that Malaysian learners exhibit low degree for autonomy in their English language learning. Additionally, they tend to prefer a teacher-centred approach to learning (Thang, 2001, 2005, 2009; Thang & Alias, 2007). Nevertheless, Malik et al. (2013) conducted a study on the readiness of learners' autonomy in Malaysian English preparatory courses. The study found that the students preferred the teacher to have a dominant role in their education. However, they were also confident in their ability to learn autonomously and were motivated to participate in autonomous activities. Their findings differ from those earlier (Thang, 2001, 2005, 2009; Thang & Alias, 2007). The study also reflects that the concept of autonomous language learning, advocated by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, has begun to yield positive results. Nonetheless, there is a lack of research on learner autonomy in Malaysia, particularly regarding autonomy in language learning other than English.

In conclusion, the existing studies on learner autonomy exhibit distinct characteristics: First, discrepancies in learner autonomy emerge across diverse cultural contexts and educational systems. Second, previous investigations into learner autonomy predominantly concentrate on English as a second or foreign language, leaving a void in research on languages beyond English. Last but not least, there needs to be more exploration into learner autonomy readiness in CFL, particularly in Malaysian settings. Hence, this study examines the readiness for autonomy among CFL learners in Malaysia. The aspiration is that this research will enhance comprehension of Malaysian learners' autonomy and offer practical guidance for future study, teaching, and learning in CFL in Malaysia. As a result, the following research question was formulated: Are the CFL learners ready for autonomy in Malaysia? Specifically, how do they perceive their responsibility for autonomous learning, assessment of autonomous learning ability, and engagement in learning activities in Chinese learning?

III. METHODS

A. *Research Design and Participants*

The current study adopts a quantitative research design, employing descriptive statistics to meticulously analyze and elucidate the respondents' readiness for autonomous learning. Conducted at a public university in Selangor, Malaysia, the selection of this institution as the target population arises from its distinction as having the highest number of CFL learners in Malaysia (Sim et al., 2019). Utilizing Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size formula, 600 participants were randomly chosen from this public university. All participants were enrolled in Chinese courses during the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year, comprising 180 males and 420 females, with ages ranging from 20 to 24 years old.

B. *Research Instrument*

The research instrument for this study was adapted from the questionnaire designed by Chan et al. (2002), which focuses on students' perceptions of responsibility and ability for autonomous language learning. This questionnaire has been used by numerous researchers and has undergone thorough scrutiny in various contexts (Ustunluoglu, 2009; Sakai et al., 2010; Abdel Razeq, 2014; Zakaria et al., 2017; Cirocki et al., 2019; Hossain & Mustapha, 2020; Tuan, 2021; Nguyen & Habək, 2022). The questionnaire was appropriately modified to suit the educational and cultural context of the present study. The final version consisted of 37 items that assessed learners' perceptions of their responsibility for autonomous learning, ability to learn autonomously, and engagement in autonomous learning activities.

Specifically, in the "Responsibility" section, students were asked, "To what extent do you believe you are responsible for your Chinese course?" This section consisted of 10 Likert scale items ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely). In the "Ability" section, students were asked, "If given the opportunity, how good do you consider yourself in the following areas?" This section also consisted of 10 Likert scale items ranging from 1 (very poorly) to 5 (very good). In

the "Activities" section, students were asked, "How frequently do you engage in the following activities when learning Chinese?" 17 items were assessed using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The instrument's reliability in the present study was high, with an alpha coefficient of 0.92.

C. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Before collecting the data, the researchers initially contacted the head of the Chinese department at the university. Her permission was sought before starting the survey. Next, the researcher forwarded the link to the questionnaire to the students in their classes through the lecturers in the Department of Chinese. Finally, 600 valid questionnaires were collected. The collected data was organized and analyzed using SPSS 25.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). In addition, this study focuses on analyzing quantitative data using descriptive statistical analysis through the mean comparison method. According to Oxford's (1990) criteria for the mean comparison method, mean scores between 1.0 and 2.4 were considered "low". Mean scores between 2.5 and 3.4 are considered 'medium'. A mean between 3.5 and 5.0 was considered "high." These criteria provided specific information about the respondents' readiness for autonomy in Chinese learning.

IV. RESULTS

The level of readiness for autonomy in Chinese learning

This section focuses on participants' readiness for autonomy in Chinese learning. It was analyzed from three perspectives: (1) the degree of students' perceived responsibility for autonomous learning, (2) the assessment of students' ability to learn autonomously, (3) students' engagement in autonomous learning activities inside and outside the classroom. Descriptive statistics were analyzed for each dimension to assess the degree of readiness of respondents for autonomy in Chinese learning. Table 1 indicates that CFL learners' overall degree of autonomy readiness in Malaysia was at a medium level (M=3.46, SD=0.714). In particular, learners' perceptions of responsibility for autonomous learning were high (M=3.62, SD=0.809). Their decision-making ability for autonomous learning was slightly below the overall mean value and at a medium level (M=3.40, SD=0.773). The lowest scores were recorded for learners' autonomy to participate in activities for learning practices inside and outside the classroom (M=3.36, SD=0.849), which is also at a medium level. It demonstrated that the learners were more aware of the responsibility of autonomous learning, relatively weak in decision-making during the autonomous learning process, and performed less effectively in their autonomous learning behaviours. The following section aims to present and analyze the study results, respectively.

TABLE 1
THE LEVEL OF READINESS FOR AUTONOMY IN CHINESE LEARNING

Variables	N	M	SD	Level
Responsibility	600	3.62	0.809	High
Ability	600	3.40	0.773	Medium
Activity	600	3.36	0.849	Medium
LA	600	3.46	0.714	Medium

A. Learners' Perceptions of Responsibility for Learner Autonomy

This subsection describes the perceptions of CFL learners regarding the responsibilities they should assume in Chinese learning. The results indicated that students' perceptions of their responsibilities in learning Chinese were high (M=3.62, SD=0.809) (see Table 1).

As shown in Table 2, most students agreed they should take more responsibility in learning Chinese and chose "mainly my responsibility". Table 2 shows that the scores of all ten items under the dimension of "responsibility" exceeded the threshold value of 3.5. It indicates that the students clearly understand their responsibilities and roles in learning Chinese. Specifically, the majority of students identified themselves as having primary responsibility for identifying their weaknesses (M=3.71, SD=0.923), stimulating their interest in Chinese learning (M=3.69, SD=0.916), checking their learning progress in class (M=3.65, SD=0.911) and out of class (M=3.66, SD=0.911), setting their learning goals (M=3.64, SD=0.935), and evaluating their Chinese learning (M=3.64, SD=0.885) respectively. Among these items, "To identify my weaknesses in Chinese learning" (M=3.71, SD=0.923) scored higher than the mean for this perspective, recording the highest score. Most students (58.8%) believed identifying their weaknesses in Chinese learning was their primary or full responsibility.

However, the analysis results show that 4 out of 10 items scored lower than the mean value for this perspective. From Table 2, it can be seen that item 8, item 6, item 7, and item 9, in that order, were the options most preferred by the students, with "half of it is my responsibility". That is, students are more likely to share responsibility with the teacher in determining the time (40.5%) and content of activities for learning in the classroom (40.3%), curriculum planning (38.7%), and the selection of learning materials (40.3%). Additionally, some of them (more than 10%) believe that they have "hardly" or "not at all" their responsibility in terms of selecting curriculum materials, determining the content of learning, and selecting classroom activities.

In a nutshell, the findings revealed that participants hold generally positive perceptions regarding their

responsibilities in learning Chinese. Most of them perceive their responsibility in Chinese learning to identify their weaknesses, stimulate their interest in learning, set learning goals, and assess their learning effectiveness. It can be concluded that CFL learners in Malaysia have a stronger sense of autonomous responsibility and belief in learning Chinese.

TABLE 2
LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR OWN RESPONSIBILITIES DURING CHINESE LEARNING

Statement	Not mine at all (%)	Hardly mine (%)	Half mine (%)	Mostly mine (%)	Totally mine (%)	M	SD
4.To identify my weaknesses in Chinese learning	1.2	7.3	32.7	37.5	21.3	3.71	0.923
3.To stimulate my interest in Chinese learning	1.5	5.8	36	35.8	20.8	3.69	0.916
2.To check how much progress I make outside Chinese class	1.8	6.3	35	37.5	19.3	3.66	0.921
1.To check how much progress I make in Chinese class	1.2	7.3	36.3	36	19.2	3.65	0.911
5.To set learning goals in my Chinese course	2	7	35	36.8	19.2	3.64	0.935
10.To evaluate my Chinese learning	1.7	5	39	36.8	17.5	3.64	0.885
8.To decide how long to spend on each activity in Chinese lessons	1.7	6.7	40.5	33.5	16	3.58	0.898
6.To decide what I should learn next in Chinese lessons	1.5	8.5	38.7	35.8	15.5	3.55	0.905
7.To choose what activities to use in Chinese lessons	1.3	8.5	40.3	34.2	15.7	3.54	0.902
9.To choose what materials to use for Chinese learning	1.2	9	40.3	33.5	16	3.54	0.905

B. Learners' Perceptions of Their Abilities to Act Autonomously

This subsection presents the respondents' assessment of their autonomous learning ability in learning Chinese. The results indicated that the respondents' perception of their ability to learn autonomously was not optimistic. As shown in Table 3, most students considered their ability to learn Chinese autonomously "average".

This perspective covered ten items; only item 9 ($M=3.57$, $SD=0.902$) scored more than 3.5. It indicates that students were more confident in identifying their weaknesses, with 51.5% choosing "good" or "very good" options. However, the scores for the remaining nine items were moderate, with mean values ranging from 3.34 to 3.43.

More specifically, the mean values for the items, such as *assessing Chinese learning* ($M=3.43$, $SD=0.889$), *selecting learning materials for Chinese class* ($M=3.42$, $SD=0.904$), *determining the time for each activity in Chinese class* ($M=3.42$, $SD=0.885$), and *selecting learning activities for Chinese class* ($M=3.40$, $SD=0.906$), were higher than the overall mean for this dimension ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.773$). It indicates that participants were moderately confident in assessing learning, selecting learning materials, and determining the content and timing of classroom activities.

Furthermore, the items for *choosing learning activities outside the Chinese class* ($M=3.37$, $SD=0.910$), *choosing learning objectives in the Chinese class* ($M=3.36$, $SD=0.898$), *deciding the next topic of the Chinese lessons* ($M=3.35$, $SD=0.902$), *choosing learning objectives outside the Chinese class* ($M=3.34$, $SD=0.899$), and *choosing learning materials outside the Chinese class* ($M=3.34$, $SD=0.899$) had scores slightly lower than the overall mean value for the dimension. It indicates that participants lack confidence in choosing extracurricular activities, defining learning objectives, determining instruction content, and selecting extracurricular learning materials. Nearly 50% of the respondents consider their abilities in these areas "OK". According to Chan et al. (2002), if the participants' response is "OK", it indicates weakness in a specific aspect.

In short, CFL learners in Malaysia exhibited moderate autonomy in their decision-making abilities during their learning process. Furthermore, this study suggested that learners need more confidence in deciding on pertinent learning content and activities beyond the classroom. In these external learning environments, learners needed more appropriate training for organizing educational materials and activities due to the absence of teacher supervision. Conversely, the study illustrated that CFL learners in Malaysia relied more on teachers' classroom instruction and guidance in Chinese learning.

TABLE 3
STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ABILITIES TO ACT AUTONOMOUSLY WHILE LEARNING CHINESE

Statement	Very poor (%)	Poor (%)	Average (%)	Good (%)	Very good (%)	M	SD
9. Identifying my weaknesses in Chinese learning	2	6.3	40.2	35.5	16	3.57	0.902
10. Evaluating my Chinese learning	2	8.5	46.7	30.2	12.7	3.43	0.889
5. Choosing learning materials in Chinese class	2.3	9.3	44.8	31.2	12.3	3.42	0.904
8. Deciding how long to spend on each activity in Chinese lessons	2.2	8.8	46	31.3	11.7	3.42	0.885
1. Choosing learning activities in Chinese class	2.7	9.2	45.3	31	11.8	3.4	0.906
2. Choosing learning activities outside Chinese class	2.8	9.3	47.8	28.2	11.8	3.37	0.91
3. Choosing learning objectives in Chinese class	2.7	9.2	48.8	27.8	11.5	3.36	0.898
7. Deciding the next topic of the Chinese lessons	3	9.8	49.3	27.5	11.3	3.35	0.902
4. Choosing learning objectives outside Chinese class	2.8	10	48.5	28	10.7	3.34	0.899
6. Choosing learning materials outside Chinese class	3.3	8.8	49	28.5	10.3	3.34	0.899

C. Learners' Engagement in Autonomous Activities Inside and Outside the Class

This subsection describes the results of the respondents' activities inside and outside the classroom, reflecting their behavioural performance in autonomous learning. The analysis is based on 17 items, as shown in Table 4. According to Table 1, the mean score for this dimension is 3.36 (SD = 0.849), indicating a medium level. It means most respondents only "sometimes" engaged in Chinese learning activities inside and outside the classroom, as detailed in Table 4.

In particular, the activities of "taking notes" (M=3.61, SD=1.056) and "using external resources (internet/app)" (M=3.5, SD=0.996) were the most frequently used by participants. The mean values of both items exceeded the critical value of 3.5, with 57.5% and 49.3% of participants considering themselves to be "often" or "always" engaged in these two activities. The results also revealed that students were moderately inclined to learn through various activities. Among them, the mean values for item 2, item 5, item 8, item 17, item 9, and item 14 were higher than the overall mean of the dimension.

However, for the items, *completing non-compulsory assignments* (M=3.35, SD=0.986), *asking questions to the teacher* (M=3.35, SD=0.967), and *making a plan to learn Chinese* (M=3.35, SD=0.946), the percentage of students who chose "sometimes" reached 43%, 44%, and 46.3%, respectively. The number of participants did not frequently engage in these learning activities. As for the items, *listening to Chinese songs* (M=3.33, SD=0.953), *attending self-study centres to improve Chinese* (M=3.26, SD=1.065), *visiting Chinese teacher to ask about study tasks*(M=3.25, SD=0.988), *reading materials (books/newspapers) in Chinese* (M=3.23, SD=1.017), *talking to foreigners in Chinese* (M=3.16, SD=1.023), and *suggesting to my Chinese teacher* (M=3.15, SD=1.044) scored lower than the mean for the overall dimension. It indicates that most participants engaged in the listed activities infrequently, with over 20% reporting "never" or "rarely" participating in activities such as self-study centres, reading Chinese materials, chatting with foreigners, and advising Chinese language teachers. The social and cultural environment in which the learners live may influence this.

Based on the findings above, CFL learners in Malaysia do not actively participate in Chinese learning activities on their initiative, which could be the primary reason for the unsatisfactory level of learner autonomy in this context.

TABLE 4
STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN AUTONOMOUS ACTIVITIES INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASS

Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	M	SD
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)		
15.Taken notes during Chinese lessons	2	15	25.5	34.7	22.8	3.61	1.056
16.Used external resources(internet/app) while learning Chinese	2.8	11.2	36.7	32	17.3	3.5	0.996
2.Note down new words and their meanings while Chinese learning	3.7	16.5	28	33	18.8	3.47	1.085
5.Watch TV shows/dramas/movies in Chinese	2.8	13.7	34.8	33.2	15.5	3.45	1.001
8.Practice speaking Chinese with my friends	2.7	12.3	37.7	32.7	15.7	3.44	0.974
17.Discussing learning problems with classmates	2.8	10.8	42.2	29.7	14.5	3.42	0.96
9.Engage in group studies in Chinese lessons	4	11.3	41.2	30	13.5	3.38	0.986
14.Summarize my studies while learning Chinese	3.5	12	41.8	29.7	13	3.37	0.971
1.Complete non-compulsory assignments while Chinese learning	4.3	11.2	43	28.5	13	3.35	0.986
11.Ask the teacher questions when I don't understand in Chinese learning	3.2	12.5	44	27	13.3	3.35	0.967
13.Plan my Chinese study	3.2	11.2	46.3	26.7	12.7	3.35	0.946
6.Listen to Chinese songs	2.7	15.3	39.7	31.3	11	3.33	0.953
10.Attend the self-study center to improve my Chinese level	6.5	15.7	35.5	30.8	11.8	3.26	1.065
3.Visit Chinese lecturer to inquire about learning tasks	5.3	13.5	41.7	29.7	9.8	3.25	0.988
4.Read materials(books/newspapers) in Chinese	5.7	15.5	39.5	29	10.3	3.23	1.017
7.Talk to foreigners in Chinese	7.7	14.3	40.3	29.5	8.2	3.16	1.023
12.Make suggestions to my Chinese teacher	7.3	16.3	40.5	26	9.8	3.15	1.044

V. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings from previous analyses, the level of autonomy readiness among Malaysian CFL learners is medium; that is, they are not ready to learn Chinese autonomously. Specifically, there are differences in learners' perceptions of the internal elements of learner autonomy.

The results of this study indicated that CFL learners in Malaysia had a strong sense of responsibility when it came to learning Chinese. It was particularly evident in their willingness to identify learning goals, determine their weaknesses, stimulate their interest in learning, and evaluate their learning performance. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of Tuan (2021), which also demonstrated that Vietnamese learners exhibit a strong awareness of autonomous learning in the context of English language acquisition.

However, the study also showed that students preferred to share responsibility with the teacher to determine the timing and content of classroom learning activities, plan the curriculum, and select learning materials. Some students even believed that the teacher should bear the primary responsibility. One of the reasons for this is that in Asian culture, the teacher is often regarded as the most authoritative figure and plays a dominant role in teaching and learning. As mentioned earlier, the traditional teaching model influences Malaysian learners, and students are also more dependent

on their teachers (Thang, 2001, 2005, 2009; Thang & Alias, 2007). The present study is consistent with the findings of many studies on Asian students (Abdel Razeq, 2014; Alrabai, 2017; Chan et al., 2002; Lin & Reinders, 2019). It further indicates that teachers play an essential role in the development of learner autonomy. It is crucial to explore new teaching methods at a later stage to enhance the collaborative teaching approach between teachers and students.

As for assessing the ability to learn autonomously among CFL learners, the results indicated that they perceived their ability in this perspective to be limited and below the overall average. It indicates that learners lacked sufficient confidence in making decisions while learning Chinese. In particular, their performance in selecting learning materials, establishing learning objectives, and choosing learning activities outside the classroom is unsatisfactory. It contrasts previous findings that indicated a sense of responsibility and awareness of the crucial role of autonomous learning. However, their decision-making abilities are insufficient, and they rely heavily on the teacher. In addition, it was also suggested that the teacher in the classroom assumed responsibility and exercised authority in deciding and carrying out classroom activities with the students, which helped build their confidence (Little, 1996). Students' autonomy outside the classroom has yet to be developed. This result is inconsistent with previous findings in the literature, which suggest that learners appear confident in their ability to learn autonomously (Şenbayrak et al., 2019; Nguyen & Habók, 2022; Abdel Razeq, 2014; Alrabai, 2017).

The results of the practical activities of autonomous learning engagement are unsatisfactory. The results of this study are consistent with previous related studies (Orawiwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017; Nguyen & Habók, 2022). The overall scores in this perspective are moderate, with most learners' autonomous activities being infrequent and characterized as "sometimes". It is especially true when making suggestions to Chinese teachers, conversing with foreigners in Chinese, reading Chinese materials (books/newspapers), visiting Chinese lecturers to inquire about learning tasks and attending the self-study center to improve proficiency in Chinese. On the one hand, the cause is still influenced by traditional Malaysian culture. Learners have a strong respect for the teacher's authority and are not adept at asking questions or offering suggestions to the teacher. On the other hand, Chinese is considered a foreign language among participants in Malaysia, and its influence is not as significant as that of English. Additionally, learners need a stronger inclination to engage in activities such as studying materials, visiting self-learning centers, or conversing with foreigners. It can be seen that there is a difference in learners' perception and practice of autonomous learning. This difference is mainly due to the influence of the traditional mode of delivery, in which students do not have the right to choose the content of teaching and activities, nor can they decide on the content of learning and the form of assessment. They are heavily dependent on the teacher in the learning process.

The current findings also align with Liu's (2015) report, which explored Taiwanese learners' autonomous behaviours. According to the study, learners' perceptions of responsibility were satisfactory, with a mean of over 3.5. As for learners' perception of autonomous learning ability, it was considered average. In contrast, learners were seldom actively involved in activities inside and outside the classroom, indicating their engagement in Chinese learning was highly unsatisfactory. Other studies also support the notion that Malaysian students rely much on their educators, though on a different measure from the one used in this study (Thang & Alias, 2007; Thang, 2009). It indicates the cause of the inadequate level of autonomy among Malaysian students. According to Jones (1995), autonomy is embedded in cultural values, and the socio-cultural context determines learners' perceptions of responsibilities, abilities and activities.

This study affirms that CFL learners in Malaysia are still teacher-dependent learners. Someone intricately linked this phenomenon to the enduring influence of the traditional teaching model and the cultural milieu prevalent in Malaysia. Malaysia bears the influence of British colonial culture, and concurrently, it is steeped in the dogma of religious culture, both of which exist in profound reverence for educators, exemplified by the prevalent practice in Malay culture wherein teachers have bestowed canes when parents enrol their children in schools or religious gatherings. It symbolizes the bestowed high authority, respect, and trust upon teachers in their role as educators (Tang, 2007). Accordingly, students undergo training to accord due respect and acceptance to the knowledge imparted by teachers. As a result, teachers wield unequivocal authority in the teaching process, leading students to develop a reliance on them. This dependence, in turn, results in a deficiency of confidence in autonomous decision-making during learning, consequently influencing the level of engagement in autonomous activities.

VI. CONCLUSION

This investigation scrutinized the readiness for learner autonomy among CFL learners enrolled in a Malaysian public university. Despite the participants exhibiting fair perceptions and attitudes towards learner autonomy, the study revealed inadequacies in their readiness for autonomous learning. They continued to exhibit a notable dependence on the teacher. Furthermore, participants demonstrated reduced involvement in autonomous language learning activities within and beyond the classroom setting. This diminished engagement may be both a result of and a contributing factor to their lower proficiency in Chinese.

Given this circumstance, educational institutions should reassess their pedagogical approach to autonomous learning. They should actively promote student engagement in extracurricular autonomous activities to bolster Chinese proficiency. Moreover, educators should strive to devise more effective strategies to foster student involvement within the instructional process. For instance, project-based learning allows students to make decisions and assume greater responsibility for their academic advancement. A genuinely student-centred approach can be realized by collaboratively

shaping the syllabus design, enabling learners and teachers to jointly determine the content and teaching activities.

Investigators could explore learner autonomy across various academic levels and disciplines for future research. It would facilitate comparisons with existing studies, unveil distinct characteristics of learner autonomy, and offer improved guidance for teaching practices. Additionally, there is a need for further qualitative research to enhance our comprehension of the factors influencing learner autonomy performance. This inquiry should elucidate the reasons for the limited readiness for learner autonomy within the Malaysian context.

In summary, this study has laid the groundwork for understanding the autonomy among CFL learners in Malaysia. Additional research findings focusing on autonomy in Chinese as a foreign language within this context are anticipated to provide valuable guidance for language teaching practices. Furthermore, such research endeavours have the potential to foster the development of learners' autonomy, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of their proficiency in Chinese during subsequent stages.

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