Demographic Factors Influencing Learner Autonomy among Indonesian EFL Students: A Quantitative Study

Nurul Ashri

Universitas Pamulang, Pamulang, Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia
dosen00635@unpam.ac.id
*corresponding author

ARTICLE INFO

Article history
Received June 07 2025
Revised July 24 2025
Accepted August 02 2025

Keywords
Keyword_1 Gender
Keyword_2 Region of Origin
Keyword_3 Faculty Affiliation
Keyword_4 Learner Autonomy
Keyword_5 EFL

ABSTRACT

This study explores how selected demographic factors, gender, language proficiency level, region of origin, faculty affiliation, and field of study relate to learner autonomy among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at Universitas Pamulang. Grounded in the constructivist view of learning and self-regulated learning theory, the research employed a quantitative survey using Biçer's (2017) Learner Autonomy Scale, with 80 students participating. Due to non-normal data distribution, non-parametric tests were used in the analysis. This study uniquely shows that only gender has a statistically significant effect on learner autonomy, with female students demonstrating higher autonomy in both planning and learning process dimensions. In contrast, no significant differences were found for the other demographic variables. These findings suggest that while some background characteristics like gender may influence learner autonomy, broader factors such as classroom practices, instructional design, and learner agency play a more central role. The study contributes to the EFL field by highlighting the limited role of static demographic factors and reaffirming the importance of pedagogical strategies that foster autonomy in diverse learner populations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the implementation of the Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP) in 2006, Indonesia's education system has progressively embraced a constructivist approach aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning. This shift was further reinforced with the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013 or K-13), which explicitly emphasizes student-centered learning, critical thinking, and reflective practice (Depdiknas, 2006; Kemendikbud, 2013). These developments align with global pedagogical movements that position learners as active agents in constructing their knowledge (Bruner, 1996; Fosnot, 2013). One of the key competencies within constructivist, student-centered education is learner autonomy, which is the ability of learners to take charge of their learning processes (Holec, 1981; Little, 2009). In the context of foreign language acquisition, learner autonomy allows individuals to plan, manage, and monitor their learning and has been associated with increased motivation, responsibility, and learning success (Benson, 2001; Ushioda, 2011).

The concept of learner autonomy has evolved from early initiatives like the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project (1971), which later influenced the development of

the CEFR. Holec's (1981) definition of autonomy as the "ability to take charge of one's learning" laid a theoretical foundation widely adopted in language education. Subsequent scholars have expanded this view, linking autonomy with self-regulated learning, intrinsic motivation, and critical reflection (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Zimmerman, 2002). Teachers are seen as facilitators who help students develop strategies and take increasing responsibility for their learning (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Reinders, 2010).

Previous studies have explored learner autonomy in relation to instructional practices, student and teacher perceptions, anxiety, and academic performance (Dam, 1995; Lamb, 2017; Little, 2007). However, limited research has directly investigated the influence of demographic variables such as gender, language proficiency, and academic background on learner autonomy, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context. Although learner autonomy has been widely studied in relation to pedagogy and learning outcomes, studies examining its relationship with demographic factors remain scarce in Indonesia. It is particularly relevant in large, heterogeneous educational institutions like Universitas Pamulang, which serves a highly diverse student population across various faculties and regions. This study uniquely contributes to the field by examining the extent to which demographic variables influence learner autonomy among EFL students in an Indonesian university context. By focusing on variables such as gender, proficiency level, origin, faculty affiliation, and field of study, the research offers insights that may inform more equitable and personalized approaches to fostering autonomy.

This study aims to investigate how selected demographic variables affect learner autonomy among students studying English at Universitas Pamulang. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions: 1) Does gender have an impact on learner autonomy? 2) Does language proficiency level affect learner autonomy? 3) Does the region of origin influence learner autonomy? 4) Does faculty affiliation impact learner autonomy? 5) Does the field of study (e.g., sciences, social sciences, or languages) affect learner autonomy?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of learner differences in autonomy development. The findings are expected to support the creation of more adaptive and inclusive instructional strategies in EFL classrooms in Indonesia and similar educational contexts.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research approach, specifically using a survey design, which is commonly used to collect data that describe the characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors of a population (Creswell, 2012). The research was conducted with 80 undergraduate students from Universitas Pamulang during the 2024–2025 academic year. The participants were selected through convenience sampling, a type of purposive non-probability sampling. While this method allows quick access to participants, it also limits the generalizability of findings due to potential sample bias. Among the participants, 28 were female and 52 were male, reflecting a gender imbalance in the sample. The primary data collection instrument was the Learner Autonomy Scale (LAS) developed by Biçer (2017), which has been widely used in EFL contexts.

The scale consists of 18 items divided into two subdimensions:

1) Planning (e.g., "I determine what I need to learn in English on my own.")
2) Process (e.g., "I regularly assess my progress in English learning.")

Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always), where higher scores indicate stronger learner autonomy. In terms of construct validity, Biçer (2017) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .75 for the Planning subdimension and .82 for Process. In the present study, internal consistency reliability was re-examined, yielding coefficients of .81 (Planning) and .80 (Process), with an overall reliability of .86, demonstrating strong internal consistency (DeVellis, 2016).

Demographic data were also collected through a short questionnaire covering the following variables:

1) Gender (male/female)
2) Language proficiency level, based on the course level in which the student was enrolled (introductory, intermediate, advanced)
3) Region of origin (categorized as Greater Jakarta, other provinces in Java, and outside Java)
4) Faculty affiliation (e.g., Economics, Engineering, Literature)
5) Field of study, grouped into science, social sciences, and languages/humanities

After data collection, the responses were analyzed using SPSS software. A preliminary test of normality was conducted using skewness and kurtosis values, which fell outside the ±1.5 acceptable range. Given the non-normal distribution of data, non-parametric tests (e.g., Mann–Whitney U, Kruskal–Wallis H) were used for hypothesis testing.

Despite the strengths of quantitative survey methods in producing structured and replicable data, the study has several limitations. First, the use of a convenience sample restricts the external validity of the findings and may not accurately reflect the wider student population. Second, the self-reported nature of the instrument may lead to response bias, particularly in measuring abstract constructs like autonomy. Third, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow for an analysis of changes in autonomy over time or causal inferences.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. The Effect of Gender on Learner Autonomy

Table 1. Gender variable

Subscale	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Rank Sum	U	Z	p
Planning	Female	28	48.14	1348.00	514.000	-2.163	.031
	Male	52	36.38	1892.00			
Process	Female	28	47.52	1330.50	531.500	-1.985	.047
	Male	52	36.72	1909.50			
Total	Female	28	49.98	1399.50	462.500	-2.680	.007
	Male	52	35.39	1840.50			

As shown in Table 1, there are statistically significant differences in learners' autonomy levels based on gender. Significant differences were found in the "Planning" ($U = 514.000$; $p < .05$) and "Process" ($U = 531.500$; $p < .05$) subscales, as well as in the total scale score ($U = 462.500$; $p < .05$). These findings suggest that female participants exhibit significantly higher levels of learner autonomy compared to their male counterparts, which aligns with prior research asserting that gender differences can influence self-directed learning behaviors.

3.2. The Effect of Language Proficiency Level on Learner Autonomy

Table 2. Language proficiency level

Subscale	Level	N	Mean Rank	df	X^2	p	Significant Difference
Planning	A2	27	41.20	2	.981	.612	-
	B1	46	38.93				
	B2	7	48.07				
Process	A2	27	36.44	2	2.854	.240	-
	B1	46	40.99				
	B2	7	52.93				
Total	A2	27	37.96	2	2.294	.318	-
	B1	46	40.12				
	B2	7	52.79				

As demonstrated in Table 2, there were no statistically significant differences in learner autonomy based on participants' language proficiency levels. The “Planning” [X^2 (2) = .981; $p > .05$], “Process” [X^2 (2) = 2.854; $p > .05$], and total autonomy scores [X^2 (2) = 2.294; $p > .05$] did not vary significantly. These findings suggest that language proficiency does not have a marked effect on learner autonomy, a view supported by some scholars who argue that autonomy may be more closely tied to learner personality and context than to linguistic competence alone.

3.3. The Effect of Region of Origin on Learner Autonomy in the Indonesian Context

Table 3. Test results for the region of origin

Subscale	Region	N	Mean Rank	df	X^2	p	Significant Difference
Planning	Sumatra	36	41.58	3	1.366	.714	-
	Java	40	38.41				
	Kalimantan	3	53.00				
	Sulawesi	1	47.50				
Process	Sumatra	36	43.75	3	1.344	.719	-
	Java	40	37.60				
	Kalimantan	3	39.50				
	Sulawesi	1	42.50				
Total	Sumatra	36	43.07	3	1.434	.698	-
	Java	40	37.53				
	Kalimantan	3	47.83				
	Sulawesi	1	45.00				

Table 3 shows that the region of origin of participants within Indonesia did not yield statistically significant differences in their levels of learner autonomy. The variations across the "Planning" [X^2 (3) = 1.366; p > .05], "Process" [X^2 (3) = 1.344; p > .05], and total scores [X^2 (3) = 1.434; p > .05] were not significant. These findings suggest that geographical or cultural background, as represented by regional origin within the Indonesian archipelago, may not be a decisive factor in the development of learner autonomy. It supports the notion that learner agency is shaped more by educational experiences and pedagogical practices than by regional background.

3.4. The Effect of Faculty Affiliation on Learner Autonomy

Table 4. Test results for university affiliation

Subscale	Faculty	N	Mean Rank	df	X^2	p	Significant Difference
Planning	A	28	36.11	3	1.807	.613	-
	B	47	42.47				
	C	3	49.50				
	D	2	42.25				
Process	A	28	39.59	3	1.967	.579	-
	B	47	39.68				
	C	3	48.33				
	D	2	60.75				
Total	A	28	37.23	3	1.711	.634	-
	B	47	41.29				
	C	3	51.67				
	D	2	51.00				

As reflected in Table 4, no significant differences were observed in learner autonomy based on the faculty where participants were enrolled. The "Planning" [X^2 (3) = 1.807; p > .05], "Process" [X^2 (3) = 1.967; p > .05], and total scores [X^2 (3) = 1.711; p > .05] indicate a statistically non-significant variation across institutions. These results align with previous studies suggesting that while institutional culture can influence learning environments, individual autonomy often remains consistent unless shaped by specific pedagogical interventions.

3.5. The Effect of Field of Study on Learner Autonomy

Table 5. Test results for field of study

Subscale	Field	N	Mean Rank	df	X^2	p	Significant Difference
Planning	Social Sciences	64	40.11	2	.105	.949	-
	Natural Sciences	12	41.67				
	Languages	4	43.25				
Process	Social Sciences	64	41.02	2	1.237	.539	-
	Natural Sciences	12	34.96				
	Languages	4	48.88				
Total	Social Sciences	64	40.30	2	.796	.672	-

Natural Sciences	12	38.33
Languages	4	50.13

As shown in Table 5, no statistically significant differences were identified in learner autonomy based on field of study. The "Planning" [X^2 (2) = .105; $p > .05$], "Process" [X^2 (2) = 1.237; $p > .05$], and total autonomy scores [X^2 (2) = .796; $p > .05$] all indicate homogeneity across disciplines. It supports the argument that learner autonomy is a broadly transferable skill, not strictly confined to the epistemological characteristics of specific academic domains.

4. DISCUSSION

This study investigated learner autonomy among Indonesian students learning English as a foreign language using Biçer's (2017) *Learner Autonomy Scale*, focusing on the influence of selected demographic variables. The analysis revealed that gender was the only variable to show a statistically significant effect on learner autonomy.

The finding that female students demonstrated higher levels of autonomy, particularly in planning and process dimensions, resonates with previous research. For instance, Kurt (2024) reported that female learners tend to exhibit stronger self-motivation and a preference for independent learning strategies, while male learners often favor structured and collaborative environments. This difference may be partly explained by socialization patterns and gendered expectations in educational settings, where girls are often encouraged to be more disciplined, responsible, and reflective in their learning (Tatar & Horenczyk, 2003). Additionally, Ryan & Deci's (2000) self-determination theory suggests that female learners may show higher intrinsic motivation, which supports the development of autonomy.

In contrast, no significant differences were found for other demographic variables, including field of study, faculty affiliation, language proficiency level, and region of origin. These findings may indicate that learner autonomy is less influenced by static background characteristics and more shaped by personal dispositions, learning environments, and pedagogical practices. The absence of effect from language proficiency, for example, contradicts some earlier studies that suggest higher proficiency correlates with greater autonomy (Scharle & Szabó, 2000). One possible explanation for this inconsistency could be the narrow range of proficiency among participants or the use of self-reported course level as a proxy, which may not fully capture actual competence.

Regarding the field of study and faculty affiliation, the lack of significance supports Benson's (2011) view that autonomy development is context-sensitive but not necessarily discipline-dependent. Learner autonomy may manifest similarly across academic domains when institutional teaching approaches are uniform, as is often the case in large universities like Universitas Pamulang.

The region of origin variable also did not show a significant effect. Although Fotiadou, Angelaki, & Mavroidis (2017) found that geographical and social factors can shape interaction patterns that foster autonomy, the present study's generalized categorization of region (e.g., within Java vs. outside Java) may have obscured more

nuanced cultural or socioeconomic influences. A more fine-grained approach to regional analysis could yield different results.

From an interpretative perspective, the significance of gender alone may reflect internal psychological factors such as self-regulation and learning goals being more strongly shaped by individual learner identity than by demographic or structural variables. It underscores the need to explore autonomy not merely as a demographic outcome but as an interactional and developmental process situated within specific learning ecologies.

This study is limited by its cross-sectional design, which captures autonomy at a single point in time and thus cannot account for changes over the course of a learner's academic journey. Additionally, the use of convenience sampling and the relatively small sample size reduce the generalizability of findings. The quantitative-only design also limits the depth of understanding regarding how and why autonomy develops differently across learners.

Future studies are encouraged to adopt longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches, which can capture the dynamic and evolving nature of learner autonomy over time and provide richer insights into learners lived experiences. Qualitative data, such as interviews or learning diaries, could uncover personal, cultural, and pedagogical influences that are not easily quantifiable but are central to the autonomy development process. Moreover, future research could explore interventions designed to enhance autonomy and examine their differential effects across demographic groups.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the complex nature of learner autonomy and its relationship with demographic variables. Gender emerged as a significant factor, with female learners demonstrating higher levels of autonomy in both the planning and process dimensions. It suggests a potential link between gender-based learning behaviors and self-regulatory capacities. However, the lack of significant differences in autonomy based on language proficiency level, regional origin, faculty affiliation, and field of study indicates that these demographic attributes do not uniformly shape learner autonomy. Instead, these results highlight the importance of instructional practices and learning environments in fostering autonomy.

Nevertheless, this study is not without limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small (N = 80) and drawn from a single institution through convenience sampling, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or diverse educational settings. Second, the use of a quantitative survey method alone restricts the depth of understanding regarding learners' perceptions, motivations, and contextual influences on autonomy. Third, the local context of Universitas Pamulang as a large private university in Indonesia with its own unique student demographics and institutional culture may have influenced the results in ways that are not easily transferable to other regions or institutions.

Future research should address these limitations by incorporating larger and more diverse samples, adopting mixed-methods or qualitative approaches, and conducting

longitudinal studies to examine how learner autonomy evolves and interacts with both demographic and pedagogical factors across various educational environments.

REFERENCES

Benson, P. (2001). *Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited.

Benson, P. (2011). *Teaching and researching autonomy (2nd ed.)*. London: Routledge.

Borg, S., & Al-Busaidi, S. (2012). *Learner autonomy: English language teachers' beliefs and practices*. London: British Council.

Bruner, J. S. (1996). *The Culture of Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Dam, L. (1995). *Learner autonomy 3: From theory to classroom practice*. Dublin: Authentik.

Depdiknas. (2006). *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia Nomor 22 Tahun 2006 tentang Standar Isi untuk Satuan Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah*. Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan Nasional.

DeVellis, R. F. (2016). *Scale development: Theory and Applications* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Fosnot, C. T. (2013). *Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives, and Practice* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Fotiadou, A., Angelaki, C., & Mavroidis, I. (2017). Learner autonomy as a factor of the learning process in distance education. *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning*, *20*(1), 95–111.

Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy and foreign language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Kemendikbud. (2013). *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia Nomor 81A Tahun 2013 tentang Implementasi Kurikulum*. Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.

Kurt, A. (2024). Supporting Every Learner: Investigating Gender Differences in Autonomy. *Innovational Research in ELT*, *5*(1). https://doi.org/10.29329/irelt.2024.1045.3

Lamb, M. (2017). The Motivational Dimension of Language Learner Autonomy. *Language Teaching*, *5*(1), 97–115. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444816000034

Little, D. (2007). Language learner autonomy: Some fundamental considerations revisited. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, *1*(1), 14–29. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2167/illt040.0

Little, D. (2009). Language learner autonomy and the European Language Portfolio: Two L2 English examples. *Language Teaching*, *42*(2), 222–233. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444808005636

Reinders, H. (2010). Towards a classroom pedagogy for learner autonomy: A framework of independent language learning skills. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *35*(5), 40–55. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2010v35n5.4

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *25*(1), 54–67. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020

Scharle, Á., & Szabó, A. (2000). *Learner Autonomy: A Guide to Developing Learner Responsibility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tatar, M., & Horenczyk, G. (2003). Diversity-related burnout among teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *19*(4), 397–408. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(03)00024-6

Ushioda, E. (2011). Motivating learners to speak as themselves. In G. Murray, X. Gao, & T. Lamb (Eds.), *Identity, motivation and autonomy in language learning* (pp. 11–24). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory into Practice*, *41*(2), 64–70. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4102_2