



Exploring the Relationship Between Learner Autonomy and Learner Engagement Among EFL Students in Cambodian Universities

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The main aims of this study are to: 1) find out how Cambodian EFL university students perceive learner autonomy and engagement; and 2) find out how these two factors correlate to one another.

Methodology: This research adopted a quantitative methods employing cluster sampling for data collection via a bilingual questionnaire in English and Khmer. The data was processed and analyzed using SPSS (Version 23), utilizing both descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlation coefficients, to extract insights from the survey findings.

Main Findings: The main findings of this study were: 1) Cambodian EFL university students showed high levels of learner autonomy and engagement, indicating the need for interventions to develop autonomy and create supportive learning environments; and 2) a moderate positive correlation was found between learner autonomy and engagement.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The unique aspect of this research is how it identifies the complex correlation between learner autonomy and engagement among EFL university students in Cambodia. High levels of motivation and autonomy were seen, but there were also clear difficulties with self-perceived competence. This comprehensive perspective enhances the existing literature by emphasizing the impact of contextual elements on autonomy and engagement, therefore addressing a gap in current research. Furthermore, the results underline the significance of creating supportive learning environments and the requirement for tailored interventions. These insights have practical implications for educational policy and pedagogical approaches, indicating that educators have to adopt techniques that foster autonomy and offer tailored support to improve learner engagement and optimize resource use.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy is essential for efficient language learning, influenced by globalization, the knowledge economy, and the information age [1]. Challenges to autonomy and academic freedom in public universities impede the advancement of higher education standards and restrict capital production and allocation [2]. Autonomy in higher education enables students to take charge of their education and development, promoting the best possible progress [3]. Additionally, learner autonomy is essential for academic freedom, flexibility, and meeting market expectations, all of which increase graduates' employability [4].

Learner autonomy, characterized by the capacity and motivation to manage one's own learning [5], is essential in higher education. It transcends the classroom and is essential for effective language acquisition [6]. Learner engagement, distinguished by effort, participation, persistence, and attention, supports deep learning [7]. In higher education, particularly in English language learning, engagement is crucial for academic achievement and fulfilling learning objectives [8].

In the Cambodian educational setting, significant barriers persist, such as teacher-centered methodologies, restricted opportunities for communication practice, and difficulties in student engagement [9], [10]. Despite these issues, success in higher education is dependent on learner autonomy and learner engagement, two essential elements that greatly influence academic performance. While previous studies have extensively examined learner autonomy and engagement in various EFL contexts [11]-[13] however, most studies focused on contexts with well-developed student-centered learning environments, such as Europe or East Asia [14], while neglecting Southeast Asian settings like Cambodia. Although study in Thailand, Khamkhien [15] suggested that autonomy promotes engagement, this finding may not apply to Cambodia due to disparities in educational infrastructure and cultural attitudes toward learning. This study bridged this gap by studying how autonomy and engagement interact in Cambodia's under-researched EFL context.

This study highlighted the urgent need for English proficiency in Cambodia's higher education, crucial for global communication and employment opportunities. Despite this demand, traditional teaching methods continue, leaving students ill-prepared for autonomous learning. The research was novel in its focus on Cambodian university students, a demographic rarely addressed in EFL autonomy studies. Findings may offer practical strategies for local educators and contribute to the global discourse on autonomy and engagement in low-resource contexts. Also, understanding how these factors materialize in the Cambodian educational context is crucial not just for improving local educational practices but also for contributing to the broader discussion on EFL education internationally. Insights gathered from this research can inform practices in other EFL environments facing similar issues, hence improving the practical significance of the findings on a global scale.

Therefore, this study aimed to enhance understanding of these concepts in the Cambodian higher education context by investigating perceptions of learner autonomy and engagement among Cambodian EFL university students and exploring the relationship between learner autonomy and engagement in this demographic. The importance of this study is based on its potential to fill a significant gap in existing literature, providing beneficial insights that can impact both local educational practices and add to the global body of knowledge on EFL education.

The following research questions guide this exploration:

1. What is the level of learner autonomy and learner engagement exhibited by Cambodian EFL university students?
2. To what extent is there a relationship between learner autonomy and learner engagement admitted by Cambodian EFL university students?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Importance of Learner Autonomy in Higher Education

Learner autonomy is crucial in higher education, significantly promoting academic performance, psychological well-being, and overall student functioning. Research demonstrates a substantial positive association between learner autonomy and academic success [16], stressing its importance in developing achievement. Autonomy encourages students to take responsibility of their learning and development, supporting optimal progress [17], [3]. Additionally, institutional autonomy increases creativity and excellence in educational processes [18]. Also, Students from private universities indicated more favorable perceptions of learner autonomy; nonetheless, levels of engagement and academic achievement were similar across both public and private institutions [19].

2.2. Perspectives on Learner Autonomy and Learner Engagement

2.2.1. Perspectives on Learner Autonomy

Nguyen et al. [20] identified important drivers of autonomy among Vietnamese EFL students, including voluntariness, learner choice, peer participation, and intrinsic motivation. Similarly, Khulaifayah et al. [21] demonstrated that higher-level EFL learners find autonomous learning as independent and reliant on their own tactics with instructor support indicating no significant variations in effort between levels. Gocić & Jankovic [22] noted that EFL and ESP students are encouraged to acquire autonomy through language learning methodologies and reflective journals. Overall, EFL learners value autonomy for its benefits to academic and professional success [23].

Conversely, Kuluşaklı [24] showed that Turkish EFL freshmen committed effort in language study but struggled to integrate independent learning skills efficiently. Similarly, Tran [25] noted that EFL students in Ho Chi Minh City, despite being cognitively aware, showed minimal interest in learner autonomy for vocabulary acquisition, stressing the need for new teaching approaches.

2.2.2. Perspectives on Learner Engagement

Research demonstrated that learner engagement is linked to instructors' autonomy support [26] and that such support fulfills basic psychological needs, hence improving engagement [27]. Engagement includes behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions influenced by autonomy support [28] and includes commitment, motivation, and the application of cognition into action [29]. In language learning, engagement shows as concentrated cognition, active participation, and positive interactions with the language [30]. Additionally, research underlines the relevance of instructional methods and curricular engagement in generating supportive settings that enhance engagement and motivation [31]. Learner engagement, characterized by effort, involvement, and other cognitive and emotional variables, increases deep learning [7].

2.3. The Correlation Between Learner Autonomy and Learner Engagement

Nie & Lau [32] discovered a positive correlation between autonomy and engagement, while Jang et al. [33] demonstrated a link between learner engagement and class-level autonomy support. Gandhimathi & Devi [34] stressed that agentic involvement is essential for learner engagement, underlining the need of a supportive learning environment. Additionally, Borg & Al-Busaidi [35] stated that teachers appreciate the relevance of autonomy for language learners.

In addition, particularly visible in EFL settings, where autonomy encourages learners' willingness to speak and enhances self-esteem and persistence [36], [37]. Moreover, autonomy and active classroom participation are critical factors impacting English proficiency among university students, showing that increasing autonomy might lead to better engagement and enhanced language outcomes [38].

3. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical underpinning of this study was: 1) the Self-determination Theory, which is an empirically supported theory of human motivation, development, and well-being [39]. The Self-determination theory has been used to measure Learner Autonomy; it contains three dimensions: autonomy, competency, and relatedness; and 2) the Flow Theory—when one is actively involved or engaged in an activity where one's talents are balanced to the activity's challenge; one can approach an optimal state of experience [40]. The Flow theory has been employed to measure Learner Engagement; on the other hand, it has another role as another independent variable. The Flow theory consists of eight dimensions: arousal, flow, control, boredom, relaxation, apathy, worry, and anxiety; however, the researcher picked only three dimensions—arousal, control, and relaxation—to include in this study.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

4.1. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative method which uses statistical data rather than individual perceptions [41]. Additionally, a clustered sampling technique was employed to reduce sample bias and assure precise responses to the research questions. This approach complied with ethical research standards and improved the generalizability of the results. The sampling technique was crafted to include a variety of perspectives from EFL students at various academic levels, hence enhancing data gathering efficiency.

4.2. Participants

The sample was selected by defining the intended population size and randomly selecting participants from 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year English majors at three distinct universities. The final sample size was calculated to be 108 out of 589, using Israel's [42] estimates that suggest a minimum number of responses. An extra 10% was added to account for possible difficulties in reaching participants, and an additional 30% was added to make up for non-responses, guaranteeing that the minimum sample size requirements were met.

4.3. Data Collection Instruments

A questionnaire served as the primary instrument for this research, comprising three distinct components. The first component, Respondent Demographics, comprised five closed-ended inquiries concerning gender, age, academic year, degree program, and university type. The second section, Learner Autonomy, consisted of 16 items modified from Johnston & Finney [43] and Wang et al. [44], aimed at evaluating perceptions of autonomy through a 5-point Likert scale, customized for the Cambodian context. The final portion, Learner Engagement, assessed perceptions using 10 items on a 5-point Likert scale, adapted from Bandura [45] and Webb-Williams [46], chosen from an original set of 33 items. The questionnaire was administered in both Khmer and English to guarantee accessibility for all participants.

4.4. Validity and Reliability

4.4.1. Validity

The modified items in the questionnaire were validated through assessments by the research advisor and three expert panelists—two possessing PhDs and one with a Master’s degree in Educational Administration, all with over a decade of experience in the education sector. Their feedback was crucial in enhancing the items to ensure they appropriately correspond with the Cambodian educational setting.

4.4.2. Reliability

Following the translation and validation of the questionnaire, the researcher administered it to 30 EFL students in their 3rd and 4th years at another university in Phnom Penh. This pilot study aimed to analyse the reliability of each item and variable, using quantitative results for the reliability evaluation, as shown in Table 1. In addition, the assessment gave useful insights into the dependability of the questionnaire items, verifying their appropriateness for measuring the intended variables. Conducting the pilot study enabled the researcher to identify and address any issues, which enhanced the reliability and accuracy of the data for the main study.

Table 1. Reliability Test on Learner Autonomy and Learner Engagement

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Learner Autonomy	16	.84
Learner Engagement	10	.83

The pilot study found that Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the 16 items measuring learner autonomy was .84 (Table 1), showing a significant internal consistency among the items. This high level of dependability shows that the items thoroughly reflect the complexities of learner autonomy as interpreted in the context of EFL instruction. Similarly, Cronbach’s alpha for the 10 items indicating learner engagement was .83 (Table 1), further reflecting a strong relationship among the items in this dimension as well.

These findings collectively verify the reliability of the questionnaire items, suggesting they are applicable for the main research study. The consistent internal reliability across both variables not only strengthens the validity of the measures but also demonstrates that the items may reflect the complex interplay between learner autonomy and engagement among EFL students. Thus, the pilot study results confirmed the questionnaire's efficiency as a tool for evaluating these essential educational constructs.

4.5. Research Procedure

The research study utilized a structured three-step procedure for comprehensive data collecting and analysis, detailed as follows:

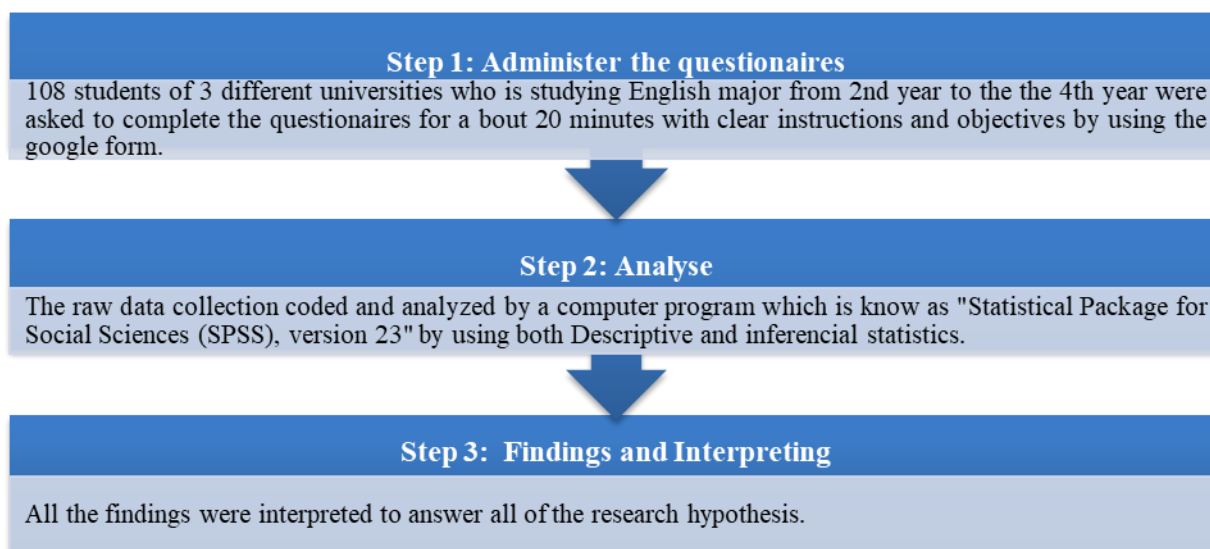


Figure 1. Research Procedure

The study entailed the development of a 40-item questionnaire, adapted and translated from English to Khmer, employing a 5-point Likert scale. Firstly, the questionnaire was conducted online using Google Forms with 108 English major students, ranging from their 2nd to 4th years, from three distinct universities. Before distribution, approval was obtained from university rectors, and cooperation was created with deans and administrative personnel to facilitate the process. The questionnaires were disseminated via Telegram groups and personal emails, with explicit instructions and objectives included (Figure 1). Secondly, data analysis was

performed utilizing SPSS version 23, concentrating on descriptive statistics for demographic data and correlation coefficients to investigate the relationships between learner autonomy and learner engagement (Figure 1). Finally, the results were methodically analyzed and displayed in different tables, pertaining to the investigation (Figure 1).

4.6. Data Analysis

After completion of data collection, the dataset was imported into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23 for analysis. In this investigation, the data were evaluated using both descriptive and inferential statistics (correlation coefficients).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presented the findings of a study that investigated demographic data; the levels of learner autonomy and learner engagement; and the correlation between learner autonomy and learner engagement exhibited by Cambodian EFL university students respectively.

5.1. Demographic Data

Table 2. Gender, Age, Study Levels, Degree of Students, and University Type

Respondents	Description	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	50	46.30
	Female	58	53.70
	Total	108	100
Age	Under 18	0	0
	18-22	52	48.1
	23-26	44	40.7
	27-Up	12	11.1
	Total	108	100
Study Levels	2 nd Year	34	31.5
	3 rd Year	29	26.9
	4 th Year	45	41.7
	Total	108	100
Degree	Associate degree	7	6.5
	Bachelor's degree	101	93.5
	Total	108	100
University Type	Public	33	31
	Private	75	69
	Total	108	100

With 53.7% of replies coming from females and 46.3% from males, Table 2 demonstrates a severely skewed gender distribution. The largest age group is 18–22 years old (48.1%), followed by 23–26 years old (40.7%) and those over 27 years old (11.1%). Notably, there were no answers from those under the age of 18. Regarding academic achievement, 41.7% of students were in their fourth year, meaning that students who were near to graduation were given precedence. 31.5% of the students were in their second year, while 26.9% were in their third. The majority (93.5%) were pursuing bachelor's degrees, with only 6.5% going towards associate degrees. In terms of university type, 31% of students were enrolled in public universities, whereas 69% attended private ones. This dispersion can be a reflection of qualities like program availability, accessibility, or perceived quality. Overall, the statistics reveal that students at private colleges are diversified and generally interested in bachelor's degree programs.

5.2. Levels of Learner Autonomy and Learner Engagement

5.2.1. Levels of Learner Autonomy

The survey data evaluated the levels of learner autonomy among Cambodian EFL university students by examining their responses to statements concerning their classroom experiences (Table 3). The replies were measured on a scale from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*). For each statement, the data includes the number of responses ($n = 108$), mean (M), standard deviation (SD), meaning, and rank (Table 3).

Table 3. Levels of Learner Autonomy among Cambodian EFL University Students

	Statement	<i>n</i>	M	SD	Meaning	Rank
1.	I can decide which activities I want to practice in the class.	108	3.79	.89	High	6
2.	I think I am pretty good in the class.	108	2.98	.98	Moderate	14
3.	In the class, I feel understood.	108	3.61	.78	High	10
4.	I have a say regarding what skills I want to practice in the class.	108	3.32	.92	Moderate	12
5.	I am satisfied with my performance in the class.	108	4.16	.88	High	2
6.	In the class, I feel listened to.	108	4.12	.78	High	3
7.	I feel that I do the class because I want to.	108	4.33	.84	High	1
8.	In the class, I feel supported.	108	3.71	.95	High	8
9.	I have to force myself to do the activities in the class.	108	2.89	1.21	Moderate	15
10.	After working on classroom activities in the class for a while, I feel pretty competent.	108	3.78	.77	High	7
11.	In the class, I feel valued.	108	4.05	.88	High	4
12.	I feel a certain freedom in choosing what I do in the class.	108	3.66	.93	High	9
13.	I am pretty skilled in the class.	108	3.24	.84	Moderate	13
14.	In the class, I feel safe.	108	3.89	.89	High	5
15.	I have some choices about what I want to do in the class.	108	3.43	.71	Moderate	11
16.	I can't do the class very well.	108	2.66	1.00	Moderate	16
	Overall	108	3.60	.89	High	

The findings presented a detailed view of learner autonomy among students. They demonstrated great intrinsic motivation to participate in class, with a mean score of 4.33 (SD = .84). Students felt listened to (M = 4.12, SD = .78), satisfied with their performance (M = 4.16, SD = .88), appreciated (M = 4.05, SD = .88), and safe (M = 3.89, SD = .89). However, areas for growth were highlighted, as students reported needing to force themselves to engage in activities (M = 2.89, SD = 1.21) and evaluated their competence lower, with mean ratings of 2.98 (SD = .98) for being competent in class and 2.66 (SD = 1.00) for excelling. The perceived choice in class activities was moderate (M = 3.43, SD = .71), as was their sense of competence post-task (M = 3.78, SD = .77).

Key findings from Table 2 indicate that students feel empowered in their learning choices and that there is strong agreement with statements 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 14 as indicated by mean scores above 4.0. In contrast, the mean scores for statements 2, 4, 9, 13, and 15 ranged from 3.0 to 4.0, suggesting a moderate level of autonomy and possible difficulties that would call for more assistance. With the lowest mean score (2.66), Statement 16 showed that most students are confident in their ability to handle the demands of the course and do not consider themselves to be struggling.

Research reveals that Cambodian EFL university students often exhibit a high level of learner autonomy, possibly due to shared autonomy-supportive characteristics across various EFL contexts. This consistency shows that autonomy is a fundamental determinant of beneficial learning outcomes. For example, Nguyen et al. [20] discovered that Vietnamese EFL students highlighted autonomy drivers such as voluntariness, learner choice, peer participation, and intrinsic motivation. Similarly, Khulaifiyah et al. [21] showed that higher-level EFL learners describe autonomous learning as independent, utilizing personal approaches with instructor support, without major effort disparities between levels. Furthermore, Gocić & Jankovic [22] underlined that EFL and ESP students are encouraged to establish autonomy through tactics including language learning methodologies and reflective journals. Overall, EFL learners respect autonomy for its usefulness in academic and professional development [23].

While the data suggested high motivation and satisfaction among Cambodian EFL university students, 34.3% expressed challenges with motivation and self-perceived competence. These results underline the significance of addressing individual needs and providing targeted support to increase autonomy. This correlates with observations in other situations, such as Turkey, where Kuluşaklı [24] showed EFL freshmen exerted effort in language study but experienced difficulty in efficiently implementing independent learning skills. Similarly, Tran [25] reported that EFL students in Ho Chi Minh City, despite cognitive awareness, displayed poor interest in learner autonomy for English vocabulary learning, indicating a need for improved teaching methodologies.

5.2.2. Levels of Learner Engagement

The statistics on the learner engagement levels of 108 EFL university students in Cambodia are displayed in Table 4 below. The data was obtained by self-assessment, which rated the students' proficiency in a range of academic skills and tasks on a scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*).

Table 4. Levels of Learner Engagement among Cambodian EFL University Students

	Statement	<i>n</i>	M	SD	Meaning	Rank
1.	How well can you learn English (reading skills, writing skills, speaking skills and listening skills, grammar, and vocabulary)?	108	3.65	.75	High	7
2.	How well can you finish your homework and assignments by deadlines?	108	3.75	.89	High	2
3.	How well can you concentrate on university courses?	108	3.67	.59	High	6
4.	How well can you take course notes of course instructions?	108	3.54	.66	High	9
5.	How well can you use the library to get information for course assignments?	108	3.46	.82	Moderate	10
6.	How well can you plan your university work?	108	3.71	.74	High	4
7.	How well can you organize your university work?	108	3.71	.64	High	3
8.	How well can you remember information presented in courses and textbooks?	108	3.56	.68	High	8
9.	How well can you motivate yourself to do university work?	108	3.80	.87	High	1
10.	How well can you participate in university course discussions?	108	3.69	.66	High	5
	Overall	108	3.65	.73	High	

Table 4 demonstrates that students display moderate to high interest in university courses, with mean scores ranging from 3.5 to 3.8, demonstrating general confidence in their abilities. For English language skills—reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, and vocabulary—the mean score was 3.65 (SD = .75), suggesting moderate confidence. Their capacity to fulfill assignment deadlines was evaluated 3.75 (SD = .89), reflecting high accountability and time management. Concentration on coursework was 3.67 (SD = .59), showing a strong academic focus, while involvement in discussions averaged 3.69 (SD = .66), demonstrating active engagement. Students also displayed good organizational abilities, with planning and arranging activities score 3.71 (SD = .74 and SD = .64, respectively).

Overall, students expressed confidence in their ability to learn English, complete assignments, concentrate, take notes, use the library, plan, organize, retain material, and participate in class discussions. Their mean score for using the library's resources, however, was lower at 3.46 (SD = .82), suggesting that utilization varies. With a retention of course material score of 3.56 (SD = .68), students demonstrated a respectable recall of the material. A noteworthy 3.80 (SD = .87) self-motivation score for university assignments was necessary for long-term academic achievement.

The results demonstrate that students' academic skills are reflected in statements 1 through 8, with high mean scores signifying confidence in learning. With their good scores, statements 9 and 10—which center on motivation and self-regulation—indicate intrinsic motivation and efficient learning management. On the other hand, statements pertaining to critical thinking and information literacy (5 and 8) scored moderately, indicating the need for additional support.

Cambodian EFL university students demonstrate a moderate to high degree of engagement, notably in self-motivation, organization, and participation. These results underline the significance of building supportive learning settings that improve autonomy and boost engagement among EFL students. This fits with prior research revealing that learner engagement are connected to instructors' autonomy support [26] and that autonomy support meets fundamental psychological needs, hence increasing engagement [27]. Engagement incorporates behavioral, cognitive, and emotional qualities impacted by autonomy support [28], and covers commitment, motivation, and the translation of thinking into action [29]. In language learning, engagement shows as concentrated cognition, active speech, and pleasant connections with the language [30].

Despite the moderate to high engagement levels, variability in library resource utilization and memory recall shows a need for tailored help to develop these areas and allow deeper learning. Research highlights the relevance of teaching practices and curricular engagement in generating supportive settings that improve involvement and motivation [31]. Learner engagement, defined by effort, involvement, and diverse cognitive and emotional elements, improves deep learning [7].

5.3. The Correlation Between Learner Autonomy and Learner Engagement

This study investigated the correlation between learner autonomy and learner engagement among 108 Cambodian EFL students. A correlational study was undertaken using Pearson's correlation coefficient to investigate both the strength and the direction of the relationship between these two variables (Table 5).

Table 5. Correlation Coefficients Between Learner Autonomy and Learner Engagement

Main Variable	Correlation Coefficient	P-Value
1. Learner Autonomy	.53	.00
2. Learner Engagement		

Note. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficient between learner autonomy and learner engagement was $r=.53$ with a P-value of $p<.01$ (Table 5). This indicates a moderate positive correlation that is statistically significant. Therefore, the correlation coefficient significantly differs from 0 to +1, suggesting that as students perceive greater autonomy in their learning, their engagement in studies also increases. This finding underscores the importance of fostering learner autonomy to enhance learner engagement.

This finding is consistent with other studies showing learner autonomy greatly promotes learner engagement across educational settings. Multiple research [32], [33] have demonstrated a clear positive correlation between learner autonomy and their levels of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement. This relationship is particularly visible when educators adopt autonomy-supportive tactics such as providing meaningful choices in learning activities, fostering self-directed goal setting, and building classroom environments that reward student initiative [34].

Moreover, the importance of autonomy is especially obvious in language learning environments. Teachers identify autonomy as a critical aspect in student success [35], with studies indicating that directly contributes to learners' willingness to engage in conversation, classroom participation, and overall language competency [38]. Autonomous language learners have more confidence in speaking tasks [36] and exhibit more persistence in overcoming language learning difficulties [37].

Furthermore, these findings correspond with Self-Determination Theory [39], which acknowledges autonomy as a fundamental psychological need that, when satisfied, leads to better intrinsic motivation and deeper involvement in learning activities. Self-Determination Theory illustrates that autonomy cultivates a sense of control, so it drives students to engage more profoundly with their studies. When students experience autonomy, they engage personally in their education, thereby improving their academic performance. Also, from the standpoint of Flow Theory [40], autonomy facilitates the attainment of a flow state by enhancing emotions of control and reducing anxiety. Essential dimensions such as arousal and relaxation are pivotal; more autonomy can increase arousal, maintaining student concentration, whilst relaxation aids in reducing stress. Consequently, the findings underscore the necessity of promoting learner autonomy in educational settings to enhance engagement, in accordance with both Self-Determination Theory and Flow Theory. Fostering autonomy can result in enhanced student motivation and improved academic performance.

Overall, the findings highlighted that promoting learner autonomy should be the top priority in educational design. For optimal outcomes, universities must empower students through structured yet flexible learning environments, while educators should employ autonomy-supportive approaches to increase engagement and academic performance.

To improve academic performance in Cambodian EFL universities, comprehensive strategies that foster learner autonomy and supportive environments are crucial: 1) recommended methods include project-based learning, offering assignment alternatives, and integrating interactive activities to improve engagement; 2) curriculum designers should establish flexible pathways for students to choose project topics and assessment forms consistent with their interests; 3) faculty development programs should focus on training instructors in

autonomy-supportive approaches; and 4) adopting digital platforms for self-paced learning, together with regular self-assessment and peer feedback, promotes metacognitive skills.

Moreover, this study has limitations because to its focus on a specific population of Cambodian EFL university students, which might limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or educational systems. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported assessments may introduce bias, compromising the accuracy of the results.

6. CONCLUSION

Primarily, Cambodian EFL university students exhibited high levels of learner autonomy and learner engagement, underlining the need for interventions that develop autonomy and establish supportive learning settings to boost academic achievements. While some students displayed good self-directed learning skills, others may need additional support and strategies to develop these skills. Moreover, a moderate positive correlation was found between learner autonomy and learner engagement, showing that enhanced autonomy corresponds with better engagement levels. This underlines the need of encouraging learner autonomy to promote engagement among Cambodian EFL students. The data also highlight challenges experienced by these students in their English language acquisition, specifically with autonomy and engagement.

Future study should address these limitations by conducting longitudinal, cross-cultural studies that explore the relationship between autonomy support and institutional constraints. Additionally, employing qualitative or mixed methods contributes to understanding the underlying elements driving learner autonomy and engagement. Such research would offer greater insights into students' experiences and perceptions, expanding the understanding of the educational situation.

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