



FOSTERING VIETNAMESE EFL LEARNERS' LEARNER AUTONOMY AND READING COMPREHENSION ABILITY THROUGH ONLINE PLATFORMS

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Abstract:

The ability of learner autonomy is a prerequisite for many university students in Vietnam. However, it is a daunting task for EFL teachers and learners to achieve that learning outcome. The present study aims to delineate second-year English majors' perceived learner autonomy and reading comprehension ability in an online reading course at Van Lang University, Vietnam, with two online platforms (synchronous via Microsoft Teams and asynchronous via Moodle). During the ten weeks of this course, different online reading and vocabulary practices were assigned to 65 students in two intact classes. The results were obtained from reading tests, questionnaires, and a follow-up interview. The findings revealed that they could perceive their learner autonomy more positively and statistically remarkably improve their reading comprehension ability after the course. The students' insights into the course's effectiveness confirmed several benefits in addition to a few barriers (i.e., technical issues, English proficiency levels, learning motivation, and online self-study skills). The results have specific implications for the practice of English reading instruction at the faculty. Viable online platforms and pedagogical techniques should be applied to foster the students' learner autonomy and reading comprehension ability.

Keywords: learner autonomy, reading comprehension, Microsoft Teams, Moodle

1. Introduction

Learner autonomy is among the top considerations in higher education in many educational contexts, and EFL teachers' roles are of great significance (Sakai & Takagi,

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2009). However, while this term is rooted in Western cultures, considering specific Asian educational contexts is necessary to adapt suitable models for learner autonomy.

In Vietnam, the demand for autonomy and English communication in tertiary educational contexts is now apparent (Vietnamese Assembly, 2019). However, low English proficiency, ineffective communication skills, and inefficient learning strategies are noteworthy concerns (Trinh & Nguyen, 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to foster Vietnamese EFL learners' ability to learn autonomously (Duong & Nguyen, 2023).

Using technologies for learner autonomy is essential because it helps motivate EFL learners to practice self-study skills and improve their language learning performance (Al Zieni, 2019; Tran *et al.*, 2020). For that reason, the ubiquity of current online platforms eases the learners' perception and practice of learner autonomy in reading comprehension classes (Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018; Alzubi *et al.*, 2019).

Most previous findings about Vietnamese EFL learner autonomy were interpreted from surveys to explore EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions and practices. Empirical studies on utilizing online platforms to foster Vietnamese EFL learner autonomy and reading comprehension ability are limited (Nguyen, 2018; Ngo, 2020; Tran *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, the incorporation of online platforms into EFL classes in other educational contexts varies in terms of tools (Mutlu & Erzo-Tüğa, 2013; Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018; Alzubi *et al.*, 2019; Kizmaz, 2019; Huang, 2020; Pasaribu, 2020). Very little attention was paid to the effect of using Microsoft Teams and Moodle on fostering learner autonomy and reading comprehension ability.

This study examines the perceived learner autonomy and reading comprehension ability of second-year English majors at Van Lang University, Vietnam, before and after an online course with two platforms, Microsoft Teams and Moodle. Two research questions are being addressed in the study:

Research question 1: How do students perceive learner autonomy before and after the online reading course?

Research question 2: How is the student's reading comprehension ability before and after the online reading course?

Triangulation data, including the pre-and post-questionnaire and the reading pretest and post-test, were employed to enhance the reliability and validity of the results.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Learner Autonomy in EFL Education

The concept of learner autonomy has been viewed in several ways. Holec (1981) defined it as "*learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's learning*" (p.3). It also refers to learners' ability to manage their knowledge for learning, learning strategies, and learning attitudes for good learning outcomes (Wenden, 1991).

Oxford (2003) added that learner autonomy refers to one's learning ability in isolation and social interactions. In EFL education, it is seen as EFL learners' ability to spot their learning advantages and disadvantages and maintain high learning motivation

to gain better proficiency (Little, 2007). Benson (2011) viewed learner autonomy as EFL learners' capabilities of adapting their mental, physical, and psychological efforts to different learning situations to achieve the learning objectives. Learner autonomy should include students' ability to govern their learning process, seek aid from others, and maintain self-confidence in controlling their learning (Le & Nguyen, 2022). In this study, learner autonomy refers to EFL learners' ability to take charge of their learning process, take advantage of all learning resources and extra help from others, and keep motivation and confidence for learning.

2.2 Factors in Learner Autonomy

Factors contributing to successful learner autonomy are numerous (Tran & Vuong, 2022). Littlewood (1996) explained that autonomous learners can take initiative in their learning by determining learning goals, plans, and strategies. The degree of learner autonomy is also strongly related to learners' English proficiency levels (Sakai & Takagi, 2009). They also seek peer and teacher support for self-study (Oxford, 2003). EFL teachers' roles in fostering learner autonomy outside the classroom are essential as they need to provide suitable opportunities for learners to practice self-study skills (Sakai *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, instructional technologies can facilitate the development of and motivation for learner autonomy (Al Zieni, 2019; Tran *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, effective autonomous learners are those who are engaged in learning activities both inside and outside class, become motivated to achieve learning results, effectively use language learning materials, and seek necessary contributions from others (Little, 2007; Benson, 2011).

EFL learners must be trained in effective, suitable learning strategies (Iamudom & Tangkiengsirisin, 2020) and committed to lifelong learning (Ghobain, 2020). Duong (2021) synthesized four critical elements of learner autonomy, namely technical elements (i.e., inside and outside learning tasks, learning strategies, learning abilities, and learning materials), psychological elements (i.e., learning motivation, preferences, and self-confidence), political elements (i.e., learning conditions and policies), and social elements (i.e., collaboration and interaction in learning).

2.3 Fostering Vietnamese EFL Learners' Learner Autonomy

It is challenging to foster learner autonomy in the Vietnamese EFL context. First, Vietnamese students are often characterized by passive learning styles due to traditional educational practices emphasizing rote memorization and teacher-centered instruction (Dang, 2010; Le & Huynh, 2019; Tran, 2020; Nguyen *et al.*, 2023).

This cultural predisposition towards passive learning hinders the development of autonomous learning skills, as students are less accustomed to taking initiative and responsibility for their learning. Second, a significant barrier to fostering learner autonomy is the generally low level of English proficiency among many Vietnamese students (Bui, 2017; Phan, 2018; Le & Nguyen, 2022; Tran & Vuong, 2023).

Students with limited English skills need help to engage in autonomous learning activities, which often require a higher degree of language competence to navigate and

utilize resources effectively. Third, the prevalence of unsuccessful autonomous learners with ineffective learning strategies and low learning motivation is clear (Tran & Duong, 2020; Duong & Nguyen, 2021; Le *et al.*, 2023; Nguyen *et al.*, 2023). Fourth, the inefficient incorporation of learning resources and collaboration among the students is apparent (Bui, 2017; Phan, 2018; Tran & Duong, 2020). Fifth, certain policy restrictions (i.e., curriculum, testing, and assessment, and so forth) on learner autonomy in many Vietnamese EFL contexts lead to low practice of learner autonomy in class (Duong & Nguyen, 2021; Trinh & Nguyen, 2021; Ngo & Luu, 2023). Sixth, teacher-related autonomy and motivation may be additional barriers to learner autonomy (Le & Huynh, 2019; Tran & Duong, 2020; Le *et al.*, 2023).

Finally, parents' contribution (Ho *et al.*, 2023; Truong & Nguyen, 2023) and instructional technologies (Tran *et al.*, 2020; Pham, 2023) to learner autonomy should be appreciated. This lack of strategic learning approaches and intrinsic motivation undermines efforts to cultivate autonomy, as students cannot set goals, monitor their progress, or sustain their engagement in learning activities.

As a result, Phan (2018) recommended that Vietnamese EFL teachers pay attention to three elements to foster learner autonomy. They are:

- 1) the students' willingness to use English both inside and outside class,
- 2) their English proficiency, and
- 3) the collaboration between the teacher and students and among students in class.

Furthermore, incorporating instructional technologies as learning resources should not be ignored (Tran *et al.*, 2020; Pham, 2023). Particularly, Duong and Nguyen (2023) noted that learner autonomy practices should aim at "self-awareness," "self-efficacy," and "motivation." These practices are comprised of several different activities, namely determining learning objectives, scheduling self-study practices, selecting and incorporating appropriate learning resources, selecting and adjusting learning strategies, seeking extra support from teachers and friends for self-study, taking risks in learning, taking chances of learning extra practices, keeping motivation for learning, and evaluating learning progress.

2.4 Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to the interpretation of written texts, including low-level (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, and semantic properties) and high-level components (e.g., background knowledge, reading strategies, and text interpretation) (Grabe & Stoller, 2013).

The assessment of reading comprehension skills in the EFL context shares one similar goal: to gather sufficient information about the student readers' capacity to apply all reading components to interpret written texts (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). Joint assessment activities are "perceptive tasks" (e.g., letter, word recognition), "selective tasks" (e.g., vocabulary tests), "interactive tasks" (e.g., impromptu reading comprehension tests, scanning, short-answer, comprehension multiple choice questions,

mapping information, completing diagrams, and so forth), and “extensive tasks” (skimming, summarizing and text responding, note-taking and outlining).

2.5 Empirical Evidence on Using Online Platforms to Foster EFL Learner Autonomy and Reading Comprehension Ability

While a growing body of research surveyed EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of learner autonomy, empirical studies on fostering EFL learner autonomy and reading comprehension ability via instructional technologies were relatively limited. Furthermore, research into using Microsoft Teams and Moodle to foster learner autonomy and reading comprehension ability is scarce.

A comprehensive study by Mutlu and Erzo-Tüğ̃a (2013) included 48 intermediate-level Turkish EFL learners, equally assigned into two study groups: one with and the other without online platforms into learner autonomy practices in five-week teaching treatment. Through questionnaires, interviews, observations, and teaching diaries, the study concluded that applying a class website and blogs in EFL teaching and learning helps them improve their perceived language learning strategies and motivation. They also enthusiastically partake in English learning activities after class and become more active learners.

Hazaea and Alzubi (2018) also demonstrated the effectiveness of instructional technologies on EFL learner autonomy in a South Arabic qualitative study. This study explored the improvement in learner autonomy of 30 EFL learners in a reading class who used WhatsApp and Google search engines to share reading materials and interact with teachers and peers. The results, obtained through students' portfolios and interviews, clarified that the learners can improve their autonomy in making personal decisions and taking responsibility for reading materials sharing and practices.

Like Mutlu and Erzo-Tüğ̃a, Nguyen (2018) conducted a three-phase mixed-methods study. In Phase 1, the online questionnaire on English learning strategies, attitudes, and motivation was delivered to 352 university students. In Phase 2, an experiment in two study groups (25 each) was conducted, whose survey results were compared to the other two control groups (25 each). While the experimental groups received English instruction with a “Learning Management System” (LMS) system, the other two were instructed directly in class. In Phase 3, an interview was conducted with voluntary interviewees (2 teachers and 15 students). The findings demonstrated that the Moodle application is helpful for EFL learners' autonomy. The students in experimental groups significantly changed their learning attitudes, improved their learning strategies, and enhanced their learning motivation.

Alzubi *et al.* (2019) demonstrated the effect of technology-mediated instruction on learner autonomy and reading strategies. The study employed a pre- and post-questionnaire for two EFL classes: one control group and one experimental group, each with 35 participants. One difference in the teaching intervention between the two groups was that the experimental group was taught reading strategies on smartphones to foster

their learner autonomy. The results illustrated that this intervention could enhance the learners' reading strategies and self-improvement.

In 2019, Kizmaz investigated the impacts of several online platforms (e.g., YouTube, Engvid, BBC News, and so forth) on Turkish EFL learners' learner autonomy. Two study groups (25 each) were included, one with and the other without online platforms. Pre- and post-questionnaires were used to compare the improvement in learner autonomy before and after a seven-week course. The results proved that using online platforms helps improve EFL learners' perceived learner autonomy and perceptions of learner autonomy besides challenges.

The study by Huang (2020) conducted an experimental study on the effects of online flipped classrooms on Taiwanese EFL learner autonomy. The research employed authentic reading texts on marine topics to facilitate EFL learners' reading comprehension and learner autonomy. The pre-and post-questionnaire comparison revealed that the learners significantly improved their autonomy, including higher engagement levels in out-of-class activities, making decisions, and taking more learning responsibilities.

Another study by Ngo (2020) utilized the Canvas online learning forum to foster learner autonomy of Vietnamese EFL learners. Multiple data collection and analysis procedures were applied via pretests, post-tests, questionnaires, and students' reflective journals. 60 sophomore English-majored students were assigned to three study groups: one pilot, one control, and one experimental group. The results clarified the remarkable improvement in English proficiency and learner autonomy level in the experimental group with Canvas. The students also expressed positive learning attitudes towards this integration.

Pasaribu (2020) examined the effects of instructional technologies (online infographics and Moodle) on EFL learner autonomy in reading class. Twenty-five Indonesian EFL learners were exposed to this online reading class and completed questionnaires, learning portfolios, and reflections. The results demonstrated that implementing digital reader response tasks on Moodle can encourage EFL learners to practice learner autonomy and maintain high learning motivation.

Quite differently, Tran *et al.* (2020) investigated the impacts of Google Classroom on learner autonomy in academic English classes at a university. Four research instruments were used: questionnaire, observation, interview, and students' diaries. The population included 97 English-majored students. The results clarified that this implementation helps increase EFL learners' autonomy regarding social interaction and collaboration outside class for self-study, improves their self-awareness of learner autonomy, and enhances their learning self-confidence.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method research design. The primary quantitative data are the reading pretest and post-test scores, as well as the pre-questionnaire and the post-questionnaire responses. The further responses in both questionnaires are treated as secondary qualitative data. Where necessary, further explanations are added for the key quantitative findings.

3.2 Participants

The convenience sampling method included 64 second-year English-majored students at Van Lang University in the first semester of the 2021-2022 academic year. Initially, 75 students were enrolled in the online reading class. However, 11 students were absent from the test days. The remaining 64 were confirmed as research participants. The information about these participants is reported in the following table.

Table 1: The Information About the Participants

Variable	Value	No.	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	29	39.1
	Female	35	60.9
English learning experience	Below 3 years	5	7.8
	3-5 years	15	23.4
	6-8 years	14	21.9
	Over 8 years	30	46.9
Previous online learning experience	No	48	75.0
	Yes	16	25.0
Preference for online English reading experience	No	40	62.5
	Yes	24	37.5
Devices for online learning	Smartphones	40	41.2
	Laptops	50	51.5
	Desktops	3	3.1
	Ipads	4	4.1
Valid		64	100

The sample included more female than male students (35 females/ 29 males, 60.9 %/ 39.1 %). Most of them had studied English for more than eight years at the time of the study (30 students, 46.9 %). Many of them did not have any online learning experience (48 students, 75.0 %). They did not strongly prefer online English reading classes (40 students, 62.5 %). The two most ubiquitous devices for online learning are laptops (50 students, 51.5 %) and smartphones (40 students, 41.2 %). In the study, they were studying in two different intact classes. However, there was no random assignment to different study groups. Because of the research objectives, they were considered as only one study group.

3.3 Instruments

The study employed two instruments: a pre- and post-questionnaire and a reading pretest and post-test, all created on Moodle. The former aims to examine the students' perceived learner autonomy before and after the course, while the latter aims to examine the students' reading ability before and after the course.

Regarding the questionnaires, they were adapted from Duong and Nguyen (2023). Both questionnaires share a similar structure and content. The pre-questionnaire consists of 8 question items. Questions 1 to 7 aim to collect the students' general information about their gender, English learning experience, prior online learning experience, past specific course names, preference for online reading classes, and the reasons and devices for online learning, respectively. Question 8 is a 5-point Likert scale (from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, respectively). It includes 16 items concerning different perceived learner autonomy abilities.

Similarly, the post-questionnaire consists of four question items. Items 1 and 2 aim to collect the students' self-evaluation of the course. Item 3 has the same scale as the pre-questionnaire. Item 4 aims to collect the students' perspectives on the course's advantages and disadvantages. These questionnaires achieved high Cronbach's alpha, above 0.6 ($\alpha=.925$ & $.980$, respectively).

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Pre-questionnaire	.925	16
Post-questionnaire	.980	16

Regarding the tests, they share the same structure and content. All question items are multiple-choice and automatically scored on Moodle to increase reliability. The test includes 20 multiple-choice items, with two reading passages (10 questions each). Part 1 aims to measure these reading abilities, namely skimming (1 question), scanning (2 questions), guessing meanings through context (3 questions), understanding referents (2 questions), making inferences (1 question), and understanding the author's attitude (1 question). Part 2 aims to measure these reading abilities, namely scanning (4 questions), guessing meanings through context (2 questions), understanding referents (1 question), making inferences (1 question), understanding the author's intention (1 question), and understanding text organization (1 question).

3.4 Teaching Procedure

In the study, these students studied reading totally online for 10 weeks. The lecturer in charge conducted synchronous and asynchronous teaching sessions in Microsoft Teams meetings and on Moodle (or the E-learning system), respectively. There are 8 main units of reading passages in the course from the primary coursebook "Q: Skills for Success Level 4: Reading and Writing with iQ Online Practice (third edition)" by Daise and Norloff (2019).

Every online class session started with virtual face-to-face meetings on Teams. The lecturer delivered the reading lecture in a fixed sequence: (1) a brief introduction to the reading topic, (2) pre-teaching keywords, (3) guiding silent reading and reading comprehension questions, and (4) further reading tasks.

In the first stage (5 minutes), the lecturer asked one leading question about the reading topic. Up to five students could volunteer answers by speaking out loud on Teams or typing in the chat box.

Once the answers had been discussed, the lecturer proceeded to teach the students 8 to 10 keywords. First, the spelling, pronunciation, and meaning of the keywords were presented. Then, the students were asked to create their own example sentences using the keywords. They were required to type their sentences in the chat box and interact with the teacher and other students during this activity (15 minutes).

Then, the main reading instruction was conducted (90 minutes). The students were invited to listen to the reading passage first to become familiar with the pronunciation of every keyword and specific proper names within the text. After that, they were asked to conduct silent reading at their own speed and then answer five comprehension questions shown in the slideshow. Both spoken and written answers were permitted. Once the answers were clarified, the main idea of each section of the passage was explained to the students. They were asked to complete three reading comprehension activities that were randomly selected from the coursebook. The students were assigned to different groups via the "Breakout Rooms" function on Teams. The teams were observed during the group work and supported when necessary. The teacher's feedback was delivered privately to each group.

Once all the feedback had been delivered, the groups were invited to return to the main meeting. The teacher responded to any questions or comments from the students and then showed the final answers in the slideshow with the lecturer's explanations (30 minutes). The students were asked to do one reading and vocabulary quiz on Moodle (<https://elearning.vanlanguni.edu.vn/course/view.php?id=6241>). After this quiz, the students were allowed to ask any further questions or comment to the lecturer.

Finally, they were assigned one reading assignment to be completed after class. Each group was supposed to submit a summary on the second reading passage of the unit via a Teams assignment.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were translated into Vietnamese to reduce bias from reading comprehension. The pre-questionnaire and reading pretest, both optional, were conducted during the first virtual session before the lesson. The lecturer carefully instructed the students before the questionnaire regarding the purpose of the survey. The reading pretest took place in twenty-five minutes. After completion, no answer clarification and marks were shown. The students were told to complete the test by themselves, and the lecturer confirmed that the reading test scores were used for study purposes only. These scores were not used for their primary academic record in the

course. The post-questionnaire and reading post-test were administered in the final session under the same procedure.

SPSS (Version 27.0) was primarily used to answer both research questions. Regarding the questionnaire responses, descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) were extracted to describe the students' perceived learner autonomy level before and after the course. Each scale's mean of perceived learner autonomy was then transformed into the overall perceived learner autonomy.

After that, a Paired samples t-test was used to compare whether there was a significant improvement in overall perceived learner autonomy within the group before and after the teaching treatment. Further questionnaire responses were used later to add further insights into the survey findings. Regarding the reading test scores, a Paired samples t-test was used to compare whether there was a significant improvement in reading test scores within the group before and after the teaching treatment.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The EFL Learner Autonomy

Before the teaching treatment, the overall perceived learner autonomy reached its mean of 3.74 (M1= 3.74). The mean increased to 4.22 (M2= 4.22) after the course. Furthermore, this increase was statistically significant ($p = .000 < 0.001$).

Table 3: Paired Samples T-test of Overall Perceived Learner Autonomy Before and After Course

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 H2 - H3	-.48197	.75837	.09480	-.67141	-.29254	-5.084	63	.000

H2: Overall perceived learner autonomy before the course.

H3: Overall perceived learner autonomy after the course.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Overall Perceived Learner Autonomy Before and After Course

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	H2	3.74	.66535	.08317
	H3	4.22	.69550	.08694

Before the course, most perceived learner autonomy abilities among the students were low. Only two abilities have a mean over 4.0, "setting course learning objectives" (Item 8: M1= 4.02, SD1= .864) and "being aware of learning abilities" (Item 5: M1= 4.13, SD1= .845). After the course, all abilities have their means over 4.0. The two highest means belong to "being aware of learning abilities" (Item 5: M2= 4.41, SD1= .750) and "being able to select learning context outside class" (Item 9: M2= 4.36, SD2= .745).

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Detailed
 Perceived Learner Autonomy Before and After Course

Items	N	M1	SD1	M2	SD2
1. I can solve all learning problems by myself.	64	3.48	.836	4.23	.899
2. I can seek alternative solutions to learning problems.	64	3.66	.895	4.21	.780
3. I consider learning problems as challenges.	64	3.80	1.101	4.38	.769
4. I can adapt to all learning problems.	64	3.52	.943	4.08	.898
5. I can be aware of my learning capabilities.	64	4.13	.845	4.41	.750
6. I can depend on myself only when learning.	64	3.98	.968	4.15	.788
7. I know which learning styles are appropriate for me.	64	3.92	.981	4.21	.820
8. I set learning objectives appropriate for my needs.	64	4.02	.864	4.06	.629
9. I select when and where to study English according to my learning needs.	64	3.95	1.045	4.36	.745
10. I make detailed plans for my English learning.	64	3.52	.976	4.00	.909
11. I can self-evaluate my English learning progress.	64	3.70	.937	4.21	.780
12. I want to select my own learning content and strategies.	64	3.75	1.069	4.23	.701
13. I want to select devices and learning materials by myself.	64	3.80	.912	4.28	.815
14. I am used to accessing to different learning resources.	64	3.73	.895	4.21	.800
15. I want the lecturer to let me decide all about my learning process.	64	3.41	.971	4.26	.706
16. I want the lecturer to assist me whenever I need it.	64	3.45	1.194	4.26	.830
Valid N (listwise)	64				

The students added further insights into the effects of the online platforms on their learner autonomy in the reading course. Several benefits of this course for their learner autonomy included:

- 1) adjusting learning strategies,
- 2) being convenient for studying at home, and
- 3) scaffolding general knowledge for self-study.

They also added a few disadvantages to this online course, including:

- 1) the instability of the Wi-Fi connection,
- 2) the unfamiliarity of using online learning materials, and
- 3) the inconvenience of online teamwork.

Therefore, this integration greatly supported the students' learner autonomy in the reading course. Their perceived learner autonomy abilities were remarkably higher after the course.

4.2 The EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension Ability

There was a statistically significant improvement in the students' reading test scores ($p = .011 < 0.05$). The mean of the post-test ($M_2 = 6.2$) is higher than that of the pretest ($M_1 = 5.3$).

Table 6: Paired Samples T-test of the Reading Test Scores

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest – Post-test	-0.8047	2.4424	0.3053	-1.4148	-0.1946	-2.636	63	0.011

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of the Reading Test Scores

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	5.3	64	1.6053	0.2007
	Post-test	6.1	64	1.5537	0.1942

The students' further responses after the course clarified that using online platforms had a few positive influences on the students' reading ability besides many challenges. Regarding the benefits, the students confirmed they could improve their reading strategies (i.e., faster skimming and scanning skills). It enables them to seek and review learning materials (i.e., reading quizzes, reading texts, lectures, and so forth) more conveniently. It also facilitates reading practices among some students familiar with reading on mobile devices. However, the students realized the numerous challenges that the online reading course poses for their reading ability:

- 1) It is difficult for students who are unfamiliar with reading on screens.
- 2) It is more challenging for many lower-level English student readers to catch up with the online lectures and higher-level ones.
- 3) Technical problems exist while studying and reading online (e.g., taking time to scroll down the screen, the low quality of the Wi-Fi connection, and so forth).
- 4) Students with low motivation for online reading cannot show their reading ability in the course.
- 5) The variety of online learning materials (both on Teams and Moodle) forces the students to adapt to the online reading course.

Therefore, although the statistical evidence of the reading test scores revealed a remarkable increase after the course, the applications were considered to have a negligible effect on EFL learners' reading ability. It is because of many mediating factors in this online reading course, namely:

- 1) EFL learners' language proficiency,
- 2) technical problems,
- 3) motivation, and
- 4) online study skills.

5. Discussion

The questionnaire results illustrated the improvement in overall perceived learner autonomy. This finding agrees with all past related studies (Mutlu & Erzo-Tüğa, 2013; Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018; Alzubi *et al.*, 2019; Nguyen, 2018; Kizmaz, 2019; Huang, 2020;

Ngo, 2020; Pasaribu, 2020; Tran *et al.*, 2020). Using instructional technologies can aid EFL learners' development in their learner autonomy abilities. In particular, the results agree with Hazaea and Alzubi (2018), Alzubi *et al.* (2019), Huang (2020), and Pasaribu (2020) that fostering EFL learner autonomy in a reading class requires online platforms. EFL teachers need to take advantage of online educational platforms (e.g., Moodle, Google Classroom, Teams, and so forth) to facilitate learners' ability to make learning decisions, set learning goals, select and use learning resources for reading (e.g., authentic texts, reading quizzes, and so forth), and take responsibility of their learning process. The findings are in favor of Mutlu and Erzo-Tüğa (2013), Nguyen (2018), Ngo (2020), and Tran, Truong, and Dang (2020). EFL learners can improve their learning motivation and strategies. They become more active learners in the course, get more interested in self-study practices, and adjust their learning strategies to deal with learning problems. The result supports Kizmaz (2019), as incorporating technologies to foster learner autonomy is perceived as beneficial and detrimental. Such integration could help EFL learners change their perception of learner autonomy after the course.

In agreement with Hazaea and Alzubi (2018), Alzubi *et al.* (2019), Huang (2020), and Pasaribu (2020) using online platforms in EFL reading classes can help improve their reading comprehension performance. It provides numerous opportunities for the students to practice reading comprehension. They can preview reading texts, search for keywords more conveniently, and look up word meanings in online dictionaries. However, Pasaribu (2020) explained that EFL learners who need to become more familiar with reading on mobile devices cannot quickly adapt to changeable learning conditions from on-site to online classes. Scrolling down screens for reading and completing many reading tasks within time constraints can demotivate students in online reading activities. This fact helps justify the popularity of the students' negative reflections on the course's convenience on reading ability, notwithstanding the higher reading test scores after the course.

It is obvious that the prevalence of students needing to be more experienced in online learning and uninterested in online reading classes before the course justifies the relatively successful implementation of this online reading course. Applying synchronous (via Teams) and asynchronous (via Moodle) could assist the students in practicing learner autonomy in several ways. First, they can collaborate with others (the lecturer and other students) to practice reading comprehension inside and after class. Second, they are given more opportunities to set learning objectives, make learning decisions, choose suitable learning materials, and take responsibility for their learning. The course also supports the students' development in reading abilities. They are trained how to read online texts more efficiently via several techniques, namely "skimming," "scanning," "making inferences," "guessing meaning through context," "understanding referents," "understanding the author's intention," "understanding the author's attitude," and "understanding the text organization." Integrating both educational platforms helps increase social interactions and gives students more chances for reading comprehension practices. However, as reckoned by the students, low English level,

technical issues, low motivation for online reading, unfamiliarity with online teamwork and learning material search, and the need for online self-study skills are significant hindrances to their compelling online reading study. This leads to the relatively small effect of the applications on EFL learners' reading ability after the course.

6. Conclusion

This study affirms that online platforms positively influence EFL learners' perceived learner autonomy in nearly all respects. Moreover, the positive effect of the integration on EFL learners' reading ability after the course was clearly shown in reading test scores. However, the students' insights into the course effectiveness clarified critical obstacles to this implementation: low English proficiency, technical issues, the need for more online self-study skills, ineffective learning material use strategies, and unfamiliarity with online reading and teamwork. These practical benefits and challenges of the course help recommend teaching ideas for other reading courses at the university. EFL lecturers may need to control more variables, such as students' online teamwork in the primary virtual classroom session, learning portfolios (well-organized collections of learning materials), and online educational platforms useful for extensive reading practices. This study has its shortcomings. Only the students' perceived learner autonomy was obtained, whereas it is difficult to measure the actual ability of autonomous learning among the students. No students' reflective journals were collected to describe their evaluation of each online lesson. Therefore, future studies can design more validated instruments to assess EFL learners' learner autonomy after the course and include students' reflective journals to report their self-evaluation of an online reading course.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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