



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***LEARNER AUTONOMY AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY  
AMONG IRANIAN POSTGRADUATES IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN  
MALAYSIA***

**SINA NEISSI**

**FPP 2017 30**



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MALAYSIA**

By

**SINA NEISSI**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
Malaysia, in fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**June 2017**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**SINA NEISSI**

**June 2017**

**Chairman : Habsah bt Hussin, EdD**  
**Faculty : Educational Studies**

This study investigated the relationship between learner autonomy and English language proficiency of Iranian postgraduate students studying in three Malaysian public universities; namely, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Two hundred and twenty-seven Iranian postgraduate students selected through multi stage cluster sampling participated in the study. A mixed method sequential explanatory design was utilized in which a quantitative correlational design was used in the first phase followed by qualitative semi structural interview in the second phase of the study. In the first phase of the study, the Learner Autonomy Profile Short Form (LAP-SH) was used to measure learner autonomy by measuring four constructs i.e. Desire, Resourcefulness, Initiative and Persistence (DRIP). In addition, an English language proficiency test was used to measure the participants' English language proficiency. In the second phase of the study, 12 participants who had successfully completed both the online survey (LAP) and English language proficiency test took part in semi structured interviews. The qualitative data gathered through the semi structured interviews helped to expand on the results of the quantitative data that had been gathered. The quantitative data obtained through the instruments in the first phase of the study were subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to describe the mean and standard deviation of the data. Inferential statistics included correlational analysis and multiple regression analysis. The qualitative data obtained in the second phase of the study was analyzed using content analysis in order to identify the themes. The findings of the study revealed that Iranian post graduate students studying in Malaysian public universities are autonomous in their learning. Also a positive significant relationship was found between learner autonomy and English language proficiency providing evidence that learner autonomy is crucial to successful language learning. Furthermore, Persistence was found to be the best predictor of English language proficiency among the

learner autonomy constructs signifying the importance of being persistent in language learning. Finally, the findings showed that exhibiting desire, resourcefulness, initiative and persistence helps Iranian postgraduate students to become more proficient in the English language highlighting the importance of the psychological perspective of learner autonomy in language learning. The findings suggest some implications for English language teaching and learning and for predicting academic potentials based on learner autonomy.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**AUTONOMI PELAJAR DAN KEFASIHAN BERBAHASA INGGERIS  
(DI KALANGAN) PELAJAR SISWAZAH IRAN DI UNIVERSITI-  
UNIVERSITI TERPILIH DI MALAYSIA**

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**SINA NEISSI**

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Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji hubungan di antara pelajar autonomi dan penguasaan bahasa Inggeris antara kalangan pelajar pasca siswazah Iran yang menuntut di tiga universiti awam Malaysia. Seramai 227 pelajar siswazah Iran telah dipilih melalui persampelan pelbagai peringkat kluster untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Satu kaedah campuran reka bentuk penjelasan berurutan telah digunakan di mana reka bentuk korelasi kuantitatif telah digunakan dalam fasa pertama diikuti oleh struktur semi wawancara kualitatif dalam kajian fasa kedua. Ujian Kecekapan Bahasa Inggeris dijalankan untuk mengukur penguasaan bahasa dalam bahasa Inggeris. Profil pelajar autonomi (LAP-SH) telah digunakan sebagai ukuran pelajar autonomi dengan mengukur empat konstruk keinginan, kepintaran, inisiatif dan kegigihan. Keputusan kuantitatif mendedahkan hubungan yang positif dan signifikan antara pelajar autonomi dan penguasaan bahasa Inggeris. Dalam penelitian fasa dua, 12 peserta telah berjaya menamatkan kedua-dua kaji selidik dalam talian (LAP) dan Bahasa Inggeris Ujian kecekapan mengambil bahagian dalam temu bual separa berstruktur. Data kualitatif berkumpul walaupun temu bual separa berstruktur membantu untuk mengembangkan hasil data kuantitatif yang telah dikumpulkan. Data kuantitatif yang diperolehi melalui instrumen dalam fasa pertama kajian ini adalah tertakluk kepada kedua-dua statistik deskriptif dan inferensi. Analisis statistik deskriptif telah digunakan untuk menggambarkan min dan sisihan piawai bagi data. Statistik inferensi termasuk analisis korelasi dan analisis regresi berganda. Data kualitatif yang diperolehi dalam fasa kedua kajian ini dianalisis menggunakan analisis kandungan untuk mengenal pasti tema. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar Iran pasca siswazah yang belajar di universiti awam Malaysia adalah autonomi dalam pembelajaran mereka. Juga hubungan yang signifikan positif didapati antara pelajar autonomi dan penguasaan bahasa Inggeris membuktikan bahawa pelajar autonomi adalah penting untuk berjaya pembelajaran bahasa. Tambahan pula, Kegigihan didapati peramal terbaik penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris di

kalangan pelajar membina autonomi menandakan pentingnya menjadi berterusan dalam pembelajaran bahasa. Akhir sekali, hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa mempamerkan keinginan, kepintaran, inisiatif dan kegigihan membantu pelajar lepasan ijazah Iran untuk menjadi lebih mahir dalam bahasa Inggeris membuktikan pentingnya perspektif psikologi pelajar autonomi dalam pembelajaran bahasa. Hasil kajian menunjukkan beberapa implikasi untuk bahasa pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris dan untuk meramalkan potensi akademik berdasarkan autonomi pelajar.



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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 7 June 2017 to conduct the final examination of Sina Neissi on his thesis entitled "Learner Autonomy and English Language Proficiency among Iranian Postgraduates in Selected Universities in Malaysia" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
L2	Second Language
Sig.	Significance
LAP	Learner autonomy profile



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

In today's world with the ever-growing phenomenon of globalization, the importance of English as a universal language cannot be ignored. English is the third most spoken language in the world following Chinese and Spanish (Schütz, 2005). There has been a recent Global trend in Education in which more people than ever before are choosing to undertake an international education (OECD, 2005). Many of the students who choose to undertake an international education are originally from countries where English is spoken as a second or third language, or where English is learnt only as a foreign language in school. For these students having a good command of the English language is crucial for their success, as English is the language used in every activity at these international institutions of higher learning. Furthermore, most of the peer-reviewed journals and technical periodicals that give international acclaim to scientists, engineers, technologists, and technocrats, use English as their main language (Clark & Sedgwick, 2005). According to Smith (1976), being proficient in the English language is of the utmost importance in every individual's education.

In recent years, Malaysia has become a major destination for students from Iran to further their studies at graduate and doctoral levels. According to the Director of Iranian Students' Affairs in South-East Asia (2012) there are 13,000 Iranian students studying in Malaysian universities. According to Farhady, Hezaveh & Hedayati (2010), the number of Iranians taking part in IELTS exam (which measures how proficient a person is in the English language) has almost doubled in recent years. As more Iranian students choose to study abroad, having a good command of the English language is very important for their acceptance and success and greatly impacts their academic performance (Wong, 2004; Hellsten, 2002; Borland & Pearce, 2002; Bayley, 2002; Robertson, 2000). Therefore, it is crucial to explore the factors that are related to their proficiency in the English language and help Iranian students to become more successful in their learning.

The huge increase of diverse populations of students has made learner autonomy an attractive goal to both governments and institutions worldwide. During the last two decades, learner autonomy has taken center stage within the context of language learning (Little, 2009). There is a consensus among many scholars that in today's globalized world there is an increase in demand from learners, to have the capacity to be autonomous (Derrick & Carr, 2003; Suharmanto, 2003; Scharle & Szabó, 2000) and learner autonomy is now seen as a global educational goal, specifically in higher education settings (Crome, Farrar & O'Connor, 2011; Benson & Huang, 2008; Ponton & Hall, 2003).

According to Jiao (2005), learner autonomy enhances the learner's motivation and leads to more effective learning. Furthermore, learner autonomy also provides learners with more opportunities for English communication in a non-native environment and is an important factor in determining the success or failure of language learners (Benson, 2001; Little, 1991). Little (2007) argues that, "learner autonomy and the growth of target language proficiency are mutually supporting and fully integrated with each other" (p.1). Learner autonomy is often applied to the process of language learning but not to its intended outcome that is English language proficiency. Furthermore, little research has been conducted explicitly on the relationship between learner autonomy and the development of language proficiency (Little, 2007). This is why the current study aims to find the relationship between learner autonomy and English language proficiency of Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

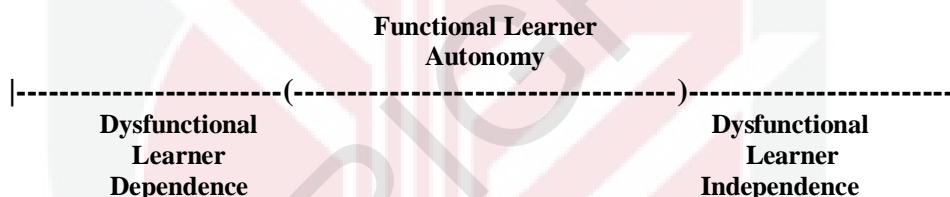
At the end of the 1970s era with regard to foreign language education, two questions were repeatedly being asked. One question was how we can make sure adult English language learners develop the communicative proficiency when moving from one country to another in order to fulfill their social and professional needs. The Second question, which was particularly persistent in university circles, was what use we can make of language laboratories now that the learning theory of behaviorists has been discredited. The answer to these two questions was presented in the University of Marci by Holec (1980) in his report to the council of Europe. The answer was non-other than Learner Autonomy (Little, 2003).

Learner autonomy gained popularity by the political turmoil of late-1960s in Europe and has drawn the attention of educational researchers worldwide ever since. The most popular definition of learner autonomy is by Holec (1981), who defines autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p.3). This definition includes determining the objectives, defining the contents and progressions, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the procedure of acquisition, and evaluating what has been acquired. However, this definition does not mean the learner should avoid any type of help from his or her tutors.

The term learner autonomy is often used in conjunction with self-directed learning in the literature. Confessore (1992) highlights the difficulty of defining self-directed learning due to a lack of consensus on a single definition. Research on self-directed learning can be divided into two parts: 1) studies that focused on the process and 2) studies focused on personality characteristics. Much of the literature on self-directed learning has focused on the process aspect rather than the personality characteristics (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). This is in line with Long's (1989) concept of the psychological dimension of self-directed learning in which he argues that there are three dimensions to self-directed learning; namely, psychological, sociological and pedagogical and "the psychological conceptualization is both necessary and sufficient to explain self-directed learning" (p.9).

Continuing on Long's (1989) work, researchers (Derrick, 2001; Meyer, 2001; Carr, 1999; Ponton, 1999) believe that autonomous learning is a co-occurring behavioral syndrome that is comprised of four conative (directed towards action) factors; namely, desire, learner resourcefulness, learner initiative and learner persistence. The result of their research is an instrument called the Learner Autonomy Profile (LAP) that is designed to produce a precise understanding of an individual's level of autonomy as a learner, which it does so by assessing learner's behavioral intentions to exhibit the necessary behaviors for autonomous learning.

Confessore (2000) describes learner autonomy as a continuum (Refer to figure 1.1) and functional learner autonomy is situated between two extremes, dysfunctional learner dependence in which the learner is too dependent on others help, and dysfunctional learner independence in which the learner will not ask for help from others when needed. Functional learner autonomy unlike the other two extremes (dysfunctional learner dependence and dysfunctional learner independence) is a state in which the learner is willing to learn independently while not being afraid to ask for help when needed. It is in this state that learners can reach their maximum learning potential.



**Figure 1.1 : Learner autonomy continuum according to Confessore (2000)**

By considering the above mentioned facts, two questions arise. One is how can learner autonomy be measured, the answer to this question can be found in the Learner Autonomy Profile (LAP), which is a validated tool and is used to measure individuals capacity to undertake self directed learning. The second question is how does learner autonomy correlate with English language proficiency. Many researchers regard learner autonomy as essential to English language learning (Little 1991), however, research on the relationship between learner autonomy and English language proficiency is insufficient (Benson, 2001). As learner autonomy is a crucial factor in determining the success or failure of language learners (Benson, 2001; Little, 1991), finding the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency will be beneficial to the literature of both learner autonomy and English language proficiency.

This dissertation focuses on finding the relationship between learner autonomy and English language proficiency.



### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

By taking into account the number of articles and books that have been published on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) autonomy theory and principles, generalizable empirical evidence that learner autonomy leads to increased English language proficiency is still lacking (Oxford, 2003; Benson, 2001). Benson (2001) addresses the pressing need for empirical research in order to demonstrate the link between learner autonomy and increased English language proficiency.

Currently, most of the research on learner autonomy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) setting consists of mainly qualitative means of research. These studies are limited and are based on a handful of English as a Second Language (ESL) students who were studying in English speaking countries. These studies mainly include case studies, diary studies, strategy use by learners and learner histories of autonomous learning (e.g., Cotterall, 2008; Benson, 2007; Benson & Nunan, 2005; Yang, 1998; Wenden, 1987). Although such qualitative studies can be useful in understanding individual learner's success in language learning, the findings of such studies are difficult to generalize due to their small sample sizes. There seems to be few quantitative studies that are related to learners in an EFL context or are directly related to EFL autonomy with the exception of studies by Cotterall (1999, 1995) that are only aimed at learner beliefs towards autonomy.

The literature regarding learner autonomy has focused too much on the technical perspective (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 1990). According to Pennycook (1997), research on autonomy has focused too much on strategies, techniques and materials that fall under the technical perspectives of autonomy. Oxford (2003) argues that these technical perspectives alone will not lead to learner autonomy without considering the psychological perspective of learner autonomy. Little (2007) states that no matter how often autonomy is applied to the process and content of language learning, the relation to its specific outcome, language proficiency, is mainly neglected. This study will give further insights into Iranian postgraduate students' learner autonomy in relation to their English language proficiency from a psychological perspective.

With much of the research on learner autonomy focusing on the description of groups or validation of the construct (Ponton, 1999; Carr, 1999), a clear link between learner autonomy and English language proficiency has yet to be explored leaving a gap in the literature of both learner autonomy and English language proficiency.

Today, one of the biggest concerns of educators and language teachers is that most learners have problems and difficulties in learning a foreign language (Farhady et al., 2010). Over the years, many studies have been carried out to determine the factors related to student's success or failure in learning a foreign language. Some of these studies emphasized the importance of intelligence and others found that personality factors played an important role in student's learning. However, Benson



(2007) emphasizes the notion that learner autonomy is related to effective learning and is the legitimate goal of language education. Moreover, there is an ongoing debate about learner autonomy in a cross-cultural settings and Oxford (2003) called for further research regarding learner autonomy in different contexts. That is why in this study, the present researcher seeks to investigate the learner autonomy of Iranian postgraduate students studying in three Malaysian public universities and how it relates to English language proficiency.

#### **1.4 Aim of the Study**

This study aims to explore and examine how learner autonomy is related to English language proficiency of Iranian postgraduate students studying in three Malaysian public universities.

#### **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

**1.5.1 To determine whether Iranian post graduate students studying in Malaysian public universities are autonomous in their learning.**

**1.5.2 To determine the relationship between learner autonomy and English language proficiency of Iranian postgraduate students at selected Malaysian public universities.**

**1.5.3 To determine which of the four factors (i.e., desire, resourcefulness, initiative, and persistence) related to learner autonomy or a combination of factors acts as the best predictor of English language proficiency among Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysian public universities.**

**1.5.4 To explore the factors that help Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysian public universities to become more proficient in the English language.**

#### **1.6 Research Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1:** There will be a positive correlation between learner autonomy and English language proficiency

**Null Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant correlation between learner autonomy and English language proficiency scores.

**Hypothesis 2:** There will be a significant correlation between desire and English language proficiency

**Null Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant correlation between Desire and English language proficiency.

**Hypothesis 3:** There will be a significant correlation between resourcefulness and English language proficiency

**Null Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant correlation between Resourcefulness and English language proficiency.

**Hypothesis 4:** There will be a significant correlation between initiative and English language proficiency

**Null Hypothesis 4:** There is no significant correlation between Initiative and English language proficiency scores.

**Hypothesis 5:** There will be a significant correlation between persistence and English language proficiency

**Null Hypothesis 5:** There is no significant correlation between Persistence and English language proficiency scores.

**Hypothesis 6:** There will be multiple correlation between learner autonomy constructs and English language proficiency.

**Null Hypothesis 6:** There is no significant multiple correlation between learner autonomy constructs and English language proficiency scores.

## **1.7 Research Approach**

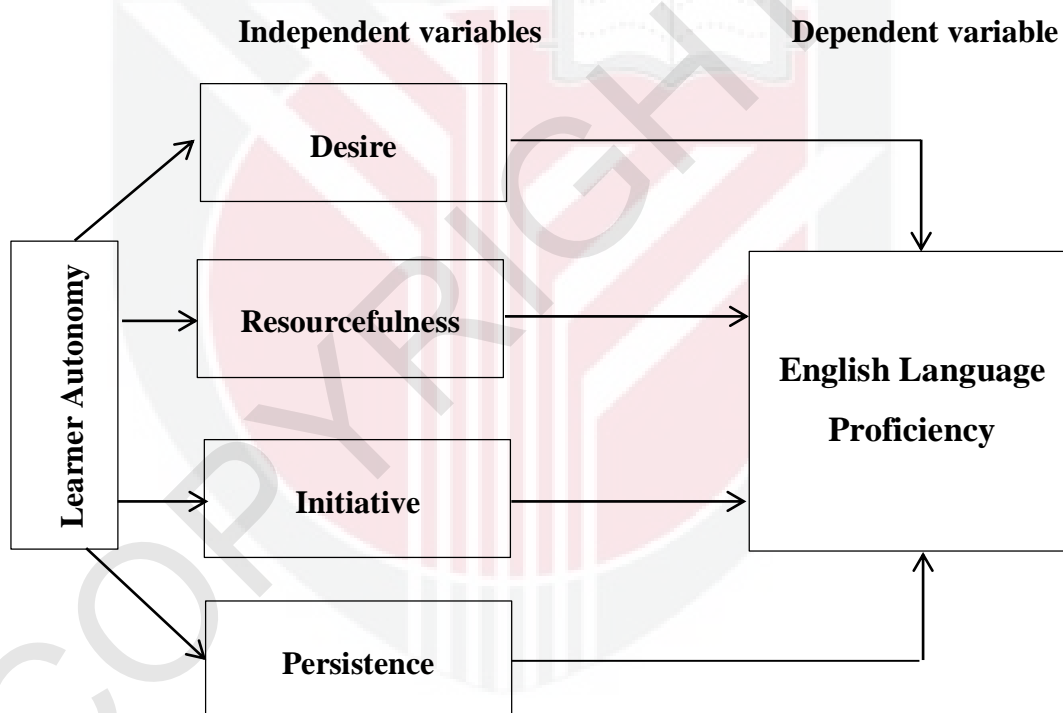
This study utilized a mix-method sequential explanatory design to investigate the relationship between learner autonomy and English language proficiency of Iranian postgraduate students studying in three Malaysian public universities; namely, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

Due to the utilization of a mix method sequential explanatory design, the current study involved the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The overall purpose of this design is that qualitative data helps explain or build upon initial quantitative results. The qualitative data and their analysis refine and explain those statistical results by exploring participants' views in more depth (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998; Rossman & Wilson 1985). The rationale for this approach is that the quantitative data and their subsequent analysis provide a general understanding of the research problem.

## **1.8 Theoretical and Research Framework**

The basis for this study is adult education, learner autonomy and self-directed learning. The literature on adult education has shifted focus from learning reinforced by facilitators to learning reinforced by learners through self-reflection (Schon, 1987).

Following theories of adult education, self-directed learning became widespread through research on learning projects. According to Long (1990), learner autonomy took center stage as focus grew on the psychological dimension of self-directed learning. He claimed that lifelong learning is possible through control. Arising from these ideas was Confessore's assumption, which states that one must possess the precursor of learner autonomy before he or she can behave. Therefore, it is important to evaluate behaviors to engage in learning rather than evaluating behaviors in previous learning experiences. According to Confessore and Park (2002), the LAP is structured around the belief that in order to understand learner autonomy, we must understand learner's intentions to engage in learning and learner autonomy is best understood in terms of the four component constructs of desire, resourcefulness, initiative and persistence (see figure 1.2). In the current study, the score on the four constructs of learner autonomy (desire, resourcefulness, initiative and persistence) as measured by the LAP, were selected as the independent variables. English language proficiency of the participants was gauged by their scores on an English language proficiency test and was selected as the dependent variable.



**Figure 1.2 : Research Framework**

## 1.9 Significance of the Study

The international student population in Malaysia is rapidly expanding by 16 percent annually and the Malaysian government estimates that by 2020 there will be over 200,000 international students enrolled in Malaysian higher education (Badaruddin, 2010). Iranian postgraduate students make up around 14 percent of the total number of international students in Malaysia (Malaysia Higher Education Statistics, 2014).

As English language proficiency is important to the success of these students, it is crucial to explore the factors that are related to their proficiency in the English language and help Iranian students to become more successful in their learning. The findings of this study will be beneficial to Malaysian public universities in terms of better graduation rates that impacts their reputation and funding for important research. Furthermore, the findings of this study will benefit Iranian postgraduate students by providing means to assess their level of autonomy in relation to their English language proficiency. This information can benefit Iranian postgraduate students by highlighting their areas of strength and their weaknesses, which they can use to attempt to improve their lifelong learning potential.

The findings of this study will contribute to the literature on learner autonomy in which a clear link between learner autonomy and English language proficiency has only been explored by theory and is yet to be proven by empirical evidence. As teachers are made to demonstrate the effectiveness of their teaching by the ever-growing worldwide concern with accountability in education, this makes the need for empirical research on the relationship between learner autonomy and English language proficiency much needed, for both practical and empirical reasons.

This study provides information about the importance of learner autonomy in language learning, which can be useful to policy makers, language-planners, curriculum designers, textbook developers, language instructors, teachers, as well as learners and their parents. It is the hope of the researcher that the results of this study will be useful for both English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) learners and teachers.

As this study investigates learner autonomy from a psychological perspective, it also contributes to a better understanding of the psychological perspectives of learner autonomy in language learning. Many studies have examined the relationship between language learning strategies and English proficiency (Nisbet, 2002; Park, 1997; Dreyer & Oxford 1996). However, little research has been conducted regarding how learner autonomy is related to effective language learning from a psychological perspective. This study will give further insights into Iranian postgraduate students' learner autonomy in relation to their English language proficiency from a psychological perspective. Finally, this study will create a better understanding of Iranian postgraduate students' learning so that educators in Malaysia can gain a better understanding of students from another culture such as Iran and to provide better guidance for these students.

## **1.10 Definition of the Terms**

### **Learner Autonomy**

In the context of this study, learner autonomy is defined as the characteristic of a person who exhibits agency or intentional behavior with regard to learning activities (Confessore & Park, 2004).

### **Autonomous Learning**

Autonomous learning in the context of this study is defined as “an agentic learning process in which the cognitive factors of desire, initiative, resourcefulness, and persistence are manifested” (Ponton & Carr’s, 2002, p. 224).

### **Dysfunctional Learner Dependence**

In the context of this study, dysfunctional learner dependence refers to individuals who rely heavily on others in all aspects of the learning process. These individuals are not able or unwilling to take part in learning projects without substantial direction and assistance in the learning process (Confessore & Park, 2004).

### **Dysfunctional Learner Independence**

Dysfunctional learner independence in the context of this study refers to an individual who does not allow others to participate in shaping any aspect of the learning process. These individuals are unable or unwilling in the acceptance of any form of guidance in the learning process. (Confessore & Park, 2004).

### **Functional Learner Autonomy**

Situated between dysfunctional learner dependence and dysfunctional learner independence, functional learner autonomy in the context of this study is a range of ability and willingness to participate in selecting and shaping learning projects in which the learner may function independently or in concert with others. This is achieved by making efficient and appropriate use of personal resources and the resources of others. (Confessore & Park, 2004).

### **Learner Autonomy Profile (LAP)**

The Learner Autonomy Profile (LAP) is a four-scale instrument that assesses learner autonomy characteristics in the conative factors of desire, resourcefulness, initiative, and persistence and was developed by Derrick (2001), Carr (1999) and Ponton (1999) and validated through a test-retest design. Each of these conative factors and

the supporting subscales were identified through foundational and theoretical research that identified and quantified each specific behavior.

### **Desire**

Desire is a behavioral construct formed by three factors; namely, *Basic Freedom*, *Managing Power* and *Acquired Skill* (Confessore, 2002). It is defined as “an intuitive urge that captures the essence of one’s purpose and links it with one’s power” (Meyer, 2001, p. 9).

### **Initiative**

Initiative is defined as “a set of co-occurring behaviors. The five behaviors that constitute learner initiative are goal directedness, action orientation, persistence in overcoming obstacles, active approach to problem solving and self-started ness” (Ponton & Confessore, 1998, p. 2).

### **Persistence**

Persistence is defined as ‘the behavior of continuing action in spite of the presence of obstacles for competing goals. The intentional behaviors of volition, self-regulation, and goal maintenance are related to persistence” (Derrick, 2001, p.11).

### **Resourcefulness**

Resourcefulness is defined as “four co-occurring behaviors: prioritizing learning over other things, making choices in favor of learning when in conflict with other activities, looking to further benefits of the learning undertaken now, and solving problems”. (Carr, 1999, p.16).

### **English Proficiency**

English Proficiency is the ability of mastering English language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the context of this study, English proficiency is measured by the total score on the English language proficiency test.

### **English as a Foreign Language (EFL)**

Refers to the study or use of the English language by non-native speakers in countries where English is not the general medium of communication (Farhady et al., 2010).



### 1.11 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the foundations on which this study was based. First, the introduction provided an overview of the importance of English as a universal language. The background of the study discussed the importance of English language proficiency for Iranian students studying abroad in Malaysia by taking the view that learner autonomy can lead to more effective language learning. In the statement of the research problem, the issues and challenges of postgraduate research for Iranian postgraduate students studying in Malaysian public universities were raised. The aim and objectives were presented followed by the research hypothesis. The research design utilized in the current study was discussed in the research approach followed by the significance of the study that focused on how being autonomous can help Iranian postgraduate students overcome the challenges they face. Finally, the definition of terms used in the current study were presented. The next chapter will focus on a comprehensive review of the literature related to the constructs upon which this research was founded.

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