



An Investigation of Responsibility and Learner Autonomy in a Sino-British EAP Program in China

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Learner autonomy has become a universally acknowledged benign notion and exercised in all levels of education, especially in tertiary settings, although some doubts have been cast on its suitability in teacher-dependent contexts. Learner autonomy entails capacity to take on responsibility for ones' own learning. This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of their own responsibility and their teachers', and then evaluate students' autonomy in English learning in an EAP curriculum in a Sino-British university in China. To these aims, a 30-item questionnaire was compiled to administer to 276 year 1 and year 2 students, and T-test and one-way ANOVA were used to analyze the data. It was found that students in this Sino-British context perceived themselves to assume more responsibility for their own learning compared to their Chinese counterparts, but teachers had more responsibility to stimulate their learning inside the classroom. The degree of autonomy increased accordingly by students' language proficiency level. Female students assumed more responsibility than male students while the latter were more autonomous than the former. Although students had a good understanding of course aims, they had low awareness of setting goals and plans. These findings have implications for promoting autonomy in tertiary settings in this specific context, as well as in other tertiary settings.

Keywords: Learner autonomy, perception of responsibility, EAP, questionnaire design

Introduction

Under the auspice of the governments' support and the popularity of the learner-centered approaches in education, learner autonomy has been widely promoted and practiced in all levels of language education around the world. A review of studies by Ou (2017) found that more than eight thousand theoretical and empirical studies related to the notion of learner autonomy were documented in China alone in the last decade (2006-2016). Besides, there are numerous pedagogical practices by language practitioners, especially in the tertiary level across China. However, it should be noted that in the last three decades, this western philosophy of teaching and learning has also been severely questioned as to whether it could be suitable for oriental contexts, where teachers tend to be perceived as authority and have to deliver knowledge through a top-down approach. However, recently a growing body of studies have manifested that this concern is redundant as autonomy is a universally-acknowledged benign concept, which has also

been practically exercised both in eastern and western contexts for long, as long as the practitioners can attend to the discrete features of their domestic teaching context (Hsu, 2015). This implies that if we want to evaluate the autonomy in a context, we also need to consider the characteristics of the context, such as course and curriculum aims, students' learning needs and goals, the learning environment and process, etc. Otherwise, the autonomy being assessed may not be the real autonomy that the students in question actually possess and exercise.

In another vein, to date there has been a tendency that more jointly-founded universities have been established by some Chinese universities and their Western counterparts. Such an educational model seems to gain its popularity now, as on the one hand students can receive a Western style of education, which encourages more freedom and independent learning, and on the other hand parents may feel that they can still monitor their children academic study and life, a deep-rooted concept, typical of Chinese parents. In such a particular EAP context, English is used as a medium of instruction and as a communication tool among staff and students. Students are exposed in an input-rich learning environment, and are supposed to exercise more autonomy and take on more responsibility. In a typical EAP program, students are explicitly aware of the learning goals, module requirements, and teachers allow them to have more leeway to exercise autonomy in class and outside the class. It is in this context where the research was conducted. So far, few studies have been carried out in such a specific EAP context with the exceptions of Li and Ruan (2015), and Zou, Cheng, and Hsu (2017) to the authors' best understanding.

Literature Review

Autonomy and Responsibility

In general, learner autonomy can be seen as an all-encompassed concept, and different scholars have different interpretations of what it actually is. However, two most widely mentioned notions in this literature are autonomy and responsibility. The relationship between the two key concepts have been vague and complicated, especially when it comes to the practice and evaluation of autonomy in language learners. A close look at the existing literature found that two schools of thought appear with two different views on what autonomy actually consists of. The first school is to (roughly) take responsibility as one element while the other school isolates it from autonomy.

The first school embraces the view of the most classic definition of autonomy by Holec (1981) as "the ability to take charge of own learning" (p. 3), and then elaborates and interprets it further by emphasizing the notion of responsibility in learning. For example, Boud (1987) in an edited book chaptered with articles from different scholars in promoting students' autonomy, concluding that autonomy is to "taking on complete responsibility for one's own learning". Scharle and Szabo (2000) compiled a practical manual for teachers and students to develop autonomy, particularly isolating "responsibility" as an essential element of learner autonomy. Dam (1995, p. 1) in her famous Bergen definition, denoted that "learner autonomy is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's own needs and purposes." The concept of autonomy has been expanded in language education, but in a general vein, it is widely acknowledged that autonomy is the ability to take on responsibility for one's own learning, and this ability is not inborn, but can be developed in a deliberate way, mainly through classroom intervention by teachers. In other words, to develop autonomy, students need to be aware of their responsibility and then be equipped with knowledge and tools to achieve more autonomous learning.

Whether students are able or willing to take on responsibility and how much responsibility they have to share with their teachers has also been a focus of research. Some scholars have also provided advice as to how to take on responsibility, such as Scharle and Szabo (2000). However, learner autonomy is not letting students work on their own; in the language classroom, teachers still play an essential role in promoting students' autonomy as a facilitator to provide necessary help and guidance. In most instances, it is impossible for students to develop autonomy without any involvement of teachers in the classroom. In

other words, it is a shared undertaking between teachers and students in the process of developing autonomy. The only difference is how much responsibility the teacher and the student have to take respectively in different stages of autonomy. Research has shown that in Asian contexts where teachers are always assumed the role of authority or knowledge providers, students tend to be dependent on their teachers and would assume teachers to take on (more) responsibility for students' learning (e.g., Ariza & Viafara, 2009; Spratt, Humphreys, & Chan, 2002). Chan, Spratt, and Humphreys (2002) carried out a large scale research study to investigate tertiary students' readiness to take on autonomous learning in Hong Kong. In general, students felt that teachers should take on more responsibility for what is happening inside the classroom, such as course planning and classroom management. On the other hand, students themselves felt they had to take on more responsibility outside the classroom. However, it is worth noting that a majority of students maintained that students and teachers should share almost equal responsibility for evaluating students' learning. In a similar vein, Sakai, Takagi, and Chu (2010) found that Japanese and Taiwanese tertiary students were reluctant to get involved in classroom management, such as evaluation of the lesson because they had not been taught to do it efficiently, and this seems to imply that teacher's intervention is essential to develop such competence and willingness in students.

Autonomy as a Capacity in Language Learning

The second school focuses more on the knowhow of the development of autonomy to achieve the goal of taking on more responsibility. Thus, specific knowledge, actions or skills for developing autonomy can be purposely isolated to achieve such a goal. To promote autonomy, scholars such as Wenden (1991) and Sinclair (1999) maintained that students need to be aware of metacognitive knowledge, which includes understanding the subject matter, understanding self, understanding external factors that influence learning, and understanding learning process (Sinclair, 2000). For example, in an EAP context, learners need to be aware of the features of academic English, and the aims and requirements of the English course. They also need to know their own strengths and weaknesses as an English learner, and their own psychological attributes related to English learning. To improve their English and autonomy, they need to grasp or even create opportunities themselves to willingly communicate with others and learn to be resourceful inside and outside the language classroom. Another tool to facilitate autonomy is learning strategies, as such strategies are 'specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, and more self-directed...' (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). The instruction of learning strategies in language classroom has been popular, especially in America, as evidenced by a series of the learner training handbooks, such as Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, and Robbins (1999), and Chamot (2009), to name a few. One particular group of learning strategies, metacognitive strategies, strategies that plan, monitor, and evaluate own learning, have been exclusively regarded as essential elements of autonomy and thus included in some learner training books, such as the award-winning learner training text book for autonomy in the UK, "Learning to Learn English" by Ellis and Sinclair (1989). In other words, these specific skills or actions can be developed deliberately in order to be able to take on responsibility in learning. Autonomy and responsibility can thus be isolated as two specific elements, with the former as the prerequisite and the latter as the outcome. Responsibility is not an ability that can be quantified. It would be better to be taken as a goal to pursue by mean of the ability of taking on autonomous learning. Such a distinction between the two key notions, which views autonomy and responsibility as two entities, appears more scientific, pragmatic and has a higher pedagogical value. This implies that autonomy can be realized as actual behaviour or skills that can be deliberately developed by teachers and learners themselves. Such a distinction also provides good rationale for learner training for autonomy as it can be divided into several specific components. Practitioners thus are able to develop such a collection of repertoires in students; students can train themselves to develop their autonomy. It is under this proposition that this research was carried out to investigate these two separate notions, and then examine their relationship.

Among the elements of and tools for autonomy, setting goals has been particularly isolated as an essential strategy. For example, Chan (2001, p. 506) identified a 5-step approach, from setting goals, identifying and developing learning strategies to achieve such goals, reflecting on learning, identifying and selecting relevant resources and support, and assessing one's own progress. Based on Knowles' (1975) self-directed learning framework for general learning, Renders (2010) also indicated setting goals as one key stage for autonomous language learning. Likewise, Cotteral (2000) also encouraged students to set goals, reflect upon their performance, and monitor their learning in the process of exercising learner autonomy. However, setting goals seems to be the weakest part in language learners, especially for Asian students, and it has been added as a key component in promoting learner autonomy (Kobayashi, 2018). Liu (2008) found that Chinese students were relatively weak at setting specific and individual goals, and needed teachers' specific guidance. This situation does not seem to be improved in post-graduate settings in China. For example, Xu (2009) pointed out that a large number of postgraduates were still incapable of setting their own learning objectives in English learning. They did not have clear schedules, learning plans and were even unaware of their learning needs. Likewise, in investigating autonomy of postgraduates from 7 Chinese universities, Yan (2007) reported that post-graduates only exhibited a medium frequency of setting goals for out-of-class autonomous learning.

Based on the specific needs of this EAP context, our perceived construct of learner autonomy, and some well-established questionnaires, such as Chan, Spratt, and Humphreys (2002), and Bruendia Arias (2015), a questionnaire with two major parts were compiled to measure students' perceptions of responsibility of their teachers and their own, and the four areas of language learner autonomy, i.e., understanding of the aims and requirements for EAP module, establishment of study goals and plans, implementation of learning strategies, and monitoring learning process.

Methodology

Research Purposes and Questions

The main purpose of this study is to assess tertiary students' learner autonomy in EAP class in a Sino-British university in China. In a general term, EAP involves the teaching/learning of specialized linguistic and literacy skills and aims at training university students to become competent English users and communicators to meet the academic requirements and achieve academic success (Perez-Llantada & Swales, 2017). Additionally, the current research context is particular in its own right in that the medium of instruction for most of the courses at this university is English, and formative assessment methods are customarily employed to gauge students' performance and learning outcomes. In general, freshmen normally receive 10 hours of EAP instruction each week, while sophomores 4 hours. Compared with the students in other universities in China, students in this university are given or even assigned more time for out-of-classroom learning. Self-study comprises a key portion of a course structure, and students are expected and even required to undertake independent learning on their own, either on their own or as a group. Besides, the freshmen are streamed into A-level class (lowest level), B-level class, C-level class and High-level class according to their English proficiency based on an in-house developed placement test. This research addresses the following questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between students' perceptions of their own responsibility and their teachers' in EAP studies?
2. Is there any significant difference in students' perceptions of their own responsibility in EAP studies by year?
3. Is there any significant difference in students' perceptions of their own responsibility in EAP studies by gender?

4. Is there any significant difference in students' degree of autonomy by year, language proficiency level, and gender?
5. Is there any correlation between responsibility and learner autonomy?

Research Design

The 30-item Likert scale questionnaire (See Appendix) was adapted from Buendia Arias (2015), and Chan, Spratt and Humphreys (2002). Chan et al. (2002) developed a 52-item self-reported questionnaire to assess students' readiness for autonomous learning in a tertiary context in Hong Kong. This instrument includes 4 major categories, i.e., students' perception of responsibilities and decision-making abilities in learning English, their motivation level and their autonomous behavior. The first category (13 items), the roles of learners and teachers, is designed to access students' perceptions of their English teachers' responsibility and their own inside and outside the classroom. In order to avoid repetition of the items in the other categories, 5 items related to general learning inside and outside in this specific EAP context were singled out. The same questions were repeated twice with the first regarding their own roles and the second the teachers'. As a result, 10 questions on responsibility formed the first part of the questionnaire (Items 1 to 10).

The second part, consisting of 20 items on autonomous learning: Items 11 to 30, was mainly adapted from the 32 items of Buendia Arias' (2015). However, we singled out items more related to this specific EAP context and combined category C (Evaluation of the learning strategy's implementation) and D (Evaluation of ability to monitor the usage of learning strategies) into one group under "Implementation of learning strategies", as these two categories appeared to be overlapped and it was intended that a neater and more compact questionnaire be produced to be in line with the current tendency of a smaller number of research scale in the literature (e.g., 14 items of Orakci & Gelisli, 2017; 16 items of Oguz, 2013). As a result, a 4-fold autonomous learning questionnaire with 20 items emerged with 5 items for "understanding of the aims and requirements for EAP modules (Items 11-15), 4 items for "establishment of study goals and plans" (Items 16-19), 6 items for "implementation of learning strategies" (Items 20-25), and 5 items for "monitoring learning process" (Items 26-30). Consequently, a questionnaire of 30 Likert scale items ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree emerged with 10 items for responsibility and 20 items for autonomous learning.

The questionnaire was administrated to year 1 and year 2 students at the end of the academic year by random sampling, and initial data analysis identified 276 valid cases, including 112 year 1 students and 164 year 2 students. Year 1 students were also further classified into groups according to their classes, A-level class, B-level class, C-level class and High-level class in an ascending order of their language achievement. Descriptive analysis was employed, and independent samples t-test, and one-way ANOVA were used to compare year 1 and year 2 students in terms of their perception of responsibility and autonomous behavior. One-way ANOVA was used to check the difference among different levels of learners. Although developing an assessment tool to tap into the construct of learner autonomy is not the primary purpose of the present study, it is still important that the adapted questionnaire from established ones assumed high level of reliability. A statistical analysis found the 30 items questionnaire has a high consistency reliability with the Cronbach α coefficient .897, and .891 with the exclusion of the 10 responsibility items, both of which are within acceptable ranges. The consistency reliability of the four components was also checked with the Cronbach α coefficient of the four categories being .815, .799, .787 and .678 respectively, which are all above the recommended threshold level .60 (Dörnyei, 2003). It should be noted that the last category, monitoring learning process, as it consists of a much wider perspective, resulted in relatively low score, but still within the acceptable range.

Results and Discussion

This section will address the 5 research questions accordingly.

Students' Perceptions of Their Own Responsibility and Their Teachers' in EAP Studies

As mentioned, responsibility can be regarded as the initial and ultimate aim of autonomy. Autonomous learners are able to take on more responsibility of their own learning. It is even more important in this authority-oriented Asian context where students tend to perceive teachers to share more responsibility in their learning.

Overall, results show that students thought they need to take much more responsibility on their own learning, and a correlation analysis shows that there is a significant difference between students' perception of responsibilities of their own (mean = 4.07, $SD = 0.85$) and their perceptions of their teachers' responsibilities (mean = 3.32; $SD = .76$), with the correlation coefficient of 0.32 at $p < .001$. This outstanding result indicates that students in the Sino-British context are more inclined to think language learning is more of their own undertaking than teachers either inside or outside the classroom, and this finding contradicts other studies in the Asian context, where students' reluctance to take responsibility for their learning were attributed to learners' teacher-dependent characteristics, such as Chan et al. (2002), and Bekleyen and Selimoglu (2016). One main reason behind such a finding can be in part contributed to this special context, where students have to take on more self-study hours outside the classroom. Another reason may result from the assessment methods adopted by this university. Formative assessment tools, such as portfolio collections, a robust tool to facilitate autonomy (e.g., Little, Ridley, & Ushioda, 2002; Sinclair, 1999; Yang, 2003), have been widely employed in a good number of the subjects in this university to assess students' academic learning outcomes and academic performance. This is specially the case for EAP modules; for example, students are usually required to complete a series of portfolio tasks in order to meet the core requirements for a writing coursework assessment. If students failed to complete any single one of the portfolio tasks, they would not be able to pass the coursework, even though they had passed the writing coursework itself. Such a formative method may have nurtured the students in this context to become more autonomous in their day-to-day practice. They have to complete these compulsory learning tasks on a regular basis, indirectly resulting in more responsible attitudes towards themselves, although they may be somehow pushed to do so. This seems to echo Hsu's (2015) claim that external driving forces are essential for Chinese students while developing autonomy, and autonomy can be triggered not merely from an intrinsic willingness but also from outside. In other words, such a course design with more free time and formative assessment tools, could have directly contributed to students' taking on more responsibility in EAP studies.

In addition, results of the t-test as in Table 1 showed that there was no statistically significant difference in students' perception of their responsibilities and of their tutors' responsibilities by year except one item (Item 7 "It is your responsibility to ensure your progress during the EAP class"), where a significant difference was found between year 1 and year 2 students.

TABLE 1

Results of T-test and Descriptive Statistics for Students' Perceptions on Their Responsibilities and Their Teachers' Responsibility by Year

	Year		Year 2 (n = 164)	95% CI for Mean	t	df
	Year 1 (n = 112)	Year 2 (n = 164)				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Difference	
Res overall	4.14	0.81	4.01	0.77	-0.07, 0.32	1.30 231.55
ResT overall	3.54	0.70	3.45	0.70	-0.08, 0.26	1.05 236.85
Item 1	3.96	1.11	3.93	0.98	-0.23, 0.28	0.22 218.76
Item 2	3.70	0.86	3.55	0.99	-0.07, 0.37	1.32 258.47
Item 3	4.28	1.02	4.10	0.96	-0.07, 0.41	1.42 230.18
Item 4	3.78	0.82	3.69	0.92	-0.12, 0.30	0.83 254.28
Item 5	4.04	0.94	3.94	0.90	-0.13, 0.32	0.86 231.45
Item 6	3.72	1.02	3.59	0.94	-0.11, 0.37	1.09 225.98
Item 7	4.21	0.94	3.98	0.96	0.01, 0.47	2.05* 241.10
Item 8	3.44	0.97	3.46	0.97	-0.25, 0.21	-0.17 239.94
Item 9	4.21	0.91	4.12	0.93	-0.13, 0.31	0.82 240.42
Item 10	3.06	1.06	2.96	1.04	-0.15, 0.36	0.82 234.95

* $p < .05$.

Note. Res overall: Overall students' perception on their responsibilities; ResT overall: Overall students' perception on their teachers' responsibilities.

Year 1 and Year 2 Students' Perceptions of Their Own Responsibility in EAP Studies

As for students' perceptions of their own responsibility in EAP studies, there was no statistically significant difference between year 1 and year 2 students (mean of 4.14 vs. 4.01). Both year 1 and year 2 students thought that it is mostly their responsibility to ensure their progress outside the classroom (Items 9 & 10). This seems to indicate that students tend to customarily associate autonomy more with their lives outside or even beyond the classroom (Benson, 2008).

Female and Male Students' Perceptions of Their Own Responsibility in EAP Studies

Table 2 shows that females are slightly more responsible than male students (4.16 vs. 4.06), and there is no significant difference by gender regarding responsibility in general. However, there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups on one of the five items of students' perception of their responsibility "ensuring your progress outside class". This finding is in line with the literature that female students obviously take more responsibility to ensure their progress outside class than male students (e.g., Sakai, Takegi, & Chu, 2010).

TABLE 2

Results of T-test and Descriptive Statistics for Students' Perception on Their Responsibilities and Their Tutors' Responsibilities by Gender

	Gender				95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	Female (n = 267)		Male (n = 157)				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Res overall	4.16	0.76	4.06	0.86	-.06, 0.26	1.24	422
ResT overall	3.36	0.69	3.26	0.81	-.05, 0.24	1.30	422
Item 1	4.03	1.02	3.95	1.02	-0.12, 0.28	0.79	422
Item 2	3.47	0.95	3.32	1.06	-0.05, 0.34	1.48	422
Item 3	4.26	0.99	4.17	0.99	-0.11, 0.28	0.87	422
Item 4	3.60	0.86	3.45	1.05	-0.03, 0.34	1.60	422
Item 5	4.06	0.91	4.01	0.95	-0.14, 0.23	0.47	422
Item 6	3.56	0.96	3.48	1.04	-0.12, 0.27	0.74	422
Item 7	4.18	0.90	4.08	1.03	-0.08, 0.29	1.09	422
Item 8	3.32	0.98	3.19	1.04	-0.07, 0.33	1.30	422
Item 9	4.26	0.87	4.08	0.98	0.01, 0.37	2.03*	422
Item 10	2.85	1.01	2.87	1.09	-0.22, 0.19	-0.18	422

* $p < .05$

Note. Res overall: Overall students' perception on their responsibilities; ResT overall: Overall students' perception on their teachers' responsibilities.

Factors Affecting Students' Degree of Autonomy

Year of study

Table 3 shows the results of a t-test for students' autonomous learning by year of study. There is no significant difference between year 1 and year 2 students in their autonomous learning (mean of 3.39 vs. 3.44), and no statistically significant difference exists in overall learner autonomy and the four categories between Year 1 and Year 2 students. However, a further look into the categorical level found that both year 1 and year 2 students had relatively low awareness of their study goals and plan (Year 1: mean = 3.26; Year 2: mean = 3.26) while exhibiting a relatively high understanding of the module aims and requirements (Year 1: mean = 3.54; Year 2: mean = 3.65). Also, year 2 students appeared to have a higher level of understanding of autonomous learning in terms of understanding of the aims and requirements for EAP and implementation of learning strategies. This finding is expected as this can be contributed to the explicit delivery of learning outcomes for each lesson and curriculum and the deliberate instruction and practice of learning strategies in EAP classes throughout the semesters. The finding of the low awareness of their study goals and plans among both year 1 and year 2 students is consistent with other studies in the Asian context, such as Buendia Arias (2015), Liu (2008), Xu (2009), and Yan (2007). For example, Buendia Arias (2015) found that both Chinese and Columbian tertiary students lacked knowledge of setting goals, and Xu (2009) indicated that Chinese students, even in the post-graduate level were still weak at formulating clear learning objectives. Setting realistic goals and objectives are essential in the development of learner autonomy and in the advancement of language competence (Reinders, 2010). This indicates that although students in this Sino-British university appear to have taken on more responsibility for their learning as discussed before, they still do not encompass the ability to be autonomous in the aspect of setting learning goals and study plans. This has serious implications for developing autonomy in this context, where students are assumed to be more autonomous. In addition, this finding seems to have endorsed our proposition that autonomy and responsibility are two separate entities.

TABLE 3

Results of T-test and Descriptive Statistics for Overall Learner Autonomy and Four Categories by Year of Study

	Year of Study				95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	Year 1 (n = 112)		Year 2 (n = 164)				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
LA	3.39	0.58	3.44	0.44	-0.24, 0.00	-0.67	196.51
Module	3.54	0.75	3.65	0.58	-0.30, 0.02	-1.34	198.19
Goal	3.26	0.72	3.26	0.65	-0.23, 0.11	-0.08	222.47
Strategy	3.41	0.69	3.47	0.56	-0.23, 0.06	-0.83	203.89
Process	3.34	0.66	3.31	0.54	-0.34, -0.06	0.30	207.26

Note. LA: Overall learner autonomy; Module: Understanding of the aims and requirements for EAP; Goal: Establishment of study goals and plans; Strategy: Implementation of learning strategies. Process: Monitoring learning process.

Language proficiency level

Regarding language proficiency level by class, results in Table 4 show that there is an increase of autonomy from A class to C class, although no statistically significant difference on overall learner autonomy and the four categories by language proficiency level was found. However, students in high level tend to be less autonomous than those in C class. One of the underlying reasons might be that high-level students usually have fewer EAP classes and spend less time in EAP studies. Another possible cause could be the structure of the high-level module and attitudes of the students towards their EAP module. Students with high language proficiency may not consider EAP class as important as those in lower level classes, as they may assume they have already had sufficient ability to meet the minimum needs to surpass the requirements and exams. As indicated by Xu (2009), Chinese students are usually instrumentally motivated, and this seems to be true for more advanced students in this context.

TABLE 4

Variation in Learner Autonomy and Four Categories by Language Proficiency Level

	A Class (n = 13)		B Class (n = 53)		C Class (n = 34)		High level (n = 12)		f	η^2
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
LA	3.15	0.76	3.42	0.58	3.47	0.54	3.30	0.46	1.09	0.03
Module	3.12	0.99	3.58	0.73	3.71	0.61	3.32	0.75	2.42	0.06
Goal	3.04	0.75	3.26	0.75	3.33	0.69	3.25	0.68	0.51	0.01
Strategy	3.19	0.82	3.49	0.68	3.41	0.71	3.28	0.54	0.81	0.02
Process	3.23	0.86	3.31	0.64	3.41	0.61	3.35	0.68	0.29	0.01

Note. LA: Overall learner autonomy; Module: Understanding of the aims and requirements for EAP; Goal: Establishment of study goals and plans; Strategy: Implementation of learning strategies; Process: Monitoring learning process.

Gender

Another surprising finding is that male students have a slightly higher level of autonomy than female students (mean: 3.50 vs. 3.38), and no significant difference on most of the categories was found except one category "Monitoring learning process", as shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5

Results of T-test and Descriptive Statistics for Students' Overall Learner Autonomy and Four Categories by Gender

	Gender				95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	Female (n = 184)		Male (n = 92)				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
LA	3.38	0.53	3.50	0.44	-0.24, 0.00	-2.05*	212.08
Module	3.56	0.66	3.70	0.62	-0.30, 0.02	-1.68	192.40
Goal	3.24	0.69	3.30	0.67	-0.23, 0.11	-.71	185.72
Strategy	3.42	0.65	3.51	0.54	-0.23, 0.06	-1.16	213.23
Process	3.25	0.61	3.46	0.53	-0.34, -0.06	-2.89**	207.83

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Note. LA: Overall learner autonomy; Module: Understanding of the aims and requirements for EAP; Goal: Establishment of study goals and plans; Strategy: Implementation of learning strategies; Process: Monitoring learning process.

In order to dig out the root cause, we further looked at individual items in this category (Table 6) and found that all items except Item 27 (*I can actively review class materials after class*) exhibit a significant difference between male and female students. These items are related to using opportunities (Item 26), overcoming negative emotion (Item 28), locating and correcting mistakes (Item 29), and keeping in line with study plan (Item 30). The finding that male students are more autonomous seems to contradict the well-acknowledged perception that female students are more autonomous because they are better language learners, and use more learning strategies (e.g., Kano, 2005), and the existing literature seems to have paralleled learning strategy use to the degree of autonomy in language learners (Brown, 2002; Wenden, 1991). In other words, more autonomous learners tend to use more learning strategies effectively. However, if we look at this finding from a socio-cultural or physiological perspective, we can still justify this result as males tend to be more aggressive and therefore be more active and are inclined to create more opportunities and make communication with others. Females, as socially conditioned, may be likely to be relatively reticent and passive.

TABLE 6

Results of T-test and Descriptive Statistics for Items 26-30 by Gender

	Gender				95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	Female (n = 184)		Male (n = 92)				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Item 26	3.11	1.00	3.38	0.96	-0.52, -0.03	-2.19*	212.08
Item 27	2.99	0.95	2.97	0.97	-0.22, 0.26	0.18	192.40
Item 28	3.49	0.91	3.79	0.86	-0.52, -0.08	-2.73**	185.72
Item 29	3.65	0.75	3.83	0.69	-0.36, 0.69	-1.97*	213.23
Item 30	3.04	0.86	3.33	0.85	-0.50, -0.07	-2.63**	207.83

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Responsibility and Autonomy

With regards to the relationship between autonomy and students' perception of their own responsibility, the results of a Pearson correlation analysis (Table 7) show that there is a reasonable relationship between overall learner autonomy and students' perception of their responsibility with the correlation coefficients being .45. Also, a moderate correlation can be found between autonomy and each of the items on responsibility, ranging from 0.36 to 0.40. Among the four categories, "Understanding of the aims and requirements for EAP" shows the strongest relationship with responsibility with the correlation coefficient being .51. This finding has again supported one of the above findings that students tend to take on more responsibility for their own learning in this EAP context where they are explicitly instructed with the course aims and requirements. However, responsibility has the weakest correlation with the last two

categories “Implementation of learning strategies” and “Monitoring learning process” with correlation coefficients being .22 and .19 respectively. This seems to indicate that responsibility is a perception, which is different from behavioral skills or competence such as learning strategies and monitoring process. This finding again seems to endorse our proposition that responsibility and autonomy can be separated from each other, as the former is regarded as more of a perception (as of awareness of aims and goals) while the latter is more related to specific competence or behavior (as of the implementation of learning strategies and monitoring learning process).

TABLE 7

Correlations between Learner Autonomy and Students' Perception of Their Responsibility

	LA	Module	Goal	Strategy	Process
Res overall	.45**	.51**	.30**	.22**	.19**
Item 1	.36**	.39**	.25**	.14*	.19**
Item 3	.40**	.49**	.26**	.21**	.10
Item 5	.39**	.36**	.26**	.22**	.20**
Item 7	.36**	.44**	.22**	.16**	.15**
Item 9	.37**	.47**	.23**	.16**	.12*

* $p < .05$ (2-tailed). ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

Note. Items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 are the five items about students' perception on their own responsibilities. Res overall: Overall students' perception on their responsibilities; LA: Overall learner autonomy; Module: Understanding of the aims and requirements for EAP; Goal: Establishment of study goals and plans; Strategy: Implementation of learning strategies; Process: Monitoring learning process.

Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, this study has found that there is a reasonable correlation between students' perceptions of responsibility and learner autonomy, and responsibility and autonomy can be treated as two separate notions. Tertiary students in this EAP context perceive EAP studies more of their own responsibility than their teachers, and freshmen assume more responsibilities on themselves and on their teachers to ensure their progress inside and outside classroom. Female students perceive themselves as well as their teachers to have more responsibility in their EAP studies, while male students are slightly more autonomous than female students, and male students are more inclined to be resourceful and moderate their learning in the process. This particular EAP context, where the medium of instruction is English, portfolios serve as a main assessment tool, and students have more time and leeway in study, seems to nurture more autonomous and responsible learners than other tertiary settings, and once explicitly aware of the course aims and requirements, students will take more initiative and be more autonomous in their learning. In addition, Chinese students are relatively weak at setting realistic goals and concrete plans on their own thanks to the teacher-dependent environment throughout their educational levels. To promote learner autonomy, students need to be explicitly taught how to set goals and study plans. Lower language proficiency levels of learners may feel more need for developing autonomy and consider teachers more important in facilitating their interest and ability in learning. In other words, students need to have a good understanding of metacognitive knowledge and have a good command of metacognitive strategies so that they act as an independent agent, progress towards a high level of autonomy, and enjoy language learning.

Therefore, in a context where students are not accustomed to taking on more responsibility, teachers are expected to provide more guidance so that students will be able to increase their degree of autonomy by working on the purposely selected or designed tasks. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help improve the curriculum design, including making adjustments on module learning outcomes and motivating specific student groups on the implementation of learning strategies and creation of study schedule.

This study suffers from some limitations. It only assessed students' perceptions on responsibility and their understanding of autonomy, rather than their actual autonomous behavior. Therefore, qualitative methods, such as portfolio tasks, diary, and lesson plans/schedule may be needed to explore the very

nature and actual behavior of students in terms of their autonomy in language learning. Moreover, we have isolated responsibility from learner autonomy and looked at their relationship. However, it is still possible that responsibility can be regarded as one component of learner autonomy, and this entails further research. Lastly, although the compiled questionnaire on language learner autonomy has acceptable internal consistent reliability, it can still be further tested and then validated by more advanced statistical analysis methods such as structural equation modeling.

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Appendix

Questionnaires on Responsibility and Autonomous Learning

1. It is your responsibility to stimulate your interests in English learning.
2. It is your EAP tutor's responsibility to stimulate your interests in English learning.
3. It is your responsibility to identify your weakness in English and improve them.
4. It is your EAP tutor's responsibility to identify your weakness in English and help you improve them.
5. It is your responsibility to actively find learning resources (website, library, dictionaries...).
6. It is your EAP tutor's responsibility to help you find learning resources (website, library, dictionaries...).
7. It is your responsibility to ensure your progress during the EAP class.
8. It is your EAP tutor's responsibility to ensure your progress during the EAP class.
9. It is your responsibility to ensure your progress outside EAP class.
10. It is your EAP tutor's responsibility to ensure your progress outside EAP class.
11. I can clearly understand my EAP tutor's aims.
12. I can clearly understand EAP module learning outcomes and assessment requirements.
13. I can clearly understand the purpose of class activities set by my EAP tutor.
14. Based on my true English level, I think my tutor's goal is appropriate for me.
15. It is easy for me to follow my EAP tutor in class.
16. I can clearly evaluate my own current English level and establish an appropriate goal for myself.
17. In addition to the assignments given by my tutor, I can consciously make a study plan based on my English level and my goal set.
18. I am good at creating a practical study schedule for EAP learning.
19. I can adjust my plan based on my current learning status.
20. I have a clear understanding of the concept of learning strategies in EAP module.
21. I can implement effective strategies consciously to improve my listening comprehension.
22. I can implement effective strategies consciously to improve my spoken English.
23. I can implement effective strategies consciously to improve my reading comprehension.
24. I can implement effective strategies consciously to improve my written English.
25. I am able to improve or change my EAP learning strategies if I realize some method of my studies is impractical.
26. I can actively use various opportunities to practice English after EAP class (e.g., taking the course in Continuing Support, taking activities in SEA, talking with roommates and classmates in English, etc.).
27. I can actively review class materials after class.
28. I am able to overcome the negative emotion in EAP study (e.g. Shyness of speaking in front of class, anxiety when speaking English, etc.).
29. In my EAP learning, I can actively find my mistakes and understand the underlying reasons for such mistakes and correct them (e.g. reading coursework feedback carefully and improve myself next time, etc.).
30. During the process of completing a certain English learning task, I can keep in line with my predetermined study plan.