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Title
A protocol for a qualitative synthesis of practitioner research of language learner autonomy in Japan

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Review Question
1. How is English language learner autonomy conceptualised in the Japanese context?

2. How is English language leaner autonomy operationalised in the Japanese context?

3. How is English language learner autonomy evaluated in the Japanese context?

Rationale
Autonomy has a forty-year history as a concept of international interest in language learning, teaching, and research, both inside and outside of formal learning contexts. It has achieved the status of being a signature part of English language learning and teaching (Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2022, p. 3). Despite this, there is a significant lack of conceptual clarity over what an autonomous language learner is, precipitating problems with operationalisation and evaluation in both research and practice (Chong & Reinders, 2022). In Japan, mirroring of these global trends is evidenced by the proliferation of research institutes, conferences, and publications promoting teaching and research in the field (RILAE, 2023), and across related areas like self-access language learner (SISAL, 2023). The 21st century market-driven need to raise English standards in Japan (Sakamoto, 2022), likely precipitated a refocusing on learner-centredness and individualisation in reaction to traditional teacher-centric, classroom-based forms of education (Mynard, 2019). Furthermore, a strong culture of carrying out and publishing primary research work in smaller scale, in-house outlets by teaching practitioners has probably sustained academic interest in language learner autonomy in Japan. However, much of this work has yet to be systematically evaluated. While secondary research in the field, in the form of a scoping review of global language learner autonomy has been conducted (Chong & Reinders, 2022), it neither included studies published in the Japanese language nor focused on practitioner research. These are both significant sources of academic work produced under diverse research designs within the Japanese educational context. Furthermore, a qualitative synthesis of practitioner work solely from the Japanese context has not been conducted. As such, this review will synthesise practitioner research of language learner autonomy published in either English or Japanese language, with a view to understanding its conceptualisation, operationalisation, and evaluation. Furthermore, as the research questions were adapted from those of the aforementioned scoping review, one affordance should be close domestic and international comparisons of language learner autonomy.

- Chong, S. W., & Reinders, H. (2022). Autonomy of English language learners: A scoping review of research and practice. Language Teaching Research, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221075812

- Mynard, J. (2019). Self-Access Learning and Advising: Promoting Language Learner Autonomy Beyond the Classroom. In: Reinders, H., Ryan, S., Nakamura, S. (eds) Innovation in Language Teaching and Learning. New Language Learning and Teaching Environments. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-12567-7_10

- Mynard, J., & Shelton-Strong, S. J. (2022). Introduction: Autonomy Support Beyond the Language Learning Classroom: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective. In M. Jo & J. S.-S. Scott (Eds.), Autonomy Support Beyond the Language Learning Classroom (pp. 1-12). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/doi:10.21832/9781788929059

- Research Institute for Language Learner Autonomy (RILAE). (2023). Research, professional education, and practice in autonomy. Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS). Retrieved 14/10/23 from https://kuis.kandagaigo.ac.jp/rilae/

- SiSAL Journal. (2023). Studies in Self-Access Learning. Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS). Retrieved 14/10/23 from https://sisaljournal.org/

- Sakamoto, N. (2022). English Language Education Reform and Assistant Language Teachers in Japan. In Teacher awareness as professional development : assistant language teachers in a cross-cultural context (pp. 7-17). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88400-0_2

Inclusion Criteria
Included studies must

1) Be published in the English or Japanese language
2) Be peer-reviewed
3) Be a research article, book, or dissertation primarily relating to, conducted, and published in Japan.
4) Be conducted either inside or outside an English language teaching or learning setting.
5) Be of a quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods design (for primary studies).
6) Have been published within the timeframe 2003-2023
7) Make direct conceptual, operational, or evaluative reference to language learner autonomy.

The rationale behind the selection of these inclusion criteria is that:

1) A significant quantity of practitioner researcher is published in both languages, and both reviewers are proficient users of both languages. Work written in other languages will be excluded.

2) To preserve the rigorous quality of the synthesis, evidence of having undergone some form of peer review must be apparent. Work for which there is no evidence of peer review will be excluded.

3) As the research questions refer to conceptualisation, operationalisation, and evaluation of language learner autonomy grounded in a Japanese practitioner context, the synthesis will be inclusive of primary, secondary, conceptual, theoretical, review or commentary work published in journal articles, in-house journals or departmental bulletins, conference proceedings, books, book

chapters, or dissertations. Other forms of research work will be excluded.

4) Research and practice on English language learner autonomy by practitioners in Japan includes a considerable focus on learning both inside and outside formal and quasi-formal learning settings. Work pertaining to languages other than English, or not pertaining to Japan, will be excluded.

5) In recognition of the diversity of research approaches likely undertaken in practitioner research, it will benefit the synthesis to cast a wide net in terms of includable research designs for primary studies.

6) This period of time is likely to capture much domain-relevant and, importantly, indexed and searchable practitioner research. Work published before this time period will be excluded.

7) This will allow the research questions to be addressed, developing a more complete picture of the available practitioner research in the field. Work that does not fulfil these criteria is unlikely to furnish useful information in answer the research questions and will be excluded.

Furthermore, in an additional measure of quality control, the TESOL Quarterly guidelines of research quality will be adapted by the researchers to suit the practitioner research context. For example, a theoretical framework may not be explicitly stated in qualitative practitioner research- so this requirement will be excluded. The rationale is that slightly less rigour may be expected of practitioner research conducted and published in Japan than may be expected of that in flagship international journals. Research work that meets the majority of these adapted guidelines will be included in the study, whereas work that does not will be excluded.

Information Sources
Publications written in both Japanese and English will be searched for on CiNii Research, a free database that indexes practitioner research that pertains to Japan and is published in relevant formats.

https://cir.nii.ac.jp/

Search Strategy
The following search string, adapted from Chong & Reinders (2022), will be used to search for both Japanese and English language work on CiNii:

'English' AND 'autonomous learning' OR 'independent learning' OR 'learning by oneself ' OR 'learner autonomy' OR 'learning how to learn' OR 'self-access learning' OR 'self-directed (language) learning' OR 'self-regulated learning'

The rationale is that CiNii allows searches to be conducted in both languages concurrently, and even work written in Japanese is tagged with English keywords. The search string is intentionally broad, to capture research work from diverse but domain-relevant fields.

Data Management
The initial screening examines titles and abstracts. Publications under consideration will be downloaded from CiNii and imported into Endnote reference management software. The two reviewers will separately conduct initial title and abstract screening before comparing decisions and resolving conflicts.

Second level screening will then proceed with both reviewers independently evaluating the full texts against the inclusion criteria and adapted TESOL Quarterly guidelines. Studies that do not meet either set of criteria will be excluded.

Selection Process

1) The first author will conduct the initial search, download and importing of publications.

2) Both first and second author will independently conduct initial and secondary screening and decisioning on each publication, before resolving disagreements in either synchronous or asynchronous online discussions.

3) The selection process will be represented diagrammatically (see Chong & Reinders, 2020; Page et al., 2021).

- Chong S.W., & Reinders H. (2020). Technology-mediated task-based language teaching: A qualitative research synthesis. Language Learning & Technology, 24(3), 70-86. http://hdl.handle.net/10125/44739

- Page, Matthew J., Joanne E. McKenzie, Patrick M. Bossuyt, Isabelle Boutron, Tammy C. Hoffmann, Cynthia D. Mulrow & David Moher. 2021. The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. Systematic Reviews 10(1). 1-11.

Data Collection Process

This review is a qualitative synthesis of research (Chong, Bond, & Chalmers, 2023). Qualitative syntheses of research have been used to conduct systematic analysis of similarly small-scale research findings in a way that enhances transferability and richly elucidates findings (Liu & Chong, 2023). This design will shed light on conceptual understandings, operationalisations, and evaluations of the autonomy of English language learners by practitioners in Japan. Interpreted qualitative data (Chong & Plonsky, 2021) will be extracted from included studies, due to the broad range of research designs that are permitted under the inclusion criteria. Initial data extraction from a percentage of the included studies will be conducted by both reviewers using a modified qualitative data extraction template developed for an international scoping review on language learner autonomy (Chong & Reinders, 2022). The completed extraction templates will be cross-referenced and compared in synchronous and asynchronous online meetings by the two reviewers to resolve differences. Once agreement has been reached through this discussion-based approach, and any final template modifications made, the remaining papers will be subjected to data extraction.

- Chong, S., Bond, M. & Chalmers, H. (2023). Opening the methodological black box of research synthesis in language education: where are we now and where are we heading?. Applied Linguistics Review. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2022-0193

- Chong, S. W., & Plonsky, L. (2021). A primer on qualitative research synthesis in TESOL. TESOL Quarterly, 55(3), 1024-1034.

- Chong, S. W., & Reinders, H. (2022). Autonomy of English language learners: A scoping review of research and practice. Language Teaching Research, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221075812

- Liu, Q. & Chong, S. (2023). Bilingual education in China: a qualitative synthesis of research on

models and perceptions. Applied Linguistics Review. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2022-0194

Data Items

Some non-exhaustive examples of data items that may be extracted from included studied are:
- year
- geographical location
- author(s)
- publishing format
- publishing language
- research question(s)
- research design (types of data, epistemological assumptions)
- study population
- research setting

Some non-exhaustive examples of data items that may be extracted to address the three research questions are:

Research Question 1: How is English language learner autonomy conceptualised in the Japanese context?
- Conceptualisations in formal/ quasi-formal learning contexts.
- Conceptualisations outside formal learning contexts.

For example:
- Descriptions of or references to existing/ adapted/ developed theoretical or conceptual frameworks such as (but not limited to) psychological/ cognitive/ metacognitive/ behavioural/affective/belief/ strategic models or structures.

Research Question 2: How is English language leaner autonomy operationalised in the Japanese context?
- Operationalisations in formal/ quasi-formal learning contexts.
- Operationalisations outside formal learning contexts.

For example:
- Descriptions of modalities, frequencies, and durations of existing/ adapted/ developed interventions, practices, and materials such as (but not limited to) digital or physical learning resources, activities, or tools, diverse forms of teacher and/or learner-led and assessed courses, strategy trainings, reflection, or learning advising.

Research Question 3: How is English language learner autonomy evaluated in the Japanese context?

- Evaluation in formal/ quasi-formal learning contexts.
- Evaluation outside formal learning contexts.

For example:
- Descriptions of modalities, frequencies, and durations of existing/ adapted/ developed study measures such as (but not limited to) scales, questionnaires, interviews, analytic or usage data or other assessment, pedagogical or evaluation materials.

- Limitations.
- Outcomes and implications.

Risk of bias/trustworthiness of individual studies

As this qualitative synthesis of research may encompass a broad quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, conceptual, secondary or other research designs, individual publications will be assessed for their trustworthiness using a reflexive approach. This is common in qualitative syntheses of research evidence (See Barradell & Bell, 2021; Chong & Reinders, 2022; Liu & Chong, 2023). Transparency and reliability in our assessments of trustworthiness can be assured by discussion and clearly logging decisioning rationales, assessments, and disagreement resolution methods from both reviewers in shared planning documents.

- Chong, S. W., & Reinders, H. (2022). Autonomy of English language learners: A scoping review of research and practice. Language Teaching Research, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221075812

- Barradell, S., & Bell, A.. (2021). Is health professional education making the most of the idea of 'students as partners'? Insights from a qualitative research synthesis. Advances in Health Sciences Education, 26(2), 513-580. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10459-020-09998-3

- Liu, Q. & Chong, S. (2023). Bilingual education in China: a qualitative synthesis of research on models and perceptions. Applied Linguistics Review. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2022-0194

Data Synthesis

A grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Thornberg et al. 2014) approach will be employed to inductively code, interpret, and analyse data from the included studies. This is a commonly used approach in syntheses of qualitative research (Chong & Reinders, 2020; Chong & Reinders, 2022; Liu & Chong, 2023), and is an appropriate methodological choice. Rather than beginning with a hypothesis, it will permit identification and isolation of actual conceptual, operational, and evaluative features of language learner autonomy in practitioner research in Japan.

- Charmaz, K. (2006). Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis. Sage.

- Chong S.W., & Reinders H. (2020). Technology-mediated task-based language teaching: A qualitative research synthesis. Language Learning & Technology, 24(3), 70-86. http://hdl.handle.net/10125/44739

- Chong, S. W., & Reinders, H. (2022). Autonomy of English language learners: A scoping review of research and practice. Language Teaching Research, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221075812

- Liu, Q. & Chong, S. (2023). Bilingual education in China: a qualitative synthesis of research on models and perceptions. Applied Linguistics Review. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2022-0194

- Thornberg, Robert, Lisa M. Perhamus & Kathy Charmaz. 2014. Grounded theory. In Handbook of research methods in early childhood education research methodologies, vol. 1, 405-439. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Meta-biases

n/a

Confidence in cumulative evidence

Over thirty methods of qualitative evidence syntheses exist (Fleming & Noyes, 2021), and transparent tools such as GRADE CERQual have been developed to promote understanding of synthesised qualitative findings (Lewin et al., 2018). However, in accordance with other qualitative syntheses of evidence in applied linguistics (Chong & Reinders, 2020; Liu & Chong, 2023), in consideration of the nature of the practitioner research included in the review, and in mirroring the discursive approach adopted at other stages of this systematic review, the reviewers will instead extensively document as narratives (and make available as supplementary material) their discussions about the synthesis. This should ensure confidence in the reliability of the synthesis results.

- Chong S.W., & Reinders H. (2020). Technology-mediated task-based language teaching: A qualitative research synthesis. Language Learning & Technology, 24(3), 70-86. http://hdl.handle.net/10125/44739

- Flemming, K., & Noyes, J.. (2021). Qualitative Evidence Synthesis: Where Are We at?. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 20, 160940692199327. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406921993276

- Lewin, S., Bohren, M., Rashidian, A., Munthe-Kaas, H., Glenton, C.,Colvin, C. J., Garside, R., Noyes, J., Booth, A., Tunc

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., Wain-wright, M., Flottorp, S., Tucker, J. D., & Carlsen, B. (2018).Applying GRADE-CERQual to qualitative evidence synthesisfindings-paper 2: How to make an overall CERQual assessment of confidence and create a summary of qualitative findings table. Implementation Science 13(10) https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-017-0689-2

- Liu, Q. & Chong, S. (2023). Bilingual education in China: a qualitative synthesis of research on models and perceptions. Applied Linguistics Review. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2022-0194

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n/a

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