The Correlation between Learner Autonomy and English Competence of 8th Graders at a State Junior High School in Surabaya

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the connection between learner autonomy and English competence among 8th-grade students. A correlational design was employed using questionnaire surveys and students' scores in midterm and final examination. The study involved 75 students from a state junior high school in Surabaya. The questionnaire assessed learners' autonomy behaviors, goal-setting skills, and willingness to take responsibility for their language learning, while English competence was measured using students' report scores book. The findings indicated that the 8th graders exhibited a high level of learner autonomy, showing self-directed learning behaviors and taking individual responsibility for their language learning. Furthermore, there was a significant positive correlation between learner autonomy and English competence suggesting that students with greater autonomy tended to demonstrate higher English competence. These results highlight the importance of nurturing learner autonomy to improve English competence. Educators and policymakers can use these findings to develop strategies and interventions that promote learner autonomy and enhance English language learning outcomes. Further research is recommended to explore other factors influencing learner autonomy and its relationship with English competence. Qualitative studies could provide deeper insights into students' perceptions and experiences regarding learner autonomy and its impact on their language-learning journey.

Keywords: English competence, language learning, learner autonomy

1. INTRODUCTION

EFL contexts, learner autonomy can serve as a strong indicator of students' academic competence. This idea highlights that when students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning process, it improves their performance in teaching and learning activities. By promoting learner autonomy, students develop a greater understanding of their specific learning objectives, utilize available resources effectively, employ appropriate learning strategies, and evaluate their learning outcomes. As a result, learner autonomy fosters students' accountability for their own learning journey, encompassing cognitive, affective, and social aspects (Ciekanski, 2007) Insufficient levels of learner autonomy are a significant factor leading to unsatisfactory learning experiences (Reeve, 2006). Therefore, learner autonomy plays a pivotal role in determining students' language competency.

The fact that English in Indonesia is still in the low category among Asian countries is like a stumbling block to the advancement of education in Indonesia. The data reported by the English First EPI (English Proficiency Index) for 2022 is able to make people's eyes widen because Indonesia's ranking has been declining in the last 5 years. In 2017, Indonesia ranked 39th out of 80

countries surveyed. In 2018, it decreased, the 51st position was obtained by Indonesia out of 88 countries in total. A year later, in 2019, Indonesia ranked 61st out of 100 countries. A decline also occurred in 2020 when Indonesia was ranked 74th out of 100 countries. In 2021, Indonesia won 80th place out of 112 countries. The latest data, in 2022, Indonesia occupied the 81st position out of 111 countries. From this sequence of data, unfortunately, Indonesia is categorized as having low English competence. Indeed, English competence is one of the results of teaching and learning activities that occur (Muchsonny et al., 2021). The data obtained from the EPI research above serves as a basis for this study, which also aims to determine whether the conclusions drawn from the broader data are applicable specifically to 8th-grade students at one of junior high school in Surabaya. These students are selected as the sample for this research, allowing for a more focused examination of their English competence in relation to the national inclination. By conducting this study, researcher sought to verify if the findings and trends observed in the broader EPI data hold true within the specific context at one of state junior high school in Surabaya's 8th-grade students. This research aims to provide insights into whether the conclusions drawn from the larger dataset can be generalized to this specific group of students. Further, English competence can be expressed by the scores that students get in activities at school (Aneski, 2022).

With reinforcement from Hadley (1993)'s, there are differences in learning objectives between one language program or educational institution and another. Therefore, English competence can be defined as students' Grade Point Averages (GPA) in English subjects they get at school. Indeed, the study recognized that there may be differences in learning objectives and English language programs across different educational institutions. It acknowledged the need to account for these contextual differences to better understand the English competence of the selected 8th-grade students. By considering the specific context of the state junior high school in Surabaya, the research aims to provide a more focused formal examination from midterm examination and final examination of the students' English competency.

Since the 2013/2014 school year, the 2013 curriculum has been in effect at all levels. Currently, Indonesia is in a transitional phase between the 2013 Curriculum and the newly launched Merdeka Curriculum, leading to the simultaneous implementation of both curricula. Under the 2013 Curriculum, grades 8, 9, 11, and 12 are still following its guidelines. This curriculum emphasizes process standards, encompassing exploration, elaboration, confirmation, observation, inquiry, processing, presentation, conclusion, and creation. The national curriculum enhances the teacher's role as a facilitator, requiring proactive students to meet educational challenges in a demanding year for progress. It is essential for students to take ownership of their learning responsibilities. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the application of autonomous learning among 8th-grade students following the 2013 curriculum in secondary school.

Hence, there are students who struggle to learn independently as they lack the skills to take control of their own learning. The conventional view portrays students as passive learners relying solely on teachers. Dam (2009) emphasizes that effective teaching and learning cannot occur without active student participation and responsibility for their own learning. Examining the connection between learner autonomy and English competence among Indonesian secondary school students in the EFL context becomes vital due to their limited awareness of the importance of self-study and the challenges associated with incorporating it into their learning process.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study aims to determine the level of learner autonomy and English competence and explore the correlation between the two. It adopted a correlational research design, focusing on quantitative data to identify patterns and relationships between the variables. This design allows for examining the correlation between learner autonomy and English competence, without manipulating or controlling either variable (Perinetti, 2019). The study was conducted at a state junior high school in Surabaya, SMP Negeri 30 Surabaya specifically focusing on 8th-grade students. This choice was made because English is a core subject in their implementation of the 2013 curriculum. In this study, probability sampling was used to select the sample, ensuring equal chances for every case in the population of 303 students. The sample size of 75 students was determined using the Slovin formula with a 10% tolerance level.

This approach is considered rigorous and widely used in quantitative research to obtain representative samples. Investigating aspects related to English language learning among this group of students aligned with the research objectives and benefits from their familiarity with the research settings. For data collection, a questionnaire was used, adapted from Zhang and Li (2004). It was chosen for its effectiveness and ability to gather a substantial amount of information. The questionnaire was modified to suit the context of English as a foreign language in Indonesia. It was reorganized based on learner autonomy indicators following Oxford (1990) classification of learning strategies. The questions were designed to assess indicators of autonomous learning in students.

These indicators encompassed the students' capacity to set goals, articulate understanding of content and progress, select learning methods and techniques, take charge of the language acquisition process, and assess their own learning. To ensure clarity, the questionnaire was translated into Indonesian, including the identity column, questionnaire information, and each question item. A JotForm was created for efficient data collection, allowing flexibility and accessibility to respondents. To test the validity of the questionnaire, Pearson Bivariate correlation was used in SPSS 22 with a sample of 35 students. The r-item value was compared to the r-table at a 5% significance level. To determine the reliability of the questionnaires, the

Cronbach's alpha formula was used in SPSS version 22. Regarding to the level of learner autonomy, the researcher used a conventional categorization method. The researcher divided the range of possible scores from the questionnaire into three categories for each variable. The length of each category was determined by the formula:

$$Class\ Width = \frac{Maximal\ Score - Minimum\ Score}{3}$$

For this specific research, the questionnaire included 20 valid questions, leading to a score range of 20 to 100. Consequently, the class width was determined to be 26.7 through calculations. The researcher then scaled the scores according to the categories defined in Table 1:

Table 2.1 The Classification of Learner Autonomy Level

Interval of Autonomy	Category
20 – 46.6	Low
46.7 – 73.3	Middle
73.4 – 100	High

The researcher collected students' grades in English from resource teachers, which represented their English competence. These grades were extracted from the Grade 8 learners' first semester report book. The notion of English competence aligns with Oxford and Stock (1995) perspective, which suggests that competence can be assessed through competence tests, verbal communication tests, subject lesson scores, and self-assessment. In this study, English competence is measured based on two criteria: mid-term and final examinations. Additionally, the content validity of the Midterm and Final Semester Examination was assessed by English education experts based on the relevance to the basic competence outlined in Permendikbud Number 37 2018 and the indicators. The reliability of the Midterm and Final Examinations was assessed using the test-retest procedure, calculating the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient in SPSS version 22 and analyzing the exam results. The study followed the Minimum Completeness Criteria set by SMP Negeri 30 Surabaya as the basis for evaluation. These criteria provide specific scoring guidelines to assess students' progress and determine their level of mastery in different subjects or areas of study.

Table 2.2 The Category of Students' English Competence

The Score Level Scale 1-100	Category	Grade
93 – 100	Very Good	A
84 – 92	Good	B
75 – 83	Enough	C
<75	Less	D

Analyze the data in this study, various methods were employed. Firstly, a normality test was conducted to evaluate the distribution of data for learner autonomy and English competence. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was utilized with a significance level of 0.05, indicating the presence of normal distribution. Additionally, the linearity of the data was assessed through an ANOVA test to determine whether there was a linear relationship between students' autonomous learning and their English competence. A significance level of 0.05 was used to determine linearity.

The questionnaire analysis involved calculating descriptive statistics such as the sample size, maximum score, minimum score, mean, standard deviation, and variance. These statistics were obtained to assess students' learning autonomy levels based on their questionnaire responses. The average scores were categorized as low, moderate, or high autonomy levels to answer the first research objective. To obtain the data for the second research objective, documentation analysis focused on students' English competence scores obtained from formal examinations, including midterm and final exams. Descriptive statistics were computed to determine the sample size, maximum score, minimum score, mean, standard deviation, and variance. The average scores provided an indication of students' English competence levels, categorized as deficient, good, or very good.

Test the hypotheses, the Pearson Correlation procedure was employed to examine the correlation between learner autonomy and English competence. The significance level of 0.05 was used to determine if a correlation existed. Simple linear regression analysis was also conducted to assess the impact of learner autonomy on English competence. The regression coefficient was calculated using the formula $Y = a + bX$, where Y represents English competence, X represents learner autonomy, and a and b are constants. The coefficient of determination ($R2$) test was employed to evaluate the predictions and determine how well learner autonomy explained English competence. A higher coefficient of determination indicated a stronger relationship between learner autonomy and English competence.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis resulted in three main research findings. Firstly, the study provided insights into the level of learner autonomy among the participants. Various assessments and indicators were used to measure their ability to independently manage their learning process, set goals, and assess their progress in English language acquisition. Secondly, the researchers evaluated the students' English competence by analyzing their scores in both the midterm and final examinations. These scores served as objective measures of their proficiency in the language. Lastly, the study investigated the relationship between learner autonomy and English competence by analyzing the data from the midterm and final examination scores. By employing statistical analysis

techniques, the researchers identified potential connections between levels of learner autonomy and students' proficiency in the English language.

Learner Autonomy Level

To obtain the analysis description about learner autonomy, the researcher analyzed the data using descriptive statistic. According to Vetter (2017), The descriptive method is primarily employed to analyze, depict, and condense gathered research data in a rational, meaningful, and effective manner. The following table shows the descriptive statistic of learner autonomy:

Table 3.1 Statistics of Learner Autonomy Questionnaire

N	Valid	75
	Missing	0
Mean		76.57

Obtain the level of students' learner autonomy, the researcher took the mean score 76.57, and compare it with the classification of autonomy level. The score of 76.57 obtained by the second-year students of a state junior high school in Surabaya falls within the high category. Based on this result, it is concluded that the autonomy level of these students is high.

English Competence

From the score of the students' English Competence above, the researcher summarized the frequency distribution of the learner autonomy score by using SPSS 22.

1) Midterm Examination

To obtain the further analysis description about English Competence (Midterm), the following table shows the descriptive statistic of students' English Competence (Midterm):

Table 3.2 Statistics of English Competence (Midterm)

N	Valid	75
	Missing	0
Mean		88.36

The above table explains that the mean of the students' English competence in the scope of midterm examination is 88.36. The median is 88.00, variance 10.423, standard deviation 3.228, minimum score is 82.0, and maximum score is 94. To determine the students' level of English competence, the researcher rechecked the mean score then classify with the table of English competence category. It informed that 88.36 is in good

category which means the level of the 8th graders' English competence of SMP Negeri 30 Surabaya is good.

2) Final Examination

The following table shows the descriptive statistic of students' English Competence (Final exam):

Table 3.3 Statistics of English Competence (Final Exam)

N	Valid	75
	Missing	0
Mean		90.49

The above table explains that the mean of the students' English competence in the scope of final examination is 90.49. The median is 90.00, variance 7.821, standard deviation 2.797, minimum score is 85, and maximum score is 95. To determine the students' level of English competence, the researcher rechecked the mean score then classify with the table of English competence category. It stated that 90.29 is in good category which means the level of students English competence of is good.

The Correlation between Learner Autonomy and English Competence

The study aimed to examine the relationship between learners' autonomy and their English competence. To achieve this, descriptive statistics were initially presented for each variable. The subsequent step involved conducting inferential analysis using correlational research. Specifically, a one-way direction approach was adopted, indicating that only the variable "x" influences the variable "y," but not vice versa. Statistical procedures, such as correlation analysis and simple linear regression, were utilized to address the study's objective. Parametric statistics were chosen due to the normal distribution, linearity, and interval scale nature of the data. Therefore, the following data analysis techniques were employed to investigate the correlation between learner autonomy in autonomous learning and students' English competence.

1) Correlation Procedure

To test the null hypothesis, a correlation analysis was conducted to determine the significance of learner autonomy on students' English competence, specifically in relation to the midterm examination and final examination.

Table 3.4 Correlation Coefficient between Learner Autonomy and English Competence
(Midterm)

		Learner Autonomy	English Competence (Midterm)
Learner Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	1	.302**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
	N	75	75
English Competence (Midterm)	Pearson Correlation	.302**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	
	N	75	75
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

If the significance values (p-values) for the correlation between learner autonomy and English proficiency are below the threshold of 0.05 (specifically 0.001 and 0.009, as mentioned), it signified a significant correlation between learner autonomy and English competence. This indicates a meaningful relationship between the two variables, suggesting that learner autonomy has a significant impact on English proficiency. Higher levels of autonomy are associated with higher levels of English competence in students.

Table 3.5 Correlation Coefficient between Learner Autonomy and English Competence
(Final Exam)

		Learner Autonomy	English Competence (Finalterm)
Learner Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	1	.370**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	75	75
English Competence (Finalterm)	Pearson Correlation	.370**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	75	75
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The correlation between learner autonomy and English competence was assessed by comparing the obtained correlation coefficient (r-obtained) with the critical value from the correlation table (r-table), where the r-obtained values of 0.302 and 0.370 were higher than the r-table value of 0.227, indicating a correlation between learner autonomy and English competence, albeit a low one according to the correlation coefficient table, at a 5% level of significance with DF = 73. Consequently, the analysis rejects the null hypothesis, suggesting a significant but low correlation between learner autonomy and English competence. This result is consistent with Dafei (2007), Myartawan (2013), and Zarei & Gahremani (2010) who reported significant positive correlation between learner autonomy, skill development, and language competence.

2) Simple Regression Analysis

In this study, the researcher conducted a comprehensive investigation using simple regression analysis to determine the influence of learner autonomy on the English competency of second-year students. The analysis focused on the students' academic performance, measured by midterm and end-of-semester assessment scores, aiming to uncover correlations between learner autonomy and English competence. Through this process, the researcher aimed to understand the role of learner autonomy in shaping the English competency of second-year students and anticipated valuable insights to emerge from the analysis of assessment data.

Table 3.6 Coefficient Output Produced by SPSS Regression (1)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	80.578	2.901		27.775	.000
	Learner Autonomy	.102	.038	.302	2.703	.009
a. Dependent Variable: English Competence (Midterm)						

It is known that Constant value (a) is 80.578, and the learner autonomy value (b / regression coefficient) is 0.102, so the regression equation can be written:

Y = a + bX

Y = 80.578 + 0.102X

Constant value 80.578 means that the consistency of English competence (midterm examination) variable is 80.578. While regression coefficient X is 0.102, stating that for every 1% addition of the learner autonomy value, the English competence in midterm examination value increases by 0.102.

Table 3.7 Coefficient Output Produced by SPSS Regression (2)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	82.235	2.449		33.576	.000
	Learner Autonomy	.108	.032	.370	3.398	.001
a. Dependent Variable: English Competence (Finalterm)						

The constant value (a) from the table above is 82.235, and the learner autonomy value (b / regression coefficient) is 0.108. From the data result, the regression equation can be written as below.

Y = a + bX

Y = 82.235 + 0.108X

The constant value (a) in Table 9 shows a high level of consistency in English competence (82.235), while the regression coefficient for learner autonomy (0.108) indicates that a 1% increase in autonomy corresponds to a 0.108 increase in English competence. Both tables confirm a positive correlation between learner autonomy and English competence, meaning that higher levels of autonomy are associated with greater proficiency in the subject. This emphasizes the importance of learner autonomy in developing English language skills and suggests that empowering students with autonomy can have a positive impact on their competence.

3) Test of Coefficient Determination

The magnitude of the correlation between learner autonomy and English competence as defined in this study provided by the value R is provided by the model summary output of SPSS in table 10 below.

Table 3.8 Leaner Autonomy & English Competence Model Summary

Midterm Examination				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.302[a]	.091	.079	3.099
a. Predictors: (Constant), Learner Autonomy				
Final Examination				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.370[a]	.137	.125	2.616
a. Predictors: (Constant), Learner Autonomy				

Table 10 reveals the impact of Learner Autonomy on English Competence, specifically in the context of Midterm and Final Examinations. The coefficient of determination (R Square) for the midterm examination indicates that learner autonomy contributes to 9.1% of students' English competence, while other factors account for the remaining 90.9%. Similarly, for the final examination, the R Square value shows that learner autonomy influences 13.7% of 8th graders' English competence, with the remaining 86.3% attributed to other factors.

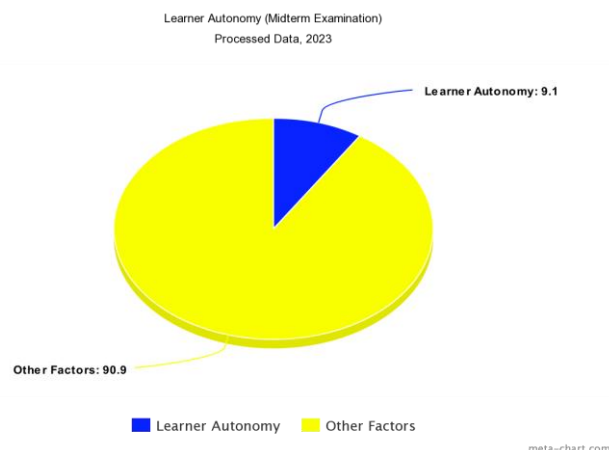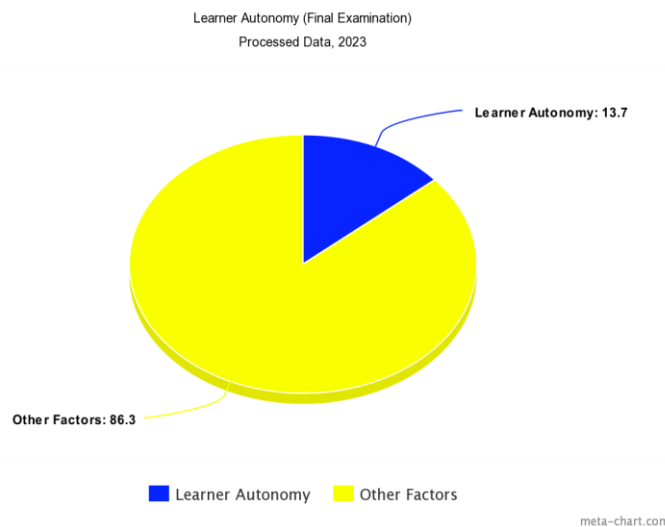Chart 3.1 The Contribution of Learner Autonomy on English Competence (Midterm)

Learner Autonomy (Midterm Examination)
Processed Data, 2023

Learner Autonomy: 9.1

Other Factors: 90.9

■ Learner Autonomy   ■ Other Factors

meta-chart.com

Chart 3.2 The Contribution of Learner Autonomy on English Competence (Final Examination)

Learner Autonomy (Final Examination)
Processed Data, 2023

Learner Autonomy: 13.7

Other Factors: 86.3

Learner Autonomy   Other Factors

meta-chart.com

Discussion

This research examines the level of learner autonomy and English competence among 8th graders at a state junior high school in Surabaya. The results indicate a high level of learner autonomy among the students, as reflected by a mean score of 76.57. The assessment covered various indicators of autonomous learning, including goal-setting, articulating understanding, decision-making, taking charge of language acquisition, and self-evaluation. The high mean score suggests that the students possess a strong inclination towards autonomy in their language learning journey. They demonstrate the ability to set goals, articulate understanding, make informed choices, take responsibility, and reflect on their progress. This finding highlights their proactive engagement and self-directedness in learning, indicating the potential for enhancing their English competence through autonomy.

The 8th graders of SMP Negeri 30 Surabaya at a state junior high school in Surabaya exhibit good English competence (M = 88.36) and (M = 90.49), surpassing the passing criteria (75), aligning with government standards. The observed learner autonomy positively contributes to their English competence, as students actively engage in learning, set goals, and access resources. The school's quality of English education, including well-trained teachers and effective methods, further enhances competence. Additional language programs, extracurricular activities, and Surabaya's favorable English learning environment contribute to this positive trend, despite the national decline.

There is a significant positive correlation between learner autonomy and English competence among the second-year students of the targeted school, indicating that as students' autonomy increases, their English competence also improves. This is in support to the previous studies reported by Dafei (2007), Myartawan (2013), Zarei & Gahremani (2010), and Nadir & Sari (2017). Higher learner autonomy is positively associated with increased English competence among students in this study. Greater autonomy appears to be advantageous

for developing higher language proficiency, suggesting that increased autonomy leads to greater language learning competence. This confirms Little's (2007) and Benson's (2001) hypothetical arguments that higher degrees of autonomy will result in greater proficiency. This is also in support to Corno & Mandinach's (as cited in Dafei, 2007) finding that autonomous learners are the learners of high language competence. Learner autonomy is a significant but modest factor influencing English competence, as there are various other factors such as teaching approaches, motivation levels, past language learning experiences, and individual differences that also contribute to English competence (Khasinah, 2014). A low correlation between learner autonomy and English competence does not diminish its significance or relevance. Despite the weak correlation, the relationship between learner autonomy and English competence holds practical implications for language education. Fostering learner autonomy, alongside other factors, can play a role in improving English competence.

4. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that learner autonomy plays a crucial role in the English language competence of 8th-grade students. The findings indicate that the students exhibited a high level of autonomy, showcasing their ability to take ownership of their learning. Additionally, their English competence was found to be above average, defying the national trend of declining proficiency. Furthermore, the study demonstrated a statistically significant but low correlation between learner autonomy and English competence. While this correlation indicates that increased autonomy is associated with improved language proficiency, the impact is relatively modest. Nonetheless, these findings emphasize the importance of promoting learner autonomy as a means to enhance English language skills among 8th-grade students. By fostering an environment that encourages autonomy and actively involving students in their learning process, educators can contribute to their overall language development. This study highlights the significance of empowering students to take responsibility for their learning, enabling them to become more proficient in the English language. Further research and exploration in this area can provide valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers to enhance language education practices and ultimately benefit students' language learning journey.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

I, VEF, an undergraduate student, contributed to the research, writing, and development of this thesis article under the guidance and supervision of Mr. AM. My contributions include the formulation of the background of the study, research questions, literature review, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the results. I conducted the research at the target school, performed statistical analysis, and wrote the initial drafts of the manuscript. I participated in discussions and meetings to refine the research methodology and to improve the overall quality of the research article.

Mr. AM, served as the thesis supervisor for VEF during her undergraduate studies. He provided guidance, mentorship, and support throughout the entire research process. His contributions involved assisting VEF in providing relevant literature and resources, advising on research methodology, and guiding her through data collection and analysis. He played an active role in reviewing and critiquing the manuscript, providing valuable feedback, and helping VEF improve the overall structure, clarity, and coherence of the research.

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