

## A digital repository for language learner autonomy research

### Project objectives

The notion of language learner autonomy, which is defined as ‘a capacity to control important aspects of one’s language learning’ (Benson, 2013, p. 839), is now widely considered a key educational goal in language teaching programmes around the world (Reinders & Benson, 2017). Despite the increasing number of studies on language learner autonomy, autonomy researchers are still grappling with its complexity and multidimensional manifestation as a theoretical construct and major challenges remaining in determining its most appropriate implementation in the classroom. In particular, there is significant difficulty in designing appropriate and effective research instruments and materials for assessing learner autonomy, which is ‘not a single, easily describable behaviour’ (Little, 1990, p. 7), either by researchers or by teachers. In addition, there is an emergence of new practices of autonomous language learning, particularly in view of the rapid development of educational technologies, which warrants a renewed conceptualization of language learner autonomy (Benson & Reinders, 2011). The understanding of learner autonomy is of paramount importance to language teachers because learners gain greater potential opportunity to access language-rich environments through the Internet and mobile language learning environments. By becoming knowledgeable in the notion of learner autonomy and characteristics of autonomous learners, pre-service and in-service language teachers are in a better position to provide self-access resources to develop learners’ self-regulated learning and encourage students to initiate their own ‘language learning program’ beyond the classroom, which is a key 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skill.

In view of the aforesaid exigencies in research and to disseminate tools/instruments and raw data of language learner autonomy research in an accessible manner to pre-service and in-service language teachers who teach a second and foreign language in the East Asian region, this project aims to:

1. develop a digital repository hosted by Research Institute for Learner Autonomy Education (RILAE), Kanda University of International Studies, which makes available research instruments, materials, and primary data on second/foreign language learner autonomy,
2. collate and make available in the repository research tools/instruments that can be used by teachers to investigate autonomous learning in their own teaching /advising e.g. through action research projects,
3. disseminate (1) and (2) to autonomy researchers and second/foreign language teachers in the East Asian region (e.g. Hong Kong, mainland China, Japan) through hosting a series of recorded webinars by the project team.

Specifically, the scope of the proposed project encompasses two aspects: open data and open instruments:

1. **Open data:** The repository aims to create a corpus of research data. For example, a researcher collects interview data, transcribes it and makes this available to other researchers to carry out their own analysis and to promote transparency in research e.g. allowing others to conduct replication research.

2. **Open instruments:** A preliminary list of instruments used to investigate learner autonomy and related constructs has been compiled by RILAE. This list would be expanded in this project in two ways: (1) by finding more such instruments, and (2) by allowing other resources to be added, e.g. questionnaires and interview questions used by other researchers (not just the large-scale, mostly psychometric tools widely available, but also the smaller-scale localized instruments designed for more specific purposes).

Adhering to the knowledge transfer spirit, this project emphasizes the nexus between theory and practice. The benefits of the development of a digital repository with freely available research tools and data will go beyond facilitating research in the field of learner and teacher autonomy; it will also help teachers' personal development by raising their level of self-awareness and strengthening their own teaching through evaluating and reflecting on their practices of developing students' autonomous language learning experience.

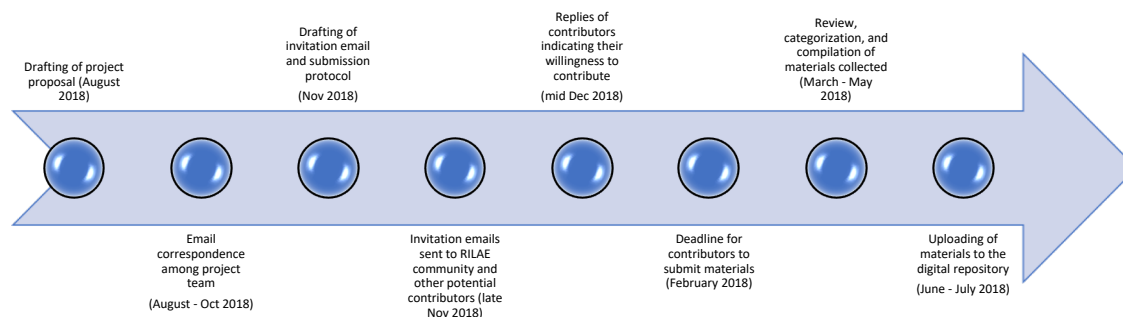
## **Project description**

### *Targets*

The target beneficiaries of this project are pre-service and in-service second/foreign language teachers in the East Asian region (e.g. Hong Kong, mainland China, Japan). Given the digital nature of the deliverables (e.g. a digital repository, webinars), the number of beneficiaries is expected to be high. As an indication of interest, the Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée (International Association of Applied Linguistics) (AILA) autonomy community has over 600 members and several hundred people have participated in RILAE's online sessions in the last year alone through live participation and accessing the recordings. Another group of target beneficiaries are researchers interested in learner autonomy, who will be invited to contribute to the repository by sharing their own studies as well as to benefit from using the instruments, materials, and data made accessible and usable. Authors who publish their work in the in-house journal of RILAE, *Relay Journal*, will be encouraged to submit their research materials. When submitting their research materials, contributors should give consent to allow RILAE to post their research instruments and raw data on the digital repository for general use.

### *Implementation plan*

With the collaboration with Prof. Jo Mynard, Director of the Research Institute for Learner Autonomy Education (RILAE), Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) and Prof. Hayo Reinders, TESOL Professor at Anaheim University, the implementation of this project will be coordinated by Mr. Sin Wang Chong, who is based in Hong Kong and a researcher at the RILAE, with the technical and administrative support from the research institute in Japan and research advice from the second and third authors who are leading scholars in the field of learner autonomy. The timeline of the project is as follows (Figure 1):



**Figure 1: Timeline of the project**

### **Deliverables and outcomes**

The deliverables of this project include a digital repository which hosts research instruments, methods, and primary data on second/foreign language learner autonomy. These research-related materials will be categorized and indexed in a way which makes searching for these materials convenient and user-friendly to researchers and teachers. An added outcome of this project is a series of webinars which disseminate these digital resources to autonomy researchers and second/foreign language teachers in the East Asian region<sup>1</sup>. These webinars will be conducted in different formats to facilitate dialogues among the project team, researchers, and teachers: presentations, interviews, and shorter demonstration sessions. In addition, the development process of this project and its outcomes will be disseminated in regional and international associations and conferences on language teaching and learning such as the Independent Learning Association conference, which usually hosts several hundred participants (founded by Professor Reinders in 2003), the JALT international conference, the TESOL Convention, IATEFL Learner Autonomy SIG, IAFOR (International Academic Forum) Language conferences, IAPLL (the International Association for the Psychology of Language Learning) which hosts biennial conferences, AILA RENLA (International Association of Applied Linguistics Research Network on Learner Autonomy), and the many conferences that have autonomy as their focus these days.

Additionally, research outputs will be produced at the end of the project. First, it is planned that at least two papers will be produced. One paper will be a review of language learner autonomy based on the studies collected for the digital repository. Another paper will be an analysis of how much interest the repository has received as evidenced through hits, diversity of contributions, and publications using the data. Another possible type of research output will be action research projects conducted by

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<sup>1</sup> The first webinar to introduce this project to the learner autonomy research communities is scheduled on November 8 2018 (<https://kuis.kandagaigo.ac.jp/rilae/lab-sessions/8-november-2018-lab/>).

the research team and second/foreign language teachers using the research tools in the repository.

## References

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