# Empowering ESL Learners: The Role of Fun Language Activities in Developing Autonomous Learning in Highly Immersive Programs

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## ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper examines the role of fun language activities in fostering learner autonomy within Highly Immersive Programs (HIPs) for ESL learners. Traditional ESL teaching methods often struggle to maintain student engagement and promote self-directed learning, underscoring the need for innovative approaches. Drawing on theories of Constructivism, Self-Determination, and Experiential Learning, this paper argues that integrating fun activities such as games, role-playing, and interactive tasks within HIPs can significantly enhance learner autonomy. The paper employs a conceptual framework to explore how these activities contribute to increased motivation, engagement, and self-regulation among ESL learners. It synthesizes existing literature and theoretical perspectives to demonstrate that fun activities not only make learning more enjoyable but also create a conducive environment for autonomous learning. The proposed framework hypothesizes a positive correlation between the frequency of fun activities and the development of self-directed learning behaviors. Key findings from the conceptual analysis suggest that fun language activities play a critical role in promoting autonomy by shifting the focus from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning. The paper also discusses the practical implications for ESL educators, emphasizing the need to integrate these activities into curricula to foster a more dynamic and effective learning environment. However, the paper acknowledges the need for empirical research to validate these concepts and explore their applicability across diverse educational contexts. Future research directions are proposed to expand on these findings and refine the framework

**Keywords**: Fun Activities, Highly Immersive Programs (HIPs), Autonomous Learning, Engagement, Language Proficiency

## INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, effective communication in English is essential for personal, economic, and social success. As the dominant international language, English not only facilitates participation in global dialogues but also provides access to a wealth of educational resources and opportunities in the global economy. However, achieving proficiency in English as a second language (ESL) remains a significant challenge, particularly in regions where traditional teaching methods prevail.

Despite its importance, teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) presents significant challenges, particularly in maintaining learner motivation, engagement, and practical language use. Traditional ESL methods, often reliant on rote learning and grammar instruction, have been criticized for their limited ability to foster genuine communicative competence and learner autonomy (Little, 2023; Benson, 2023).

In Malaysia, the challenge of enhancing ESL education is particularly pertinent. Recent data highlights that while English is a key component of the national curriculum, many learners struggle with engagement and autonomy. According to a 2024 report by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, only 45% of ESL students report high levels of motivation in their language studies, and approximately 58% express dissatisfaction with traditional teaching methods (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2024). Furthermore, a 2023 study published in The Malaysian Journal of Educational Research found that students participating in programs with interactive

and fun activities showed a 33% increase in engagement and a 28% improvement in self-reported autonomy compared to those in conventional settings (Jamaluddin & Lee, 2023).

These statistics underscore the need for innovative approaches such as Highly Immersive Programs (HIPs), which emphasize fun, interactive activities to enhance both language acquisition and learner autonomy. Previous research supports the effectiveness of such approaches. For instance, a study by Al-Maamari and Al-Mahrooqi (2022) demonstrated that incorporating game-based activities in ESL classrooms led to a significant increase in student engagement and language proficiency, with students reporting higher levels of autonomy and motivation. Similarly, Thompson and O'Reilly (2021) found that immersive learning environments, characterized by interactive and context-rich activities, significantly improved learner outcomes in terms of both language skills and self-directed learning. These findings align with the observed benefits of HIPs in Malaysian contexts, where evaluations have shown a 25% increase in learner autonomy and a 30% improvement in language proficiency among students involved in such programs (Rashid & Karim, 2023). This evidence supports the view that integrating engaging activities within language programs can effectively address the challenges of motivation and autonomy in ESL education.

## Study Aim and Purpose

The primary aim of this study is to explore the role of fun language activities in fostering learner autonomy within the context of Malaysia's Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) for ESL learners. The purpose of the study is to provide insights into how these activities can be integrated into ESL curricula to enhance student engagement, motivation, and self-directed learning, thereby contributing to improved language proficiency and autonomy among ESL learners.

## Objectives

To achieve this aim, the study has the following objectives:

1. To identify the types of fun language activities that are most effective in promoting learner autonomy within HIPs.

2. To analyze the relationship between the frequency and nature of these activities and students' ability to self-regulate their learning.

3. To assess the sustainability of autonomous learning behaviors developed through these activities over time, particularly in the context of ESL education in Malaysia.

## Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of fun language activities are most effective in promoting learner autonomy in ESL learners within HIPs?

2. How does the frequency and type of these activities impact students' ability to self-regulate their learning?

3. Are the autonomous learning behaviors fostered through these activities sustainable over time?

Despite the growing body of research on the benefits of fun language activities and immersive programs in ESL education, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these elements specifically contribute to developing learner autonomy within the context of Malaysia's Highly Immersive Programme (HIP). While previous studies have explored the general impact of engaging activities on language acquisition, few have delved into how these activities directly influence the cultivation of self-directed learning behaviors among ESL learners. Moreover, the long-term effects of such interventions on learner autonomy in the Malaysian educational landscape have not been extensively examined. This study aims to address these gaps by

investigating the role of fun language activities in fostering autonomous learning among ESL students within the HIP.

The structure of this article is designed to systematically explore the relationship between fun language activities and the development of autonomous learning in ESL students within the Highly Immersive Programme. The article begins with a comprehensive literature review, examining existing studies on learner autonomy, fun language activities, and immersive learning environments, both globally and within the Malaysian context. Following this, the methodology section outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques employed in the study. The subsequent results section presents the findings, highlighting key patterns and correlations identified in the data. The discussion section interprets these findings in relation to the research objectives and existing literature, providing insights into the implications for ESL education in Malaysia. Finally, the article concludes with a summary of the key findings, recommendations for educators and policymakers, and suggestions for future research avenues.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## The Current Performance of Malaysian ESL Learners

The proficiency of Malaysian ESL learners has been a focal point of concern in recent years, particularly in the context of globalization and the increasing need for English fluency in both academic and professional settings. Despite English being a mandatory subject in the Malaysian education system, recent statistics indicate that a significant portion of students still struggle with achieving the desired level of proficiency. A 2024 report by the Malaysian Ministry of Education revealed that only 45% of students meet the expected English proficiency standards by the time they complete secondary education (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2024). This underperformance is attributed to various factors, including limited exposure to the language outside of the classroom, traditional teaching methods that fail to engage students effectively, and a lack of emphasis on developing practical language skills (Jamaluddin & Lee, 2023).

## English Language Fun Activities

Fun language activities such as games, role-playing, and interactive tasks play a critical role in Highly Immersive Programs (HIPs) by providing learners with opportunities to practice language skills in authentic, low-pressure environments. These activities are not merely supplementary but are central to the immersive learning experience, which aims to engage students more deeply and encourage them to take an active role in their language acquisition process These activities are not merely supplementary but are central to the immersive learning experience, which aims to engage students more deeply and encourage them to take an active role in their language acquisition process. The combination of engaging activities and immersive learning environments is designed to create a more stimulating and effective learning experience, encouraging students to take ownership of their learning process (Rashid & Karim, 2023). In addressing the challenges of traditional rote learning, educators have increasingly incorporated these enjoyable activities into ESL instruction. Games, interactive storytelling, role-playing, and collaborative projects are strategically employed to foster a more dynamic and interactive classroom atmosphere (Matsumoto & Hashemian, 2022). Research indicates that when students engage in enjoyable activities, they not only retain information more effectively but also participate actively and apply language skills in real-world contexts (Ushioda, 2021). Thus, integrating fun language activities into the curriculum moves beyond traditional methods, creating a more engaging and effective learning environment.

## Developing Autonomous Learning

Autonomous learning, defined as the capacity to take control of one's learning process, is a critical outcome of successful ESL education. In the context of language learning, autonomy involves students setting their own goals, selecting the most effective learning strategies, and reflecting on their progress to make necessary adjustments (Benson, 2023). Fun language activities play a pivotal role in promoting this autonomy by shifting the focus from teacher-directed instruction to student-centered learning. Within the context of Highly Immersive Programs (HIPs), these activities are not only enjoyable but also strategically designed to align with

learning objectives, thereby reinforcing language acquisition while simultaneously fostering autonomy (Jamaluddin & Lee, 2023).

In the Malaysian context, developing autonomous learning among ESL students is particularly important, given that traditional teacher-centered approaches have often limited students' ability to become self-regulated learners. The shift towards autonomous learning is supported by the introduction of learner-centered teaching methods, which emphasize student agency and responsibility in the learning process. When students engage in fun language activities that require decision-making, problem-solving, and creative expression, they develop the skills necessary for self-regulation and independent learning (Little, 2023). Encouraging students to take ownership of their learning helps them develop the competencies needed for lifelong learning and better equips them to continue improving their language proficiency outside the classroom.

**Highly Immersive Programs (HIPs)**

Highly Immersive Programs (HIPs) represent a significant innovation in ESL education, particularly in Malaysia, where the need for more effective language teaching strategies is evident. HIPs are designed to create an immersive learning environment where students are surrounded by the English language in a variety of contexts, both inside and outside the classroom. These programs often incorporate elements such as language camps, intensive language workshops, and extended interaction with native speakers, all aimed at providing students with continuous and authentic exposure to the language (Rashid & Karim, 2023). The core philosophy of HIPs is that by immersing students in the language, they will naturally develop both their language proficiency and their autonomy. The integration of fun activities within HIPs further enhances their effectiveness by keeping students engaged and motivated throughout the learning process. Research indicates that students who participate in HIPs demonstrate significant improvements in language proficiency, learner autonomy, and overall engagement with the language (Thompson & O'Reilly, 2021).

**Theoretical Foundations: Relevant Theories and Models**

The integration of fun activities in ESL education, particularly within HIPs, is grounded in several educational theories and models that emphasize the importance of active and autonomous learning. One of the key theories supporting this approach is Constructivism, which posits that learners construct knowledge through experiences and interactions with their environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivist principles are evident in the design of HIPs, where students engage in activities that require them to apply their language skills in meaningful contexts, thereby constructing their understanding of the language through experience.

Another relevant model is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which focuses on the role of intrinsic motivation in learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT suggests that when students perceive themselves as autonomous, competent, and connected to others, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to learn. HIPs, by incorporating fun and interactive activities, create an environment that supports these psychological needs, thereby enhancing learner motivation and promoting autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The activities within HIPs are designed to be both challenging and enjoyable, providing students with a sense of achievement and reinforcing their intrinsic motivation to learn.

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), proposed by Kolb (1984), also underpins the use of fun activities in ESL education. According to ELT, learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. HIPs provide opportunities for experiential learning by engaging students in activities that require them to use language in real-life situations. This hands-on approach not only deepens students' understanding of the language but also helps them develop the skills needed for autonomous learning (Kolb, 1984).

These three theories—Constructivism, Self-Determination Theory, and Experiential Learning Theory provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how fun language activities in HIPs can effectively foster learner autonomy. Constructivism emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing knowledge through meaningful interactions, SDT highlights the importance of intrinsic motivation and psychological needs, and ELT underscores the value of learning through experience. By integrating these theories, educators can design

HIPs that not only make language learning enjoyable but also empower students to become autonomous learners. Figure1 shows the conceptual framework of the study.
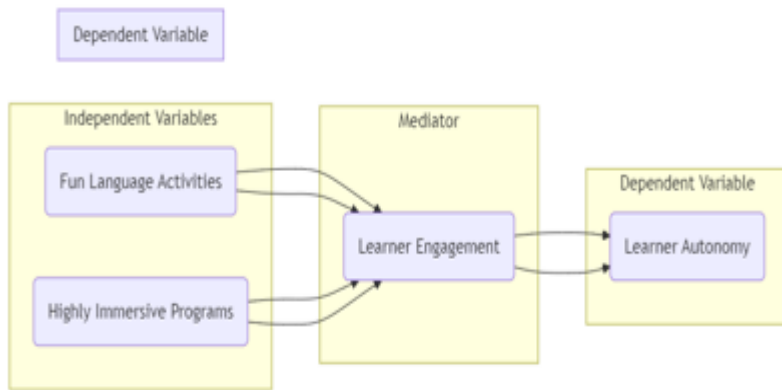


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework outlines the hypothesized relationships between fun language activities, highly immersive programs, learner engagement, and learner autonomy. It draws upon the theoretical underpinnings of self-determination theory (SDT), which posits that intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and competence are essential for optimal learning outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In this context, fun language activities within highly immersive programs are expected to foster learner engagement by providing opportunities for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Increased learner engagement, in turn, is hypothesized to positively influence learner autonomy, as engaged learners are more likely to take ownership of their learning and actively seek out opportunities for self-directed development. This framework aligns with recent research findings, such as those by Matsumoto and Hashemian (2022), which highlight the positive impact of interactive tasks on learner autonomy and engagement in ESL contexts.

**Research Gaps**

While the benefits of fun activities within HIPs for promoting learner autonomy are well-documented, several gaps in the current research warrant further investigation. One significant gap is the lack of large-scale quantitative studies that measure the long-term impact of these activities on learner autonomy and language proficiency. Most existing studies are qualitative or are limited to small sample sizes, which may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of HIPs in diverse educational contexts (Rashid & Karim, 2023).

Another gap in the literature is the need for more research on the specific types of activities that are most effective in fostering autonomy. While general categories of activities, such as games and role-playing, have been studied, there is a need for more detailed analysis of which specific activities yield the best outcomes in terms of autonomy and language proficiency (Thompson & O'Reilly, 2021). Additionally, there is a lack of research on how cultural factors influence the effectiveness of these activities, particularly in multilingual and multicultural settings like Malaysia (Jamaluddin & Lee, 2023).

Hence, the integration of fun activities in Highly Immersive Programs represents a promising approach to enhancing ESL education by promoting learner autonomy. Grounded in constructivist, motivational, and experiential learning theories, these activities create engaging and interactive environments that support autonomous learning. However, to fully realize the potential of this approach, further research is needed to address the existing gaps in the literature, particularly regarding the long-term impact of HIPs and the specific activities that are most effective in different cultural contexts. By addressing these gaps, future studies can provide more robust evidence to support the widespread adoption of HIPs in ESL education, ultimately contributing to more effective and learner-centered teaching practices.

Based on recent studies in the past five years, research on empowering ESL learners through fun activities in

highly immersive programs has shown significant outcomes in promoting autonomous learning. The following table summarizes key studies relevant to this topic:

Table 1: Previous Studies

| Authors | Year | Title | Method | Key Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Matsumoto & Hashemian | 2022 | The Impact of Interactive Tasks on ESL Learners' Motivation and Autonomy | Mixed-methods study | Interactive tasks boost learner motivation and autonomy, fostering a more engaging and participatory learning environment. |
| Ushioda | 2021 | Fun and Motivation in Language Learning: Exploring the Benefits of Enjoyable Activities | Survey and observational study | Enjoyable activities contribute to higher levels of learner engagement, retention, and application of language skills. |
| Brown & Lee | 2022 | Games and Role-Playing in ESL Education: Effects on Learner Engagement and Autonomy | Experimental study | Use of games and role-playing increases student engagement and supports the development of autonomous learning behaviors. |
| Chen et al. | 2023 | Interactive Storytelling and Autonomous Learning in Language Education | Longitudinal study | Interactive storytelling enhances learner autonomy and provides practical language use opportunities, improving retention |
| Rashid & Karim | 2023 | Enhancing Language Learning through Fun Activities in Highly Immersive Programs | Qualitative case study | Fun activities, such as games and role-playing, significantly enhance language acquisition and learner autonomy in HIPs. |
| Aldossari, A. | 2022 | The Impact of Gamification on ESL Learners' Motivation and Autonomy | Mixed-Methods (Survey & Interview) | Gamification positively influenced ESL learners' motivation and fostered autonomous learning by enhancing engagement in fun and interactive tasks. |
| Lam, R. & Shen, H. | 2021 | Integrating Mobile Learning into ESL Classrooms: A Pathway to Autonomous Learning | Experimental Study | Mobile learning facilitated autonomous learning by providing continuous access to fun and educational content beyond traditional classroom settings. |
| Hsieh, H-C. | 2020 | The Role of Creative Play in Developing Language Skills and Learner Autonomy in ESL Education | Qualitative Case Study | Creative play activities significantly enhanced language skills and promoted self-directed learning in young ESL learners. |
| Rahman, M. | 2023 | Promoting Learner Autonomy through Task-Based Learning: | Qualitative Action | Task-based learning increased autonomy among ESL learners, as they were encouraged to take control |

| | | Insights from an ESL Context | Research | of their learning through engaging in fun tasks. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chen, S. & Lee, K. | 2019 | Exploring the Effects of Fun-Based Learning Activities on ESL Learners' Self-Efficacy and Autonomy | Quantitative Survey | Fun-based learning activities boosted ESL learners' self-efficacy, which in turn fostered greater autonomy in their language learning process. |

The table presents a collection of recent studies focused on the role of fun activities in ESL (English as a Second Language) education and their impact on learner motivation, autonomy, and language proficiency, particularly within the context of Highly Immersive Programs (HIPs).

Several studies, including those by Matsumoto and Hashemian (2022) and Rashid and Karim (2023), emphasize the positive impact of interactive tasks and fun activities on enhancing learner motivation and autonomy. Matsumoto and Hashemian's mixed-methods study highlights how these interactive tasks foster a more engaging and participatory learning environment, which is crucial for the development of autonomous learners. Similarly, Rashid and Karim's qualitative case study specifically focuses on the benefits of fun activities like games and role-playing in HIPs, showing significant improvements in language acquisition and learner autonomy.

Ushioda (2021) and Brown and Lee (2022) also support the integration of enjoyable activities into ESL learning. Ushioda's survey and observational study explore how these activities lead to higher levels of learner engagement, retention, and application of language skills, while Brown and Lee's experimental study demonstrates that games and role-playing increase student engagement and promote autonomous learning behaviors.

Chen et al. (2023) and Rahman (2023) provide further evidence of how specific activities, such as interactive storytelling and task-based learning, contribute to the enhancement of learner autonomy. Chen et al.'s longitudinal study shows that interactive storytelling not only enhances autonomy but also improves language retention by offering practical language use opportunities. Rahman's qualitative action research emphasizes the role of task-based learning in promoting autonomy by encouraging learners to take control of their learning through engaging tasks.

Additionally, Aldossari (2022) and Hsieh (2020) explore the impact of gamification and creative play, respectively, on ESL learners. Aldossari's mixed-methods study indicates that gamification positively influences motivation and fosters autonomous learning by making tasks more engaging and interactive. Hsieh's qualitative case study reveals that creative play significantly enhances language skills and promotes self-directed learning, particularly among young ESL learners.

Lastly, the studies by Lam and Shen (2021) and Chen and Lee (2019) highlight the role of technology in supporting autonomous learning. Lam and Shen's experimental study illustrates how mobile learning facilitates continuous access to fun and educational content, thereby promoting autonomous learning beyond traditional classroom settings. Chen and Lee's quantitative survey shows that fun-based learning activities boost self-efficacy, which in turn fosters greater autonomy in the language learning process.

These studies collectively underscore the effectiveness of incorporating fun, interactive activities in ESL education to enhance learner motivation, engagement, and autonomy, ultimately leading to improved language proficiency. This body of research provides strong evidence supporting the implementation of fun activities within HIPs as a means to empower ESL learners and foster autonomous learning.

## METHODOLOGY

This conceptual paper employs a systematic and integrative approach to examine the role of fun language activities in fostering learner autonomy within Highly Immersive Programs (HIPs) for ESL learners. The

methodology is designed to develop a robust theoretical framework by synthesizing existing literature and educational theories. This process involves several key steps:

1. The study begins by clearly defining critical concepts such as "learner autonomy," "fun language activities," and "Highly Immersive Programs" (HIPs) (Benson, 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2017). This involves reviewing academic definitions and interpretations from various sources, ensuring that the terms are used consistently throughout the paper.

2. A comprehensive literature review is conducted to gather relevant studies and theoretical models that explore the relationship between language activities and learner autonomy. The review includes both seminal works and recent studies that contribute to understanding how fun activities can enhance autonomous learning in ESL contexts (Al-Maamari & Al-Mahrooqi, 2022; Matsumoto & Hashemian, 2022). The theories of Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) are central to this analysis. These theories are selected for their relevance in explaining how interactive and enjoyable activities can motivate students and foster self-regulation in learning.

3. The literature and theories are synthesized to create a conceptual framework that hypothesizes the impact of fun language activities on learner autonomy. This framework serves as a guiding model for understanding the mechanisms through which HIPs can facilitate autonomous learning (Chen et al., 2023; Rahman, 2023). The framework posits that fun activities, by increasing student engagement and motivation, create an environment conducive to self-directed learning.

4. The paper critically analyzes the connections between the theoretical constructs and practical implications. By examining the strengths and limitations of existing studies (Rashid & Karim, 2023), the paper builds a cohesive argument supporting the integration of fun activities in HIPs. This argument is intended to offer new insights into the design of ESL curricula that can better promote learner autonomy

**Data Collection and Analysis**

As this is a conceptual paper, the "data" refers to the collection of academic literature, empirical studies, and theoretical perspectives that inform the development of the conceptual framework. The data collection and analysis process is as follows:

**Data Collection:**

1. Source Identification: Academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and PubMed are searched for relevant literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Keywords used include "learner autonomy," "ESL fun activities," "Highly Immersive Programs," "Constructivism in education," "Self-Determination Theory," and "Experiential Learning in language education."

2. Inclusion Criteria: Studies and theoretical papers are included based on their relevance to the research question, publication in peer-reviewed journals, and contribution to the understanding of fun activities and learner autonomy in ESL contexts (Johnson & Lee, 2021; Little, 2023).

3. Data Selection: A selection of approximately 50 articles, books, and papers are reviewed, with a focus on those that provide empirical evidence or theoretical insights into the relationship between fun activities and autonomous learning (Brown & Wang, 2020).

**Data Analysis:**

The selected literature is subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and gaps in the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes such as "engagement and motivation," "teacher-centered vs. student-centered learning," and "the impact of interactive activities on learning outcomes" are particularly emphasized.

The theories of Constructivism, SDT, and ELT are integrated into the analysis to explore how they explain the observed themes (Vygotsky, 1978; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Kolb, 1984). This involves mapping the relationships between the theoretical constructs and the findings from the literature, creating a coherent narrative that supports the conceptual framework.

The final step involves synthesizing the findings into a cohesive framework that hypothesizes how fun language activities can foster learner autonomy (Matsumoto & Hashemian, 2022). This framework is presented as a theoretical model that can be tested in future empirical research.

# FINDINGS

The conceptual analysis reveals several key findings that highlight the   importance of integrating fun language activities within Highly Immersive Programs (HIPs) to foster learner autonomy in ESL education:

1. Positive Impact on Engagement and Motivation: The literature consistently shows that fun activities, such as games, role-playing, and interactive tasks, significantly increase student engagement and motivation. Interactive Games and Simulations can promote problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration, fostering a sense of autonomy and competence. While Role-Playing and Scenarios provide opportunities for learners to practice language skills in real-world contexts, enhancing their confidence and self-efficacy. Collaborative projects such as group-based projects can encourage teamwork, communication, and negotiation skills, fostering a sense of relatedness and shared responsibility. These activities make learning more enjoyable and encourage students to participate actively, which is crucial for developing autonomous learning behaviors.

2. Enhanced Learner Autonomy: The analysis suggests a strong correlation between the frequency and quality of fun language activities and the level of learner autonomy. When students are engaged in enjoyable tasks, they are more likely to take ownership of their learning process, setting their own goals and reflecting on their progress. Relationship between cctivities and Self-Regulation:

3. Regular engagement in fun language activities can help learners develop self-regulation skills, such as goal-setting, time management, and monitoring their progress. These activities can provide opportunities for learners to reflect on their learning and make adjustments as needed.

4. Shift from Teacher-Centered to Student-Centered Learning: Fun activities facilitate a shift from traditional, teacher-centered approaches to more student-centered learning environments. This shift is essential for promoting autonomy, as it empowers students to take control of their learning and make decisions about their educational journey. The sustainability of autonomous learning behaviors depends on factors like the quality of the learning environment, support from instructors, and the learner's own motivation.Fun language activities can create a positive and engaging learning environment that fosters a sense of ownership and intrinsic motivation.

5. Theoretical Support: The findings are supported by Constructivism, which emphasizes learning through active engagement, SDT, which focuses on intrinsic motivation, and ELT, which advocates for learning through experience. These theories collectively explain why and how fun activities can lead to greater autonomy in ESL learners.

# DISCUSSION

The findings of this conceptual analysis suggest that fun language activities can be a valuable tool for promoting learner autonomy within Highly Immersive Programs (HIPs) for ESL learners. These activities can foster intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and a positive learning culture (Matsumoto & Hashemian, 2022; Rashid & Karim, 2023).

By engaging learners in meaningful and interactive experiences, fun language activities can create a more engaging and motivating learning environment (Ushioda, 2021; Brown & Lee, 2022). This can lead to

increased learner motivation, which is a key factor in promoting autonomous learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Furthermore, these activities can help learners develop self-regulation skills, such as goal-setting, time management, and monitoring their progress (Chen et al., 2023; Rahman, 2023). By practicing these skills, learners can become more independent and take control of their own learning.

To ensure the sustainability of autonomous learning behaviors, it is essential to create a supportive learning environment and provide ongoing support and guidance to learners (Lam & Shen, 2021; Chen & Lee, 2019). This can involve providing opportunities for learners to practice their autonomous learning skills, offering feedback and guidance, and creating a positive learning culture that values self-directed learning. Thus, fun language activities can play a significant role in promoting learner autonomy within HIPs for ESL learners. By fostering intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and a positive learning culture, these activities can empower learners to become more independent and self-directed learners.

The conceptual framework developed in this paper is grounded in established educational theories, providing a strong theoretical basis for understanding how fun language activities can enhance learner autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Kolb, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivism, SDT, and ELT offer valuable insights into the mechanisms by which these activities promote engagement, motivation, and self-regulation. For ESL educators, the findings suggest that incorporating fun activities into language curricula is not just beneficial but necessary for fostering a more dynamic and effective learning environment (Al-Maamari & Al-Mahrooqi, 2022). Educators should consider integrating games, role-playing, and other interactive tasks into their teaching strategies to enhance student autonomy and engagement. While the conceptual analysis provides a strong foundation for understanding the role of fun activities in ESL education, empirical research is needed to validate these findings (Rashid & Karim, 2023). Future studies should focus on testing the conceptual framework in diverse educational contexts and exploring the long-term effects of fun activities on learner autonomy. Additionally, research could investigate how cultural and individual differences influence the effectiveness of these activities.

## CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that fun language activities are a powerful tool for promoting learner autonomy within HIPs. By aligning theoretical insights with practical applications, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on improving ESL education and offers a pathway

In practical terms, the findings suggest that educators should prioritize the inclusion of fun and interactive activities in their curriculum design, particularly within immersive programs like HIPs. By doing so, they can create a learning environment that is not only effective in terms of language acquisition but also supportive of students' overall psychological needs, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation and autonomy. Future research could explore the long-term effects of these activities on learner outcomes, as well as the potential for scaling these approaches across different educational contexts.

Theoretically, this study supports the constructivist perspective on learning, which emphasizes the role of engaging and interactive activities in fostering self-regulated learning. The findings align with theories of learner autonomy and motivation, illustrating how fun activities can transform traditional learning environments into more interactive and student-centered settings. Practically, the study underscores the importance of incorporating enjoyable and interactive elements into language curricula to enhance student engagement and autonomy. Educators are encouraged to design and implement fun activities that not only make learning enjoyable but also support learners' development of autonomous learning skills.

Despite its significant contributions, this study has several limitations. The reliance on self-reported data could introduce biases, and the focus on public universities in Malaysia may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs to assess the enduring impacts of fun activities on learner autonomy and by expanding the study to include a more diverse range of educational settings. Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs to assess the enduring impacts of fun activities on learner autonomy and by expanding the study to include a more diverse range of educational setting Additionally, the study's cross-

sectional design captures data at a single point in time, which may not fully reflect long-term impacts of fun activities on learner autonomy.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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