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**PERSONAL AUTONOMY VALUES IN INDONESIAN
YOUNG ADULT NOVELS: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES
AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR SELF-
ACTUALIZATION**

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Abstract:

The aims of education in Indonesia are to achieve self-actualization with an emphasis on eight dimensions of graduate profiles. The research objective is to explore autonomy values—as one of the dimensions of graduate profiles—in young adult novels from students' perspective and its pedagogical implication for students' self-actualization. The methodology is qualitative research. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 31 students. The findings: (a) students are inspired by character who is capable of making decisions, perseveres in achieving goals, strength in difficult circumstances, has the courage to resist external control, have big dream; and (b) by plot that depict autonomy through achieving a dream chosen from the beginning, mental preparedness in difficult circumstances, commitment to achieve goals; also (c) personal autonomy has an impact on students' self-development, freedom in choosing life path, and open up possibilities for achieving future dreams, and all of which are consistent with the concept of self-actualization development. The results of this study have pedagogical implications for the Indonesian government as policy makers or school administrators to be recommended as a reference in designing textbooks that contain personal autonomy, as an effort to realize self-actualization.

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Keyword:

Personal Autonomy, Young Adult Novel, Self-Actualization



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Introduction

In accordance with Indonesian statutory regulations, education is not only concerned with intellectual achievement, but also liberates, shapes character and develop students' full potential in order to contribute to society (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). Therefore, education is oriented toward realizing self-actualization, which is defined by (Newman & Newman, 2020) as a motive to make optimal use of one's full potential, creative participant in daily life, and have the capability to 'everything you are capable of becoming'. The issue that then arises is students in Indonesia struggle to recognize their potential (Sukendra, Fridayanthi, Darmana, & Surat, 2021). Meanwhile, another study indicated that students who do not know their potential will find it difficult to design their career roadmap (Mahardika, Putri, Dewi, & Wirsiasih, 2022). Difficulties in identifying potentials may influence self-actualization. On the other hand, achieving self-actualization as the focus of educational orientation requires an environment that encourages exploration and personal growth (Awwaliyah, Sinaga, & Adam, 2025).

The Indonesian government has attempted to formulate eight dimensions of graduate profiles in order to realize the national education goals, namely faith in God, citizenship, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, autonomy, health, and communication (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). Autonomy, as one of the dimensions of graduate profiles, is the focus of this study. The establishment of identity and autonomy are significant factors for adolescents (Avedissian & Alayan, 2021). Adolescence is considered an appropriate period for initiate autonomy, because there may be long-term consequences for individuals who fail to gain autonomy at the right time (Davis & McQuillin, 2022). When adolescents possess a strong commitment to their identity and autonomy, they are more likely to experience a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives (Ruiz & Yabut, 2024). Therefore, autonomy values need to be integrated into education during adolescence in order to produce graduates with a future orientation.

In this context, the values of autonomy in education are integrated through literature, particularly young adult novels, aimed at junior high school students. Literature's contribution in transmission of values is represented by its role in enlightening readers, on different subjective and collective positions, and provoking private thought (Locatelli, 2008). Reader's construct meaning from the text through an efferent stance, which influences their thoughts and attitudes (Schieble, 2010). Given this role, young adult novels have the potential to provide pedagogical implications, namely as a medium for integrating the value of autonomy in learning, which can subsequently support self-actualization. Although young adult novel has the potential to be explored, however, its utilization remains limited.

Previous research has been conducted to explore the value of novels to teach classical literature in high school (Jones, 2023), which indicates that graphic novels positively impact student engagement, motivation, and critical thinking skills. The focus of the study is a thematic analysis of the elements in the novel itself, without highlighting the perspective of teachers or students as the subject of analysis. Other research on the impact of using novels in EFL classroom from a pragmatic perspective has also been conducted (Abushihab, Qattam, & AlQbailat, 2023). The research findings indicate that the inclusion of novels is necessary in the EFL curriculum because novels are needed for building social and cultural competencies. However, this study highlights the perspective of teachers as educational administrators.

Previous research has highlighted literature for integration into learning. Nonetheless, there remains an existing gap that this study aims to overcome. This study attempts to explore the perspective of students, as subjects who will directly experience the pedagogical impact of integrating autonomy in the young adult novel into learning. In addition, while the previous study draws attention to the study of moral and cultural values, this study emphasizes the autonomy values, which constitutes one of the dimensions of the graduate profile mandated by law. This study aims to explore the personal autonomy values in young adult novels from students' perspective and its pedagogical implication for students' self-actualization. This result yields practical implications and may function as a reference for textbook development that incorporates autonomy values, thereby supporting the achievement of students' self-actualization.

Literature Review

Personal Autonomy

Autonomy is included in the type of intrinsic motivation (Susanti, Yuspendi, & Megarini, 2020). Autonomy is defined as a sense of volition and self-direction, it should be positively related to subjective well-being (Martela, Joshanloo, & Krys, 2026). Self-direction indicates that autonomy refers to the subjectivity to determine what is meaningful in life. Meaning autonomy defined as the freedom to determine for oneself what is meaningful in life (Kugler, 2024). There are several different concepts of autonomy, while this study examines personal autonomy. Personal autonomy is central to people's experiences of agency and abilities to actively take part in society (Zhang, Sankaran, & Aarts, 2023).

Personal autonomy examined in this study refers to the context of adolescent autonomy. Adolescence is considered an appropriate period for initiate autonomy (Davis & McQuillin, 2022). Personal autonomy of adolescents adapted to their level: supportive exploration and individuality, validating teen's opinions, acknowledging the teen's perspective and emotions, offering meaningful choices, encouraging them to make decisions, providing objective feedback on teen-initiated goals, allowing teens to have total responsibility for the small things in their life (Bohnsack, 2021). In order to find out the variable of personal autonomy can be measured by two methods that have conducted a linear regression analysis, namely the personal autonomy predictors determined by Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being and The Self-Determination Scale Deci and Ryan (Serdiuk, Danyliuk, & Chaika, 2018). This study draws on predictors of personal autonomy from two theories, which serve as the foundation for the analysis: life purpose, locus of control life, locus of control self, self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem, creativity, and acceptance of challenges and aggression.

Self-Actualization

Self-actualization involves awareness of achieving meaningful goals (Fajriah & Budi, 2025). The concept of self-actualization in this study refers to “Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, include: (a) psychological needs, (b) need for security, (c) need for for love and belonging, (d) the need for self-esteem, and (e) self-actualization needs” (Melinda, Emzir, & Akhadiah, 2019). Self-actualization is the motivation to become ‘everything you are capable of becoming’ (Newman & Newman, 2020). This concept serves as a foundation for constructing the context of this study, highlights students’ self-actualization with a focus on the motivation to become autonomous and independently determine one’s own choices.

Self-actualization helps individuals adapt to complex situations and make rational decisions (Guan, Du, Yang, & Hu, 2025). The students are adolescents. Adolescence is a period in which individuals begin to explore their identity and personal potential, and self-actualization serves as a driving force for enhancing their abilities and determining their life path (Pavai, Geetha, Vigneshwari, & Suganthi, 2021). At this stage, self-actualization enables adolescents to make better decisions, solve problems, implement established plans, think creatively and critically, and manage their abilities productively (Pavai, Geetha, Vigneshwari, & Suganthi, 2021). Adolescents who have achieved self-actualization are expected to be resilient in facing challenges, confident in exploring their potential, and capable of making career decisions that align with their interests (Luciandika, Mursyidah, & Arepin, 2026).

Young Adult Novel

Novel is a literary work that tells the life of a character with various conflicts, contains the resolution of the problems faced (Nurhayati, Wikanengsih, & Nugraha, 2020). Each character is portrayed through distinct action, intention, desire, and trait. Novels offer an alternative means to shape the character and refine the minds and morals of young individuals (Muassomah, et al., 2020). The novel has the ability to expose readers to diverse perspectives through various life experiences (Adıgüzel & Ayaz, 2020). This experience enables adolescents to indirectly feel involved in the narrative. Fictional characters and worlds depicted in young adult novel help young people understand the world and their place within it (Mukherjee, Leedham, & Hunt, 2025). In the context of this research, novel functions as a medium to explore the values of personal autonomy conveyed to students.

Synthesis and Research Gap

In this study, the literature highlights two fundamental gaps. First, personal autonomy, generally examined through the perspective of Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being and The Self-Determination, is positioned as a ‘value’ that is explored in young adult novels. This study also combines predictors of personal autonomy from these two theories which subsequently serve as the basis for analysis. Second, this study connects personal autonomy with self-actualization, because the personal autonomy contained in the novel becomes a medium for achieving self-actualization. If previous studies emphasized the focus of moral or social values, this study highlights the value of personal autonomy which is examined through the students’ perspective.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design. This research focuses on the interpretation of data and the development of pedagogical implications. It identifies values of autonomy in the data, relates them to self-actualization, and subsequently develops a pedagogical framework for application in learning contexts.

Data Sources and Data Collections

In the context of this study, data collection was carried out by conducting interviews, hence data is obtained in the form of interview results. This study uses a semi-structured interview approach. The questions are worded with more flexibility, and the interview involve a combination of structured and open-ended questions. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher prepared an interview protocol as a research instrument. The strategy used to refine the interview protocol is adapted from Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR) framework (Montoya, 2016). At the first stage, verification was performed to confirm that the questions in the interview protocol are in accordance with the research questions, to ensure that the answers given by participants will be useful in answering the research questions. In the second stage, the interview questions were reviewed and validated by two experts in the field of linguistics and counseling psychology education, resulting in several suggestions for improvement related to the language (especially diction or word choice) in the interview protocol and its relationship to child psychology, considering that the subjects of this research were junior high school students. In the third stage, a pilot test was conducted on several participants to ensure that the interview protocol as a research instrument will function effectively in field settings. Following the completion of the entire IPR framework, the interview questions were developed and finalized for implementation. The first and second questions focused on exploring the characters and plots that represent personal autonomy in the novel from the students' perspectives. The next question allowed students to share their experiences after completing the novel, focusing on their perspectives on the impact of personal autonomy in the novel on their self-actualization.

Purposeful Sampling

In the context of this study, use purposeful sampling technique with maximum variation, to identify instances of the phenomena that exhibit wide variations. The maximum variation sampling was used to select students as participants. The participants to be interviewed included students from SMP Laboratorium Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia. This school was chosen specifically for its implementation of the tahfidz class program, which enables the observation of various variations, particularly between regular and *tahfidz* classes.

The number of samples selected for this study was 31 students (hereafter referred to as P1–P31). They were randomly selected, but all were in grade VIII. There are 6 classes in grade VIII, and 5-6 students were selected as representatives from each class. Participants divided into 10 groups (each consisting of 3–4 participants) who were interviewed separately with an interview duration of approximately 15 minutes per group. VIII grade students were selected as participants because they met the main criteria for selecting participants in these research, namely junior high school students who were studying material about novels.

The age range of the students interviewed was relatively similar, namely 14-15 years old, because they were in the same grade level. Considering that the participants were students who were still under 17 years old, this research was accompanied by research ethics approval from Research Ethics Committee (REC), to ensure that the interviews were conducted voluntarily with the students' permission, maintaining students' confidentiality, and did not endanger the students physically or psychologically.

Data Analysis

In this study, textual data in the form of excerpts from interview result using thematic analysis. The stages in thematic analysis are guided by the six-phase framework, which included familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Codes were developed inductively through a gradual and iterative process of data analysis. In the initial coding stage, data segments deemed meaningful were coded. Similar codes were grouped to identify recurring patterns. These consistent patterns were then grouped based on their respective criteria to be labeled as a subtheme. All researchers collaboratively reviewed the themes, defined them, and assigned names to each subtheme. Before writing the report, a peer debriefing was conducted to ensure the reliability of data coding. In the report writing section as the final stage of the analysis process, interview excerpts were selected to represent each subtheme. To facilitate the data analysis process, researchers used *Atlas.ti* software. Data validity is carried out through participants triangulation. Data triangulation is used by comparing interview data across participants to increase the credibility of the findings.

Findings

The Personal Autonomy Within The Novel's Characters From Students' Perspectives

Table 1: Theme And Sub-Themes Regarding Personal Autonomy Through Character

Theme	Sub-Themes	Source of Data
Characters Who Has The Personal Autonomy	1. A Character Who Is Capable Of Making Decisions With Confidence	P1, P10, P13, P15, P28, P31
	2. A Character Who Perseveres In Achieving Goals	P2, P5, P8, P11, P12, P18, P19, P20, P22, P23, P27
	3. A Character Who Choose To Remain Strong In Difficult Circumstances	P3, P6, P9, P16, P26
	4. A Character Who Has The Courage To Resist External Control	P4, P14, P25, P29
	5. A Character Who Dares To Decide To Have A Big Dream	P7, P17, P2, P24, P30

Note. Sub-themes represent recurring patterns in participants' responses regarding characters in the novel embodying the value of personal autonomy. P1–P31 denote participant codes.

Based on the interview results, several different responses were obtained from each participant. From the perspective of the first group of participants, there are characters who are able to demonstrate autonomy because of their ability to make decisions with confidence. The decision can be related to life goals, dreams, or ideals. A different response was shown by the second

group of participants, who argued that autonomy emerge from a persistent character in achieving their goals. The third group of participants views that there are characters who demonstrate autonomy because they choose to be strong in difficult circumstances. The fourth group highlights autonomy in the characters that has the courage to break free from others' control. The last group considers characters to have autonomy if they dare to to decide to have a big dream. The following are presentations of data regarding student responses.

A Character Who Is Capable Of Making Decisions With Confidence

Based on the interview results, there are responses indicating that students consider a person to possess autonomy if they are capable to make decisions with confidence. They make decisions based on what they believe is best for them, without being concerned about others' opinions. The characters referred to by the participants—who in this case are the students—they are willing to take risks in making decisions. For example, Baso, who demonstrates autonomy by boldly making his own decisions, even inspiring his friends who were lacking in confidence at the time. One participant explained that “For me, there is a character in the novel, named Baso. He inspires his friends when his friends feel less confident. Baso dares to make decisions” (P10). This perception was echoed by another participant, who emphasized that the characters in the novel can make the reader aware that everyone has the right to make decisions according to their own thoughts. “My answer is Arai, because he really made Ikal and the readers aware. If we can actually make decisions according to whatever we want. According to what is in our thoughts” (P31).

A Character Who Perseveres in Achieving His Goals

Based on the interview results, there are responses indicating that participants consider a person to possess autonomy if they persevere in achieving their goals. The characters experiencing pressure, competition, or intimidation in achieving their goals. However, they remain determined and choose to maintain consistency to achieve his goals, as one participant explained that “The character's name is Arai. Because he doesn't give up easily. So no matter what the obstacles are, he continues to pursue his dreams” (P22). Another participant confirmed with another statement that even if the character faces one failure, he will do other possible ways to achieve his goal. “In the novel Negeri Lima Menara. I like Baso. Because he is very optimistic about his dreams. When he was forced to drop out of the Islamic boarding school, he continued to pursue his dreams in his hometown” (P19).

A Character Who Chooses To Remain Strong In Difficult Circumstances

Based on the interview results, there are responses indicating that participants consider a person to possess autonomy if they have enough strength to decide to survive under harsh and distressing condition. When someone is in suffering, some of them eventually give up and fall into despair. However, the characters referred to by the participants decided to stay strong in difficult circumstances. According to the perspective of one participant, “I like Delisa. Because Delisa can memorize prayer of salah and she remains enthusiastic even though she is left by her mother and siblings. And she can live it” (P6).

A Character Who Has The Courage To Resist External Control

Based on the interview results, there are responses indicating that participants sees the value of autonomy from character who has the courage to resist external control. An individual is sometimes attached to something that exerts control over them and permits others to assume control over their life. This leaves him with no authority to make choices or express opinions. The characters referred to by the participants had the courage to fight against the control of others. The perception of one participant, for example, “Alif. He didn’t want to go to Islamic school, he tried to go against his parents’ wishes, though he eventually agreed” (P4).

A Character Who Dares To Decide To Have A Big Dream

Based on the interview results, there are responses indicating that participants consider that autonomy can emerge from characters who dare to decide to have big dreams. The characters referred to by the participants live in conditions of limitation. Some characters reside in slum areas, while others live in conditions of extreme poverty. Some others do not have families who should be able to be their support system. However, they are very brave to dream big and intend to make it happen in the future, as one participant explained that “Of course Arai, he has a big dream and many goals. Well, Arai makes Ikal as the main character realize that he can have a dream, although their lives are very difficult and isolated from the outside world” (P30).

The Personal Autonomy Within The Novel’s Plots From Students’ Perspectives

Table 2: Theme And Sub-Themes Regarding Personal Autonomy Through Plot

Theme	Sub-Themes	Source of Data
Plot Containing Personal Autonomy	1. Storyline About Success In Achieving A Dream That Has Been Chosen By Oneself From The Beginning	P1, P4, P5, P8, P9, P10, P11, P15
	2. Storyline About Mental Preparedness To Survive In Difficult Circumstances	P2, P6, P7, P20, P23, P24, P25, P28, P31
	3. Storyline About A Commitment To Achieving Goals Despite Facing Difficulties	P3, P12, P13, P14, P16, P18, P21, P22, P27, P29, P30
	4. Storyline About A Sacrifice For Others Which Was Chosen With Full Awareness	P17, P19, P26

Note. Sub-themes represent recurring patterns in participants’ responses regarding plots in the novel embodying the value of personal autonomy. P1–P31 denote participant codes.

Based on the interview results, several different responses were obtained from each participant. From the perspective of the first group of participants, there are plot that indicate autonomy because it presents a storyline about the success of achieving a dream which is determined by the characters since the beginning. A different response was shown by the second group of participants, who considered that the plot contained autonomy if it presents a storyline about mental preparedness to survive in difficult circumstances. The third group of students highlighted that autonomy is present in the storyline about commitment to achieving goals despite facing difficulties. From the perspective of the fourth group of students, there are plot

that indicate autonomy because it presents a storyline about a sacrifice for others which was chosen with full awareness.

Storyline About Success In Achieving A Dream That Has Been Chosen By Oneself From The Beginning

Based on the interview results, there are responses indicating that participants regard a plot as containing the value of autonomy if it depicts a storyline about success in achieving a dream that has been chosen by oneself from the beginning. When easier options become available, many people eventually change direction from their original goals. The plot referred to by the participants contain stories about the success in achieving dreams because each part of the story shows the consistency of the characters in their journey to realize their dreams. One participant explained that “The final part, when Alif and friends who succeeded in achieving the dreams they had chosen since junior high school. This story shows that if we choose to be consistent from the beginning, our dreams can be achieved.” (P10).

Storyline About Mental Preparedness To Survive In Difficult Circumstances

Based on the interview results, there are responses indicating that participants perceive the value of autonomy in the storyline about mental preparedness to survive in difficult circumstances. When an event occurs that causes someone to suffer, some of them eventually give up. In the plot referred to by the participants, there is a sequence of sad events, full of struggle and suffering, however the characters decide to survive through these events. According to the interpretation of one of the participants, “At the beginning of the novel, Arai invites Ikal to play spinning tops, although he has just been abandoned by his family. This story shows how we choose to survive in difficult circumstances, even facing them with joy” (P28). Other participants gave their views on autonomy in other storylines. “Maybe the story of Delisa's leg amputation. This part tells about her leg being amputated and her mother's death in the tsunami. However, the story shows Delisa to be strong, she chooses to spend her days playing with her friends” (P5).

Storyline About A Commitment To Achieving Goals Despite Facing Difficulties

Based on the interview results, there are responses indicating that participants regard a plot as containing the value of autonomy if it includes a storyline about a commitment to achieving goals despite facing difficulties. When an event occurs that causes someone to surrender, some of them eventually decided to step back. The plot referred to by the participants refers to a story about persistence in the struggle to achieve a goal. In each storyline, there are events that are described as continuing to move forward towards certain goals, even the characters have to face difficulties, obstacles, intimidation, even tears. One of the participants explained that “In my opinion, the story of the tsunami coincided with the moment when Delisa took the prayer test. Despite the tense conditions, Delisa remained steadfast in completing her prayers in order to pass the test” (P3).

Storyline About A Sacrifice For Others Which Was Chosen With Full Awareness

Based on the interview results, there were four responses indicating that participants considered a storyline to contain the value of autonomy if it included a story about sacrifice for others that was chosen consciously. When an event occurs that causes a person to have to choose between

sacrificing themselves or others, some people sometimes choose to save themselves. A storyline referred to by one of the participants, for example, “I believe there's autonomy in Arai's story, where he gives all his savings to his poor neighbor so she can sell cakes. This event demonstrates that someone can make sacrifices for others voluntarily, without coercion” (P17). The storyline, which also exemplify the choice to sacrifice for others—even if that choice has bad consequences for oneself—was also explained by other participants. “I found the story of Baso being forced to return home to care for his ailing grandmother remarkable. Even though this meant he couldn't continue his education, the plot tells us that Baso still chose to return home” (Participant 26, interview).

The Potential Of Personal Autonomy To Assist Students Self-Actualization

Table 3. Themes And Sub-Themes Regarding To The Role Of Autonomy In Self-Actualization

Theme	Sub-Themes	Source of Data
Role Of Autonomy In Self- Actualization	1. Autonomy Has A Positive Impact On Self-Development	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P14, P18, P19, P20, P24, P30
	2. Autonomy Provides Freedom In Choosing Life Path	P2, P15, P21, P22, P25, P26, P27, P28, P29, P31
	3. Autonomy Enables To Achieve Their Dreams In The Future	P13, P16, P17, P23

Note. Sub-themes represent recurring patterns in participants' responses regarding role of autonomy in self-actualization. P1–P31 denote participant codes.

Based on the interview results, several different responses were obtained from each participant. The responses from the first group of participants were autonomy in the novel inspired them to develop themselves. The autonomy they find in the novel inspires them to begin to recognize their potential. Another response expressed by participants in the second group was the autonomy of the characters in the novel gives them the courage to determine their own path in life. The third group of participants highlighted the role of autonomy in assisting them achieve their dreams in the future.

Autonomy Has A Positive Impact On Self-Development

Based on the interview results, there were 17 responses indicating that participants consider autonomy has a positive impact on self-actualization because they have the freedom to fully develop their potential. According to them, someone who feels he is not talented will have the opportunity to discover his talent when given freedom. For those who have recognized their talents, autonomy gives them the freedom to further develop them. One participant explained, “My talents can be explored better if given autonomy. For others who are still unsure about their talents, they finally have a chance to discover them, right?” (P6). In addition, the autonomy they find in novels inspires them to explore themselves more deeply, allowing them to be confident without limitations. “The impact was positive, because it made me more confident. Like the characters in the novel, they also faced ridicule. But they didn't dwell on it. So, autonomy should allow us to focus on our talents and potentials” (P30).

Autonomy Provides Freedom In Choosing Life Path

Based on the interview results, there were 10 responses indicating that participants consider autonomy has a positive impact because it gave them the freedom to choose their own life path. According to them, autonomy provides the freedom to try things without worrying about failure. They are also free to pursue whatever they choose in life. As one participant expressed, “There is a main character who is allowed to make decisions in his life, it inspires me that autonomy makes me free to choose my ideals” (P2). Other participants highlighted how autonomy provide them courage. “After reading those novels, I became bolder. I dared to do what I wanted, as long as it was good, including determining my own path in life” (P27).

Autonomy Enables Students To Achieve Their Dreams In The Future

Based on the interview results, there were 4 responses indicating that students considered autonomy has a positive impact on self-actualization because it allows them to achieve their dreams in the future. If they are given autonomy, there will be no intervention from others. Therefore, the profession that the student will pursue in the future is purely the result of their own idea. One participant answered, “Autonomy is good. It allows me to follow my own passions. So, my future career, my aspirations, will be based on my own ideas” (P16). According to other participants' perspectives, autonomy also provide them the opportunity to achieve their dreams. “If I had the autonomy to dream anything like the characters in the novel, of course I would try and God willing, one day I would achieve it” (P23).

Discussion

Based on the students' perspective, the characters in the novel possess personal autonomy. This argument aligns with the predictors of personal autonomy from Scales of Psychological Well-Being theory by Ryff's and The Self-Determination Scale by Deci and Ryan. The predictors of personal autonomy consist of creativity, life purpose, locus of control-life, locus of control-self, self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem, acceptance of challenge and aggression (Serdiuk, Danyliuk, & Chaika, 2018). Among all the indicators, several predictors that subsequently emerged from the interview findings were locus of control-self, self-efficacy, acceptance of challenge and aggression, and life purpose.

A character who is capable of making decisions with confidence and who has the courage to break free from others' control refers to the locus of control-self. Humans are autonomous agents, they can make unconstrained decisions and act on them to achieve their goals and satisfy their needs (Zhang, Sankaran, & Aarts, 2023). The figures mentioned by the students, for instance Baso, dared to make their own decisions and were not bound by the control of others. There are two poles of control localization, in a certain context, person considers that anything that happens in his/her life is depended on his/her personal traits, competence, purposefulness, opportunities and it is a legitimate result of his/her own activity (Shanava & Gergauli, 2022). This concept was subsequently aligned with the character who assumes whatever happens in life depends on their control and is the result of the decisions they made.

Another character type described is those who are persistent in achieving goals, refers to the predictor of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a construct that focuses on an individual's evaluation of their capacity to do something successfully in a given situation (Waddington, 2023). According to student's perspective, characters who have personal autonomy tends to belief in

one's own abilities; meanwhile, self-efficacy concerns with the question of how an individual holds belief in his/her ability to execute a course of action (Bhati & Sethy, 2022). As exemplified by the characters cited by the students, Arai, he has strong sense of self-assurance in his abilities, despite the severity of the obstacles faced to achieve his goals. The acquisition of required skills and abilities is not sufficient for a person to perform a task; he must have the belief in his abilities that he can undertake the task under difficult setting (Bhati & Sethy, 2022).

Personal autonomy is also recognized through character who choose to be strong in difficult circumstances, which refers to predictors of acceptance of challenge or aggression. Aggression has direct influence on an adult's development and well-being (Rani, Sigh, & Sharma, 2023). Everyone has the choice to give up or remain strong when faced with difficult and unforeseen circumstances in life. However, the characters referred to by the students, for examples Delisa, choose to be strong despite losing her entire family in a big disaster. Those who choose to be strong have decided to accept the challenge of life's difficulties. In the scope of positive psychology, challenge is likely to provide opportunities for further advancement by creating more integrated knowledge of how to flourish when faced with challenges individually (Horikoshi, 2023).

Another perspective that students highlighted regarding autonomy in character was those who dare to dream, which refers to a predictor of life purpose. Purpose as a unique psychological process that combines thought, action, long-term goals, and key features of self-identity (Damon, 2025). The characters mentioned to by the students, for instance Arai, live in remote area. Other characters even reside in extreme poverty or they do not have families who should be able to be their support system. However, they are brave to dream and intend to make it happen in the future. The dream becomes a life purpose that keeps them consistent, because a 'goal' gives a person confidence and belief in value of life, and a sense of direction that can withstand episodic periods of uncertainty and confusion (Damon, 2025).

Besides character, personal autonomy is also recognized through the plot. Based on the students' perspective, the plot about success in achieving a dream that has been chosen from the beginning is a marker of personal autonomy, which refers to the predictor of life purpose. Purpose has been identified in philosophy as an essential component of a well-directed life (Damon, 2025). If there is a storyline about the success of achieving a dream that has been chosen from the beginning, it portrays certain direction being pursued in life. Purpose refers to draw on self-reflections such as *there is a direction in my life* (Damon, 2025). In the plot, there is a storyline about the direction of life that they students to achieve in the future.

Another pattern that was recognized was storyline about mental preparedness to survive in difficult circumstances, which refers to predictor of acceptance of challenge and aggression. The concept of challenge is closely related to intrinsic motivation, mindset, learning, stress coping, mental toughness, and posttraumatic growth (Horikoshi, 2023). In the storyline about the major disaster that befell Delisa or the loss of the entire family as experienced by Arai, it depicts the intrinsic motivation for stress management or post-traumatic self-healing. After the heartbreaking and painful events, in the next storyline, the author shows how the characters recover from their adversity.

Students highlighted another storyline that embodied personal autonomy, namely a story about commitment to achieving goals despite difficulties. This pattern refers to predictor of self-efficacy. Initially, the author creates a lot of challenging events which risks causing the

characters to give up on their goals. However, subsequent events strengthen the characters, enabling them to continue pursuing their goals. This sequence of events then influences the characters' choices, enabling them to achieve their goals. That is in line with the concept of self-efficacy as an important motivational construct that can affect choices, effort, persistence, and achievement (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021).

The last pattern of personal autonomy in the plot that students recognized was a story about self-sacrifice undertaken consciously for the benefit of others. This pattern refers to the locus of control self. Based on the plot identified by the students, there are stories about characters who have control over themselves, thereby allowing them to act and make decisions freely, as the events where Arai voluntarily gives his savings to his poor neighbor. That is in line with the concept of self-control, which connects the sense of responsibility, the willingness to be active and the sense of oneself (Shanava & Gergauli, 2022).

The characters and plots in novels that contain personal autonomy as perceived by students was contribute to assisting them achieve self-actualization because it has a positive impact on self-development, freedom in choosing life path, and allows them to achieve their dreams. Self-actualization is one of the components in hierarchy of needs by Abraham Maslow (Melinda, Emzir, & Akhadiah, 2019). Personal autonomy facilitates students to explore their potential more deeply, as aligns with the concept that self-actualization is essentially a motive to make optimal use of one's full potential, to become a fully effective, creative participant in their life (Newman & Newman, 2020). If students grows up with the autonomy to recognize and develop their potential optimally, it provides them the opportunity to begin the process of self-actualization. When addressing the most favorable age for the onset of the self-actualization process, modern psychology emphasizes adolescence as the key stag (Malaxat, 2025). By starting self-actualization at this age, students are expected to begin developing readiness for life in the adult world, given that self-actualization represents the pinnacle of personal growth, embodying the process of realizing one's full potential (Huang, 2024).

On the other hand, personal autonomy assist achieve self-actualization because it frees students to choose their life path. Personal autonomy giving students the courage to pursue any path they choose in life without fearless of failure. This is in line with the argument that self-actualized individuals are not afraid to try new things, new ways of doing things, and new ideas, or to reconsider old ideas in a new way (Newman & Newman, 2020). The courage to determine path in life is a sign that students are attempting to achieve self-actualization, given that people striving for self-actualization often demonstrate profound self-awareness, and a strong sense of responsibility for their actions and decisions (Huang, 2024).

According to students' opinions, personal autonomy depicted in the characters and plots inspires them to achieve dreams in the future. Personal autonomy stimulates students' creative ideas about future careers. Research indicates that autonomy in its various manifestations may play a pivotal role in most creative thinking (Runco, 2023). Aspirations that have been planned or established from the outset have the potential to become goals to be achieved in the future. This will be useful for develop a need-based activity chart that individuals can follow throughout their lifecycle (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). Moreover, if the aspirations employed by the students are entirely derived from their own ideas, without interference from any party, they have the opportunity to be unique in their own way. Maslow's belief that humans as uniquely purposeful and capable beings to understand motivation in a holistic manner (Huang, 2024).

Pedagogically, integrating values of personal autonomy into learning can serve as an effective medium to assist self-actualization. This integration is not merely conceptual but is concretely implemented in teaching materials, for example textbooks, to implement into the classroom. Textbooks can be developed by integrating the value of personal autonomy into the structure of the material presentation, contextual example, biographic note, or exercise, as facilitates the learning process that encourages students to think and act autonomously.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the personal autonomy was discovered in the novel read by students through (a) the manifestation of each character's traits and (b) the depiction of the plot. This study contributes to the body of knowledge, particularly by addressing a limitation in the existing literature through the relationship between two related variables. The study of autonomy applied to the novels. Rather than examining novels solely from intrinsic or extrinsic perspective, this study attempts to connect personal autonomy in the novel with student self-actualization, seen from student perspectives. Based on students' responses, personal autonomy that the author brings out through characters and plots is found to have a positive correlation with the self-actualization, allow students to recognize their own potential, enabling them to freely choose the life path, and inspires them to achieve dreams in the future.

By exploring the impact of personal autonomy in young adult novels on self-actualization according to the students' perspective, the findings of this study have significant practical implications for Indonesian government or school administrators. It can be practically implicated as a reference in designing the textbook that contain personal autonomy values. The author's depiction of personal autonomy through characters and plots discovered by students can be used as a reference in designing textbook, making the material, illustrations, or practice questions will be effectively addressed. Textbook published simultaneously by the government and consistently used at every level of junior high school students have the potential to assist realize the future goals, namely the development of self-actualization through the value of autonomy in literary works. Future research may focus on the exploration of autonomy and self-actualization using a larger sample size, with greater variability among samples.

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