

Exploring English Teachers' Cognitions on the Implementation of Autonomous Learning

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Abstract.

This study explores English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' comprehension of autonomous learning and their strategies for fostering it. Utilizing qualitative research methods, including open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, data was gathered from teachers in Solo, Indonesia. The findings indicate that while teachers have a foundational understanding of autonomous learning, their practical application is still in the early stages. They recognize the significance of learner autonomy but often find it challenging to fully encourage students to learn independently. Although they express a desire to modify their teaching strategies to promote independence, they acknowledge the difficulties involved. The study underscores the necessity for further professional development to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills required to effectively promote autonomous learning in EFL classrooms. Future research should focus on strategies for supporting teachers in this area and examine the impact of autonomous learning on student outcomes.

Keywords: *Autonomous Learning, Teacher Cognitions and ELT.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Autonomous learning is a crucial aspect of education, particularly in English language teaching (ELT). It involves students finding opportunities to learn foreign languages outside and inside the classroom. Learner autonomy (LA) refers to the capacity of learners to take responsibility for their learning, which has become increasingly important in the field of education. However, teachers' conceptions of LA have received relatively little consideration, as they significantly influence their teaching methods and approaches. Learner-centered language learning emphasizes language content and the learning process itself, with learners actively engaging in the decision-making process while teachers tailor content to meet their students' specific needs. Autonomous learning enables learners to engage in multiple tasks simultaneously and determine the input and output of their language skills.

Over the years, the topic of autonomy in language learning has received significant attention, with literature by Benson (2011) shedding light on various perspectives related to the identification and implementation of autonomy, as well as the benefits it offers to learners, such as increased independence in selecting learning options. However, this study reveals that teachers' conceptions of autonomy have received relatively little consideration. Wedell (2009) noted that teachers' conceptions significantly influence their teaching methods and approaches. Therefore, understanding teachers' perspectives is crucial for enhancing their classroom practices. The two primary objectives of learner-centered language learning are emphasizing language content and the learning process itself (Nunan, 1996). To achieve these aims, learners must actively engage in the decision-making process, while teachers are responsible for tailoring content to meet the specific needs of their students.

In an autonomous classroom, teachers serve as guides, facilitators, and counsellors, helping learners take responsibility for managing their learning by setting goals, planning, monitoring, evaluating progress, and assessing outcomes (Gardner, 2011). Learner autonomy involves effective strategies for learning from successes and failures, enabling students to become more capable learners in the future. This research aims to offer new insights into Learner Autonomy (LA) research by exploring teachers' cognitions of AL and their

influence on the strategies they adopt to promote it. Previous studies have primarily focused on the teachers' perspectives concerning learners' abilities and the factors that impact AL in education. However, there is a significant dearth of research in understanding how teachers view LA and how they foster it. Problem Statement Based on the above issues, problem statement has been formulated "What are the EFL teachers' cognition of autonomous learning?" to comprehensive and detailed approach to understand teachers' cognitions of AL. By bridging the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application, this research can contribute to the development of teaching practices and strategies to promote learner autonomy in education.

II. METHODS

This study is a qualitative research approach to investigate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' perspectives on learning autonomy. To achieve this, the researcher utilized an open-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview as the primary sources of data. In addition to these, the questionnaire administered to the participants to provide insights into the research question, which explores EFL teachers' cognitions on AL. The data collection in this research is using open-ended questions allowed the participants to express their viewpoints and opinions freely without any interference from the researchers, as suggested by Foddy (1993). The interview questions are designed based on Borg and Al Busaidi's (2012) concept of autonomous learning. A semi-structured interview, as described by Jamshed (2014), is a useful approach that includes an interview guide comprising a main question and a series of linked questions relevant to the subject matter under investigation. The data analysis method employs a descriptive-analytical approach, collecting detailed information through the cognition by the teachers, problem identification, and making conclusion.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research question was regarding his knowledge of autonomous learning, he answered "*That's independent learning, sis*". He stated that he had used this method in teaching and learning activities, but this was the first time. When the researcher asked whether he had mastered this method, he answered, "*To be honest, because it's the first time, I'm still trying to do trial and error, especially since the students play a big role in learning independently.*"

The next question that the researcher asked was "*For the use of AL, what teaching strategies are used to support the learning method and what is the form of implementation in each class taught?*" He answered, "*To be honest, I can't just release AL to the students. So, I also direct the students on what they should do. Because sometimes the children don't understand what they should do.*" Then, regarding the obstacles/challenges faced when implementing the AL strategy in each class he teaches, he said, "*Maybe this is a new method too, so students still don't understand what AL means, I've only just started implementing the AL method, so I'm still in the trial phase, Sis.*" Regarding the students' responses to implementing these teaching strategies in the classroom, he answered "*The students are enthusiastic, that's just because they are still new, sis, so they are still asking questions, maybe they can't be completely independent yet.*"

The following is the researcher's presentation of the results of the questionnaire that the researcher gave to 5 primary school and secondary school teachers in Solo.

No	Statements	first teacher	Second teacher	third teacher	fourth teacher	fifth teacher
1	Language learners of all ages can develop learner autonomy.	5	5	4	5	4
2	Independent study in the library is an activity which develops learner autonomy.	5	5	5	5	5

3	Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone.	5	5	4	3	4
4	Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn.	3	3	3	3	4
5	Individuals who lack autonomy are not likely to be effective language learners.	3	3	3	3	3
6	Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom.	3	3	3	3	3
7	Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.	5	5	5	5	5
8	Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher.	2	2	2	2	2
9	It is harder to promote learner autonomy with proficient language learners than it is with beginners.	3	3	3	3	3
10	It is possible to promote learner autonomy with both young language learners and with adults.	5	5	5	5	5
11	Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence.	5	5	5	4	4
12	Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would.	5	5	5	5	5
13	Learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all cultural backgrounds.	4	3	3	3	3
14	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do.	5	4	3	3	3
15	Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centered classrooms.	4	5	5	5	5
16	Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other.	5	5	5	5	5
17	Learner autonomy implies a rejection of traditional teacher-led ways of teaching.	4	5	5	5	5

18	Learner autonomy cannot develop without the help of the teacher.	5	4	4	5	5
19	Learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together.	3	3	3	3	3
20	Learner autonomy is only possible with adult learners.	3	3	3	3	3
21	Learner autonomy is promoted by independent work in a self-access centre.	5	5	4	4	4
22	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed.	3	3	3	3	3
23	Learner autonomy is a concept which is not suited to non-Western learners.	3	3	3	3	3
24	Learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher.	3	3	3	3	3
25	Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy.	5	4	4	4	4
26	Promoting autonomy is easier with beginning language learners than with more proficient learners.	3	3	3	3	3
27	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials.	3	3	3	3	3
28	Learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy.	5	5	5	5	5
29	Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy.	5	5	5	5	5
30	Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy.	4	5	5	5	5
31	Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy.	5	5	5	5	5
32	The ability to monitor one's learning is central to learner autonomy.	3	3	3	3	3

33	Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.	5	5	5	5	5
34	The proficiency of a language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy.	3	3	3	3	3
35	The teacher has an important role to play in supporting learner autonomy.	5	5	5	5	5
36	Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner.	5	5	5	5	5
37	To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	5	5	5	5	5
	Average	4,10	4,08	3,97	3,97	4

Fig. 1. Results of the teacher's questionnaire

Based on the table above, it is known that the average score of the five teachers' questionnaire results is 4, which means that the teacher agreed to almost all statements. The five teachers answered that they disagree with statement number 8 "Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher", in line with what was expressed by Lengkanawati (2017) who stated that autonomous learning should not be understood as learning without a teacher, instead, students choose how they will learn and what activities they will do. The first teacher answered 13 statements with unsure, the second teacher answered 14 statements with unsure, and the third teacher answered 15 statements with unsure, the fourth teacher answered 16 statements with unsure, the fifth teacher answered 14 statements with unsure. This shows that the teachers still do not fully understand about autonomous learning. This is in line with the statement of Teacher WN who stated, "*AL is a new method, I've only just started implementing the AL method, so I'm still in the trial phase*".

Based on the results of the observation sheets collected by the researcher, it shows that all teachers that the researcher observed received a "Yes" answer on all sub-indicators. However, there are notes on several indicators. Namely on the sub-indicator "Teachers understand teaching strategies related to autonomous learning in the classroom", the researcher found that teachers already understand autonomous learning strategies but still have not fully released students to learn independently in class. Then on the sub-indicator "Teachers can adapt teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of students and manage the complexity of everyday classroom interactions", the teacher stated that he was still trying to adapt and needed time for trial and error.

1. Teachers' classroom activities that promote learner autonomy.
2. The extent to which a student practices autonomous learning.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, show that teachers at primary school and secondary school in Solo have met the criteria for teachers' cognition about learning autonomy, namely knowledge base, theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge, and personal beliefs. However, the results obtained by teachers still have several notes. They are on the sub-indicator "Teachers understand teaching strategies related to autonomous learning in the classroom", the researcher found that teachers already understand autonomous learning strategies but still have not fully released students to learn independently in class. Then on the sub-indicator

"Teachers can adapt teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of students and manage the complexity of everyday classroom interactions", the teacher stated that he was still trying to adapt and needed time for trial and error. These results are reinforced by the results of an interview with one of the teachers at a secondary school in Solo when the researcher asked if he had truly mastered this method, he said that it was his first time using it and that he is constantly experimenting, especially since the students play an important role in their education. AL is a new method, so pupils are still unsure what it means; he has just recently begun adopting the AL method, so he is still in the trial phase.

Then it was also strengthened by the results of the questionnaire that the teacher had answered, the researcher found that the first teacher answered 13 statements with unsure, the second teacher answered 14 statements with unsure, and the third teacher answered 15 statements with unsure, the fourth teacher answered 16 statements with unsure, the fifth teacher answered 14 statements with unsure. AL becomes a new challenge for teachers in the present and future. As stated by Ismail et al. (2020) Autonomous learning is depicted as a shared responsibility between teachers and learners, and its feasibility hinges on the extent to which teachers hold beliefs about it and the pedagogical principles embedded in language classes. The study conducted by Alwasidi and Alnaeem (2022) reveals that EFL teachers hold varying views on LA and are inclined to enhance it, despite facing practical challenges. The transition to online learning has created additional opportunities for students to practice LA, and the study proposes practical solutions to promote LA in EFL contexts.

1. Teachers' classroom activities that promote learner autonomy
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In summary, the teacher's feedback reflects a growing understanding of autonomous learning while also underscoring the challenges associated with its implementation. Although the teacher has previously incorporated independent learning methods, he acknowledges the necessity for further exploration and improvement. He emphasizes the significance of offering guidance and assistance to students as they transition to more autonomous learning methods. The teacher's observation that students are enthusiastic about this new approach suggests that autonomous learning can be both motivating and captivating for learners. Nevertheless, the successful implementation of autonomous learning requires a gradual process of adjustment and continuous.

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