EXPLORING EFL TEACHERS' BELIEFS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LEARNER AUTONOMY IN ONLINE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Learner Autonomy is a dynamic process in which learners take an active role and are responsible for their learning. Nowadays, teachers and learners are using technology in online classrooms due to the pandemic situation during which learner autonomy can play critical roles. However, studies investigating teachers' beliefs in fostering learner autonomy by utilizing technology in online classrooms remain sparse. To fill this gap, this qualitative study explored the teachers' beliefs in fostering learner autonomy by using technology in online classrooms. Drawing on the data garnered from online questionnaires and open-ended questions that involved 48 English teachers from various levels of education in Central Kalimantan with different teaching experience and education degrees, it was found that the teachers deployed various technological tools, which helped them foster learner autonomy in online classrooms.

Keywords: *Learner Autonomy, Teachers' Beliefs, Online Classrooms, Technology*

INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy is defined as a situational condition in which learners direct their learning outside the classrooms independently, evaluate and monitor their learning progress (Dickinson, 1987). Learner autonomy is considered one of the desirable characteristics of language learners in the teaching and learning process (Benson, 2016). Learner autonomy is implementing language education practice and research for over 40

years (Holec, 1981). Related to 21st educational systems, which emphasize learner-centered, learner autonomy becomes essentials in English language teaching, which encourages learners to be critical in decision making (Benson, 2016).

In fostering learner autonomy, teachers have to know the concepts of learner autonomy and how learner autonomy means to them. Learner autonomy will impact teachers' practices, how teachers promote learner autonomy in classrooms, and it will affect the opportunities for learners to be autonomous (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019). In the same vein, Bullock (2014) stated that it is necessary to comprehend what teachers think, know, believe, and do because teachers' beliefs will influence instructional behaviors and teaching practices (Nguyen, 2014). Moreover, Aguirre and Speer (2000) revealed that beliefs play a central role in teachers' choices, goals, and classroom action priorities. Furthermore, there is still a need to increase teachers' awareness in fostering learner autonomy in classrooms.

Moreover, the new education policy from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture called *Merdeka Belajar,* or independent learning has the same concept as learner autonomy. It focuses on teachers' and learners' freedom to choose and implement learning strategies (Kusmaryono, 2020). Furthermore, the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* becomes faster due to the spread of Covid-19. The flexibility of teaching and learning from distance urges teachers to be creative and utilize technology in their online classrooms. Hence learner autonomy is considered necessary. As Holec (1981) defined learner autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's learning, learner autonomy is needed to foster in the teaching and learning process, particularly in this current situation because teachers teach their students in distance learning (Lengkanawati et al., 2021).

The utilization of technology in teaching and learning has been investigating by some researchers. A study conducted by Hidayati (2016) revealed that the ICT integration enables teachers to vary teaching and learning, focus on students, give more opportunities to be active in learning, and provide authentic learning materials. Moreover, Selli (2017) stated the use of technology for more effective communication and instruction.

Arigusman et al. (2018) investigated the kinds of technology tools used by high school students and their beliefs toward using technology.

However, most studies focused on using technology in classrooms rather than using technology to foster learner autonomy. Furthermore, this study was conducted to investigate the teachers' beliefs in fostering learner autonomy by utilizing technology in online classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of autonomy is an issue for some fields of inquiry. Learner autonomy has developed as the demand of twenty-first-century education to teaching and learning theories, learning styles, strategies, and approaches (Blidi, 2017). The term autonomy refers either to a person's capacity o to some condition of situational freedom. In language learning, learner autonomy is defined as the ability to take charge of one's learning (Holec, 1981). Moreover, Dickinson (1977) described autonomy as a situation where learners are responsible for their learning and decisions. In the same vein, Little (1999) proposed a separation of learner autonomy as "proactive" and "reactive" based on two levels of self–regulation. Proactive means regulates the direction of activity as well as the action itself. In other words, learners can plan, monitor, and access their learning. In addition, learners can organize the resources to achieve their purposes. In comparison, reactive means regulates the activity once the direction has been set or in other words, reactive autonomy involves control over methods alone (Benson, 2001). Reactive autonomy is considered a lower-order autonomy, seen as a preliminary step of learner autonomy.

Regarding teachers' beliefs on learner autonomy, it refers to ideas that beliefs consider to be true and influence teachers' practices (Skott, 2014). In the same vein, Aguirre and Speer (2000) revealed that teachers' beliefs related to teaching and learning goals and actions in classrooms. To foster learner autonomy, teachers must be autonomous first (Little, 1995). Therefore, teachers are one of the essential factors in the successful teaching and learning process.

Teachers' beliefs affect the teaching and learning goals (Borg, 2001; Mansour, 2013; Nguyen, 2014). Some previous studies have revealed the importance of teachers' beliefs in EFL classrooms. For example, a study conducted by Begum (2019) examined the perception of teachers and strategies that they used to foster learner autonomy in Bangladesh University. There were significant findings in his research about the lack of teachers' preparation, students' reluctant attitude, and discipline in EFL classrooms. In line with Nguyen (2014), teachers still play an essential role in fostering learner autonomy by making learners aware of their learning goals and decision–making process.

Teachers' beliefs are essential in language learning. It will impact teachers' behavior and knowledge in planning the lesson and teachers' decisions in classrooms. Borg (2001) stated that teachers' beliefs would be inferred from what they say, intend, and do. Teachers' beliefs are difficult to change if the teachers do not have a chance to consider and discuss their beliefs. Therefore, investigating teachers' beliefs toward implementing learner autonomy in online classrooms by utilizing technology is needed to explore.

There are six approaches to foster learner autonomy proposed by Benson (2001); Little (2004). Firstly, the resource-based approach focuses on the provision of opportunities, materials, and resources. Secondly, the technology-based approach is focused on the utilization of technology to access some resources. Computer-assisted language learning (Schwienhorst, 2012), social media, web-based online resources, presentation tools, E-learning, and apps/games exemplify the utilization of technology (Rinekso & Kurniawan, 2020). Thirdly, the learner-based approach is about developing students' learning skills, strategies, learning styles, and motivation. Fourthly, the classroom-based approach is related to the role of the teacher to discuss material, tasks, and assessment before the learning process. Fifthly, the curriculum-based approach emphasizes that teachers make learners aware of learning goals and learning processes. Lastly, the teacher-based approach is about teachers' professional development and teacher education in fostering learner autonomy. However, this study

focused on the utilization of technology to foster learner autonomy in online classrooms.

Some previous studies have investigated the advantages and impact of technology in classrooms. A study conducted by Khaira (2021) revealed the benefits of ICT utilization as a learning tool. In her research, she found that the *KineMaster* application is helpful to implement in online learning. Moreover, Sobiruddin et al. (2019) investigated the utilization of ICT in interactive projector to improve the learning process in classrooms. The study revealed that the utilization of interactive projector encouraged students' and teachers' enthusiasm to positively utilize particular media learning in classrooms.

Furthermore, Ramadhan et al. (2019) explored the teachers' perception of cell phones and the Edmodo application. There were some significant findings in this study, such as improving students' attention, the varieties of pictures, videos, and text. These technology tools also helped teachers monitor the students' progress for self–study.

The majority of the study investigated the advantages of using ICT in the learning process rather than learner autonomy. Therefore, this study was conducted to gain insights into teachers' beliefs in fostering learner autonomy by utilizing technology and does the particular technology help to foster learner autonomy.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to answer the research questions. As Hamied (2017), Yin (2014), and Huberman and Miles (1994) stated, a qualitative research methodology is best suited for explore new and complex topics, define people's beliefs, social and cultural norms that occur in a bounded context. In line with this idea, a qualitative case study design is used for this research for several reasons. First, it aimed to identify the teachers' beliefs of learner autonomy in online classrooms. Second, it placed what particular technology helped teachers to foster learner autonomy in online classrooms.

The forty-eight English teachers who teach in various education levels in Central Kalimantan were invited as research participants. They filled out the questionnaire via *Google Forms*. The data collection, including questionnaire distribution and open-ended questions, was conducted from 21 May – 31 May 2021.

This study used a questionnaire adapted from Borg and Albusaidi (2012), which focused on English teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy. Based on the data gathered from the teachers' questionnaire, open-ended questions were held to explore more on teachers' beliefs in learner autonomy and does particular technology fosters learner autonomy in online classrooms.

At the data analysis stage, the data from the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively by using descriptive statistics to calculate the frequency and the percentage of the data distribution. The calculation follows this formula.

$$\frac{\text{Total score per questionnaire items}}{\text{Total participants}} \text{ x } 100$$

Note:
The results of the calculation can be categorized as follows.
Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 – 25 %
Disagree (D) = 26 – 50%
Agree (A) = 51 – 75 %
Strongly Agree (SA) = 76 – 100 %

Meanwhile, the data from open-ended questions were analyzed to explore thematic similarities from all the participants' answers. All these data were triangulated, synthesized, and interpreted to answer research questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participants' profile

48 English teachers were involved in this study. The participants were various since the teachers came from different gender, levels of education (elementary, junior, and high/vocational school), teaching experiences, and educational degrees. The respondents' profile is presented in Diagram 1.
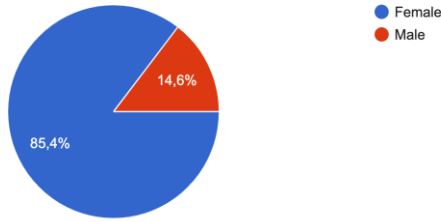
Gender
48 jawaban

Diagram 1. Participants' profile based on gender

From the diagram above, most of the participants were female. There were 41 female teachers and seven male teachers. Next, the diagram of school/institution background was presented in diagram 2 below.

School / Institution Background
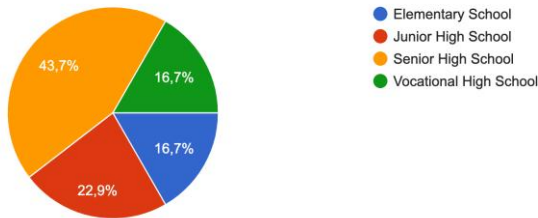48 jawaban

Diagram 2. Respondents' profile based on schools/institution backgrounds

Based on the diagram above, most of the teachers were coming from senior high school. There were 21 teachers from senior high school, 11 teachers from junior high school, and eight vocational and eight elementary school teachers. Then, the diagram of teaching experiences was presented below.
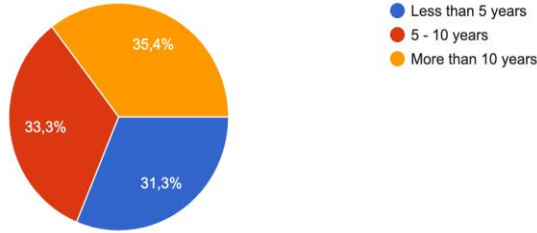
Years of Teaching Experiences
48 jawaban

Diagram 3. Respondents' profile based on teaching experiences

From the chart above, mainly the teachers had been working for more than ten years. Seventeen teachers have more than ten years of teaching experience. They can be categorized as senior teachers and have more experience in teaching and learning. Then it is found that 15 teachers for less than five years and 16 teachers for 5 – 10 years teaching experiences. Then, the diagram of educational degrees is presented in Diagram 4.
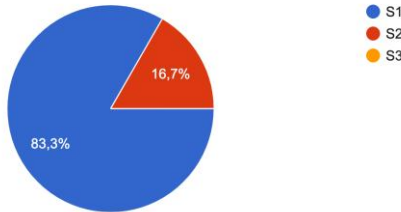
Educational Degree
48 jawaban

Diagram 4. Respondents' profile based on the educational degree

Diagram 4 revealed that most teachers held a bachelor's degree, which fulfills the minimum academic background for teaching in Indonesia. There were 40 teachers with bachelor's degrees and eight teachers with magister's degrees. It is revealed that teachers are aware of their professional teaching development.

Teachers' beliefs in learner autonomy

Based on the questionnaire data, it can be obtained the summary of participants' responses. The results of the teachers' beliefs on learner autonomy are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Teachers' beliefs in learner autonomy

No.	Statement	Percentage
1.	Independent study is an activity which develops learner autonomy	68,8 %
2.	Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks	81,3 %
3.	complete tasks	54,2 %
	Autonomy means that learners can make choices about their learning	
4.	choices about their learning	64,6 %
	Learning outside the classroom can develop learner autonomy	
5.	learner autonomy	56,3 %
	Learner autonomy can promote learners to be confident in learning English	
6.	be confident in learning English	37,5 %
	Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centered classrooms	
7.	teacher-centered classrooms	50%
	Learner-centered classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy	
8.	conditions for developing learner autonomy	47,9 %
	The teacher has an important role in supporting learner autonomy	
9.	supporting learner autonomy	64,6 %
	Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner	
10.	success as a language learner	70,8 %
	The ability in monitoring and evaluating are essential in fostering learner autonomy	

From the table above, it can be seen that all of the answers for each statement are varied. It indicates that the participants have different beliefs towards the concept of learner autonomy. A statement has a high percentage (81,3 %) which the participants believed that learner autonomy is promoted through regular

opportunities for learners to complete tasks. Moreover, the participants also agree with some statements. Firstly, the participants thought that monitoring and evaluating are essential in fostering learner autonomy (70,8 %). Secondly, the participants ensured that independent study is an activity that develops learner autonomy (68,8 %). Thirdly, the participants agree to learn outside the classroom can build learner autonomy (64,6 %). Fourthly, the participants believed that learner autonomy positively affects success as a language learner (64,6 %). Fifthly, the participants also believe that learner autonomy can promote learners' confidence in learning English (56,3 %). Lastly, the participants agreed that autonomy means that learners can make choices about their learning (54,2 %). However, the two statements have a lower percentage of 50 % in statement 7 and 37,5 % in statement 6. The participants did not convince that learner-centered classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy, and the concept of learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centered classrooms. In contrast with Jaiswal (2019) argued that a learner-centered instructional approach could enhance students' memory of vocabulary and foster learner autonomy.

Furthermore, based on the open-ended questions answers, most teachers agree that learner autonomy is needed in online classrooms. It can be seen from one of the participants' answers below.

"I agree that learner autonomy can be fostered by utilizing technology. The students get many learning resources and find any information related to the topic by themselves by using technology" (participant's answer)

From the statement above, the participants agreed that learner autonomy is essential. In line with Dickinson (1987), one of the desired characteristics of learners can monitor and evaluate their learning materials outside the classroom independently.

Besides, most participants agreed that utilizing technology can stimulate learners' critical thinking and become updated with the current development. It is in line with one of the participant's answers.

"Based on my personal opinion, technology is not helping to foster learner autonomy but also utilizing technology can develop students' mindset and students become high technological learners" (participants' answer)

Learner autonomy also can develop the cognitive level of the learners. In line with Benson (2001), it is stated that learner autonomy includes the monitor and self-management of the learning process. When students are aware of their learning goals, it will develop their cognitive levels and learning management. Moreover, the use of technology help learners to be an autonomous learner (Benson, 2001; Little, 2004).

Teachers' beliefs towards the utilization of technology to foster learner autonomy

The last discussion is about teachers' beliefs towards the utilization of technology to foster learner autonomy. The questionnaires' statement would analyze the teachers' beliefs and the practices to foster learner autonomy by utilizing technology. The results of questionnaire data will be presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Teachers' beliefs towards the utilize of technology to foster learner autonomy

No.	Statement	Percentage
1.	Technology can help teachers in teaching and learning process	71,4 %
2.	Online resources can help to find learning materials	65,3 %
3.	Apps or games can improve learners' motivation	53,1 %
4.	Apps or games can be used to evaluate learning progress	67,3 %
5.	Learners cannot be separated from the use of technology	44,9 %
6.	Technology can be used for self–regulated learning	67,3%
7.	Teaching and submitting assignments through e-learning apps	71,4 %
8.	Using technology for the successful online learning	53,1 %
9.	Involving students in choosing games/apps	69,4 %
10.	Utilizing technology in online classrooms can foster learner autonomy	73,5 %

From the table above, it can be seen that all of the participants have positive beliefs towards the utilize of technology to foster learner autonomy. It can be seen from all the statements got more than 50 %. It indicates that the participants agreed that the utilization of technology for fostering learner autonomy in online classrooms is needed. The participants also believed that the implementation of technology through social media (W*hatsApp group*), presentation tools (*PPT*), web-based online resources (*YouTube*), E-learning (*Google Classroom*), apps/games (*Kahoot*) could foster learner autonomy. It can be seen from table 2, utilizing technology in online classrooms can foster learner autonomy got the highest percentage which was 73,5 %. The participants also believed that teaching and submitting tasks through e-learning apps effectively in online classrooms (71,4 %). The participants acknowledged that technology could help teachers in teaching and learning process (71,4 %).

Moreover, based on the open-ended answers, the participants agreed that technology is helpful to engage students in distance learning, communicate with students outside the classrooms, and increase students' attention. It can be seen from the answers below.

> *"In my opinion, technology helps me conduct the class better and make it easier to check students' assignments. Furthermore, technology helps the teaching and learning process in the pandemic era, since most teaching is conducted online".*

In this pandemic situation, online learning is considered the best option to sustain the teaching and learning process. It is in line with Lengkanawati et al. (2021) stated that teachers and students are encouraged to conduct online from home by utilizing some relevant technology.

Most teachers use technology tools in online classrooms, such as *Google Classrooms, Zoom Meeting, Google Meet, Quizzes, WhatsApp, Kaizala, Wattpad,* etc. The answers from the participants support it

> *"In my online classrooms, I use zoom as the media for the meeting, PowerPoint as the explanation of the material, YouTube and Google as the additional explanation, quizzes to test students' understanding."*

The utilization of technology to support online learning is globally used due to the pandemic nowadays. Online learning is delivered synchronously or asynchronously. Synchronous classes

are conducted through the interaction of teachers and students by teleconference, for example, *Zoom Meeting, Google Meet, Skype* (Plaisance, 2018). Meanwhile, asynchronous gives flexibility for learners to do tasks anywhere using internet access within the flexible time parameter such as Learning Management System Applications (LMSs), such as *Google Classrooms, Schoology, Moodle, etc. Edmodo, Microsoft Teams* (Subekti, 2021). Online learning can be done using an instant messaging app such as *WhatsApp* (So, 2016) and through social media such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *Twitter* (Kumar & Nanda, 2019).

Besides the advantages of technology that teachers gain from technology utilization, some teachers encounter some challenges, particularly teachers who teach in a remote area. It can be seen from the answer below.

> *"When I am conducting my online teaching, some students do not have internet access even for mobile phone. So, the use of technology cannot be applied maximally."*

This statement is supported by Indrayana & Sadikin (2020) in their study, which revealed the struggle that students encounter when accessing online learning due to internet connectivity. Moreover, some students are not familiar with online learning applications.

Conclusion & recommendation

Based on the results of data analysis, the study revealed that most EFL teachers have positive beliefs of fostering learner autonomy by utilizing technology. The participants agreed learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks. Besides, the ability to monitor and evaluating are essential in promoting learner autonomy. Moreover, the participants also believed that technology could be utilized as a potential tool in online learning. They agreed because technology can help them to find learning materials, identify students learning characteristics.

Moreover, technology also helps the teacher to find suitable approaches in teaching. Using technology gives a chance for students to choose the specific topic and the difficulty they want.

In addition, some challenging factors were identified in fostering learner autonomy by utilizing technology, i.e., internet connection, poor device, and students lack the knowledge for using technology. Furthermore, some EFL teachers teach in remote areas, and students do not have internet access devices. There is a recommendation related to this study. There is a need for EFL teachers to get professional development of workshops on utilizing low bandwidth technology when connectivity is poor or reliable, particularly in a remote area. Also, a seminar on learner autonomy needs to be held since learner autonomy must be fostered in online learning. For further research, similar studies could investigate the EFL teachers' beliefs and the students' beliefs about understanding learner autonomy by utilizing technology.

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