

ELEMENTARY EFL TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES IN FOSTERING LEARNER AUTONOMY

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Abstract

Learner autonomy is essential in young learners' language development, yet its implementation remains limited at the elementary level, particularly in contexts rooted in teacher-centered traditions. This study examined the understanding of elementary EFL teachers and the strategies they use to foster learner autonomy in EYL classrooms in Indonesia, employing a sequential mixed-methods design. The study commenced with a survey of 34 teachers, followed by semi-structured interviews with four selected teachers. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze survey data, while thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts. The findings revealed that most teachers have a positive understanding of learner autonomy, with a particular emphasis on their role as facilitators and motivators. Teachers applied various strategies to foster autonomy, such as providing choice in learning activities and giving positive feedback. However, this positive orientation was contrasted by the presence of teacher skepticism regarding young learners' readiness for autonomy. These findings suggest that while the conceptual understanding of learner autonomy is present, its implementation still requires targeted professional development focusing on age-appropriate pedagogical scaffolding and practical tools to move teachers beyond conceptual understanding to consistent autonomous practice.

Keywords: *EFL teachers; learner autonomy; young learners.*

1. Introduction

Learner autonomy (LA), first conceptualized by Holec (1981) in the context of foreign language learning, refers to the learner's capacity to take control of their own learning; setting goals, choosing strategies, monitoring the process, and evaluating progress. Holec emphasizes that this capacity should be developed with expert guidance, not considered an innate trait. David Little (1991) positioned LA as the essential goal of all education, stating that LA is not a method of teaching, nor a luxury for a few, but rather a fundamental dimension of human development. In contemporary language education, LA is increasingly recognized not only as a pedagogical choice but as a normative goal that empowers learners to become reflective and self-regulating agents. This perspective aligns with a broader educational commitment to lifelong learning, in which learners cultivate the critical

awareness and adaptive capacity needed to navigate the ever-evolving linguistic and social demands outside the classroom.

LA, although often associated with adult learners, can also be developed in young learners (Little, Dam, & Legenhausen, 2017). However, English learning at the elementary level has distinctive challenges as children are still developing cognitively, socially, and metacognitively, making them highly dependent on clear direction and concrete activities. Short attention spans and the need to learn through games often encourage teachers to use a teacher-centered approach, even though children do show an early desire to make choices and negotiate (Pinter, 2011). In this context, fostering LA becomes increasingly important because early experiences in making decisions, managing simple tasks, and reflecting on the learning can shape long-term learning attitudes. However, children's developmental needs and their strong reliance on teacher guidance make implementing LA in EYL classrooms a complex process that requires carefully planned strategies and thoughtful scaffolding.

Examining LA in the context of EYL in Indonesia is relevant because of the pedagogical characteristics that have been going on for a long time. Learning in many primary schools was still dominated by a teacher-centered approach, while students are often placed as recipients of knowledge (Firmansyah & Jiwandono, 2022). In addition, the demands of standardized exams encouraged teachers to focus on accuracy, material completion, and hands-on teaching, rather than making room for student-led exploration (Ramadhani, 2017; Abdulah, 2017). Although the latest policy, the plan to return English as a compulsory subject in elementary schools starting from the 2027/2028 school year (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025), opens up strategic opportunities, many teachers do not yet have practical provisions to implement LA meaningfully. Teacher training programs were also still limited in providing practical strategies to foster LA in young learners (Mujahida & Rus'an, 2019). These conditions make Indonesia an important context for investigating how EYL teachers understand and apply LA in daily practice.

The implementation of LA in the classroom is also greatly influenced by teacher cognition, which encompasses teacher knowledge, beliefs, and experiences (Borg, 2003; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019). In addition, teachers' beliefs about students' ability to be autonomous greatly influence how they design learning activities (Intraboonsom, Darasawang, & Reinders, 2020; Ismail, Yunus, & Zahidi, 2020). In the Indonesian context, teachers' understanding of learner autonomy is still developing. Lengkanawati (2017) found that although many teachers were not yet familiar with the full concept of autonomy, those who had a clearer understanding emphasized that autonomy should not be equated with learning without a teacher. They interpret autonomy not as independent learning, but as giving students opportunities to choose or participate in decision-making. However, these conceptual understandings do not always translate into classroom practice, particularly within environments shaped by rigid curricula, time constraints, and limited methodological training. This discrepancy indicates a knowledge-practice gap that warrants deeper investigation.

Existing studies have investigated the methods or strategies for fostering LA in young learners (Hossain, Manzoor, & Hashmi, 2023; Suharto, Damayanti, & Lengkanawati, 2025; Yeh & Lan, 2018). Furthermore, studies by (Bhattarai, 2021; Nur Yusuf, 2021; Saraswati, Dasar Bosowa, Insani, & Bogor, 2019; Ya-Hui Chang, 2020) have examined teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in secondary level, then (Van Tuyen & Thi An, 2019) have explored learner autonomy practices and challenges at the tertiary level. While those studies have

identified teachers' beliefs about LA, there is a paucity of research that qualitatively explores the specific strategies used by elementary EFL teachers in Indonesia and investigates the factors underlying their skepticism regarding young learners' readiness for autonomy. Therefore, the study aims to examine the knowledge and practical strategies employed by elementary EFL teachers in Indonesia to foster LA and to provide a foundation for targeted professional development that moves beyond theoretical understanding to effective classroom scaffolding techniques.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Learner Autonomy Concept

Learner autonomy is defined by Holec (1981) as the ability to take responsibility for one's own learning. In the context of language learning, autonomy involves students' ability to set learning goals, select materials, and evaluate their learning outcomes (Benson, 2011). Holec emphasized that these abilities are not innate, but must be developed through formal mentorship and learning. Little (1991) then developed this concept by viewing LA as a psychological capacity that involves critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action in learning. LA is not just learning without a teacher, but a process in which learners are empowered to take control with the role of the teacher as a mentor and facilitator. This understanding establishes the ideal foundation that teachers should encourage in language learning.

2.2 Learner Autonomy in the Elementary EFL Context

The application of LA to early childhood demands a different approach from the adult context, given the characteristics of their cognitive and emotional development. According to Vygotsky's (1978) theory, children learn most effectively in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) the range between what they can do on their own and what they can achieve with the help of an adult or a more capable peer. Within this framework, autonomy is not something that arises naturally, but is built through scaffolding, that is, temporary support that is gradually reduced as the independence of the learner increases. The theories of Piaget (1970), Vygotsky (1986), and Bruner & Watson (1985) support this by emphasizing the importance of active interaction, scaffolding, and social guidance in building autonomy.

Experts such as (Pinter, 2011) and Little, Dam, & Legenhausen (2017) emphasized that autonomy needs to be introduced from an early age, as learning attitudes and habits formed from childhood are difficult to change in adolescence or adulthood. At the age of EYL (6–12 years), children are not yet able to fully manage learning, but they have the initial potential for autonomy such as the desire to make choices, express preferences, and negotiate (Pinter, 2011). Therefore, LA in EYL should be understood as guided independence, where the teacher plays the role of a facilitator who provides structure, limited choices, and reflective feedback. This approach does not contradict the child's natural dependence, but instead uses it as a starting point to cultivate learning responsibilities gradually.

2.3 Teacher Beliefs vs Classroom Practice in LA

A number of cross-contextual studies show a consistent pattern: EFL teachers widely recognize the importance of learner autonomy, but its application in the classroom remains limited. In Taiwan, teachers agreed that LA is important for lifelong learning and motivation,

but their actual practices, such as meaningful choice or student involvement in curriculum planning are minimal, mainly due to the pressures of exam-based curriculum and the perception that students are less motivated (Chang, 2020; Lin, 2024). Similar findings emerged in Iran, where university instructors valued LA as the foundation of learning responsibility, but were hesitant to implement it due to students' passive attitudes, low motivation, and strict curricular burdens (Mansooji et al., 2022). In Vietnam, although teachers used strategies such as self-assignment and group work, they faced significant obstacles from students' low language skills, extreme dependence on teachers, and a lack of training and resources to support LA (Van Tuyen & Thi An, 2019). In Indonesia, research at the secondary level also revealed that although teachers understand their role as facilitators, practices remain dominated by a teacher-centric approach due to a learning culture that emphasizes obedience, large class sizes, and a lack of practical training opportunities (Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati, 2019). Collectively, these findings underscore that the gap between belief and practice is not the failure of individual teachers, but rather the result of a complex interaction between student factors (motivation, readiness, dependency), institutional factors (rigid curriculum, exam pressure), and professional factors (lack of concrete pedagogical models for implementing LA early and contextually). External factors such as dense curriculum pressures, large class sizes, and a lack of resources reduce the space for pedagogical experimentation. Internal factors such as doubts about student readiness, teacher-centered teaching habits, or lack of confidence in designing autonomous activities are also significant barriers (Borg, 2003; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019).

2.4 Teachers' Role in Fostering Learner Autonomy

Teachers can encourage student autonomy in a number of ways, such as: Giving pupils a choice, letting them select a project or activity. Cooperation: Promoting shared accountability through group projects. Using technology: Promoting self-directed learning using digital resources like online learning environments or language learning applications (Reinders & White, 2011).

2.4.1 Providing Choice

Based on Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), giving learners choice reinforces a sense of psychological autonomy, which in turn increases intrinsic motivation. In EYL, the choice can be choosing a project topic, work partner, or type of activity (e.g. coloring vs. singing). Pinter (2011) shows that children respond positively to control over the learning process, as long as the choices are clear and relevant.

2.4.2 Effective Feedback

Feedback that supports LA is not only correction from teachers, but also mechanisms that encourage self-reflection such as self-correction or peer-correction. By accustoming students to evaluate their own work (e.g. through a simple checklist), teachers instill metacognitive skills that are essential for autonomy (Little, 1991).

2.4.3 Scaffolding Techniques

Early childhood scaffolding for LA involves three principles: (1) providing clear models (e.g., examples of how to set simple goals), (2) providing gradual support (e.g., visual or verbal guidance), and (3) slowly shifting responsibility to the student (Wood, Bruner, & Ross,

1976). This strategy allows children to "try" independence in a safe and structured environment.

Then the approaches that can be applied in the classroom are: The first is a resource-based approach by providing opportunities for students to learn independently through interaction with various learning resources, both physical, human, and digital. This approach is more effective and suitable for those who already have a high level of autonomy. Next, the student-based approach aims to provide direct skills to students so that they can manage their own learning. Then the classroom-based approach prioritizes student involvement in planning and evaluating learning in the classroom, which has been proven effective when supported by collaboration and assistance from teachers. Furthermore, the curriculum-based approach gives students more freedom to control their learning, but its success depends on the support of structures that help them in decision making. Finally, the teacher-based approach emphasizes the importance of changes in the role of teachers in supporting student autonomy, where teachers must have skills and commitment to the idea of autonomy. Teacher education programs that integrate direct experience and reflection on autonomy strategies as students and teachers can increase the effectiveness of this approach. Overall, the effectiveness of each approach depends heavily on student readiness, teacher support, and existing learning structures (Benson, 2011).

Overall, the literature confirms that LA is an important goal in language education, that its implementation in EYL requires ZPD-based scaffolding, and that teachers often face tensions between ideal beliefs and practical realities, especially in contexts with teacher-centered teaching traditions such as Indonesia. While numerous studies document the LA-practice gap globally, a detailed mixed-methods investigation into the specific interplay between teachers' conceptual knowledge, their expressed skepticism, and their observed strategies within the elementary EFL context in Indonesia remains necessary. This study addresses that gap by providing context-specific empirical data.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a Sequential Mixed-Methods Design where a quantitative phase (survey) is conducted first to obtain an overview of the teacher's knowledge and belief in LA, which then informs the selection of participants for the qualitative phase (in-depth interview). This design was chosen because the survey allowed researchers to identify variations in knowledge levels and practices among a number of teachers, while interviews allowed for an in-depth exploration of the reasons behind the gap between knowledge and practice, including doubts about early childhood readiness to learn autonomously. The integration of these two phases strengthens the validity of the findings through methodological triangulation.

3.2 Research Participants

The research was conducted mostly in the West Sumatra area. Participants came from more than 10 public and private elementary schools, and were teachers who have direct experience in teaching young learners. There were 34 elementary English teachers involved in completing the questionnaires, 28 females and 6 males. Only 2 participants have teaching experience of more than 4 years, and 32 participants have teaching experience in

the range 0-4 years. All participants held a bachelor's degree. Out of these, 4 teachers were purposively selected for in-depth semi-structured interviews based on their questionnaire responses and willingness to participate further.

Group 1 (N = 34): Consisting of 34 elementary English teachers (28 females, 6 males) selected through convenience sampling, taking into account accessibility and willingness to participate. The average teaching experience is 0-4 years, and the average class size is 15-25 students per class. All participants have a minimum educational background of S1, mostly in the field of English Language Education.

Group 2 (n = 4): Four teachers were selected from the survey group through purposive sampling, based on different response patterns in the questionnaire:

Teacher A: High score on knowledge and practice

Teacher B: High score on knowledge, but low on practice

Teacher C: Moderate score on knowledge and practice

Teacher D: Scores moderately on both aspects, but expresses explicit doubts about early childhood readiness for autonomy

This selection allows for an exploration of the variety of perspectives and reasons behind the implementation (or non-applicability) of LA in the EYL class.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument and Procedures

Data collection was carried out in two stages using the following instruments:

Survey (Quantitative Phase): The survey consisted of Likert-scale items assessing teachers' conceptual knowledge of Learner Autonomy (LA) and their self-reported frequency of LA-promoting practices. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: (1) demographic data; (2) 10 items for teachers' knowledge about learner autonomy, adapted from (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Seddiq, 2019), and (3) 13 items for the strategy that teachers apply in promoting learner autonomy constructed by Seddiq (2019). Section two was slightly modified to suit the context of young learners. The questionnaire was administered online using Google Form.

Semi-Structured Interview (Qualitative Phase): Based on questionnaire responses, a subset of teachers was selected for semi-structured interviews using an interview guide adapted from Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012). The four selected teachers were interviewed online for 15-20 minutes. The interview guide covers four thematic areas: (1) Knowledge of Learner Autonomy (2) Perceptions of early childhood readiness for autonomous learning, (3) Specific examples of strategies used to encourage LA, (4) External and internal barriers in fostering learner autonomy. Interviews were conducted individually, either via video call or chat/audio, depending on participants' availability, and with their informed consent. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative Data: Survey data were analyzed using SPSS version 21. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to summarize the level of knowledge and frequency of LA practice among the 34 teachers. These results became the basis for the selection of interview participants. Qualitative Data: Interview transcripts were analyzed through Miles and Huberman model approach. The process includes: (1) data reduction, (2) data display, (3) conclusion drawing/verification. Data Integration: Qualitative findings are used to explain and deepen quantitative patterns.

3.5 Trustworthiness

To ensure the reliability and credibility of the research, several trustworthiness strategies are implemented: Methodological triangulation: The combination of quantitative and qualitative data reinforces the validity of the findings. Member checking: A summary of the interview findings is shared back with all four participants to verify the accuracy of the interpretation. Anonymity: All participants, especially the four interview teachers, were coded (Teachers A–D); The name of the school and specific location were not disclosed. Informed consent: Written consent is obtained from all participants after a full explanation of their objectives, procedures, and right to withdraw at any time.

4. Results and Discussion

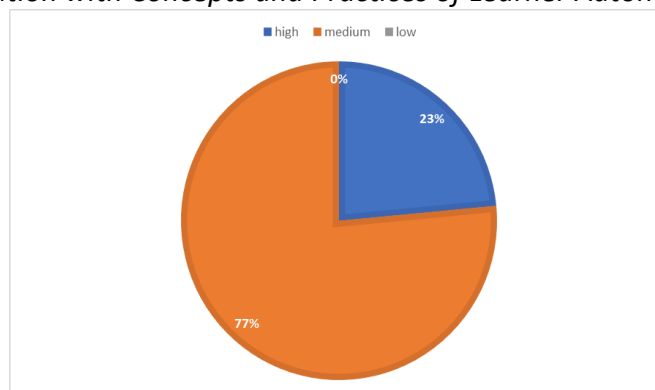
This section presents and discusses the research findings regarding teachers' knowledge and practices of learner autonomy in EYL classrooms derived from surveys and semi-structured interviews. Findings are organized thematically to highlight key patterns, tensions, and pedagogical implications.

4.1 Teachers' Familiarization with Concepts and Practices of Learner Autonomy

Figure 1 below reveals the proportion of teachers' knowledge and practices levels regarding learner autonomy in EYL classrooms, categorized into high, medium, and low.

Figure 1

Teachers' Familiarization with Concepts and Practices of Learner Autonomy



A combined analysis of knowledge and practice scores (Figure 1) revealed that 77% teachers demonstrated high levels of understanding and application of LA, while 23% teachers showed moderate levels and none scored low. This indicated a generally strong foundational awareness of LA among participants, though implementation depth varies.

4.2 Teachers' Knowledge about Learner Autonomy

Table 1 showed the descriptive statistic for the responses in section 1 of the questionnaire.

Table 1

Teachers' knowledge about learner autonomy

Questionnaire Item	Mean	SD	Rank
The importance of teachers' role in supporting LA	3.62	.493	1
Evaluating learning by students enhances LA	3.50	.615	2
Developing LA at early age facilitates future language learning	3.44	.613	3

Using learning resources (library, internet) develops LA	3.35	.597	4
LA can be applied within the current educational system	3.32	.638	5
Learners' confidence enhances LA	3.29	.836	6
Setting learning goals by students enhances LA	3.29	.719	7
Co-operative group work supports LA	3.26	.567	8
Learning strategies are a crucial feature of developing LA	3.26	.567	9
Choosing activities by students enhances LA	3.18	.716	10
LA allows language learners to learn more effectively	3.00	.778	11
Learning to work alone is central to developing LA	2.94	.832	12
It is easier to promote LA in children than in adults	2.71	.790	13

The quantitative findings from the questionnaire revealed that elementary EFL teachers generally possessed a moderate to high level of understanding regarding learner autonomy. Following are the three highest scores:

a. Understanding Teacher's Role

This was further supported by interview data, as explained by T1 "without a teacher who provides motivation and direction for learner autonomy, a students' learner autonomy will not work". A similar opinion was expressed by T4 "children still do not know how to learn well, the right strategies, that is where the teacher's role is".

These viewpoints align with Little's (1991) argument that autonomy does not imply learning devoid of a teacher, but rather a process in which the learner is empowered to assume control, with the teacher serving as a guide and facilitator. The teacher's role in demonstrating solutions, providing scaffolding for tasks, and cultivating a supportive environment is essential, especially for young learners (Dam, 1994). In addition, it resonated with findings from Lengkanawati (2017) study in Indonesian EFL contexts, where teachers similarly rejected the notion of autonomy as teacher-independent learning and emphasized scaffolding as essential.

The pattern mirrors findings in Taiwan (Chan, 2001) and Saudi Arabia (Seddiq, 2019) where teachers similarly believed autonomy requires structured teacher facilitation. However, unlike those contexts, Indonesian teachers in this study place stronger emphasis on emotional support and modelling strategies, suggesting an emerging culturally responsive understanding.

b. Early Development and Self-Evaluation

Based on the interview, T1 stated, "they will summarize what they like and what they have just learned, and the mistakes they often make". The similar idea shared by T4 "by giving the feedback, the students are invited to reflect and evaluate their work".

These align with Little's (1991) notion of autonomy, which incorporates learner reflection as a fundamental component. It also aligns with Benson (2011), prompting learners to evaluate their own development fosters accountability and a sense of ownership regarding their educational experience. The emphasis on student self-evaluation resonates strongly with Yusof (2021) in Malaysia, where 87.5% endorsed self-evaluation as essential. This cross-national similarity suggests a regional pedagogical trend that views metacognitive engagement, not just taking independence, as the core of autonomy in the ASEAN EFL context.

c. Early Introduction of Learner Autonomy

Teachers explained the importance of fostering learner autonomy since young learners, as T1 shared "... by creating learner autonomy since elementary school, it will make it easier for students in the learning process in the next stage because they have recognized their learning style early on which can make it easier to absorb the information given by the teacher". Similarly, T3 mentioned "the importance of fostering autonomous learning for elementary school students is very influential in their learning process. The results they will get from fostering autonomous learning can help the learning process and achieve the goals they want to achieve." While T4 emphasized "in my opinion, it is very important because students need to learn to be confident and not depend on others or teachers".

This corresponds with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): young learners can perform beyond their independent level as long as adequate scaffolding is provided. Yusof (2021) findings corroborated this perspective, emphasizing three primary benefits of early autonomy: assisting learners in recognizing their learning preferences, fostering confidence, and promoting sustained academic achievement. The teachers' acknowledgment of these advantages indicates a transition towards more learner-centered methodologies in elementary language courses.

d. Hesitation About Age and Autonomy

Although this was the lowest-rated item, interviews revealed productive skepticism rather than rejection. The teacher assessed that elementary school students were not ready to learn independently because they were still very dependent on instruction and guidance. This can be seen from T2 and T3 statement, "most elementary school students still need guidance... They're used to being told what to do." T4 explained that elementary school students are generally not able to show learner autonomy because they have not been able to determine what they want to learn, monitor the learning process, choose methods, or evaluate themselves. As said, "how can elementary school children learn on their own... Except for grades 5/6, but the ones below seem not to be," although they can be directed to be independent in doing assignments with many examples and guidance.

The main obstacles include students' need for many examples, additional explanations, and limited study time. T3 said "learners need more examples and explanations... Time is also often an obstacle." T2 reinforced "the obstacles are a lack of motivation and limited time". Then, T2 believed that learner autonomy is important but it is difficult to realize in practice because of the demands in completing the material.

These findings are in line with cross-contextual studies showing that teachers in various settings in Taiwan (Lin, 2024; Chang, 2020), Iran (Mansooji et al., 2022), Vietnam (Van Tuyen & Thi An, 2019), and Indonesia (Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati, 2019) which consistently recognized the value of learner autonomy, but doubted the readiness of young students to apply it independently. Teacher skepticism about young learners' readiness for autonomy can be understood using Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This theory suggests learners move from dependence to autonomy by receiving appropriately scaffolded support. Skepticism arises not because LA is inherently impossible for young learners, but because teachers lack strategies to scaffold autonomy effectively for this developmental stage. Teachers recognize the ideal of LA but are uncertain how to translate it into practice without practical scaffolding techniques.

4.3 Teachers' Beliefs about their Promoting Role of Learner Autonomy in EYL Classrooms

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for the sample responses in section 2 of the questionnaire.

Table 2

Teachers' Beliefs about their Promoting Role of Young Language Learner Autonomy in the Classroom

LA Practices	Promoting	Item Description	Mean	SD	Ranking
Communication and collaborative learning		Using authentic materials to stimulate verbal communication	3.47	.563	1
Making decisions		Involving students in deciding on classroom rules	3.38	.739	2
Safe environment		Giving positives feedback and focusing on achievement	3.35	.734	3
Setting goals		Helping students identify their levels, needs, and interests	3.35	.646	4
Safe environment		Raising students' awareness of time and practice required for language learning	3.15	.744	5
Making decisions		Giving students a list of options to choose among	3.15	.558	6
Independent learning		Teaching study skills and language learning strategies	3.15	.744	7
Reflection		Asking students reflective questions about their learning process	3.12	.686	8
Independent learning		Referring students to external resources (websites, apps, books)	3.03	.790	9
Making decisions		Involving students to create their materials and self-access center	3.00	.953	10

Table 2 revealed that elementary EFL teachers generally possessed a moderate to high level of beliefs about their promoting role of young language learner autonomy. All statements have an average above 3.00 (3.00 to 3.47), indicating that respondents generally support strategies that promote student independence.

4.3.1 High Frequency Strategies

1) Using authentic materials

Teachers frequently use videos, songs, and real-life materials. According to the interviews, T1 mentioned "i use videos and songs to avoid boredom and keep students interested".

This technique corresponds with Benson (2011) focus on utilizing authentic resources to augment learner motivation and communicative competence, two essential elements of learner autonomy. The frequent use of songs and videos in this study aligns with Yuzulia & Yusuf (2019) observation that Indonesian teachers most commonly recommend listening to English songs and practicing with friends as out of class autonomous activities.

2) Involving students in decision-making processes

Teachers involve learners in rule-making or choosing activities. T1 remarked, "I invite students to make rules in class, and they agree on the rules together. I try to give students the freedom to choose the topics they want to learn", T3 also mentioned "I give the list of options to choose by the students, like storytelling or singing". However, T4 expressed selective involvement: "I do not involve students in making rules, but I provide them with a list of activities, there are some activities to choose among, such as storytelling, drawing, or writing, whatever they like".

Holec (1981) conceptualized learner autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's own learning, which includes making decisions about learning objectives, content, methods, and evaluation. Offering learners choices directly supports this principle by enabling them to participate in decision-making processes and exercise control over aspects of their learning. Allowing students to participate in pedagogical decisions and co-create classroom norms represents a change from teacher-centered to learner-centered instruction, encouraging independence in a controlled setting. Furthermore, Yusof (2021) discovered that students are more likely to be involved and self-assured in their own learning when they are given choices and responsibilities. Thus, the information indicates that even at the elementary school level, giving kids options and involving them.

3) Providing positive, constructive feedback

Teachers use supportive feedback to build independent learning in students. T1 provided praise, such as "good job" or "well done", to increase students' motivation, and provided constructive feedback when students made mistakes without directly providing answers or solutions. Likewise, T4 added "if they are wrong, I still give good feedback, like 'you are almost right'", T3 added "given rewards and small notes or stars, the more rewards there are, the more pride there is, and it makes students more enthusiastic in learning".

Little (1991) underscores that autonomy develops through reflective engagement, where learners actively monitor and evaluate their learning. Constructive feedback plays a crucial role in this process, as it guides learners in identifying strengths, addressing weaknesses, and making informed adjustments thereby strengthening their capacity for self-regulation. This encouraged the development of self-regulation and resilience, both critical components of autonomous learning (Ahmed & Hossain, 2024). Teachers provide affective support to enhance learner motivation, using strategies like verbal encouragement and goal-setting. This supportive feedback fostered self-confidence and encouraged students to take responsibility for their learning, ultimately contributing to the development of learner autonomy (Işık & Balçikanlı, 2020)

The need for emotive support in fostering learner autonomy is continuously emphasized by research. Işık & Balçikanlı (2020) For example, contended that goal-setting and verbal support increase learner motivation and foster a sense of responsibility for learning. According to Maulana & Singh (2023) Teachers in Indonesia were crucial in encouraging autonomy in their students by keeping an eye on them, evaluating them, and providing them with constructive criticism. This helps students become more self-assured, critical, and self-directed in their English language study. Furthermore, Jiang, Vauras, Volet, Salo, & Kajamies (2019) stressed that recognizing students' emotional states and offering justifications increases their level of participation and strengthens their sense of autonomy.

4.3.2 Emerging or Limited Practices

Teachers hesitate to involve young learners, T4 stated, "I never ask the students to make their learning materials, because they are still young". Additionally, T4 expressed skepticism about the young learners' capabilities, asserting that an educator must be knowledgeable about things that align with the students' needs. A little bit different insight from T1: "I ask students to find small examples, like 'I like bananas.'"

These responses reveal that while teachers acknowledge the value of student involvement in learning, many remain hesitant to fully implement autonomy-supportive practices such as material development or self-access centers, particularly at the elementary level. This hesitation is not uncommon; as Benson (2011) notes, the implementation of learner autonomy must be adapted to learners' age and developmental stage. For young learners, full independence in designing materials may indeed be unrealistic, but limited involvement, such as contributing examples or choosing content, can serve as a scaffold toward autonomy (Reinders & White, 2011). Additionally, Dam (1995) argues that even minimal participation in classroom decision-making fosters a sense of responsibility and ownership, gradually building the learners' capacity to work independently. The difference in approaches between T4 and T1 highlights the varying levels of confidence and readiness among teachers in integrating autonomy-supportive strategies in early language education.

Overall, the findings indicate that elementary EFL teachers hold moderately to highly supportive beliefs regarding their role in promoting learner autonomy, and they implement several practical strategies that reflect these beliefs. Although some variation exists in the extent to which teachers apply autonomy-supportive practices, particularly in areas like involving students in creating materials, many demonstrate a growing awareness of how to adapt autonomy principles to the developmental needs of young learners. These practices are aligned with established research, suggesting that autonomy can be nurtured through scaffolding, choice, and emotional support. The observed gaps and hesitations also signal areas where further professional development could strengthen teacher confidence and capacity in fostering learner autonomy more comprehensively at the primary level.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that EFL teachers at the elementary school level in Indonesia generally have a positive and adequate understanding of learners' autonomy and apply various strategies to encourage their development in the classroom. Teachers widely recognize LA as a valuable goal, affirm their role as facilitators and routinely employ supportive practices such as using authentic materials, offering limited choices and providing positive feedback. However, there are still doubts among some teachers about the readiness of early childhood students to become autonomous learners, especially in practices that demand high levels of independence, such as creating their own teaching materials or managing independent learning resources. This bridges the observed knowledge-practice gap, revealing that the core challenge lies not in belief, but in pedagogical capacity.

The unique contribution of this research is its empirical grounding for urgent reform in Indonesian teacher education. It provides clear evidence that current pre-service and in-service professional development (PD) programs overemphasize theoretical definitions of LA while neglecting the demonstration and practice of concrete, manageable techniques suited to early childhood learners. To address this, the curriculum and PD frameworks must be overhauled to shift focus from what LA is to how to scaffold LA in grade 1-6 classrooms.

Finally, this study has certain limitations. The qualitative component involved only four interview participants, which constrains the generalizability of the findings, particularly regarding the prevalence and nature of teacher skepticism. Future research should involve:

1. Large-scale quantitative surveys to assess how widespread these beliefs and practices are across diverse Indonesian regions.
2. Longitudinal intervention studies that evaluate the effectiveness of newly designed teacher training programs focusing on scaffolding-based autonomy instruction.

Such future work would deepen the understanding of how learner autonomy can be sustainably developed in Indonesian EYL classrooms and provide stronger empirical grounding for national-level pedagogical reforms.

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