

# **INDONESIAN TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT FOSTERING LEARNER AUTONOMY IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL EFL CLASSROOM**

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**ABSTRACT:** This presentation reports on a study that aimed to explore English language teachers' beliefs about fostering learner autonomy in the Indonesian secondary school classroom. The project was quantitative in nature and gathered data from 36 teachers. The teachers came from state schools located in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia. The quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire designed by Borg and Al Busaidi (2012), who had employed it in their own study in Oman. The instrument focused on teacher beliefs about learner autonomy and categorized them into technical, psychological, political and social perspectives. Additionally, the questionnaire aimed at investigating teacher views about the desirability and feasibility of involving EFL learners in making decisions regarding the teaching-learning process. The gathered data were analyzed statistically. The findings revealed that Indonesian teachers felt positive about promoting learner autonomy in their classrooms. The study also found that the level of desirability of involving learners in the decision-making process was higher than the level of feasibility.

**KEYWORDS:** Learner autonomy, teacher beliefs, EFL secondary school classroom.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Much has been reported about fostering LA in EFL classroom context. Some of the research are dealing with the use of new approaches in promoting LA in language learning (Illes, 2012; Smith & Craig, 2013; Levy, 2014; Yagcioglu, 2015). Unlike the former research findings focusing on the use of new approaches, Batyra's (2016) study points out that some potential difficulties of introducing autonomy in which LA is still considered taboo issue in Polish education context. The practice of LA is also reported from China. Wang & Wang' findings (2016) report that teachers understood the basic features of LA and to some extent said they implemented LA in their teaching practices. Some research publications are also reported dealing with teachers' beliefs and practices in Asian language learning context. Borg and Al Busaidi (2012a) conducted a research on teachers' beliefs and practices about LA at the language centre of Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. Their research findings reveals that 93,4 percent teachers believe that LA has positive effect on the success of language learners.

Borg & Al Busaidi (2012b) then developed their questionnaires based on the initial universal definition of learner autonomy suggested by Holec (1981:3), that is, LA is defined as the ability to take responsibility for all language course decisions including determining the learning objectives, defining the content and progressions, selecting methods, monitoring the procedure of acquisition and evaluating what has been acquired. Borg and Al Busaidi's questionnaires on teachers' beliefs and practices on LA have been widely used by some Asian researchers (Nguyen, 2016; Wang & Wang, 2016; Keuk & Heng, 2016; Haji Othman & Wood, 2016; Tapinta, 2016; Lengkanawati, 2016) pointing out some optimistic as well as pessimistic of language teachers's on promoting LA in language teaching and learning. In Vietnam education context, Nguyen (2016) states that some aspects of LA may not be feasible. In particular, the teachers showed a lack of trust in their students' ability to take charge of their own learning. On the contrary, in Thailand, Tapinta' findings (2016) suggest that the participants were knowledgeable and had positive attitudes in promoting LA in language teaching and learning.

Various perceptions appear concerning how to foster LA in secondary EFL classroom. When LA is introduced in Indonesia, teachers are hardly familiar with the term of LA (Lengkanawati, 2016). She explains that the teachers consider autonomy as learning without a teacher. In this case, Esch (1998:37) emphasizes that LA is NOT self-instruction/learning without teacher, something teachers do to learners (e.g. new methodology), a single easily identifiable behaviour, and a steady state achieved by learners once and for all. Therefore, teachers must attempt to shift their mindset by making learners to be more independent learners.

This research project on LA is considered essential as the findings would provide insight as well as recommendation to the policy makers, particularly minister of education, to follow up the research findings by holding seminars, workshops, or teacher trainings on LA. This research project also supports Indonesian national curriculum in which teachers are supposed to foster students to become autonomous learners by having the 21st century skills such as creative, productive, critical, independent, collaborative and communicative thinking skills (Minister Decree No 20, 2016). Autonomous learning which has the idea of learning how to learn would equip the learners with lifelong learning skills. It is supported by a research finding conducted by Yurdakul (2017) which shows that autonomous learning has a positive interaction with lifelong learning. Finally, the investigation of teachers' beliefs about fostering LA would enrich the literature of LA in Indonesian educational context.

Regarding the fact that language teachers in Indonesia are not yet familiar with the concepts of LA and limited literature is reported regarding teachers' beliefs on LA, it is important to conduct a study about teachers' beliefs, desirability and feasibility of fostering LA in Indonesian secondary classroom. The aims of the research is to describe the Indonesian EFL teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in the EFL classroom and to know how desirable and feasible the teachers feel it is to promote learner autonomy.

## **2. METHODS**

In conducting the research, survey research design was applied. It involved 40 EFL secondary school teachers attending one-day 'Best Practices' English teachers' workshop in Surabaya state university, East Java, Indonesia. Out of the 40 questionnaires distributed, the researcher only got 36 questionnaires completely filled in. The questionnaires were then analysed statistically by using descriptive statistics in the form frequency counts and percentages. The reports are then presented in the form of tables of frequency based on four categories, that is, technical, psychological, political and social categories.

Regarding the instruments used, the researcher applied questionnaires developed by Borg and Al Busaidi (2012b) to collect the data. They are chosen because they are well-designed based on LA principles and have been used by researchers in many different context in Asian countries. The questionnaires consist of two sections. The first section is in the form of 37-Likert scale items on five-point scale of agreement addressing the concepts of LA, while in the second section, the focus is on the teachers' view about desirability and feasibility of involving learners in making decisions on various learning activities.

## **3. RESULTS**

### **A. Teachers' Beliefs about LA**

In this study, teachers' beliefs are categorized into four parts: technical, psychological, political, and social perspective (Borg & Al Busaidi, 2012b). In technical aspect, it includes learning facilities such as the use of library, internet, and self-access centre. Factors such as age group, motivation, confidence and learning effectiveness are classified into psychological aspect. While in political category, it covers items which are connected to freedom, choices, decision making, and teacher-centeredness. At last, social category has something to do with cultural backgrounds, collaboration and western-non western issues.

#### **Technical Perspective**

No	Statements	Disagree %	Unsure %	Agree %
1	Independent study in the library is an activity which develops LA.	0	13,9	86.1
2	LA can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom.	5,6	16,7	77.7
3	LA is promoted by independent work in a self-access centre.	2,8	19,4	77.8
4	Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote LA.	0	13,9	86.2

Table 1. Technical Perspective of LA

From table 1, teachers show their strong agreement that students who perform activities in the library seems to have great potential to become independent learners (86.1%). Library is considered appropriate to be used by teachers to assign their students to do out-of-class tasks which require learners to read books as well as to use internet. Internet access which mostly available in the library provides all the information needed by the students for the purpose of accomplishment of their learning tasks. In this case, teachers feel that the use of

internet for learning significantly promotes LA (86.2%). Additionally, teachers are convinced that giving the students outdoor activities will enable students to be more autonomous (77.7%). Students will experience new things when they are exposed with new learning environment outside the classroom. Similar to learning beyond the classroom, teachers also feel positive that independent work in self access centre will give great influences to learners to promote learner autonomy (77.8%).

**Psychological Perspective**

No	Statements	Disagree %	Unsure %	Agree %
1	Language learners of all ages can develop LA.	8.3	16.7	75
2	LA means learning without a teacher.	38.9	27.8	33.4
3	It is possible to promote LA with both young language learners and with adults.	8.3	8.3	83.4
4	LA requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher.	27.8	25	47.2
5	Learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing LA.	2.8	8.3	88.9
6	The ability to monitor one’s learning is central to LA.	2.8	16.7	80.6
7	Motivated language learners are more likely to develop LA than learners who are not motivated.	2.8	13.9	83.3
8	LA has a positive effect on success as a language learner.	0	5.6	94.4
9	To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	0	11.1	88.9

Table 2. Psychological Perspective of LA

In spite of showing uncertainty in the development of LA, items in psychological aspect mostly gives positive notions in the development of LA (Table 2). Most teachers agreed that language learners of all ages could develop LA (75%). However, when it is specified into young and adult learners, teachers are more convinced (83.4%) that LA could develop more effectively for young language learner. Teachers are also convinced that LA will develop well if learner centered classroom is applied in the classroom management (88.9%). The indication of the development of LA is determined by learners’ ability to control their learning (80.6%), and to evaluate their learning progress (88.9%). In this case, learners must show high motivation (83.3%) in order to develop learner autonomy. In contrast, teachers are still doubtful whether LA means learning without teacher or not (27.8%). This uncertainty is supported with the teachers’ beliefs that LA requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher (25%). Above all, most teachers agree (94.4%) that LA has a positive effect on the success of language learner.

**Political Perspective**

No	Statements	Disagree %	Unsure %	Agree %
1	Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn.	0	2.8	97.2
2	Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes LA.	0	11.1	88.9
3	LA is promoted when learners have some choices in the kinds of activities they do.	11.1	8.3	80.5
4	LA is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other.	2.8	0	97.2
5	LA cannot develop without the help of the teacher.	33.3	38.9	27.8
6	LA is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed.	2.8	16.7	80.6
7	LA is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials.	5.6	19.4	75

Table 3. Political Perspective of LA

Political category is perceived the most vital element to characterize the development of LA (Table 3). Most language teachers agreed that autonomy means learners can make choices about what to learn (88.9), how they learn (97.2%), and what activities they want to do (80.5%). Additionally, learners also have the

opportunities to learn from each other (97.2%), and have freedom to decide how their learning will be assessed (80.6%). In contrast, teachers still unsure (38.9%) whether LA could develop without the help of teachers or not(33.3%).

**Social Perspective**

No	Statements	Disagree %	Unsure %	Agree %
1	LA can be achieved by learners of all cultural backgrounds.	2,8	13,9	83,3
2	LA is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together.	13,9	13,9	72,3
3	LA is a concept which is not suited to non-Western learners.	41,6	33,3	25
4	Cooperative group work activities support the development of LA.	2,8	2,8	94,5
5	Learning to work alone is central to the development of LA.	16,7	36,1	47,2

Table 4. Social Perspective of LA

The last is social aspect (Table 4). Here, teachers agreed that LA could be practiced by learners of all cultural backgrounds (83.3%). However, when the discussion goes further in terms of western and non western issue, teachers are doubtful (33.3%) whether the concept of LA is applicable or not for eastern learners. This gives implication that teachers are not convinced whether the skills of LA could be applied in Indonesian educational context. Based on teacher’s perception, activities that encourage learners to work together and cooperative group work activities are believed to promote LA showing significant rate (72.3%) and (94.5%) respectively.

**B. Desirability and Feasibility**

The results of the questionnaire concerning the teachers’ desirability in involving learners in a range of language course decisions are shown as follows:

No	Statements	Desirability		Feasibility	
		Undesirable	Desirable	Unfeasible	Feasible
Learners are involved in decision about:		%			
1	The objectives of a course	22.2	77.8	30.5	69.5
2	The materials used	13.9	86.1	25	75
3	The kinds of tasks and activities they do	11.1	88.9	16.7	83.3
4	The topics discussed	16.7	83.4	25	75
5	How learning is assessed	5.6	94.5	13.9	86.1
6	The teaching methods used	11.1	88.9	22.2	77.8
7	Classroom management	2.8	97.3	22.2	77.8

Table 5. Teachers’ Desirability and Feasibility

In all cases (see Table 5), teachers were positive about involving learners in a range of language course decisions. First of all, teachers are quite desirable to involve learners in determining the objective of the course (77.8%). Concerning the use of materials, teachers are desirable to give freedom for the students to select their own materials (86.1%) which enhance the students’ motivation to learn. Teachers also show their high desirability in involving learners to choose their own tasks and activities (88.9%), select their own topics to be discussed (83.4%) and choose their own methods of learning (88.9%). The highest percentage of teachers’ desirability is involving learners to assess their own learning progress (94.5%) and involving learners to determine the kinds of classroom management the learners like (97.3%).

Like the results of teachers’ desirability of fostering LA in the classroom, teachers also show their positive responses regarding the feasibility of involving learners in a range of language course decisions. Student involvement in decision making was seen to be most feasible in relation to the kinds of task and activities (83.3%) and the procedure how learning is assessed (86.1%). The feasibility in involving learners to determine the format of classroom management has the same rate as to determine the teaching methods used by learners (77.8%). This also happens in case of involving learners to choose the materials and topics to be discussed (75%). In terms of determining the objectives of the course, although teachers view it is still feasible, the percentage is the lowest among other aspects of feasibility (69.5%).

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

##### **Teachers' Beliefs about LA**

Like many other research findings (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012a, 2012b; Chan, 2003; Joshi, 2011; Nguyen, 2016), EFL teachers in Indonesia acknowledged the value of LA in language learning. However, teachers' viewpoint are greatly influenced by their understanding towards national curriculum. The curriculum has mandated EFL teachers to equip the students with the 21st century skills such as creative, productive, critical, independent, collaborative and communicative thinking skills (Minister Decree No 20, 2016). Among four categories of teachers' beliefs about LA (technical, psychological, political, social), teachers are merely convinced about technical aspect which could develop LA in language learning.

In technical perspective, most teachers believe that learning activities in the library could promote LA effectively. Library provides a quiet and safe place for self study. Learners could carry out many activities such as finding literature of research, reading books, writing essay or doing school task independently. Similar to the function of library, self access centre provides great opportunities for learners to perform LA behaviors in using technology. The importance of self access centre in LA development is also shown in Smith and Craig's (2013) findings that learners' consciousness was raised about what is expected of users in the autonomous use of CALL in a self-access centre. Teachers' beliefs on technical perspective would give consequence of optimizing out-of-class task in the library and self access centre for the purpose of students' learning.

Teachers' viewpoint mostly agreed that LA could be promoted in all ages. In psychological perspective, learners must be motivated to perform LA skills. In this case, teachers believe that motivated language learners are more likely to develop LA than learners who are not motivated. However, motivation must be stimulated to appear, otherwise students will remain passive in language learning. This viewpoint corresponds towards Yagcioglu' (2015) view that students need to be motivated and trained to be autonomous learners. Unlike learner's psychological aspect, teachers' viewpoint shows uncertainty whether LA means learning without teacher or not. Esch (1998:37) emphasized that LA is NOT self-instruction/learning without teacher. The teachers still need to guide, facilitate, and help the learners to learn. This is important as learning how to learn will prepare students for lifelong learning. All in all, most teachers believe that LA has a positive effect to make the learners successful in learning English.

In political perspective, most teachers believe that autonomous learners must be able to make decisions on what to learn, how they learn, and how to assess their own learning. This in line as what has been proposed by Holec (1981:3) about the definition of autonomous learning, in which learners must take responsibility for all decisions concerning determining the objectives, defining the content and progressions, selecting methods, monitoring the procedure of acquisition and evaluating what has been acquired. In line with Holec's early definition on LA, Reinders (2010) developed a framework for cyclical autonomous learning. This includes eight stages in autonomous learning process (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Autonomous Learning Process

Lastly, concerning social perspective, teachers feel positive that LA can be developed by learners of all cultural backgrounds. This indicates that LA can be fostered without seeing the aspects of ethnic group, gender, races, sexes or age groups. As long as the learners have high motivation, they can become independent learners. Teachers also believe that applying cooperative group work activities support the development of LA. In line to this issue, In Indonesian curriculum, teachers are encouraged to implement a variety of teaching methods such as project-based learning, problem-based learning and also cooperative learning. These learning methods support the development of LA. However, almost half percentage of the teachers still believe that LA is a concept which is not suited to non Western learners. This means that teachers are still pessimistic whether LA could be promoted in Indonesian context or not.

### **Desirability and Feasibility**

The results from the questionnaires about desirability and feasibility show that in all cases teachers were more positive about the desirability of involving students in making decision than they were about it's feasibility. Teachers more desired to involve students to set the classroom management. It means that teachers were willing to give more freedom to the students to determine their own way of learning. Teachers are also quite desirable to involve learners in assessing their own learning progress. Meanwhile, the items about involving learners in selecting the teaching methods, topics discussed, the materials and kinds of tasks used have almost the same percentage. This indicates that the teachers are willing to share control to the students to determine their own way of learning in order to promote LA. The least teachers desirability is in terms of determining the learning objective.

In terms of feasibility, teachers perceived involving learners in taking decision is less feasible compared to their desirability. Among those seven items, only the selection of tasks and the procedure of assessment are quite feasible. These two items correspond to the level of desirability indicating that teachers are quite concerned in giving more freedom in the area of selecting task and determining the procedure of learning assesment. While in terms of involving learners in decision about the selection of materials used, topics discussed, teaching methods and classroom management, teachers' feasibility is less than teachers' desirability. As a result, teachers may be less optimistic that they could promote maximum learner autonomy in the classroom.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

As a conclusion, language teachers' beliefs in promoting learner autonomy are categorized into technical, psychological, political, and social perspective. Among those four categories, only items in technical aspect are

believed to support total development of autonomous learning in secondary classroom, while other three categories still show uncertainty in particular items. The prominent issue in psychological perspective is that, despite autonomous learning has positive effect on the success of language learners, language teachers are still uncertain whether learner autonomy could develop effectively with or without teachers.

The findings also reveal that teachers' desirability are higher than their feasibility in involving learners to make decisions concerning language course. This indicates that language teachers are willing to promote learner autonomy, but they are still unsure about its implementation in language learning.

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