




Vietnamese Teachers' Beliefs About Fostering Learner Autonomy in English Teaching and Learning

INTERACTIVE ARTICLE COVER




About the Journal

Journal Home	www.rupkatha.com 
Journal DOI	https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha
Indexed in	Web of Science Core Collection™ Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)
Journal Impact Factor (JIF)™	2022: 0.2 5 Year: 0.2 <i>Source:</i>  Journal Citation Reports™ 2023

About the Issue

Issue	Volume 15, Number 2, 2023
Issue DOI	https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n2
TOC	https://rupkatha.com/v15n2.php 

About the Article

Title	Vietnamese Teachers' Beliefs About Fostering Learner Autonomy in English Teaching and Learning	
Author/s	Duyen. N. T. Ngo ¹ , Vy. T. M. Luu ²	
Affiliation	^{1,2} Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance, Vietnam.	
Author ID	0000-0002-7314-1352 ¹ & 0000-0003-0231-3863 ²	
Review DOI	https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n2.27	Pages: 1-14
Abstract	https://rupkatha.com/v15n227 	
Full-text PDF	https://rupkatha.com/V15/n2/v15n227.pdf 	
Article History	Received 23 January 2023, modified 23 June 2023, accepted 15 July 2023, first published 29 July 2023	
Copyright	<i>Author/s</i>	
Licensing	Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 	

Vietnamese Teachers' Beliefs About Fostering Learner Autonomy in English Teaching and Learning

Duyen. N. T. Ngo¹, Vy. T. M. Luu²

¹Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance, Vietnam. ORCID: 0000-0002-7314-1352.
Email: duyennt@uef.edu.vn

²Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance, Vietnam. ORCID: 0000-0003-0231-3863.
Email: vyltm@uef.edu.vn

Abstract

Driven by rapid technological developments together with social and economic changes, the demand for flexible education has grown in a way that the cultivation of learner autonomy (LA) has become a worldwide phenomenon, especially in language learning and teaching. In this sense, the study reported here makes further contributions to the understanding of teachers' beliefs in fostering LA in English learning and teaching at the tertiary level in Vietnam. The study adopted a complete qualitative approach to exploring how 10 Vietnamese teachers perceive LA based on their previous teaching experiences. Data analysis from an in-depth interview reveals that participants gave multiple interpretations of LA and admitted that Vietnam's deep-rooted traditional teaching culture causes the main constraints on developing autonomous learning. Besides, these teachers seem fully aware of the significance of LA but not the "how" in assisting learners with exercising LA both within and beyond educational settings. The findings also propose some pedagogic implications for teacher development as well as curriculum development in English learning and teaching at tertiary levels.

Keywords: teachers' beliefs, learner autonomy, English language learning, Vietnamese context.

[\[Sustainable Development Goals: Quality Education\]](#)

Introduction

With the potential of technological resources and facilities nowadays, language learners do not necessarily situate themselves within the four walls of the classroom anymore. As a result, the idea of fostering learner autonomy has permeated most educational institutions (Raya & Vieira, 2020) without the exception of the Vietnamese context. As stated by Nguyen (2014), the significance of learner autonomy has been recognized and emphasized in Vietnamese educational policies and demonstrated by the ultimate goal to enable students to become lifelong and autonomous learners. However, autonomy can exist in degree and take various forms depending on learning environments and learners' characteristics (Gardner, 2011). Within institutional contexts, especially in East Asian countries, according to Littlewood (1999), being autonomous can be simply

understood as being able to organize learning materials independently to obtain their goals on the condition that learners are provided with essential guidelines from instructors. The underlying reason for this argument is ascribed to the impact of values and perceptions within the sociocultural group that both students and teachers inhabit. Particularly, the ways that educators and learners choose to exercise autonomy are often decided by their beliefs. Therefore, understanding teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy development is crucial because it can offer some indications of how teachers behave in their teaching practices. Moreover, teachers' beliefs can serve as the background leading to their decisions and actions in designing tasks for fostering LA (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). This also reflects the claim by Pajares (1992) stating that "beliefs are far more influential than knowledge in determining how individuals organize and define tasks and problems and a stronger predictor of behavior "(p. 311).

Given the significance of teachers' beliefs in fostering LA, numerous studies have been carried out to get more understanding of teachers' perspectives of autonomy as well as opportunities and challenges for them in promoting LA at the tertiary level (e.g., Le, 2013; Le & Huynh, 2019; Nguyen, 2016; Nguyen, 2014; Nguyen, 2011). These studies have investigated the teachers' perceptions of LA in terms of the potential and constraints as well as how their instructional practices reflect these beliefs. However, the participants in these investigations were teachers with different degrees and were asked to fill out the questionnaire and join semi-structured interviews. Utilizing a comprehensive qualitative strategy to obtain profound knowledge of LA development in the Vietnamese setting has not received much consideration. Therefore, this present research aims to fill this void in the literature by examining the beliefs of Vietnamese teachers about fostering LA in English education at the tertiary level. Keep this in mind, the current study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How do Vietnamese teachers understand LA in English learning and teaching at the tertiary level in EFL contexts?
2. How do Vietnamese teachers evaluate LA at the tertiary level in EFL contexts?
3. What are their strategies to foster LA in English learning and teaching practice at the tertiary level in EFL contexts?

Literature review

Learner autonomy

The term "learner autonomy" (LA) was initially described by Holec (1981) as "the capacity to take responsibility for one's own learning" (p. 3). Several alternative definitions have been developed later in multiple studies, highlighting the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. This transformation stems from the inadequacies of conventional teaching techniques whose inability to accommodate every student's needs and learning styles, resulting in a passive and monotonous learning environment. Meanwhile, Littlewood (1999) interpreted the idea of autonomy as "learners' ability and desire to make decisions independently". The author asserts that success in building LA includes two key components: skills and willingness. These features are inextricably linked and may be broken down further into four subcomponents that are knowledge, skills, motivation, and confidence to enhance student independence in the classroom.

Regarding the benefits of LA, there are three crucial advantages of encouraging LA in language teaching. First, learners can have the chance to be involved in the process of making decisions for features in class, which makes learning more concentrated, purposeful, and effective. If they are given a voice in the decisions that affect their language skills (Little, 1991; Chan, 2003), they will probably have more positive attitudes toward the learning process. In addition, fostering LA can help prevent the limitations presented in traditional teacher-centered educational institutions. This process will make ways for learners to see their responsibilities for their educational trajectories as well as the affiliation between schooling and life (Littlewood, 1999). Furthermore, giving students more control over their studies can help them become more motivated and raise their level of autonomy in learning. When learners, as noted by Zhuang (2010), have a range of learning opportunities to make the most of their time in and out of the classroom based on their needs and chosen learning modes, they can enhance their capacities to acquire a language. What is more, according to Benson (2013), from a liberal perspective of personal autonomy, autonomy is in the nature of humans, which is necessary for lifelong learning.

Numerous researchers agree that autonomy in language learning can be promoted (Benson & Voller, 1997; Little, 1991; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Benson (2013) argues that LA can be fostered through the use of the following types of practices: resource-based approaches, technology-based approaches, learner-based approaches, teacher-based approaches, classroom-based approaches, and technology-based approaches. Among these approaches, the significance and efficiency of applying teacher-based approaches have been recognized by many studies conducted in Asian countries and Vietnamese higher education (Nguyen, 2011; Nguyen, 2014, Nguyen, 2016). In short, teachers' beliefs are considered the essential component in the growth of learner autonomy. As a result, how teachers understand LA and their roles in developing LA are worth taking into account.

Teachers' beliefs about learning autonomy

Teachers' belief systems, according to Richards and Lockhart (1996), develop progressively over time and include both subjective and objective elements. These systems are built up by various sources, including their language learning experience, the experience of effective factors, established practice, identity, and principles derived from strategies, education, and research. They also contend that teachers' beliefs serve as the foundation for the majority of the teachers' decision-making and conduct, and therefore constitute what has been termed the culture of teaching. Furthermore, these beliefs are intimately teachers' techniques for dealing with obstacles in their everyday professional lives and their overall well-being. In addition, these beliefs impact students' learning environments, motivation, and accomplishment (OECD, 2009). Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend educators' perspectives to understand and enhance current educational practices.

Indeed, the significance of teachers' beliefs in LA has been investigated in related literature (e.g., Benson, 2013; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). These researchers share the similarity that teachers' belief plays a pivotal role in the process and methodologies which they utilize to foster LA, select, and prioritize goals and actions. According to Little (2003), instructors could be to blame for Asian students' reluctance to accept responsibility for their own education due to their teacher's

expectations of how they should learn. Little (2003) also stresses the need to address teachers' attitudes and views before introducing educational innovations.

Constraints and opportunities in fostering LA

Jing (2006) argues that there always exist constraints on the growth of LA in any educational setting; however, this does not exclude the possibility of gaining autonomy. Benson (2013) introduces four constraints including policy, institution, the conception of language, and language teaching methodologies. Except for the policy constraints, Jing (2006) contends that the potential for developing autonomy within these restrictions is primarily contingent on teachers' desire and aptitude to endure a continual process of change. In studies about LA development in the Asian context (Nguyen, 2011; Nguyen, 2014, Nguyen, 2016; Pham & Renshaw, 2013; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018), the findings revealed that there were three main types of limitations: social, psychological, and institutional. Yasmin and Sohail (2018) demonstrated that these constraints affected teachers' perspectives, teaching methodologies and performance. Besides, according to Palfreyman and Smith (2003), the cultural background of students may also be a constraint in developing their autonomy. Chan (2015) notes that Asian learners experience reactive autonomy and the author considers LA and Asian culture to be on opposite ends of the spectrum. It is argued by Pham and Renshaw (2015) that Asian teachers enjoy authority and respect, and they are supposed to be in charge of all educational aspects and they are sometimes hesitant to delegate control to students.

Previous studies about teachers' beliefs in LA

Various research has been conducted to examine the perceptions of teachers toward LA in a variety of contexts. Due to limited space, only the most significant and closely related studies will be discussed in the following section. The study of Rañosa-Madrurnio et al. (2016) highlights the significance of educators' perspectives on student autonomy. The study used a sample size of 16 instructors from four public sector institutions, with the target population being regular English teachers at 20 public universities in Punjab, Pakistan. Teachers' perception showed a lack of familiarity with the concept and a diverse opinion on LA as an innate feature, learners' ability to work independently, having the power to make independent learning decisions, a strategy, individual responsibility, or shared responsibility. Pakistani instructors understand the word differently from previous academics. The findings suggest that the learning environment might hinder or accelerate learner autonomy. Teachers require intensive professional development to raise knowledge of LA and promote teacher and instructional autonomy. Preparing and training instructors are advised. In addition, Pedagogy management policies should also be updated. In short, learner autonomy is a spectrum of conditioned behaviors performed within institutional and sociocultural infrastructures, and this study finishes by highlighting this fact.

Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) conducted a study to investigate the attitudes, practices, and restrictions related to learner autonomy as reported by 359 educators (mostly expatriates) at a university in Saudi Arabia who were involved in the English Preparatory Year Programme. The teachers in this study typically connected learner autonomy with concepts of independence and control and defined it as students' capacity and impetus to accomplish assignments on their own

or in groups, within and outside of class, with little oversight from instructors. They discussed how they encouraged student initiative and agency in their classrooms. Most, however, were pessimistic about the likelihood of success in fostering learner autonomy and provided explanations that focused on curriculum, society, and—most importantly—learner variables (such as poor motivation, independence, and English competence). In line with the restriction in cultural factors, the research by Yasmin and Sohail (2018) identified the various socio-cultural limitations that may limit the development of student autonomy and analyzed the ideas held by Pakistani English instructors about the viability of learner autonomy. Interviews using semi-structured formats were used to collect data from a sample group consisting of sixteen English language instructors drawn from four different public colleges. After that, the data were analyzed using a thematic approach. Learners and instructors in Pakistan were under the impression that learner autonomy is a novel notion. It has been discovered that culture plays a significant part in the function of restricting the role of learner autonomy. Based on this research, it is clear that educators in Pakistan have recognized a number of barriers that may prevent students from being autonomous in their learning. Learner dependence on the teacher, shyness in interacting with the opposite sex, teacher bias, and a lack of awareness about learner autonomy were cited as the most common and significant perceived socio-cultural barriers impeding the promotion of learner autonomy.

In the context of Vietnam, Nguyen (2014) explored the perceptions of 188 university English instructors in Hanoi using mixed-methods research and discovered that they did not completely comprehend the concept of LA. The majority of the respondents stated that they were in charge of defining learning goals, selecting teaching material, and measuring students' performance. Two years later, the study by Nguyen (2016) presents the findings of a survey and interview research on Vietnamese English instructors' attitudes and actions regarding their students' levels of independence in the classroom. Eighty-four lecturers from six different public institutions took part in the study. The majority of participants highlighted the significance of fostering learner autonomy and their crucial role in this regard. Nonetheless, they favored the sociological and psychological perspectives on learner autonomy over the technological and political ones. While acknowledging that certain parts of learner autonomy may not be practical in the setting of Vietnam, they nonetheless brought up the subject of students' capacity to take control of their learning in describing their practices. The teachers' lack of faith in the students' abilities to direct their own education was particularly apparent. The results and the existing literature are used to derive conclusions about how to best encourage student autonomy in the classrooms of Vietnam and other countries where English is taught. Similarly, Le and Huynh (2019) adopted the mixed method to examine the perspectives of students and the practices of lecturers at a university in Vietnam. Although the English-major freshmen were instructed to build up responsibility and autonomous abilities via in-class activities, there were many obstacles encountered regarding students, teachers, and the context. It was apparent that the teachers are autonomous and put a lot of effort into fostering LA and the biggest challenge for teachers was the lack of motivation from the students. The authors also emphasized the importance of knowledge and skills for gaining autonomy because the freshman seemed to familiarize themselves with the conventional teaching methodology from their high school. Both teachers and students need support from the curriculum, materials, and institutions to foster autonomy.

All in all, these studies have investigated the teachers' perceptions of LA in terms of the potential and constraints as well as how their instructional practices reflect these beliefs. However, the participants in these investigations were teachers with different degrees and were asked to fill out the questionnaire before joining semi-structured interviews. Little attention has been paid to the employment of a full qualitative approach to gain more insights into LA development in Vietnam. Therefore, this present research aims to fill this void in literature.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative perspective in collecting data by using unstructured interviews. The reason was that the researcher aimed to gain insight into the awareness of Vietnamese teachers towards the concept of LA, how they perceive the opportunities as well as the constraints in fostering LA, and what strategies they use in promoting LA. In this sense, in-depth interviews allowed the researchers to explore the participants' thoughts freely without giving them any rubrics or presumptions about LA.

The criteria for selecting participants were that they had teaching experience at the tertiary level and are currently graduates of any MA program in TESOL or Applied Linguistics. These participants were selected as a result of convenience sampling. The researchers contacted some graduates they know and 10 of them agreed to take part in the study. The participants' ages are between 27 to 49 years old, and their teaching experiences range from 2 to 6 years. Besides teaching experience, the participants also work in different positions at tertiary institutions such as tutor, consultant, faculty secretary, and program director, which gives them the chance to understand students' problems and behaviors.

Participants were told about the purposes of the study and filled out the consent form before being interviewed. Each interview was conducted in Vietnamese and lasted approximately 30 minutes online. All were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The current research apply the thematic analysis as this is a versatile qualitative research tool applicable to a broad variety of epistemologies and research issues (Nowell et al., 2017). It is a strategy for exploring data for patterns and then reporting on those patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Nowell et al., 2017, theme analysis bridges the gap between qualitative and quantitative research approaches by serving as a common language for researchers from both camps. In addition, results from a thorough thematic analysis may be relied upon and provide valuable insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the transcriptions of the recordings were analyzed and themes were identified by two separate raters. To ensure reliability, the two raters met and decided to reach a final agreement on the themes and categories of data.

Findings and Discussion

Teachers' understandings of LA

Regarding the first question about the definition of LA, 9 out of 10 participants described LA from a metacognitive perspective on the vast dimension of LA definitions. This resonates with what can be found in prior literature. Specifically, these definitions have centered around the concepts of "independence," "freedom," "activeness," "choice," "control," and "responsibility" (Little, 1991).

The participants considered LA as the ability to be responsible and actively prepare for students' learning beyond the classroom. Most participants believed that autonomous learners could set the goal for their learning, prepare their lessons, research and access sources, and practice by themselves.

Half of the participants also added that autonomous learners can make choices and decisions about their learning outside the classroom. These ideas are illustrated in the following quotes by participants:

When you see a student who has a clear goal, understands, and knows his or her own learning styles and also has effective learning strategies, this student is also conscious about learning, accountability and responsibility. I can say this is an autonomous learner. (Participant 1)

The students are considered autonomous learners when they fully prepare for their learning journey, have the strategies and plan of learning in their mind, and dare to speak out their opinions and raise problems to teachers. (Participant 3)

Additionally, Participant 9 expressed that students should take charge of their education rather than wait passively for teachers to "spoon-feed" them. Regarding the requirements for autonomous learners, Participant 6 brought up an intriguing point: "Students must be enthusiastic and motivated to learn". Moreover, the participants revealed two themes: 'taking responsibility' and 'understanding.' The responses conform to the definitions provided by previous scholars in the field of LA (Benson, 2007; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). Therefore, the Vietnamese English language teachers, similar to many English teachers in other studies (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Chan, 2003), recognized the significance of LA in language acquisition. The participants' understanding of the concept was formed by social and psychological perspectives, emphasizing the development of abilities for learning how to learn, consciousness and assessment of learning, and learning through the collaborative work of groups (Benson, 2013).

In addition, all participants agreed that LA does not mean learning without a teacher. They believe that the teacher has a vital role in the first stage of the learning process when students cannot learn by themselves. When it comes to a higher level, students still need guidance and support as well as evaluation from the teacher:

Being autonomous does not mean learning without the teacher because learners still need support from the teacher to show them the right directions and help evaluate their performance. (Participant 2)

It is like a cycle, where the students are autonomous, they can plan, prepare and practice by themselves then the teacher will evaluate and guide them to revise their plan or their practice and continue with this cycle. (Participant 9)

As a result, all the participants have some level of comprehension of the notion of learner autonomy and do not have the misconception, which is significant in fostering LA. This result differs from other pieces of research (Nguyen 2011; Nguyen, 2014, Nguyen, 2016) showing teachers' misconceptions about LA. These misconceptions have been recorded due to the misinterpretation of the translated words (Nguyen, 2016) and the lack of knowledge of LA (Nguyen, 2011). The participants in the current study understand the definition of autonomy in

their learning in English acquisition and also know other aspects of the concept. The participants acknowledged the concept of autonomy through their training, which may indicate the improvement of teacher training in the context of Vietnam.

When asked to describe the characteristics of learner autonomy, the participants had mixed opinions:

The characteristics of LA are having clear goals, understanding, and knowing their learning styles. In addition, students have effective learning strategies and are conscious about learning, accountability, and responsibility. (Participant 1)

Autonomous students can fully prepare for their learning journey, have ideas in their minds, and dare to speak out their opinions and raise problems with the teacher. They also can question and evaluate themselves to improve in the future. (Participant 2)

Autonomous students have a clear purpose and motivation for learning. They are patient, disciplined, and curious about searching, and they are also independent, flexible, and adaptive to different environments. (Participant 4)

As a result, two reoccurring themes include learning on their own initiative and taking responsibility for different aspects of learning like creating objectives and analyzing learning results. The former promoted an active learning attitude while the latter emphasized actual learning behaviors.

In terms of the key to LA in English language acquisition, the Vietnamese participants also acknowledged its significance, which is in accordance with prior study findings (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Chan, 2003; Le & Huynh, 2019; Nguyen, 2016). Some typical quotes from participants are as follows:

It is important at any level and especially at this level due to the great amount of knowledge, learner autonomy will help students to have better performance. In addition, autonomy will help students to complete required tasks well and have better performance and results. (Participant 6)

Learner autonomy is beneficial for not only students but also teachers. It can help to reduce the work and burden of the teacher. Students cannot succeed in any subject or field without autonomy. (Participant 7)

As a result, it is a positive sign compared to what was found in previous studies. These participants were aware of the concept, characteristics, and significance of LA in the classroom environment and in real life through their training at institutions and learning for a Master's degree. According to Freeman (2001), taking part in teacher-training courses is a viable option for assisting and empowering educators to alter their perspectives and methods of teaching and learning. Freeman (2001) also adds that instructors' lessons might be affected by the strategies they learned in college. This happens because education is more than just following directions. It is possible that instructors' perspectives on a technique may shift after being exposed to a new one, leading them to make adjustments that will ultimately benefit their students. These answers are also consistent with the theory of Benson (2013) stressing that autonomy is crucial in many aspects of life and

education. The participants in the study also include the growth of LA as a crucial factor in their teaching goal.

Teachers' evaluation of LA

The teachers in the current research had a clear understanding of students' circumstances in the classroom at the tertiary level thanks to their experience working at different positions in higher education contexts. Two out of ten participants did not have confidence in their students' abilities to engage in autonomous learning. They held the belief that their students lacked a sense of autonomy in their learning and that many students are passive. Other participants share the view that there are two main groups of students. The first group has some levels of autonomy, is actively engaged in their learning, and has clear goals and strategies. In their opinion, this group of students is likely to ask for extra work outside the classroom or ask the teachers for support or sources for self-learning and self-practice. All are reflected in the following quotes:

Nowadays, students are more active and confident, and they have multiple sources of knowledge and learning; they can study on their own and use the resources very well. They are more independent than the preceding generation. (Participant 7)

Students these days have more advantages than previous generations in learning and integrating into the global world because they are very good at keeping updated or finding new sources of knowledge. (Participant 10)

Another group is reported to be passive students who still keep their learning habits from high school and tend to refuse to adapt or change their learning strategies to become autonomous at the tertiary level:

This group of passive students is not a small quantity, and it is very hard to change their minds or help them to foster learner autonomy because they refuse to do so. (Participant 4). In my class, there is always a group of students that are not willing to be involved in any collaborating activity, and they are always silent when I ask for their decisions in class, or they leave it to me. (Participants 9)

The characteristics of this passive group of students concur with the results from previous Vietnamese studies. Dang (2010) argues that Vietnamese culture emphasizes memorization and absorption above experimentation in the learning and creative processes. Students demonstrate respect for their professors and peers by being silent in class and obeying instructions without questioning or disagreeing with them (Nguyen, 2011). Therefore, cultural influence and students are to blame for this level of passivity. Howe's research on Vietnamese students (1993), on the other hand, revealed that students' levels of passivity or activity were moderated by instructors' expectations and students' own cultural backgrounds.

The current research shares some similarities with other former studies (Dang, 2010; Le & Huynh, 2019; Nguyen, 2011; Nguyen, 2014; Nguyen, 2016) in the Vietnamese higher education context, in which sociocultural factors hinder students' development of autonomy. However, our results differ from others (Dang, 2010; Le & Huynh, 2019; Nguyen, 2011; Nguyen, 2014; Nguyen, 2016) in demonstrating that the passive group of students tends to be less dominant. Instead, there has been an increase in the number of students who show potential and the ability of autonomous

learners. In addition, teachers' perspectives towards Vietnamese students' autonomy are pretty positive, which is not very common in previous studies in the same context.

Regarding the desirability and feasibility of LA in the teaching contexts, all participants strongly desire their students to acquire LA skills, including goal setting, self-assessment, strength and weakness identification, progress tracking, reflection, and evaluation. However, they reported that some students would require a significant amount of time to alter their learning patterns, notably to decrease their dependency on educators and instead engage in autonomous study. In contrast, other students are autonomous and need to increase their level of autonomy. The data reveals that the participants had some difficulty overcoming barriers to cultivating student autonomy at the university level. The challenges mainly relate to three main factors: students, contexts, and policy.

The present research shares some similarities with Pham's results (2005) showing a discrepancy between what instructors wish to achieve and what they can or believe they can do. It is noted by Trinh (2005) that it is the learning environment, not the learner's ability to hinder autonomy. In addition, the participants have clear strategies for fostering LA through in and out-of-class activities. They recognize the value of authentic materials and arouse students' interest. However, they show serious concern about the constraints of time and curriculum. According to Kristmanson et al. (2013), it is important to identify the differences between the curriculum that was intended and the curriculum that was actually implemented and delivered. Teachers should be concerned with delivering the intended curriculum and with what learners accumulate. The authors also add that curriculum and instruction should be linked and centered on learners' particular interests and real-life circumstances. Teachers' haste and need to maintain the pace of the intended curriculum may obstruct the progress of LA due to the increase in teacher dominance. Therefore, teachers should be relaxed and should not experience stress from school administrations.

Teachers' strategies for fostering LA

When asked to describe their strategies to foster autonomy, all participants emphasized that the first step is to acknowledge and introduce to students the importance and techniques of learning independently. Then, the next step is involving students in collaborative classroom activities and designing out-of-class activities for students. Some participants noted that this process needs to be done gradually and can take a lot of time because many students are used to depending on teachers from primary to high school; therefore, they need time to shift and adapt to the new method and environment at the university.

In terms of in and out-of-class activities, there are mixed opinions from the participants. The teachers agree that there are situations in which student participation and student decision will improve their learning. They gain new insights into learner-centered pedagogies and are eager to implement them in their classrooms. The majority of teachers in the current research are willing to give students authority to decide on topic discussions and forms of activities in and out of the classroom.

Students should be given a chance to make decisions in the learning process so they can have their reflection and self-evaluation, which can contribute significantly to their learning as well as work in the future. (Participant 2)

Students should do so in every subject so they can figure out their ways, their weaknesses, and how to improve themselves. (Participant 3)

I always show the syllabus and the goal of the subject on the first day of class then I will discuss with the students the tasks they want to do or the knowledge they expect or need to fulfill. (Participant 6)

Some of the participants also highlighted the essential of scaffolding in their strategies. Consequently, a gradual decrease of teacher involvement in combination with scaffolding is the primary strategy of the participants in the current research, and it concurs with the theory of Zone of Proximal Development by Vygotsky (1978). Motivation is also a critical factor that the participants mentioned in their strategies. In addition to the in-class activities, the participants also mention out-of-class activities. Writing journals, language club, and authentic materials are the three activities chosen by all participants. Regarding authentic materials, the participants acknowledge the resources-based approach to developing autonomy but could not describe clearly the learning possibilities in and out of the scope of materials to foster the autonomy of students. In addition, due to the research limits, it cannot be concluded about the participants' application of a resources-based approach. Besides, applying ICT and flipped classrooms are the choice of 80% of the participants to make the students more involved and interested in learning. While they expressed a strong desire to engage students in the decisions and task implementation to foster LA, the participants still believed that student input into curriculum development and evaluation was less likely to be implemented. The enforced top-down curriculum in countries like Vietnam may be to blame for this impression. However, the participants show some concerns when giving students the power to be involved in the assessment process.

Conclusions and Pedagogical implications

The current study attempts to explore the beliefs of Vietnamese teachers regarding LA at the tertiary level in Vietnam. The overall findings can be concluded in three main pedagogical implications.

Firstly, the participants in this study were reported to have a better understanding and knowledge of LA and also put into practice the process of fostering autonomy. These teachers are doing their Master's degrees and know the concept of LA through their training and learning. However, they need help figuring out the right strategies to overcome the obstacles and deal with constraints in real-life situations. As a result, there should be more support for them in terms of pre-service training to define the barriers and make changes to the situation. The teachers need to be provided with precise instructions and appropriate techniques to have a clear and systematic plan to foster autonomy in the real-life classroom. It is necessary to have appropriate investment in learning infrastructure and resources from the institutions such as training, workshops, and contemporary resources. Therefore, they can grasp the core concepts and apply them in classrooms. Besides, further research is needed to establish a paradigm for teacher's knowledge

and professional development in connection to LA as well as additional knowledge of LA should be included and emphasized in their Master's training.

Secondly, from the view of these teachers, students at tertiary institutions in Vietnam are reported to be more self-directed and proactive when it comes to language acquisition, yet there are still a number of students who are passive and reluctant to change their learning habits. The most reported factor comes from the student's need for more awareness and motivation; the student-centered approach may be unfamiliar to them. Undergraduate students need to be aware of the significance of autonomy in the classroom and life-long targets to become autonomous. In order to achieve this goal, teachers at the tertiary level should collaborate with students to remove the barriers that impede them from nurturing LA and show them the strategies to learn in and out of the classroom. From the institutional level, it is necessary to have workshops or skill training sections for students to change their dependent mindset.

Finally, it is necessary for policymakers and material developers to be involved because passive learning methods are rooted in lower-level education. It is necessary for course designers to include additional resources or reference books with detailed descriptions to help teachers, students and parents in this context to cultivate the beyond classroom materials and resources. It can also be a suitable measure to raise the awareness of parents and students at lower levels to approach the nurturing of LA. Furthermore, the promotion of LA should not only be the objective at the tertiary level but spread to the lower level as well. In short, the obstacles to establishing LA in the Vietnamese EFL educational setting should be mitigated by mutual understanding, collaboration, top-down curriculum mandates and bottom-up initiatives.

Despite the above-mentioned significant contributions, the study has some limitations. First, this is a small-scale study, so generalization to other contexts should be cautious. In addition, the current study only focuses on the teacher's beliefs; inspection of real-life classrooms is beyond the scope of the study. Therefore, further work can be done by combining teachers' beliefs and practices. Finally, the research only discovered the beliefs of the teachers. It is necessary to conduct future research from the viewpoints of students and university administrators to have a better understanding of LA implementation.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

Funding Disclosure

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency.

References

- Barnard, R., & Nguyen, G. V. (2010). Task-based language teaching (TBLT): A Vietnamese case study using narrative frames to elicit teachers' beliefs. *Language Education in Asia*, 1(1), 77–86.
https://doi.org/10.5746/leia/10/v1/a07/barnard_nguyen
- Benson, P., & Voller, P. (1997). *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. Longman.

- Benson, P. (2007). Autonomy in language teaching and learning. *Language Teaching*, 40(1), 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444806003958>
- Benson, P. (2013). Teaching and Researching: Autonomy in Language Learning. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315833767>
- Borg S., Al-Busaidi S. (2012). *Learner autonomy: English language teachers' beliefs and practices*. London: The British Council. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccr065>
- Chan, M. (2015). Language learner autonomy and learning contract: A case study of language majors of a university in Hong Kong. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 05(02), 147–180. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2015.52013>
- Chan, V. (2003). Autonomous language learning: The teachers' perspectives. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 8(1), 33–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1356251032000052311>
- Cotterall, S. (1995). Readiness for autonomy: Investigating learner beliefs. *System*, 23(2), 195–205. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251x\(95\)00008-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251x(95)00008-8)
- Dang, T. T. (2010). Learner autonomy in EFL studies in Vietnam: A discussion from Sociocultural Perspective. *English Language Teaching*, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v3n2p3>
- Gardner, D. (2011). *Fostering autonomy in language learning*. Zirve University. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.2654.8886>
- Freeman, D. (2001). Second language teacher education. *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*, 72–79. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511667206.011>
- Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Howe, S. (1993). Teaching in Vietnam. *Interchange*, 22, 29-32.
- Jing, H. (2006). Fostering learner autonomy within constraints : negotiation and mediation in an atmosphere of collegiality. *Prospect*, 21(3), 38–57. <https://doi.org/10.3316/aeipt.157758>
- Kristmanson, P., Lafargue, C., & Culligan, K. (2013). Experiences with autonomy: Learners' voices on Language learning. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 69(4), 462–486. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.1723.462>
- Le, T. V., & Huynh, A. T. (2019). Learner autonomy: Practices used and challenges encountered by EFL teachers in fostering learner autonomy at tertiary level. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 35(4). <https://doi.org/10.25073/2525-2445/vnufs.4402>
- Le, Quynh X. (2013) *Fostering learner autonomy in language learning in tertiary education: an intervention study of university students in Hochiminh City, Vietnam*. PhD thesis, University of Nottingham.
- Little, D. (1991). Learner autonomy. *Dublin*, 86(11), 15-22.
- Little, D. (2003). Learner autonomy and second/foreign language learning. *Guide to Good Practice*.
- Littlewood, W. (1999). Defining and developing autonomy in East Asian contexts. *Applied Linguistics*, 20(1), 71–94. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/20.1.71>
- Nguyen, T. N. (2014). *Learner autonomy in language learning: Teachers' beliefs* (Unpublished PhD Thesis). Queensland University of Technology.

- Nguyen, T. V. (2011). Language learners' and teachers' perceptions relating to learner autonomy: Are they ready for autonomous language learning? *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 27(1), 41-52. <https://js.vnu.edu.vn/FS/article/view/1463>
- Nguyen, V. L. (2016). Learner autonomy in Vietnam: Insights from English language teachers' beliefs and practices. *Language learner autonomy: Teachers' beliefs and practices in Asian contexts*, 1-22.
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 160940691773384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Nunan, D. (1996). Towards autonomous learning: some theoretical, empirical and practical issues. In *Taking control: Autonomy in language learning* (pp. 13–26). Hong Kong University Press.
- OECD. (2009). Teaching practices, teachers' beliefs and attitudes. In *Creating effective teaching and learning environments: First results from TALIS* (pp. 87–135).
- Oxford, R. L. (2003). Toward a More Systematic Model of L2 Learner Autonomy. *Learner Autonomy across Cultures*, 75–91. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230504684_5.
- Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(3), 307–332. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543062003307>
- Pham, & Renshaw. (2013). How to enable asian teachers to empower students to adopt student-centred learning. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(11), 65–85. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n11.4>
- Pham, H. H. (2005). University English classrooms in Vietnam. *ELT Journal*, 59(4), 336–338. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/cci063>
- Rañosa-Madrurnio, M., Tarrayo, V. N., Tupas, R., & Valdez, P. N. (2016). Learner autonomy: English language teachers' beliefs and practices in the Philippines. *Language learner autonomy: Teachers' beliefs and practices in Asian contexts*, 114-133.
- Raya, M. J., & Vieira, F. (2020). *Autonomy in Language Education: Theory, Research and Practice*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429261336>
- Richards, J. C., & Lockhart, C. (1994). *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780521451819>
- Smith, R. C. (2003). Pedagogy for autonomy as (becoming-)appropriate methodology. *Learner Autonomy across Cultures*, 129–146. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230504684_8
- Trinh, Q. L. (2005). *Stimulating learner autonomy in English language education: A curriculum innovation study in a Vietnamese context* (Unpublished PhD Thesis). University of Amsterdam.
- VYGOTSKY, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (M. Cole, V. Jolm-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds.). Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9vz4>
- Zhuang, J. (2010). The changing role of teachers in the development of learner autonomy— based on a survey of "English dorm activity." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 1(5). <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.1.5.591-595>