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Practices and Perceptions of Teacher Educators on Learner Autonomy

Ram Bahadur Mouni

Durgalaxmi Multiple Campus, Far Western University, Nepal

Email: ram.fwu3886@fwu.edu.np

Abstract

This study explores practices and perception of English language teacher educator on learner autonomy. It aimed to identify the ways through which teacher educators practice autonomy in students learning and encourage them be autonomous. Using qualitative narrative inquiry research design, the data were collected through interviews with the five English language teacher educators teaching at undergraduate level, of Far Western University, Nepal. The findings of the study highlight a shared understanding of learner autonomy, emphasizing independent learning, self-direction, and responsibility. Teacher educators stress the pivotal role of instructors in promoting autonomy, advocating for a shift from traditional to student-centered methods. Despite a common understanding, challenges persist, including psychological factors, institutional constraints, and socio-cultural beliefs. The study also suggests the need to address these challenges through targeted strategies for successful promotion of learner autonomy in English language classrooms. Moreover, the study shows that even though it is challenging, teacher educators are making efforts to encourage students be autonomous in providing choices, goal-setting, encouraging self-evaluation, finding out the resources, preparing assignments, having class presentations into classroom practice using different strategies.

Keywords: Learner autonomy, challenges, perception, practice, teacher educators

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Introduction

Learner autonomy refers to the ability of learners to take control of their own learning processes and make independent decisions about what, how, and when they learn. It involves learners actively engaging in the learning process, taking responsibility for their education, and becoming self-directed learners. Scholars such as Henry Holec, David Little, Phil Benson and Terry Lamb have differently interpreted learner autonomy (LA), however, they have common characteristics. These interpretations of learner autonomy entail the ability of learners to take control of their own learning process (Holec, 1981), make decisions, set goals, (Little, 2004) and regulate their learning activities independently (Benson, 2011). The role of learner autonomy in learning in general and language learning in particular is pivotal in giving learners opportunities to take responsibility of their own learning. Little (2004), Lamb (2008), Benson (2011), Ushioda (2011), Ismail et al. (2018), Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019), Chang (2020) and Alrabai (2021) opine that autonomy in learning has consistently been recognized as a crucial factor in determining the effectiveness of language learning. As emphasized in the fourth objective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as explained by Rosa et al. (2019), learner autonomy plays a vital role in ensuring high-quality education and equal opportunities, particularly in promoting lifelong learning for everyone. The United Nations recognizes this goal as a means to cultivate the skills and knowledge necessary to support future industries and sustain them by the year 2030. As documented by scholars such as Benson (2011), Little (1991), and Smith (2003), for over 30 years, the concept of learner autonomy (LA) has been a significant focus in foreign language education. However, how to practice the LA principles in teaching and learning invites further study and discussions. There has been limited attention given to the obstacles that may prevent its widespread adoption. This lack of consideration regarding the practicality of LA has caused a delay in its implementation. This gap between principles of learner autonomy and their implementation in language teaching and learning is relatable to the English language teaching and learning in the context of Nepal as well.

Negi and Laudari (2023) argue that English Language Teaching (ELT) experts are making efforts to implement new methods and strategies such as Task-Based Language Teaching, Peer Collaboration Flipped Classroom, Project-Based Learning for teaching English. While these methods and techniques offer ways

to improve instructional practices in ELT, students' overall proficiency in English remains relatively low, particularly in remote and under-resourced regions. They further argue that in developing countries like Nepal, many schools and colleges lack sufficient language learning materials and resources. Additionally, classrooms tend to be crowded, and access to learning technologies such as computers, the internet, and e-resources is limited. Consequently, teachers might have difficulties to provide differentiated instruction to accommodate learners with diverse needs. In such a condition, developing English language competencies, maintaining motivation in learners and promoting learner autonomy remains challenging.

Although recent efforts have been made to promote autonomous language learning, English teaching is still predominantly teacher-directed. Scholars such as Nunan (1999) and Richards (2006) have highlighted the need for a shift from traditional teacher-centered practices to more interactive and student-focused pedagogies. Similarly, Borg (2011, 2015), Stockwell (2017), and Farrell (2018), accept the prevalence of teacher-directed instruction and advocate for the incorporation of student-centered strategies to enhance language learning outcomes. These representative evidences indicate that teacher-centered learning is influencing in the practice of autonomous teaching and learning in different EFL/ESL contexts, including Nepal. The research works on exploring the status and challenges of learner autonomy are scarce in the Nepalese EFL/ESL context. Moreover, no significant attention has been paid in the area of autonomy and autonomous practices in Far Western University. Thus, this study attempted to explore practices and perceptions of English language teacher educators on learner autonomy in Far Western University. More specifically, the study attempts to explore the perceptions and practices, challenges and teachers' efforts in creating autonomous learning. The study also aimed to bring a clear picture of autonomy in terms of what teacher educators say and what they are doing in classes.

To explore the practices and perceptions, challenges and teachers' efforts in creating autonomous learning regarding learner autonomy, the study dealt with following research questions:

1. How do teacher educators perceive learner autonomy?
2. What challenges do teacher educators have in creating autonomous English language learning classes?
3. What efforts do teacher educators make use/adopt to develop autonomy of the students while learning English?

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Autonomy and Autonomy in Learning

Holec's (1981) definition of Learner autonomy is a significant and widely recognized contribution to the field. According to Holec, learner autonomy can be understood as the “ability to take charge of one’s own learning” In other words, it refers to the individual's capability to take control of and manage their learning process independently. In the words of Holec (1981) the term ability means:

to have and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning, i.e., determining the objectives; defining the contents and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used; monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.); evaluating what has been acquired (p. 3).

Similarly, Benson (2011) has defined LA with technical, psychological and political variations in terminology and foci and Dam (1995) included the dimension of “willingness,” irrespective of learner’s capacity. Autonomous learners, according to Dickinson (1994) and Lin and Reinder (2019), exhibit qualities of responsibility, persistence, resourcefulness, and initiative when it comes to making and executing decisions related to their language learning journey. They do not rely solely on their teachers and instead demonstrate independence. This self-reliance contributes to the effectiveness of their learning process compared to situations where they heavily depend on their teachers (Rao, 2018). Consequently, this reduces the need for students to rely on their teachers and, at the same time, improves their capacity for self-reflection, which proves to be an effective method for learning from both successes and failures (Crabbe, 1993).

The different definitions of learner autonomy enable me to infer the meaning that learner autonomy involves a self-directed learning approach, wherein learners take charge of their learning by planning, establishing goals, assuming greater learning responsibilities, and engaging in self-reflection throughout the learning process. Even though the definitions and principles of LA and concept of learner autonomy (LA) have been a significant focus in foreign language education, in discussions about how to apply LA principles, there has been limited attention given to the obstacles that may prevent its widespread adoption. This lack of consideration regarding the practicality of LA has caused a delay in its implementation.

Challenges in Implementing the Principles of Learner Autonomy in Practices

Learner autonomy, a concept rooted in educational theory, emphasizes the learner's active role in their own learning process. Drawing from the works of influential scholars such as Holec (1981) and Knowles (1975), learner autonomy is characterized by learners taking initiative, responsibility, and control over their learning goals, methods, and evaluation. This principle encourages learners to engage in self-directed learning, enabling them to choose what, when, and how they learn, fostering a sense of independence and intrinsic motivation (Little, 1991; Benson, 2001). Autonomy is not a complete abandonment of guidance but rather an empowering collaboration between learners and educators, aligning with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978), wherein learners actively construct knowledge with the support of their social environment. The principles of learner autonomy also resonate with contemporary educational paradigms, such as constructivism and connectivism, underscoring the importance of personalized and collaborative learning experiences (Siemens, 2004; Jonassen, 1999). Embracing learner autonomy not only enhances cognitive skills but also nurtures lifelong learners capable of adapting to an ever-evolving knowledge landscape (Candy, 1991).

Regarding the challenges in the promotion of LA, majority of studies investigate the factors that limit the involvement of learners have primarily focused on adult participants (Cross, 1991; Saar et al., 2014). The research in this area has predominantly centered on psychological factors (Blair et al., 1995), with some studies also exploring social aspects (Babchuk & Courtney, 1995; Gooderham, 1993) and others delving into the influence of the educational institution (Jung & Cervero 2002; Saar et al., 2014). Similarly, the majority of research on Learner Autonomy has examined a combination of these aspects within their primary investigations (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Nga, 2014).

Cross (1991) conducted a prominent study that identified three primary categories of barriers hindering learner engagement: situational, dispositional, and institutional. The situational barriers were linked to individual life circumstances such as limited time or financial constraints, while dispositional barriers were associated with personal traits and concerns like lack of confidence or motivation towards learning. On the other hand, institutional barriers pertained to practices within educational settings that impeded learner participation. However, Saar et al. (2014) further explored these barriers and highlighted that external institutional

barriers were the most amenable to removal through adjustments in the education system. Other researchers, like Benson (2000), categorized barriers based on their relevance to policy, institutions, the conception of language, or language teaching methodologies. Alternatively, some researchers, such as Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), classified barriers as being linked to teachers, learners, or institutions.

Irrespective of the criteria used for categorization, numerous challenges have been identified in various previous research studies. Among these challenges, several common issues stand out. These include teachers expressing a lack of confidence in their learners' abilities and experiencing limited autonomy in their teaching practices. Learners often face obstacles such as a lack of prior experience in autonomous learning, insufficient incentives to engage in autonomous learning, and an excessive reliance on their teachers (Farahani, 2014). Additionally, learners' limited exposure to English beyond the classroom, their primary focus on test performance, and the scarcity of relevant resources for both teachers and learners contribute to the challenges (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Furthermore, the rigid curriculum, the dynamics of teacher-learner interactions, and the examination system also emerged as significant hurdles (Jing, 2005). Additionally, constraints like limited time availability, adherence to traditional teaching practices, and educational policies further impede the advancement of Learner Autonomy (Nguyen, 2014). Both categories of constraints intersect with the crucial influence of culture on the learning process. Learners' cultural background can either be perceived as a hindrance to learner autonomy (Smith, 2003) or, conversely, as an opportunity for promoting their autonomy (Nasri et al., 2015).

Similarly, some recent studies carried out in the field of LA reveal a number challenges for teachers in fostering learner autonomy in EFL classes. Pasaribu (2020) in his research revealed that even though online tasks motivate learners to engage in meaningful language learning experience and nurture social dimensions of autonomy, Syafryadin et al. (2022) in their study, found some challenges faced by teachers, including poor internet connection, students' different characteristics, and lack support from school policymakers. Wiraningsih and Santosa (2020) found out that some policy constraint due to the school zoning system; institutional constraint due to the unscheduled events; language teaching methodology constraints due to the lack of knowledge of teaching strategy and different characteristics of students. Similarly, Le, and Nguyen (2022) revealed that the students were not very confident

with their learner autonomy, and they have a lot of difficulties when conducting their learning on their own outside the classroom. Mansooji et al. (2022) indicated that challenges in promoting learner autonomy are caused by students' passive learning styles and low levels of motivation and the pressure that the teaching demands place on the teachers.

Even though several research works have been carried out to identify the challenges in promoting language learner autonomy, some studies also suggest some ways to respond to the challenges. Le and Nguyen, (2022) suggested that learner autonomy can be promoted through learner's self-regulating skills, strengthening their interactions with teachers and friends, and receiving more support from society. Syafryadin et al. (2022) argue that LA can be promoted through ICT-based English learning; giving and freedom for the students to access different online resources according to their interest. Finally, Mansooji et al. (2022) suggested that teachers can foster autonomy for learners in their teaching process through suitable learning styles, high levels of motivation and minimizing the pressure that the teaching demands place on the teachers.

There are some studies carried out on learner autonomy in the English language teaching and learning context of Nepal. Such studies primarily entail perceptions, practices and challenges of promotion of learner autonomy. Joshi (2011), Paudel (2013) and Neupane (2019), found positive attitudes of university teachers and learners towards autonomous learning. Bhattarai (2021) explored the awareness of teachers on the promotion of learner autonomy. Similarly, Khadka (2015) argues that giving the learners opportunity to participate in designing activities and materials can be a helpful technique in a large and low resource classes. Dhakal (2017), Bidari (2021) and Rana and Rana (2022) explored role of group interaction, presentation, simulation, role playing; interview storytelling techniques developing autonomy. Gharti (2019) and Karki (2020) explored that Self-Directed Learning (SDL) helps learners to achieve better achievement and effective learning.

Some studies have also been carried out on learner autonomy that explore role of technology and tools in creating autonomous learning classes. Pantha (2017) found use of smartphones; Gautam and Sarwar (2018) highlight the role of various tools, techniques and strategies; Neupane (2019) found use of Moodle; Joshi and Poudel (2019) showed use of ICTs; Shrestha (2020) suggests use of newspapers; and Paudel and Rana (2022) suggested that video games can be an assistive tool to engage teenage learners in collaborative and autonomous learning activities.

The studies on learner autonomy practices show various causes of challenges in promoting learner autonomy in the classrooms. Pant (2019) and (2019) found deep-rooted social practices and myths; Nepal and KC (2020) revealed lack of sufficient knowledge of teachers; Negi and Laudari (2022) revealed students' over-dependence on their teachers, and teachers and spoon-feed teaching to students during their instructional practices as the major challenges in promoting LA in language classrooms.

The review of literature basically revealed the presence of two research gaps. Firstly, a substantial portion of the studies relied on survey-based methodologies, which has raised concerns about the limitations of employing surveys as an exploratory instrument. It is suggested that alternative instruments or study designs might be better suited to unveil a broader range of aspects that cannot be captured solely through predetermined codes. Secondly, the geographical scope of the literature's research was predominantly focused on other regions of the world such as Europe, Africa and Arab, and other countries than Nepal which creates research a gap in the understanding of the subject within the specific context being investigated. Third, most of the studies are confined to the challenges but practice part is still shadowed and the actual observation of autonomous strategies of teachers and activities of the students are lacking in the context of teaching and learning English as a second language, Nepal differs from European, American and Arab context English teaching and learning. Thus, this study aims to delve into teachers' beliefs concerning the potential promotion and practices of Learner Autonomy (LA) and discern the major challenges that may impede the development of LA in the Nepalese context.

Methods

Qualitative narrative inquiry research design has been followed in this study. The interpretive research paradigm was employed for the discussion where emphasis was given to the social relationships and processes. The participants selected for this study were 4 English language teacher educators out of 58 who were faculty members at the undergraduate and graduate level in 4 constituent campuses of Far Western university, Nepal. The participants were selected on the basis of longer experiences in presupposition that teachers they have better experience of the learner autonomy practices. Four constituent campuses out of 16 of Far Western University were chosen as the target because they are the oldest campuses and have large

number of students studying at undergraduate and graduate level. This selection also offers a wider range of geographic and demographic diversity.

Prior to the collection of data, the participants were personally approached and informed about the research and data collection. Then the participants were interviewed and for supplementary data open-ended questions were developed and provided to the participants through google forms and telephone conversations. To ensure a more natural and adaptable interview process, the sequence and phrasing of questions were made flexible, following the guidance of Bailey (2007). This approach allowed for a deeper exploration of each individual's insights and experiences. The interview questions were formulated by drawing upon relevant literature in the field of learner autonomy (LA). The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The data were presented and discussed on three themes derived on the basis of research questions.

To maintain ethical considerations in this study, the researchers, prior to data collection, ensured that all participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, the chosen research methods, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. To protect the participants' confidentiality, codes for teacher educators (TE1, TE2...) were assigned instead of using their real names.

Findings and Discussion

From the interviews, information elicited through questionnaire from google docs and telephone conversations, three primary themes have been generated. The themes are in line with the three research questions: how the teacher educators perceive learner autonomy; what challenges the teacher educators have in creating autonomous English language learning classes; and what efforts the teacher educators make to develop autonomy of the students while learning English. The themes include: perceptions of teacher educators on learner autonomy, challenges in using autonomous activities in students' learning of English and autonomous learning strategies practiced in teaching and learning of English.

Perceptions of Teacher Educators on Learner Autonomy

The findings of the study reveal a comprehensive understanding among the study participants regarding the fundamental concepts, theoretical underpinnings, and principles associated with learner autonomy. In response to inquiries probing

their perceptions of learner autonomy, all participants, consistent with established principles proposed by Holec (1981), Little (2004), and Benson (2011), expounded that learner autonomy encompasses the ability to learn, independence in the learning process, and assuming responsibility for one's own learning and evaluation. An illustrative quotation from the participant (TE1) highlights this viewpoint:

If applied, learner autonomy is a good practice for self-pace in learning. Learners can be aware of their own learning and progress through this practice. Our campuses should work towards promoting it in case English language teaching. (TE1)

TE1's perspective accentuates the perceived benefits of learner autonomy, positing it as a constructive practice fostering self-directed learning and advocating for its promotion within the context of English language teaching and learning. This recommendation underscores the potential role of learner autonomy in augmenting self-directed learning practices among students.

The other participants, TE2, TE3 and TE4, on the other hand, describe learner autonomy as building independent learning capacity, taking charge of their learner's own learning, deciding goals of their learning and evaluating their own learning. On perception of learner autonomy, they reflected:

Learner autonomy is the capacity of learning independently with the ESA (Engage, Study and Activate) process, means capacity of setting goal, study, and self-evaluation of the learning. It is learner need and interest-based learning from input to output. (TE2)

It's learner's ability to take charge of their own learning. Learner autonomy is an independent learning process where the learners plan them. (TE3)

Learning, set learning goals, take more learning responsibilities, and self-reflect on the learning process. (TE4)

Even though the participants describe their understanding of learner autonomy in different words, their perception on learner autonomy is almost similar. All of them reflect that learner autonomy encompasses developing capacity to learn, taking responsibility, setting goals and involving in self-evaluation. However, TE2 focuses more on capacity of independent learning. TE2 further links the role of engage-study-activate (ESA) sequence of learning to autonomous and independent learning. TE3, on the other hand, emphasizes on importance of making the plans for learning

and taking the charge of their own learning. Similarly, TE4 adds importance of self-reflection in learner autonomy.

Apart from the theoretical understanding of learner autonomy, the participants also describe the importance of teacher's role in promoting learner autonomy in English language learning classes. In response to the question, how they perceive the role of teachers in promoting language learner autonomy, all the participants responded:

Teachers should work towards promoting learner autonomy, but I believe no teacher is doing so. We often have traditional way of teaching and learning. To empower the learners and make our teaching student-centered, learner autonomy can be one of the good practices in campuses.

TE1 opines that a teacher's role is essential in promoting learner autonomy and empowering the learners to become self-learner. However, he/she believes that teachers in different campuses are not making efforts to promote learner autonomy since they follow the traditional methods of language teaching and learning.

Regarding the question, the teachers engage students in self-directed learning and how they act while engaging them in self-directed learning, the participants, TE2, TE3 and TE4 have similar views. They respond:

The role of teacher should be as an organizer or facilitator, teachers help their students to be more responsible for their own learning. (TE2)

I take the role of facilitator, confidence developer and help students to take interest in autonomous learning. (TE3)

Teachers play an essential role in negotiating learners' participation in planning for learning, putting the plans into action, monitoring, and evaluating their learning to carry out the learning tasks autonomously. In most cases, the success of language learning depends on the teachers, how they teach, and what learning opportunities they provide to their students by creating various learning contexts as facilitators, counsellor, and resource persons. (TE4)

All the participants, TE2, TE3 and TE4, believe that a teacher in the class should work as organizer, facilitator, helper, confidence developer, participant, monitor, evaluator, counselor and resource person. They also believe that such activities of the teacher are significant in creating autonomous learning environment in the class

and promoting language learner autonomy. TE4 further adds to his/her response that success of language learning depends on the autonomous activities the teachers bring into the classroom practice; how they teach; and what learning opportunities they provide to their students by creating various learning contexts. Similarly, the participants also highlighted that along with the roles a teacher plays for the sake of learner autonomy promotion, a teacher should supply various resources to make their learning autonomous. In this regard, they reflected:

Our classrooms should be well facilitated with technology with internet access. Learners should have laptop and computer literacy. Teachers should also have digital literacy to promote learner autonomy. (TE1)

Need based and contextual resources are required to facilitate learner autonomy in the classroom. (TE2)

Give a lot of materials to read, provide opportunities to share their ideas, ask them what they want to learn, let them present in the class, let them lead, set learning environment, self-assessment, reflection, give chance to take risk. (TE3)

Adequate self-access resources for the students. (TE4)

The participants of the study emphasize that modern ICT technology is essential for fostering learner autonomy. TE1 insists that autonomous classes should equip with computer and internet technology and the teachers should have digital literacy as well. However, the other participants, TE2, TE3 and TE4 believe that providing contextual and need-based materials and resources to the learners is beneficial for providing learners the opportunities for interaction, collaboration self-assessment, reflection, giving them chance to take risk.

The participants of the study expressed a number of ways of encouraging to learners for autonomous learning. They also mention that there are some psychological factors associated with students learning behaviours. Regarding the question of encouragement and feeling of the learners, all the participants responded:

I often suggest the learners to have much more self-study, go to the library for study, and ask them to search google to find any relevant information so that they can learn in a better way. (TE1)

Then students also feel encouraged when I ask them to promote their own learning.

Students are encouraged by giving them chance to express their learning interest and feedback to themselves rather than from others. (TE2)

I provide them some clues and assignments related to the topic, which they have to search and prepare notes. Some students feel it as a tiring job while others take it as a motivational one. (TE3)

Giving opportunities to plan their learning, set learning goals, take more learning responsibilities, and self-reflect on the learning process. (TE4)

More or less, all the participants state that they use similar strategies such as self-study, self-feedback, freedom in learning, assignments, self-planning, and self-reflection, for promoting learner autonomy in the classroom. However, TE1 focuses more on self-learning activities than other strategies. Similarly, TE2 believes that self-feedback encourages the learners make autonomous learner. TE3, on the other hand, encourages learners to take responsibility of their learning by giving regular assignments and notes on various topics. Finally, TE4 encourages learners to be autonomous by allowing them to plan their learning by themselves, asking the learners to set their learning goals, take responsibility of their own learning and reflecting on the learning process.

Challenges in Using Autonomous Activities in Students' Learning of English

In response to the second research question: What challenges have teachers been facing while engaging students in self-paced learning, the participants expressed the diversified opinions. Regarding the inquiry of the key factors that hinder students' willingness to take initiative and be autonomous in their learning process, the participants, TE1, TE2, TE3 and TE4 replied:

There are some psychological factors that hinder students' willingness to have learner autonomy. One is traditional mindset that teacher is the source of every knowledge. Second is the lack of that kind of learning environment. (TE1)

TE1 opines that there are two major psychological factors that generate difficulty in creating autonomous learning: first, traditional mindset of learners; students still believe that students' learning is solely the responsibility of the teachers. Hence, students have less motivation to take responsibility of their own learning. Second, is the lack of access to the autonomous learning environment. Since the teachers both have traditional mindset of teaching and learning, getting them into autonomous learning becomes challenging. Similarly, the other participant (T2) reflected:

Students' interest and readiness, Students' ability, family encouragement, teachers' motivation and encouragement are the main factors that play vital role in students' learning autonomy, due to the lack of such factors it is impacted. (TE2)

The other participant, TE2, on the other hand, feels that the psychological factors such as, learner's interest, readiness, ability to learning, family encouragement, teacher motivation are the primary factors that obstruct in creating autonomous environment for language learning. He/she expresses that such factors are almost absent in all campus. Thus, creating autonomous classes is impractical.

Some financial and institutional factors such as teacher, learning resources, motivation, self-confidence, environment, tasks are some of the key factors that hinder students' willingness to take initiative and be autonomous learner. (TE3)

Teachers' spoon-feeding pedagogy and lack of opportunities to become autonomous. (TE4)

However, different from the view of TE2, the other participant, T3 stated psychological, financial and institutional factors are major challenges in implementing autonomous learning. The factors such as lack of learning resources, motivation, self- confidence, learning environment are some major factors that hinder autonomous learning in language learning classes. However, participant TE4 opines that 'spoon-feed pedagogy' and lack of opportunities create challenges in making teaching and learning autonomous. But he/she doesn't clearly mention the types of opportunities that are barriers for creating autonomous learning environment.

Apart from these challenges of promoting learner autonomy, the participants also show some practical challenges that impose difficulty in fostering learner autonomy. In relation to practical issues the teacher encounter in English language classes, the participants expressed:

[...] no habit of studying the subject matters, [...] because of Facebook and TikTok, they pass most of their time in such social media rather than searching things to learn more. (TE1)

Students are not eager to take learning responsibility, they depend upon teachers and prescribed materials only. (TE2)

Limited time, class size, learning resources, learning environment, tasks, teacher student relationship, materials, learner's readiness are some of the difficulties that I have faced in fostering learner autonomy in the class. (TE3)

Lack of resources and students' overdependence on the teachers. (TE4)

The responses from the participants, TE1, TE3 and TE4, showed mixture of psychological, social, financial and institutional challenges in promoting and practicing learner autonomy in the class. Such factors involve students' learning habit, learners' interest in taking learning responsibility, unnecessary use of social media, time limitation, class size, learning resources, learning environment, tasks, teacher student relationship etc. are major challenges the teacher face while promoting learner autonomy in the classroom. In this line, TE1 emphasizes that mis/overuse of social media such as TikTok has impaired students' learning habit. TE2, and TE4 on the other hand, view that learners are overly dependent on the teachers and prescribed materials and course of study. Thus, the learners seem to be reluctant to take initiatives of learning in their own.

Moreover, the participants of the study also experience some socio-cultural challenges that create difficulty in the promotion of learner autonomy in the language classroom. The participants in this context replied:

Our students often have traditional mindset that teachers should teach everything and impart knowledge. Our context is like that. So, it is difficult to avoid this kind of mindset at once. (TE1)

Yes, socio-cultural and the contextual factors pose the challenges to the development of learner autonomy, the traditional beliefs, cultural beliefs and the principle of obeying the superior and following the seniors create the challenges. (TE2)

Yes. Student's social environment and sociocultural context creates challenges in learner autonomy. (TE3)

All of the participants agree that there are some social and cultural factors that pose challenges in the promotion of learner autonomy in the class. As TE1 reflects, learner's mindset is shaped by traditional socio-cultural ideology i.e., teacher is the source of knowledge and students are only the recipients. This ideology is responsible for continuing teacher centered teaching and learning practices. Both of the participants, TE2 and TE3 also agree with the view of TE1. They further say that most of the students come from the social contexts which still accepts the superior role of teacher in teaching and learning. Because of such socio-cultural beliefs of the learners, the participants believe that it is difficult to change the teaching learning system. Thus, developing and promoting learner autonomy is quite challenging.

Autonomous Learning Strategies Practiced in Teaching and Learning of English

The participants of this study not only indicate the challenges on learner autonomy, but also expose how they overcome the challenges to create autonomous learning environment. They reported that they use a number of strategies to convert traditional classes into autonomous platforms for learning. Such strategies included making choices and decisions for learning, giving freedom to learn and evaluate, collaboration, assistance from the institution and individual treatment of needy learners.

Regarding the question of freedom, making choice, setting goals and decision for learning and evaluation, the participants responded:

In case of making choices, I often let my students to do so. But while making decisions about any issue, we often have compromise about what to do. I don't keep students free to make decisions. (TE1)

Students are given chances to make their own decisions and choices in learning on the basis of the content and exercises (TE2)

I always give them freedom to choose learning styles and make their own decisions for learning (TE3)

Most often students I motivate my students to make choices and evaluate their own work. (TE4)

Regarding the freedom the teachers give to their students for making choices for learning the content, TE3 and TE4 explicitly said that they allow their students for making choices. However, they do not mention how often and on which situation they allow their learners to make choices. Similarly, TE1 responds that he/she often lets the learners in making choices for their learning. However, if there is any issue in making choices, the teacher and students work together to settle the problem. TE2 mentions that he/she only allow students make choices on the basis of the content and exercises. In line with making the choices for learning items and making decisions for learning, another issue of learner autonomy is setting the learning goals by the learners. To the question if teachers allow the students to set their own learning goals, the participants reported:

Yes. (TE1)

Usually, I don't let my students set their learning goals. I make them clear about what they have to do in any task and work. (TE2)

The goals are already determined in the syllabus, so the freedom is not given to the students. (TE3)

Yes. (TE4)

In case of students' freedom to set the goals of learning, TE1 and TE4 say that they allow their learners to set their learning goals. However, they don't clarify the contexts in which the students are free to set their goals or objectives of language learning. They also do not mention that how the students involve in goal setting process. TE2 on the other hand, mentions that he/she doesn't let the students to set the goals; instead, he/she himself/herself describes the goals of learning to the students. Similarly, TE3 explicitly denies the freedom of students in setting the goals. He/she mentions that students have nothing to do with learning goals since they have to follow the syllabus; the course of study designed by the university clearly mention the goals of learning and the course structure doesn't allow students to set the goals in their own.

The other strategy of enhancing learner autonomy is enabling learners to evaluate their own learning. Regarding the question if teachers allow their learners to evaluate their own work to promote learner autonomy, the participants reply:

Yes. (TE1)

Obviously not. Evaluation is often done through tasks and assignment and term exams. (TE2)

Students do not habit of evaluating themselves though they are given freedom contextually, they only wait for teachers' response. (TE3)

Yes. (TE4)

Even though they do not mention the context and situation in which they allow their learners to evaluate their own learning, the participants, TE1 and TE4 say that they try to promote learner autonomy by asking the learners to evaluate their own learning activities. However, other participants, TE2 and TE3 opine that making evaluation of learners' work is not the part of students learning; instead, evaluation is done through the tasks and assignments in terminal and final exams. Moreover, they explicate that students do not habit of evaluating themselves. Even though they are given freedom contextually, they only wait for teachers' response. Thus, it shows that this strategy does not seem to be effective in promoting learner autonomy.

Apart from the application of principles of learner autonomy in fostering learner autonomy in the class, the participants also expose some other efforts for enhancing autonomous learning. The first is collaboration with colleagues. To a question if they work with their colleagues to help learners in making autonomous learners, the participants reply:

We often don't have that kind of environment. Our colleagues do not work together to promote learner autonomy. (TE1)

Yes, I work but students are fully depended on teachers (TE2)

Sometimes. (TE3)

Yes. (TE4)

Majority of the participants, TE2, TE3E4 agree that they work with their colleagues to promote learner autonomy. However, they do not mention the frequency, process and strategies of collaboration they do with their colleagues. Nevertheless, they show positive attitudes on the role of collaboration with colleagues to promote learner autonomy. In contrast, TE1 clearly mentions that he/she does not have favourable environment for working with colleagues because the teachers in his/her campus do not work or even discuss about the promotion of learner autonomy.

To the questions regarding if the institution they work in and the society they live in make any effort to encourage teachers in promoting learner autonomy, all of the participants share that the campuses and even the university do not have trend of encouraging teachers for promoting learner autonomy. However, the institutions have provided internet and computer facility to the teachers and students which is indirectly helping in learners autonomous. Similarly, the participants also mention that society and parents do not have the culture of communication about the teaching and learning. The participants share that they do not have any experience of communicating with society about learner autonomy practices.

Finally, in a question what suggestions they like to share to for fostering autonomous learning in the classroom, the participants of this study suggest various strategies that can be helpful in promoting learner autonomy. On this question, they responded:

First thing is that we need to change our mindset that teaching is teacher centred. Rather than lecture method, other student centred methods and techniques should be used by the teachers. (TE1)

In my experience convincing learners that they are capable of greater independence for learning, helping, encouraging and engaging in planning can be the effective strategies. (TE2)

Ask students about their preference in relation to tasks, offer student choice e.g., Group work, pair work, materials, learning environment etc. Let learner take initiative, inspire, set clear goals, active learning strategies etc. can be effective in overcoming barriers to learner autonomy. (TE3)

Giving opportunities to the students to plan their learning, set learning goals, take more learning responsibilities, and self-reflect on the learning process. (TE4)

The responses of the participants on the promotion of learner autonomy seem to be promising. Even though there are some psychological, social, financial and institutional limitations, the participants believe that fostering learner autonomy is essential for better learning. For that the participants share a number of suggestions. TE1 shared that traditional mindset of the teachers and students should be changed and teacher-centered teaching methods should be replaced by the learner-centered ones. Similarly, TE2 felt that convincing the students about their capacity of learning, enhancing their self-confidence for self-learning, helping and encouraging in self-learning and making them independent learners would be better strategies for the promotion of learner autonomy. In line with other participants, TE3 and TE4 suggested that understanding the needs and choices of the learners, encouraging learners to take responsibility of learning, engaging learners in making choices, decisions and setting goals of learning, encouraging them in collaborative learning and inspiring them with different strategies can be useful strategies for promoting learner autonomy in English language classrooms. However, none of the participants mentions that what role the institution, society and parents should play to foster autonomous learning.

Conclusion

The results of the study delve into three key themes aligned with the research questions, providing valuable insights into teacher educators' perceptions of learner autonomy, challenges faced in implementing autonomous English language learning classes, and efforts made to promote learner autonomy in English language education. The findings reveal a consistent understanding among teacher educators

regarding the conceptualization of learner autonomy, encompassing the ability to learn independently, taking charge of one's learning, and assuming responsibility for learning and evaluation. The study participants emphasize the importance of teachers in promoting learner autonomy, acknowledging the need for a shift from traditional teaching methods to more student-centered practices. Despite a shared understanding of learner autonomy, challenges persist, including psychological factors, institutional constraints, and socio-cultural beliefs that hinder the transition to autonomous learning environments. Teacher educators employ diverse strategies to foster learner autonomy, such as providing choices, setting goals, and encouraging self-evaluation. Collaboration with colleagues and institutional support are acknowledged as facilitating factors, though societal and parental involvement remains limited. Recommendations for fostering learner autonomy include changing the mindset towards learner-centered teaching, enhancing students' self-confidence, and adopting strategies that actively engage students in the learning process. The study underscores the importance of addressing multifaceted challenges and implementing targeted strategies to successfully promote learner autonomy in English language classrooms.

Even though this study covers limited landscape and participants, the findings of the study can have wide range of implications. First, this study has explored learner autonomy in relations to English language teaching and learning in the local context. However, learner autonomy is not only confined to language; the finding can be beneficial for the researchers working in various disciplines other than English language. Second, the study has brought insights to all the teachers ranging from basic to university level. Third, the study seems useful to make further investigation for the researchers working nationally and internationally. Fourth, it will be equally helpful for all learners to understand and practice learner autonomy in their real classrooms. Finally, it can be significant for English Education Department of/ and Far Western University to make policies for promoting learner autonomy in its constituent campus. This is a small-scale research work that reveals perceptions of teachers on learner autonomy. More rigorous further research works would explore more on how learner autonomy really works to enhance effective teaching and learning.

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