

Teacher's and Learners' Perceptions of Learner Autonomy in EFL Context

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Abstract—Learner autonomy places important role in language learning because it promotes independent role to increase the learning progress as well as learning achievement; thus, the purpose of this study was to analyse teachers' and learners' perception of learner autonomy in their classroom practice, especially in EFL context. The data was taken from close-ended questionnaire related to learner autonomy, teachers' understanding, perceptions and feasibility of conducting learners' autonomy in the class. Questionnaire as primary tool was filled by 30 EFL teachers and 21 students. Descriptive qualitative was used in analysing the data. The result showed that teachers have strong idea about learner autonomy. Teachers perceive learner autonomy as learning independently. In addition it is perceived that learner autonomy gives notion of letting the students involve in learning process, especially deciding what and how to learn; furthermore, motivation and language proficiency are seen as key role in successful learner autonomy; however, most of the participants choose slightly unfeasible to let the students decide topics learnt in class. Learners perceive teachers as responsible person in teaching and learning process; however, they also believe that as individual, they need to be responsible for their learning. It is hoped that the research contribute to the development of teaching and learning process as well as the learner autonomy promotion.

Keywords—*learner autonomy; EFL context; perception; teacher*

I. INTRODUCTION

In current teaching and learning process, learner autonomy plays important role. Indonesian newest curriculum which is curriculum 2013 is assumed to promote more about learner autonomy in teaching and learning process; thus, it is very important to understand how teachers and students perceive learner autonomy. Students practice and active participations during and after the class become the basic foundation of student's skill improvement [1]. Independence as learning habit is supported with the implementation of LA; however, teachers' perceptions become important during this process. Because teachers are the main facilitator in the class, they have to lead the students and create a learning environment which supports learner autonomy. Teachers' role is not merely related to be in front of the class and dictate everything that happens as well as explain grammar lesson. Encouraging students to learn more, telling students about their progress during the class,

giving feedback, acting as the resources of information are included into teachers' role and activity [2]. On the other hand, students are the entities who receive the information given by teachers. Students become the object of teachings and learning progress. The current case is active involvement of students. The development and changes in society, especially in education has led the changes of student position and roles during the teaching and learning process. Students' active involvement in controlling and deciding particular lesson become important agenda during learning process [3-5]. In this case, teachers' perception affects how they teach and actualize their belief. It is explained that teachers belief have significant impact on how teacher engage, interpret, and actualize a learning concept as well as facing a problem [6]. Teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy also influence the way they teach.

Learner autonomy is a prominent area to develop conductive and effective language learning and teaching especially in English class. Learner autonomy actually relies on the idea of freedom to have a choice in learning situation, make students become more responsible, allow learner to set up the lesson, and evaluate the process [7], furthermore, learners autonomy is also defined as ability to take change of one's own learning as stated by Holec [7]. In more specifics context, activities, such as determining learning objectives or goals, defining content, selecting learning strategy, assessing strength and weakness are prominent activity in learner autonomy. It is also associated with desirable classroom situation, doing homework, using target language actively, learning from mistakes, and using all chances to learn both inside and outside classroom; thus learner autonomy promotes independent action in the classroom with teacher's guidance and directions [8]. Responsibility of learning is main ideas to support learner autonomy. The development of learner autonomy depends on student responsibility and awareness of goals, methods, and topics of learning process [3]. Benson [9] in Nguyen and Gu [10] stated that there are six approaches to learner autonomy, such as resource based, technology based, curriculum based, teacher based, classroom based and learner based.

Learning autonomy does not only cover students' choices, planning, actions and assessment, but it also covers students capacity, ability, attitude, willingness, and in general responsibility toward the learning process both inside the

classroom and outside the classroom as stated by Little [11] in Joshi [12]. One of important factors of learner autonomy is the responsibility feeling held by the language learner because learner autonomy encompasses the decisions made regarding the learning as well as the completions of the decisions [13]. Teachers' role has to be the facilitator in promoting learner autonomy; furthermore, each in Joshi explains that learner autonomy does not mean self-instruction learning without teacher and teacher intervention and initiative is not entirely banned [12]. Learners' ability to set learning goals and organize their learning activity are taken into account in learner autonomy [3].

This study was conducted in order to investigate teachers' perceptions and learners' perceptions about learner autonomy. Applying learner autonomy in language teaching is prominent. First, students are able to work individually to achieve their own goals by realizing their weakness and strength. Kenny in Jiménez Raya and Sercu explains that autonomy is more than just permitting students to have more choices in learning situation [7]. It involves more nurtured areas, such as encouraging learners through process which deliberately set them up, beginning to express who they are, what they think, what they would like to do, how they initiate and define themselves, allowing them to be in change. By having these abilities, students have chance to see more about themselves. Second, fostering autonomy in teacher education will help teachers to be more creative in creating comfortable and effective learning environment. In addition, learner should be aware of their learning strategy and how this strategy will help them to increase their potential. To make this condition become reality, teacher should be knowledgeable about how to promote learner autonomy. Raising focus on students and all stakeholders' awareness of the impact related to learning autonomy is central to the learning process [14].

The idea of knowing students and teachers perceptions of learning autonomy should be revealed; so that improvement, knowledge and awareness of how beneficial the concept of learner autonomy can be applied in classroom context effectively.

The specific areas of investigation addressed are as follow:

- What are teachers' perceptions regarding learner autonomy?
- What are the students' perceptions of learner autonomy in the classroom and outside classroom?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Learner Autonomy*

There are different opinions regarding learner autonomy. Learner autonomy, context of learner autonomy in and outside classroom activity, teachers' and learners' roles are crucial elements to be defined in learner autonomy (henceforth called LA). Learner autonomy refers to the idea brought by Holec stated in Palfreyman which expressed that learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning [15]. Learners need to be responsible in the learning process; furthermore,

learners should also be involved actively in learning activity both in classroom context and outside the classroom context.

According to Crabbe, LA is defined as "the individual has the right to be free to exercise his or her own choices as in other areas and not become a victim of choices made by the social institution" [16]. LA encapsulated the notion that learners have the capability to be independent and improve themselves based on their own pace and strategy. LA means opportunity to have control over learning aspects both general and specific aspects [17].

The differences and changes in how teaching and learning are conducted brought the development of learning autonomy. During 20th and 21st century, there is a rising interest in LA field since it emphasizes on individual improvement by working independently [9]. Being responsible of learner own learning becomes the central idea of LA [11,16].

LA does not restrict the learners to learn. Learners improve themselves to their maximum capacity as long as they become autonomous learner and strive to develop their language competency. Learner ability to set their learning goal and decide the organization of learning activity are the foci of LA implementation [3]; hence teachers should not hamper the learner's capability to be autonomous. Classroom activity should provide a certain degree of flexibility in which learners are execute their skills thoroughly. In this case, teachers do not have absolute power. Teachers are no longer marked as the only expert in learning activity.

Defining objectives, contents, progress, method, techniques, time, place and evaluation are basic point of LA [17]. It can be synthesized that LA encouraged learner to learn how to learn properly by being independent. It is an empowerment act in which learners take control of learning activity.

B. *Context of Learner Autonomy*

LA can be implemented during the classroom activity and outside the classroom learning; thus learning does not happen in vacuum. It does not only focus on what kind of activity in the class that can improve students' level of autonomy, but it also focuses on how learners learn willingly outside the classroom context. LA is a wide theory that regards learning as activity in and outside the class. On the other hand, LA increases the sense of responsibility and being in charge of learning progress [12,18].

Teachers hold important roles in implementing LA activity in classroom context. Management for learning and learning content should be defined by the learners independently or at least handled by learners with little guidance from teachers.

In outside classroom context, self-access, library, and even internet have provided adequate materials. These materials can be used as a media to foster learner autonomy. In current era, internet and other software facilitate a better learning activity, by providing material and providing more interesting learning activity. Outside classroom context emphasizes a greater area. Collaborative work with other students is also important to spread the knowledge which also sharpens the level of autonomous learning.

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C. Teachers' Role

Bliidi explains that teachers' roles in LA are to explore how students can learn by themselves by using their own pace freely and using various resources effectively [14]. This also means that learner should value their capacity in learning by analysing their strength and weakness. Learners' point of view may become the basic resource for classroom activity. By involving learning directly, asking their opinion about what to learn, and using their opinion in actual teaching and learning process would increase students' control over their own learning. During the implementation of LA, teachers should provide a chance for learners to decide what task should be done and to complete the task given to them. Dogan characterizes different roles of teachers, such as [18]:

- Becoming active in learning process
- Understanding learners' perception of LA
- Raising learners' sense of control
- Respecting learners' identity
- Respecting capacity
- Understanding students' motivation
- Presenting various choices to students to choose

D. Learners' Roles

Holec in Karababa et al. [1] states that learners' roles are:

- Making choices or learning objectives
- Creating content
- Creating learning materials
- Knowing the methods and techniques in learning
- Assessing the progress of learning

III. METHODS

This research was designed as qualitative study. It is used to describe and to interpret the subjects that is being analysed and what has influences the matter. The present study is meant to be the research to the present situation that happened when the research conducted. The research analyses the current case and problems by looking deeply into the problem without necessarily giving the participants any treatment or interventions. The questionnaire and interview were conducted. Likert scale was used in the questionnaire.

A. Data Collection

The data was taken by using online questionnaire which was also spread online. The correspondences are teachers who are working in Bandung.

B. Sample

There are 30 teachers who teach in EFL context. There are 21 students who study in Bandung. The student participants volunteered to participant in this research. 57.1 % or 12 students are female and 42.9% or 9 students are male. Their age ranged from 14 to 19 years old. 15 students are high school third grader. 1 student is high school second grader and 5 students are high school first graders. The teacher age ranged between 22 and 50 years old. Their experienced in teaching ranged from 3 until 20 years. All of the teachers were non-native speakers of English.

C. Instrument

The questionnaire was adapted from Duong's journal on EFL teachers' perceptions and classroom practices. The questionnaire focused on teachers perceptions of learner autonomy.

Student questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first sections focuses on asking general information, such as names, gender, age, school, and class. The second section reflects students' perceptions of learner autonomy. It tries to find out how learners perceive learning autonomy and how they put their viewing positions. The third section was designed to look out their desire to use learner autonomy in the class and how the English class is done in their school.

Teacher questionnaire was also divided into three sections. The first section focuses about general description, such as names, and age. The second sections were designed to investigate teachers' perceptions of LA as well as their understanding. The third sections were used to analyses the feasibility of applying learner autonomy.

The response of questionnaire could conclude the students and teacher perceptions of learner autonomy in their English class. The reason why questionnaire adapted from previous journal is its validity and reliability. The questionnaire had been used in larger scale to analyse teachers' perception of LA and their practice as well as students' perceptions.

D. Data Analysis

Collections of data were analysed by tallying each questions and drawing percentage basis which generate general information. Data were collected through student questionnaire, teachers' questionnaire, student's interview and teacher interview, then data were analysed in several stages. The data was analysed qualitatively; furthermore, the raw data were organized and identified the key themes for each questions. Frequencies were calculated. In analysing teacher and student interview, audio recording were transcribed. Raw data were categorized by identifying each questions and analysing main themes to answer research questions.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to investigate teachers' and students perceptions of learner autonomy in EFL context by looking at their understanding, desirability and feasibility in applying learner autonomy.

A. Teachers' Perceptions of Learner Autonomy

A structured questionnaire and interview were administered to investigate how teacher perceive learner autonomy. The

questions include investigations of their understanding of learner autonomy, feasibility of LA, and their practice in applying LA. In addition further questions were administered, such as challenges, problems and suggestions in applying LA. The first section of the questionnaire involves general information and background of the respondents. There were 30 respondents whose age range from 19 to 42 years old. In this section, the results come from the second sections of teacher questionnaire which consists of 15 questions about LA feasibility and teachers understanding.

TABLE I. TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING AND PERCEPTIONS OF LA

No	Teachers Understanding and Perceptions					
	Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	In autonomous learning, students can choose their own material	-	6.7% (2)	30% (9)	50% (15)	13.3 % (4)
2	Learner autonomy means learners have choices to choose their learning activity	-	-	16.7% (5)	60% (18)	23.3% (7)
3	Learner should be entirely independent of the teacher	10% (3)	53.3% (16)	10% (3)	16.7% (5)	10% (3)
4	Independent study in the library or self-access centre is an activity to promote learner autonomy	-	3.3 % (1)	13.3% (4)	53.3% (16)	30% (9)
5	Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy	-	30 % (9)	16.7% (5)	46.7% (14)	6.7% (2)
6	learner autonomy means that there is freedom to decide how learning assessment will be conducted	6.7% (2)	30% (9)	16.7% (5)	46.7% (14)	-
7	Motivation in language learning is the key factor of successful learner autonomy	-	-	6.7% (2)	36.7% (11)	56.7% (17)
8	A confident student develops better learner autonomy than student who lack of self confidence	-	16.7% (5)	10% (3)	40% (12)	33.3% (10)
9	Successful learner autonomy happens when students are able to connect the content of classroom learning and students experiences	-	-	-	70% (21)	30% (9)
10	language proficiency does not affect students ability to develop learner autonomy	6.7% (2)	43.3% (13)	13.3% (4)	20% (6)	16.7% (5)

The results show that teachers have positive understanding of learner autonomy; furthermore it shows that teachers have clear understanding of what learner autonomy is because most of the respondents choose agree as their answer.

Item 1 in the questions reveals different voices and perceptions of teachers. The results in Table 1 reveal that 50% of teachers perceive learner autonomy as freedom to choose learning materials. There are 19 teachers who believe students can choose the learning material in autonomous learning. 30% of participants chose neutral. Neutral depicts uncertainty of the respondents. It means 9 teachers are not sure about what learner autonomy is and the roles of learner in autonomous learning. It can be concluded that a great number of teachers have understanding that learner autonomy also gives freedom to the learner to choose their learning material.

Great number of participants expressed their agreement with items 2. 18 teachers chose agree and 7 teachers chose strongly agree. It can be concluded that 25 teachers believe that learner autonomy means learners have choices to choose their own learning activity.

Most teachers expressed their disagreement with item 3 (learner should be entirely independent o the teacher. 19 teachers expressed their disagreement by choosing disagree and agree. Items four yield similar results. 16 teachers chose

agree and 9 teachers chose strongly agree. 4 teachers chose neutral. It means that these teachers were not sure of their own perception. While 3.3% or 1 teacher chooses disagree. It shows that teachers perceive independent study in library or self-access is an activity to promote learner autonomy. Similarly, most teacher choose agree and strongly agree for items 5 and 6. There are 14 teachers who choose agree for items 5 and 6. It shows that teachers perceive learner autonomy as a mean to work alone to develop themselves and assess themselves.

Teachers also express significant agreement on items 7 and 8. It shows that teachers perceive motivation as important aspects in language learner autonomy. It is believed that successful product of language learner autonomy is dependable on motivation hold by the learners. Item 8 shows that 40% of participants chose agree and 10 participants chose strongly agree. 3 participants choose neutral and 5 participants choose disagree. Majority of teachers believe that confident is also one of the key factors in determining the result of learning and the process of learner autonomy.

All of the teachers believe that successful learner autonomy happens when students are able to connect the classroom learning content with their experiences. 70% respondents choose agree and 30% respondent choose strongly agree. Item 10 focuses on language proficiency roles. 43.3% or 13 teachers

choose disagree and 6.7% choose strongly disagree. It shows that teacher believe language proficiency has impact toward student learner autonomy.

In general, the result of this section reveals that teachers have clear understanding of learner autonomy.

B. Feasibility of Implementing LA

The result as regards the feasibility of conducting learner autonomy in classroom context based on teachers' perceptions. This section investigates feasibility of conducting LA.

TABLE II. FEASIBILITY

No	Feasibility				
	Items	Un-feasible	Slightly un-feasible	Quite feasible	Feasible
1	Learners are involved in decision about objective and material used	10%	40%	43.4%	6.7%
2	Learners are involved in decision about the activity in the class, including choosing topics and tasks	16.7%	36.7%	40%	6.7%
3	Learners are able to identify their needs, strength and weakness	6.7%	30%	46.7%	16.7%
4	Learners are able to assess themselves and learn independently	6.7%	33.3%	36.7%	23.3%
5	Learners are able to monitor their progress and find their learning procedures	10.7%	39.3%	35.7%	14.4%

The results show that in general teachers perceive learner autonomy is feasible to be conducted in classroom practice; however, there are several condition perceived as unfeasible. Table 2 indicated that teachers perceive that it is unfeasible to let students choose their own learning objectives and material. Teachers also expressed that it is unfeasible to let students involve in making decisions about topic discussed in the class, task and activity; however, teachers see that students are able to judge their weakness, strength, and need. On the other hand the ways teachers perceive learner ability to monitor learning progress is still absurd. Based on the data collected before teachers still have reluctant to give freedom to students to decide what to do with learning process.

C. Teachers' Overall Perceptions

The section is based on interview. Key questions, such as what they think about learner autonomy, the challenges, and their practice of learner autonomy were asked. There were three teachers volunteered for this section. They were chosen based on their teaching experiences. It is perceived that;

- The purpose of LA is to let students discover by themselves to find out more about particular subjects
- LA involves learning by doing, choosing what to learn and making use of facility to achieve something are

parts of LA, giving authority for students to decide, promoting willingness and taking responsibility of learning.

Challenges that teachers face in applying LA are school curriculum set by government does not encourage LA significantly, students lack of motivation and curiosity, teachers professional attitude and habit proficiency level contribute to the differences in successful LA.

Regarding the last questions (how do you apply LA in your practice?), teachers also have different techniques. Journal writing, letting students decide topic, and using problem solving games were conducted in the class to promote LA. In general, teachers understand the concept of LA and have ever applied LA in their practice; however, they expressed that LA is not entirely done in the class and not the basis of teaching and learning process.

D. Learners Perception of LA

There were 21 participated in this research whose age range from 14 – 18 years old. They are in the first until third grade of high school. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, the general information, their perception and active involvement to apply LA.

TABLE III. LEARNERS PERCEPTION

No	Items	Learner Perceptions				
		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
1	Students should make decisions and goals of their leaning	-	-	-	52.4%	47.6%
2	Students should use their free time to learn English more	-	4.8% (1)	28.6% (6)	38.1% (8)	28.6% (6)
3	Students should practice English more outside the class	42.9% (9)	-	-	-	57.1% (12)
4	Students should create notes and lesson summary	-	9.5% (2)	28.6% (6)	38.1% (8)	23.8% (5)
5	Students should know their strength and weakness in learning English	-	-	4.8% (1)	42.9% (9)	52.4% (11)
6	Students should read other materials as an additional to their primary learning source	-	-	9.5% (2)	61.9% (12)	28.6% (6)
7	Students should be more responsible in their learning progress	-	-	9.5% (2)	57.1% (12)	33.3% (7)
8	Teachers have responsibility to make the students understand the lesson, especially in English class	-	4.8% (1)	4.8% (1)	19% (4)	71.4% (15)
9	Teachers are the most responsible and the most powerful person in the class	4.8% (1)	9.5% (2)	19% (4)	52.4% (11)	14.3% (3)
10	Teachers should let the students find their own mistake and weakness	-	23.8% (5)	14.3% (5)	42.9% (9)	19% (4)

Based on the result of item 1, it can be concluded that learners believe that as students they should make decisions and goals of their learning because majority of students agreed. Item 2 focuses on looking at student perception on how to use free time. 8 students choose agree, 6 students choose strongly agree, 6 students are unsure of their opinion and 1 student choose disagree. It can be concluded that most of students believe that they should use their free time to learn English more. Item 4 tries to reveal students' perceptions of taking and creating notes. Different points of view existed in items 4. It can be seen from the results that 11 students in general agree to create notes and lessons summary to help them study.

Regarding item 5, there are 9 students choose agree, 11 choose strongly agree and 1 student choose unsure. It indicates that students should know their strength and weakness in learning English. Item 6 and 7 focuses on learners' responsibility. 13 students choose agree and 6 choose strongly agree and 2 students are unsure. It indicates that students should read other material to improve their leaning and students should be more responsibility.

Items 8,9,10 focus on students' perceptions of teachers' role. 19 students out of 21 students believe that teachers have responsibility to make students understand the lesson, especially in English class. In general, it can be synthesised that students believe that they want to be involved in LA, but they also perceive teacher as the most powerful entity and the source of information in the class. In general, it can be seen that learner perceive themselves as important in learning process; however, they still perceive teachers' role is highly important to guide them learn. It shows that learner are aware of their learning process, however, their true potential to work by themselves are not catered well. In English class, teachers mostly dictate the lesson, explain about grammar and translate the sentences. The activities during the lesson involve making dialogues, practicing saying dialogue in the class, making

presentation and giving feedback to the presenters. Outside English class, students use internet to help them learn by reading English news, watching video, finding English material and occasionally speaking English with friends.

V. CONCLUSION

Both students and teacher have positive point of view about LA. Teachers have responsibility to promote LA. Learners are ready and have desire to learn by themselves, on the other hand, teacher has to be responsibility of guiding the students and promoting LA. Teachers still think that it is slightly feasible to applicate LA in classroom context, however including students in creating decision may help students learn more and effectively. Further research about comparison analysis of Indonesian learner autonomy in rural and urban area as well as cultural differences can be conducted.

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