

HUYNH THI THUY LINH

Educational Science Doctoral Programme, Faculty of Psychology and Education, Eötvös Loránd
University, Budapest

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Kien Giang University, Viet Nam
htlinh@vnkgu.edu.vn

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6234-4982>

Huynh Thi Thuy Linh: Teachers' roles in promoting English language learner autonomy in
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Teachers' roles in promoting English language learner autonomy in Vietnamese higher education: a questionnaire study

The decision to promote autonomy in language learning is usually made by the teacher, and such decisions often entail redefining the role of the teacher (Alonazi, 2017). Most of the research previously conducted on learner autonomy has focused on the perceptions that teachers and learners have towards autonomy (Al-Busaidi & Al-Maamari, 2014; Dang, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2019). Crabbe (1993) also claimed that a re-examination of the teacher's role is needed to encourage autonomous learning among students. In light of this research context, a questionnaire study was carried out which consisted of three sections measuring different aspects of autonomy in language teaching: teachers' practices in promoting learner autonomy, challenges teachers face in promoting learner autonomy, and preferable approaches that help promote learner autonomy. The participants in the study were 111 EFL teachers working in private and public universities in Vietnam. The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 22.0. The findings revealed that teachers still tend to dominate the learning process, predominantly in the role of a manager, leaving less space for learner autonomy. The role of learner-centered and learner-based approaches in equipping learners with particular skills and approaches for monitoring their own learning is discussed in light of the findings. In the learning context under investigation, the teacher's roles as facilitators and counselors are also considered.

Keywords: teacher's role, English language, learner autonomy, higher education, questionnaire study

1. Introduction

In language education, the role that the learner in the learning process has received increased attention from teachers and researchers. Learner autonomy (LA) has arisen as a prominent issue in the study of foreign language teaching following a shift from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness in education. Since Holec (1981) first introduced and defined autonomy, more and more researchers have investigated LA's influence on language education (e.g. Benson, 2001; Little, 1988; Khalil, 2019; Yu, 2020; Zoghi & Nezhad Dehghan, 2012). Learner autonomy definitions will be discussed in the next section to further understand the importance of the concept in the language classroom, it is essential to have a better understanding of the roles that teachers and students play in order to develop methods for fostering LA in language education.

Autonomy has received special attention from researchers in East Asian contexts who examine the effects of autonomy in different aspects of language education. In Vietnam, lecturing is the most common means of delivering lessons. Students have a passive role and are oftentimes unfamiliar with the concept of autonomous learning, as the concept is relatively new in the Vietnamese context (Benson, 2007; Dang, 2010; Littlewood, 1999; Nguyen et al., 2014; Phan, 2013; Roe & Perkins, 2020; Swatevacharkul & Boonma, 2020; Thai, 2015). In Vietnamese higher education, there has been little research on the role that teachers play in increasing students' autonomy. One example is Phan (2013), who carried out a case study on instructors' and students' perceptions of language learner autonomy. The findings revealed that university lecturers had little understanding of learner autonomy and that their practice failed to foster autonomous learning. The results of a study conducted by Alonazi (2017) to investigate the role of teachers in promoting learner autonomy in secondary schools in Saudi Arabia showed that English language instructors frequently promoted autonomous learning in their classrooms. Typically, EFL teachers used various instructional techniques to demonstrate the four roles of a manager, facilitator, counselor, and resource. Additionally, the results demonstrated that teachers faced a number of challenges, such as students' lack of independent learning abilities, rules and regulations in place in schools, and teachers' lack of fundamental ways to promote autonomous learning. Additionally, the teachers thought that strategies like reducing school policies that limit their independence, continuously reflecting on and analyzing their own teaching methods, and providing teachers with professional development programs on learner autonomy could all be beneficial in fostering both learner and teacher autonomy. Therefore, to examine awareness of the concept of autonomy and foster it, the current study investigates the role of teachers in fostering learner autonomy, specifically in English major learners at the tertiary level in Vietnam. This study is also interested in the ways that Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers promote learner autonomy in their EFL classrooms and their expectations regarding the practicability and usefulness of developing autonomy in the chosen context. The study's findings provide insights into EFL pedagogy, and teacher training, as well as suggestions for further research regarding teachers' roles in promoting learner autonomy and some recommendations for autonomy-based language learning programs.

1.1. Learner autonomy

In the early 1980s, the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project introduced the concept of learner autonomy to the field. One of the first definitions of autonomy, "the ability to take charge of one's learning" (Holec, 1981: p. 3), was developed from the notion of "the need to develop the individual's freedom by developing those abilities which will enable him to act more responsibly in running the affairs of the society in which he lives" (p.1).

Similarly, Little (1991) defined autonomy as “a capacity of self-direction” which is exercised in “the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of learning activities, and necessarily embraces both the content and the process of learning” (p. 4). Benson (2001) adds that “autonomy can also be described as a capacity to take charge of, or take responsibility for, or control over your own learning” (p. 1). The three definitions focus mainly on the notion of taking control of one’s own learning or self-directed learning as well as attitudes and abilities along with the avoidance of distractions from the surrounding learning environment. To modify the understanding of learner autonomy, Dickinson (1987) described autonomy as “a mode of learning – one in which the individual is responsible for all the decisions connected with her learning and undertakes the implementation of these decisions” (p.27). Crabbe (1993) added that “the individual has the right to be free to exercise his or her own choices as in other areas, and not become a victim (even an unwitting one) of choices made by social institutions” (p. 443).

In language teaching and learning, even though the concept of learner autonomy has been discussed, modified, and critiqued in the decades following its introduction (Holec, 1981), Benson’s (2007) description of autonomy as “a complex and multifaceted concept” (p. 29) can provide a broader view of the concept. Paiva and Braga defined autonomy as follows:

autonomy is a complex socio-cognitive system, subject to internal and external constraints, which manifests itself in different degrees of independence and control of one’s own learning process. It involves capacities, abilities, attitudes, willingness, decision making, choices, planning, actions, and assessment either as a language learner or as a communicator inside or outside the classroom. As a complex system, it is dynamic, chaotic, unpredictable, non-linear, adaptive, open, self-organizing, and sensitive to initial conditions and feedback (p. 447).

Paiva and Braga’s (2008) definition of autonomy is suitable for the current study as it combines most of the views and arguments related to the term. The conceptualization describes language learners as having the ability to take responsibility in the language learning process, thus enhancing their language through decisions made regarding the study material and its reflections on their completed work.

Understanding the features of the concept of learner autonomy will provide better insights into the selection of appropriate strategies to foster learner autonomy. On the one hand, Littlewood (1996) claimed that there are three different types of autonomy that individuals possess: autonomy as a communicator (communicating using selected languages and suitable approaches), autonomy as a learner (deciding and taking individual responsibilities), and as a person (building and improving individual differences and establishing a foundation for learning). On the other hand, Benson (1997) proposed three levels learner of

autonomy in language learning: the technical, the psychological, and the political. The technical level contains strategies and management skills and the psychological level relates to “the capacity to take responsibility for one’s own learning”, while the political level involves “control over the content and process of one’s own learning” (p. 25). The connections between the three types of autonomy put forward by Little (1996) and the three levels of autonomy authorized by Benson (1997) may benefit teachers and researchers in selecting appropriate strategies for delivering English lessons that promote learner autonomy.

1.2. Fostering learner autonomy

Selecting appropriate strategies and methods for fostering LA can be challenging due to the effects that such efforts may have on the process and outcomes of autonomous learning. Among the many studies investigating the diverse approaches to promoting LA, the taxonomy developed by Benson (2001) has proven to be one of the most widely accepted frameworks. Six approaches for enhancing LA were introduced, including resource-based, technology-based, curriculum-based, teacher-based, classroom-based, and learner-based approaches, with different management functions described in connection with the learning procedure. Nguyen and Gu (2013) elaborated on the six approaches. First, resource-based approaches highlight learners’ opportunities to address their own learning in self-study, self-access, and distance learning, while learning resources and counseling have become the principal tools for the development of resource-based approaches. Secondly, technology-based approaches refer to the use of various digital tools in the learning process. Thirdly, curriculum-based approaches concentrate on teacher and learner discussions aimed at improving learners’ decision-making in regard to the content, activities, tasks, and evaluation of their learning. Fourthly, the teacher-based approaches focus on the expertise, mindsets, and efforts to promote LA in classroom practices. Fifthly, classroom-based approaches emphasize a shift in classroom relations and discipline that encourages a shift from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered approach. Finally, learner-based approaches attempt to equip learners with particular skills and in introducing them to approaches to monitoring their own learning. While the first five approaches encourage the learner to be more active in their own learning, the learner-based approaches tend to focus more on building and developing learning skills and strategies. Therefore, fostering learner autonomy in language education requires a consideration of the different factors that may affect “the effectiveness of initiatives designed on language learner autonomy” (Benson, 2007: 34–35).

1.3. The role of the teacher in fostering LA

The role of the teacher in fostering LA is complex and involves several interrelated factors that depend upon what the learner and the teacher perceive their respective roles to be, as well as the set of decisions made by both parties

and imposed upon them. Knowles (1975) stated that teachers act as facilitators, helpers, or consultants, while Higgs (2012) argued that during the learning process, teachers play the role of managers. This manager role involves creating a supportive and stimulating learning environment, being available as a learning resource, challenging learners to achieve their potential, and assisting learners in becoming aware of institutional requirements and expectations associated with the discipline in which they are studying. In addition, Nunan (1997) claimed that teachers are moving away from their conventional responsibilities towards new ones which involve closer engagement with their students' language acquisition and helping students to build effective learning practices; this leads to teachers becoming active participants, monitors, consultants, and guides for students. Voller (2014) also laid out the various roles that language teachers can play, including a facilitator who initiates and supports decision-making processes, a counselor who reacts to the needs of learners, and a resource who makes their knowledge and skills accessible to learners when required. Teachers play an important part in creating students' learning strategies, which may aid in the development of LA (Yang, 1998). Xu and Xu (2004) highlighted the ways in which teachers assisted learners in developing their beliefs and confidence in self-directed learning. These actions included supporting students in developing practical plans guiding students in considering and implementing learning methodologies, effectively implementing a self-directed center to help students develop LA, encouraging additional interaction between instructors and students via different medresourcesces to track the learning process, and increasing the number of possibilities for students to develop their autonomy. The findings of the above-mentioned studies have significantly contributed to increasing the awareness of learner autonomy and the ways that it can be promoted in the context of English language learning and teaching at the tertiary level in Vietnam by approaching the concept of learner autonomy from the perspective of teachers.

Based on the theoretical framework presented above and the objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

- 1) What role do EFL teachers at Vietnamese universities play in promoting learner autonomy?
- 2) What are the challenges that EFL teachers at Vietnamese universities face in promoting learner autonomy?
- 3) What solutions do EFL teachers at Vietnamese universities find helpful for promoting learner autonomy?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

A quantitative approach was opted for in order to gather data from a large sample of participants and gain more generalizable results. A descriptive survey design was used to investigate the fundamental roles that EFL teachers play in fostering learner autonomy at universities in Vietnam. Descriptive research helps the

researcher understand the characteristics and phenomena of their participants (Sekaran, 2003). The research instrument for this study was a questionnaire adapted from Alonazi (2017) which showed a high degree of reliability (the overall Cronbach's alpha value is 0.85). According to Taber (2018), Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.70 or higher are considered acceptable. Therefore, there was no pilot study conducted to test the reliability of the questionnaire used in the current study.

2.2. Participants

The participants of the study were EFL teachers who are teaching English majors at the tertiary level in Vietnam. The participants were randomly selected from various parts of the country and consisted of 111 EFL teachers from either public or private universities in the academic year 2020–2021. Among the 70 female and 41 male participants, 76 were working in public institutions and 35 were working in private ones. The participants' ages ranged from 24 to 61 years old and their years of teaching experience ranged from 1 to 40 years.

2.3. The Instrument

The questionnaire originally developed by Alonazi (2017) was adapted into an online format and used as the main instrument for data collection to measure teachers' perspectives regarding the roles that they play in fostering LA. The language of the questionnaire was English, as non-Vietnamese teachers are also working at Vietnamese universities. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first section contained 20 items using a five-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, 5 = always) which aimed to investigate the four roles that teachers play in promoting learner autonomy by measuring four different dimensions. The dimensions measured are listed below:

1. *The role of facilitator (4 items)*: respondents were asked to reflect on the extent to which they fulfilled the role of a counselor in their teaching practice. Example: Helping students to set up their own learning objectives.
2. *The role of a counselor (5 items)*: the same options were used as in the previous dimension to reflect on the teaching practice for the role of a counselor. Example: Making students aware of the skills and strategies needed to learn by themselves.
3. *The role of a resource (6 items)*: in regard to the extent to which they provide learners with resources in their teaching practice. Example: Selecting and evaluating resources according to students' needs and levels.
4. *The role of classroom manager (5 items)*: the respondents indicated the extent to which they fulfilled the classroom manager's role. Example: Organizing different kinds of games and activities in the classroom.

The second section aimed to identify the challenges teachers face in fostering learner autonomy by responding to five items on a five-point scale of agreement ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

5. *Challenges (5 items)*: respondents were asked to reflect on the extent to which they faced challenges in promoting learner autonomy. Example: Rules and regulations of the schools restrict the teachers' freedom in making choices on their teachings.

The third section of the questionnaire aimed to discover the participants preferred means of enhancing learner autonomy in higher education with four items using a five-point scale of agreement ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. (See Appendix A).

6. *Solutions (4 items)*: The respondent chose from the provided options to express the solutions that they found most helped in promoting learner autonomy. Example: Teachers' continuous reflection and analysis of their own teaching process.

Cronbach's alpha values were measured to determine the reliability of the scales that made up the questionnaire. The results showed that the overall Cronbach's alpha value was 0.88. The values ranged from 0.731 to 0.900, which suggested that the scales had a relatively high degree of reliability. Table 1 presents the Cronbach's alpha values of the three sections of the questionnaire.

2.4. Procedure

The online questionnaire for this study was designed with Google forms and consisted of four sections which represented the three scales (*Teachers' practices in promoting learner autonomy*, *Challenges teachers to face in promoting learner autonomy*, *Approaches that help in promoting learner autonomy*), and a section with biographical questions. The questionnaire was sent to random participants nationwide via email and was posted to a number of Vietnamese research groups on Facebook. The respondents spent approximately 20 minutes completing the questionnaire. It took four weeks to gather 111 responses from EFL teachers either from public or private universities in Vietnam.

2.5. Data analysis

The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 22.0. Descriptive statistics and frequency tests were computed to determine the mean and standard deviation values of the scales measured in the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis was carried out to check the internal reliability of the scales of the questionnaire.

Table 1. Cronbach’s Alpha Values to Measure the Reliability of the Questionnaire

No.	Scales	Cronbach’s Alpha
1	Teachers’ practices in promoting learner autonomy (20)	0.90
	<i>The role of facilitator (4)</i>	0.81
	<i>The role of a counselor (5)</i>	0.79
	<i>The role of a resource (6)</i>	0.90
	<i>The role of classroom manager (5)</i>	0.96
2	Challenges teachers face in promoting learner autonomy (5)	0.77
3	Approaches that help in promoting learner autonomy (4)	0.73
Total		0.88

3. Results

This section will present the results of the study. First, the roles of the EFL Vietnamese university teachers in promoting learner autonomy (i.e., *facilitator, counselor, resource, and classroom manager*) will be presented. Second, the challenges that Vietnamese university EFL teachers face in promoting learner autonomy will be discussed. Third, the EFL Vietnamese university teachers’ preferred approaches to promoting learner autonomy will also be analyzed.

3.1. Descriptive Statistics of the Scales

To answer RQ1 (What types of roles do Vietnamese university EFL teachers play in promoting learner autonomy?), descriptive statistics of the investigated scales were calculated.

3.1.1. The role of the facilitator

Table 2 shows the four items related to the role of English teachers as learning facilitators. The overall mean score is (3.84), which indicates that the respondents fulfill this role in promoting learner autonomy. The statement “Encouraging students to reflect on their learning process” scored the highest mean with 29 (26.1%) teachers who responded “always” and 49 (44.1%) who responded “often” to this statement. The statement “Helping students to set up their own learning objectives” has the second-highest mean, receiving similar responses to the highest mean statement, with 29 (26.1%) teachers who responded “always,” and 49 (44.1%) who responded “often”. The third and fourth rankings belong to the items “Helping students select their learning materials” and “Helping students evaluate their own learning and progress”. These received 30 (27%) “always” responses. Although the statement “Helping students to evaluate their own learning and progress” has the lowest mean score, there is a considerable number

of “often” responses to this statement, numbering 49 (44.1%). The third-ranking item received the lowest number of responses to “often” with only 40 participants (36%).

Table 2. Sample Responses for Teaching Practices Related to the Role of “Facilitator”

	Item	Mean	SD	Ranking
1	Helping students to set up their own learning objectives	3.86	0.94	2
2	Helping students to select their learning materials	3.85	1.07	3
3	Helping students to evaluate their own learning and progress	3.78	1.00	4
4	Encouraging students to reflect on their learning process	3.87	0.96	1
Overall mean		3.84	0.79	

3.1.2. The role of the counselor

Table 3 shows the data from the four items measuring the extent to which the participants fulfill the role of a counselor. The overall mean is 3.96, which suggests that the teachers sampled often play the role of “counselor” in promoting learner autonomy.

As shown in Table 3, the largest group of participants, 60 teachers (54.1%) reported that they “always” are “positive and supportive, especially when giving feedback” (this statement also received the highest mean value: 4.42). The statement “Making students aware of the skills and strategies needed to learn by themselves” is ranked second with 47 (42.3%) “always” responses. 50 (45%) of the participants believe that they “often” create “dialogues with students to find solutions to their learning difficulties”, suggesting that they find the practice to be more important in fostering learner autonomy than “Encouraging students to make study plans” with 44 (39.6%) “often” responses or “Identifying psychological problems that inhibit students’ progress” with 42 (37.8%).

3.1.3. The role of a “resource”

Table 4 consists of the data from item 10 to item 15, which examine the “resource” role of the participants in their teaching. It is indicated that the teachers often fulfill the role of a “resource” in promoting autonomy, as the overall mean is 4.06. The item “Suggesting websites, videos or online dictionaries that motivate students to use the target language outside the classroom”, which scored the highest mean value ($M = 4.33$), received the same number of responses as the second-highest-ranking statement, “ Encouraging students to study with their peers”, with 51 (45.9%) teachers selected “always.” Surprisingly, the same number of respondents, 51 (45.9%), “often” reported that they “often” use

“computer-based learning materials”. There are 49 (44.1%) teachers who reported “often” “Selecting and evaluating resources according to students’ needs and levels” and 45 (40.5%) participants also reported that they “often” encourage “students to read English books, magazines, and newspapers outside the classroom.”

Table 3. Sample Responses for Teaching Practices Related to the Role of “Counselor”

N	Item	Mean	SD	Ranking
5	Making students aware of the skills and strategies needed to learn by themselves.	4.25	0.76	2
6	Identifying psychological problems that inhibit students’ progress.	3.41	1.05	5
7	Making dialogues with students to find solutions to their learning difficulties.	3.81	0.89	4
8	Encouraging students to make study plans.	3.91	0.93	3
9	Being positive and supportive, especially when giving feedback	4.42	0.71	1
Overall mean		3.96	0.62	

3.1.4. The role of “Classroom Manager”

Table 5 shows the results for five items related to the practices of the sampled EFL teachers regarding the role of classroom manager. The overall mean is 4.09, which suggests that the participants often play the role of “classroom manager”. The statement “Providing clear instructions of the tasks assigned to students” received the highest number of responses, with 66 (59.5%) responding “always”; this item also has the highest mean value ($M = 4.54$). Regarding the number of participants who responded with “often,” the other four statements received slightly different responses. Additionally, 54 (48.6%) teachers “often” organize “different kinds of games and activities in the classroom”, 53 (47.7%) teachers “often” give “learners opportunities to tell their opinions about their learning activities”, 52 (46.8%) teachers “often” give “learners opportunities to tell their opinions about classroom management”, and 50 (45%) participants “often” explain “the purposes and the significance of the tasks assigned to students”.

Table 6 summarizes and highlights how EFL teachers at Vietnamese universities often play multiple roles to promote LA. The overall mean of the four roles is 4.00. It can be seen that the “manager” role still dominates among Vietnamese university EFL teachers, receiving the highest rank. Moreover, the teachers in the study also fulfill the role of a “resource” for learners as the role of “resource” received the second highest mean score. To promote LA, it is important to focus on the learner-centered approaches to provide learners with particular skills and approaches to monitor their own learning. Hence, fostering

LA in language education requires the consideration of different factors that may affect “the effectiveness of initiatives designed on language learner autonomy” (Benson, 2007, pp. 34-35). Nunan (1997) stated that teachers’ traditional roles were being replaced by new ones, reflected in the responses of the participants who acted as monitors, advisors, and guides as they worked closely with their students to improve the language acquisition process and assist them in developing better learning methods. Additionally, language teacher may act as a facilitator who initiates and supports decision-making processes, a counselor who responds to students’ ongoing needs, and a resource who makes his or her knowledge and abilities available to learners when needed (Voller, 2014). In other words, the roles of the teacher as a “facilitator” and a “counselor” need to be the primary roles.

Table 4. Sample Responses for Teaching Practices Related to the Role of a “Resource”

N	Item	Mean	SD	Ranking
10	Suggesting tools and techniques for self-assessment	3.76	1.01	6
11	Using computer-based learning materials	3.98	0.81	5
12	Selecting and evaluating resources according to students’ needs and levels.	4.00	0.85	4
13	Suggesting websites, videos, or online dictionaries that motivate students to use the target language outside the classroom	4.33	0.72	1
14	Encouraging students to read English books, magazines, and newspapers outside the classroom.	4.06	0.91	3
15	Encouraging students to study with their peers.	4.23	0.90	2
	Overall mean	4.06	0.56	

In response to RQ2 (What are the challenges that EFL teachers at Vietnamese universities face in promoting learner autonomy?), the second section of the questionnaire investigated the challenges the participants face in promoting learner autonomy in their teaching practice. As the overall mean of the five items is 3.13, the level of agreement with the items overall appears to be somewhat neutral.

The results in Table 7 demonstrate that the challenges the teachers and learners faced stemmed from both teachers and learners. On the one hand, regarding challenges caused by learners, 52 (46.8%) of the teachers responded “strongly agree” to the statement “Students lack the skills for autonomous learning”. This suggests that teachers recognize the importance of learner-centeredness and

learner autonomy. On the other hand, 38 (34.2%) of the teachers reported that they agreed with the statement “Teachers lack the essential strategies to promote learner autonomy”. In addition, 33 (29.7%) others reported “neutral” responses to “Teachers themselves are not autonomous”. In regard to the items “Technology is not effectively implemented in language learning” and “Rules and regulations of the schools restrict the teachers’ freedom in making choices on their teachings”, it is suggested that these factors reflect negative influences on the promotion of learner autonomy, as they both received 26 (23.4%) “agree” and “neutral” responses. The findings addressed the same issue raised in previous autonomy research, namely that learners were passive and inexperienced with autonomy (Dang, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2014; Roe & Perkins, 2020; Thai, 2015). Based on the results it appears that further efforts are required from teachers to assist students in becoming aware of the notion of autonomy and develop their independent learning abilities.

Table 5. Sample Responses for Teaching Practices Related to the Role of “Manager”

N	Item	Mean	SD	Ranking
16	Organizing different kinds of games and activities in the classroom.	3.89	0.81	4
17	Providing clear instructions on the tasks assigned to students.	4.54	0.60	1
18	Explaining the purposes and the significance of the tasks assigned to students.	4.28	0.73	2
19	Giving learners opportunities to tell their opinions about classroom management.	3.86	0.88	5
20	Giving learners opportunities to tell their opinions about their learning activities	3.91	0.80	3
Overall mean		4.09	0,53	

Table 6. The Means and Standard Deviations of the Four Roles

N	Roles	Mean	S. Deviation	Ranking
1	Manager	4.09	0.53	1
2	Resource	4.06	0.56	2
3	Counselor	3.96	0.62	3
4	Facilitator	3.84	0.79	4
Overall mean		4.00	0.51	

In response to RQ3 (What do EFL teachers at Vietnamese universities find helpful for promoting LA?), another descriptive statistic test was run to investigate the participants preferred approaches toward enhancing learner autonomy.

Table 7. Sample Responses for the Challenges that the English Teachers Face in Promoting Learner Autonomy

N	Items	Mean	SD	Ranking
21	Students lack the skills for autonomous learning.	4.10	1.03	1
22	Teachers lack the essential strategies to promote learner autonomy.	3.50	1.15	2
23	Teachers themselves are not autonomous.	2.80	1.26	4
24	Technology is not effectively implemented in language learning.	2.70	1.29	5
25	Rules and regulations of the schools restrict the teachers' freedom in making choices regarding their teachings.	3.12	1.28	3
Overall mean		3.13	0.97	

The results in Table 8, consisting of four items, investigated approaches that help EFL Vietnamese university teachers in promoting learner autonomy in the third section of the questionnaire. The overall mean was 4.21, which indicates a general agreement among the respondents regarding the approaches to promoting learner autonomy. The statement “Teachers’ continuous reflection and analysis of their own teaching process” received the highest mean score ($M = 4.35$), with 51 (45.9%) teachers “strongly agreeing” with the approach. There were 51 (45.9%) participants who responded that they “strongly agree” with the approach of “Introducing learner autonomy in teacher education to future teachers”. Regarding the approach of “Reducing the institutional rules that restrict teacher autonomy,” there were 44 (39.6%) participants who strongly agreed. The approach “Offering in-service teachers with professional development programs on learner autonomy” received 50 (45%) “agree” responses.

Table 8. Sample Responses regarding the Approaches that Help EFL Teachers at Vietnamese Universities Promote Learner Autonomy

N	Items	Mean	SD	Ranking
26	Introducing learner autonomy in teacher education to future teachers.	4.29	0.76	2
27	Offering in-service teachers with professional development programs on learner autonomy.	4.23	0.75	3
28	Reducing the institutional rules that restrict teacher autonomy.	3.97	1.04	4
29	Teachers’ continuous reflection and analysis of their own teaching process.	4.35	0.68	1
Overall mean		4.21	0.61	

4. Conclusion

The decision to consider autonomy in the context of language learning is often made by the teacher, and a teacher's efforts to promote autonomy are often dependent on the rethinking of their role as a teacher (Alonazi, 2017). Crabbe (1993) similarly advocated that the teacher's position be reconsidered in order to help students become more autonomous. Teacher reflection is the practice of assessing beliefs, goals, and actions in order to enhance student learning. Cognitive reflection is a reliable indicator of this feature in regard to teachers' beliefs about autonomy. The reflective practice may help teachers with the selection, planning, and sequencing of teaching methods, as well as increase the presence of autonomy curriculum. Practicing the cognitive component of reflection can help instructors enhance their teaching abilities and become self-sufficient enough at the level of curricular autonomy to organize classes and choose materials in order to foster learner autonomy. (Noormohammadi, 2014).

In the Vietnamese higher education context, LA has been emphasized as an effective factor for enhancing the quality of language classroom practice (Roe & Perkins, 2020). The purpose of this questionnaire study was to investigate the critical roles that EFL teachers play in fostering LA at universities in Vietnam. The findings from this study demonstrated how EFL teachers at Vietnamese universities reflect on their views and their roles in promoting learner autonomy, which contributes to a better understanding of the challenges that constrain the promotion of LA and preferred solutions for promoting autonomous learning. The study results revealed that EFL teachers at Vietnamese universities often play the roles of "classroom manager" and "resource" in their teaching practice. Further research can be carried out to investigate factors affecting the roles of teachers as "facilitators" and "counselors" in higher education.

The reflections on teachers' challenges in their teaching practice, namely, that "Students lack the skills for autonomous learning" and "Teachers lack the essential strategies to promote learner autonomy" are the most concerning factors highlighted in this study. EFL Vietnamese teachers must discover approaches that can be implemented to develop learning skills and provide teachers with useful strategies. Therefore, intensive support will be needed to promote LA so that students will be able to implement what they learn in real life outside the classroom.

The limitations of this study result from the methodology, a single quantitative questionnaire. The research instrument was an adapted questionnaire, which was prepared in a different country (Saudi Arabia), with a different culture, language, and target group. In order to generalize this study, the research instrument needs to be modified and the sample defined with a clear context of research to suit the aim of the research project. Further investigations are required in order to find the strategies that help teachers implement the four roles: manager, facilitator, counselor, and resource in learner-centered language education.

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