



Exploring the Enabling Factors and Constraints for Developing Learner Autonomy in an Underprivileged Indonesian EFL Context

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Learner autonomy is a multidimensional and complex concept that has attracted immense research attention in both Western and Asian contexts. The majority of this research focused on privileged environments neglecting underprivileged contexts, where learner autonomy has been recognised as a rescue strategy. Simultaneously, most research addressed either student or teacher perceptions on learner autonomy development in a single study. This study addressed the aforementioned gaps, by investigating EFL teachers' and students' perceptions about the prospects and barriers in the promotion of learner autonomy in disadvantaged Indonesian secondary schools. It adopted a phenomenological qualitative approach comprising 32 interviews with EFL teachers and focus groups with 30 EFL learners. Findings revealed that both teacher and student participants identified socioeconomic factors as the most prominent hindrance comprising limited access to learning resources and limited time to conduct autonomous learning. Moreover, a notable disparity emerged in the teachers' and students' perceptions of the enabling factors for promoting autonomy. The students were more optimistic about the feasibility of developing learner autonomy, acknowledging several enabling factors compared to their teachers. The study provides practical implications for designing appropriate teacher training to address the needs of many similar underresourced teaching environments.

Otonomi pebelajar adalah konsep multidimensi dan kompleks yang telah menarik perhatian banyak penelitian di konteks Barat dan Asia. Mayoritas penelitian ini berfokus pada konteks lingkungan yang maju dan memiliki hak istimewa namun mengabaikan konteks yang kurang mampu, di mana otonomi pebelajar telah diakui sebagai strategi penyelamatan. Secara bersamaan, sebagian besar penelitian membahas persepsi siswa atau guru saja dalam satu studi tentang pengembangan otonomi pebelajar. Penelitian ini merujuk pada kesenjangan yang disebutkan di atas, dengan mengeksplorasi persepsi guru dan siswa yang mempelajari Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing tentang prospek dan hambatan dalam meningkatkan otonomi pebelajar di sekolah menengah tertinggal di Indonesia. Penelitian ini mengadopsi pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologis yang terdiri dari 32 wawancara dengan guru Bahasa Inggris dan wawancara kelompok dengan 30 pelajar. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa baik guru maupun siswa mengidentifikasi faktor sosial ekonomi sebagai hambatan terbesar yang terdiri dari terbatasnya akses terhadap sumber belajar dan terbatasnya waktu untuk melakukan pembelajaran mandiri. Namun, kesenjangan yang mencolok muncul pada persepsi kedua kelompok partisipan ini terkait faktor pendukung dalam implementasi otonomi pebelajar. Hal ini terkonfirmasi dalam persepsi kedua kelompok partisipan tersebut mengenai kelayakan implementasi otonomi pebelajar ini. Dalam hal faktor pendukung untuk meningkatkan otonomi, siswa lebih optimis mengenai kemungkinan mengembangkan otonomi pebelajar, dan menyatakan beberapa faktor pendukung dibandingkan dengan guru mereka. Studi ini memberikan implikasi praktis untuk pelatihan guru yang sesuai untuk memenuhi kebutuhan banyak lingkungan pengajaran yang kekurangan sumber daya.



Keywords: learner autonomy, EFL teacher perceptions, EFL student perceptions, underprivileged schools, feasibility of learner autonomy

Introduction

Learner autonomy has been a sought-after educational goal in many educational institutions and educational curricula globally. Similar to many other nations, learner autonomy has been one of Indonesian national education goals and was first introduced in the new curriculum reform, Curriculum 2013 (Khaerudin & Chik, 2021). The curriculum 2013 promoted the adoption of learner autonomy to address global educational trends, the growing and diverse nature of local student needs and the advancements of science and technology (Daflizar, 2017). It highlighted the integration of aspects of learner autonomy, specifically the active involvement of students in their own learning and in knowledge development and construction (Kemendikbud, 2018). The centrality of learner autonomy in the curriculum 2013 reform is seen in the terms “active learning” and “independent learning”, which are often connected to learner autonomy (Benson & Huang, 2008). This curriculum innovation expects teachers to shift their roles from authoritarian teachers to communicative, learner-centred guides, and facilitators (Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati, 2019; Suyanto, 2018). They are expected to create learning tasks that not only engage students in knowledge discovery and knowledge transfer but also raise their awareness of the use of their own learning strategies.

A number of studies in the Indonesian context (Agustien, 2014; Arifin, 2017; Qoyyimah et al., 2020; Suyanto, 2018) have reported that English teachers face difficulties in implementing the new curriculum guidelines and some highlighted the difficulty of fostering learner autonomy. With particular reference to this curriculum innovation in the Indonesian schools, limited research (e.g., Cirocki et al., 2019; Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati, 2019) has looked at the feasibility of promoting this concept from the perspectives of both teachers and students particularly those in underprivileged schools of Indonesia. The current study is part of a large-scale research project intended to bridge this gap by exploring teachers’ and students’ perspectives on the feasibility and potential challenges of promoting learner autonomy in underprivileged Indonesian schools (Amalo, 2023). The findings of this study extend the literature on learner autonomy research in Asian context (e.g. Chan et al., 2002; Daflizar, 2017; Daflizar & Petraki, 2022; Gamble et al., 2012; Yildirim, 2008) as well as investigations into the feasibility in promoting it in underprivileged and rural educational contexts.

Literature Review

Definitions of Learner Autonomy

The construct of learner autonomy was first coined by Holec (1981), who defined it as “the ability to take charge of one’s own their learning” (p. 3). This ability comprises skills for making decisions in learning such as: determining learning objectives, defining the learning contents and progressions, selecting learning methods, monitoring learning acquisitions and evaluating learning progress and acquisition. Following Holec’s definition, Little (1991, p.4) put forward another definition of learner autonomy, considering the learner’s psychological capacity to control the learning process.

Essentially, autonomy is a capacity—for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in how the learner learns and in how he or she transfers what has been learned to broader contexts (Little, 1991, p. 4).

Three years later, Little (1994) further asserted that learner autonomy is “the product of interdependence rather than independence”. In this view, learners need guidance from others, such as teachers and peers, on developing their autonomy instead of simply being told that they are autonomous (Little, 1994) and this has been one of the common misconceptions about the concept (Benson, 2007).

To summarise the numerous definitions of learner autonomy, Benson and Voller (1997) highlight five different ways the term has been used in language education (p. 1-2) and which guided this research:

- for situations in which learners study entirely on their own;
- for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
- for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by the institution;
- for the exercise of learners’ responsibility for their own learning;
- for the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

Arguably, there is consensus on the complex, multifaceted, and multidimensional aspects of learner autonomy (Benson, 2011; Everhard, 2019; Murase, 2015). Notably, autonomy does not imply complete independence from teachers, but can be a gradual progression towards learning independence and may comprise varied support from teachers assisting student development of active learning strategies (Oxford, 2003). Hence, different levels of autonomy may be practised differently from context to context, especially in the underprivileged EFL context where the scarcity in language learning resources, is often regarded as incentive for its implementation (Smith et al., 2018; Teng, 2019).

Previous Studies on Learner Autonomy

A large number of studies on learner autonomy have been conducted in both Western and non-Western educational contexts examining either teachers’ or learners’ beliefs of its importance or implementation. In terms of teachers’ beliefs, in the Western context, Camilleri (1999) was the pioneer in investigating teachers’ beliefs about learner autonomy in European countries (Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Belorussia, Estonia, and Poland). She then replicated this study eight years later (Camilleri, 2007) in Malta. Studies on teachers’ beliefs of learner autonomy in the non-Western contexts have been well documented in the literature to name a few: China (Wang & Wang, 2016), Hong Kong (Chan, 2003), Japan (Nakata, 2011; Roloff Rothman & King, 2017), Iran (Ahmadianzadeh et al., 2020; Amirian & Noughabi, 2017; Salimi & Ansari, 2015), Turkey (Balcikanlı, 2010; Doğan & Mirici, 2017; Inozu, 2011), Oman (Al-Busaidi & Al-Maamari, 2014; Al-Shaqsi, 2009; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012), Saudi Arabia (Al Asmari, 2013; Asiri & Shukri, 2018; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019), Vietnam (Nga, 2014; Phan & Hamid, 2017), and Thailand (Duong, 2014; Wichayathian & Reinders, 2015).

Findings from all contexts indicate that most EFL teachers place high value to student autonomy development (e.g. Ahmadianzadeh et al., 2020; Al-Busaidi & Al-Maamari, 2014; Amirian & Noughabi, 2017; Asiri & Shukri, 2018; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Camilleri, 1999, 2007; Salimi & Ansari, 2015; Wichayathian & Reinders, 2015). With regard to the research in the Asian contexts, despite their positive perceptions, teachers are less optimistic about the feasibility of implementing autonomous practices, due to various hindrances resulting from students’ low motivation or low linguistic proficiency. (e.g., Ahmadianzadeh et al., 2020; Al-Busaidi & Al-Maamari, 2014; Amirian & Noughabi, 2017; Asiri & Shukri, 2018; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Doğan & Mirici, 2017; Wichayathian & Reinders, 2015).

Similarly, significant research has been conducted on students’ readiness for learner autonomy in both Western (Cotteral, 2000, 2017) and non-Western contexts. (e.g. Chan et al., 2002; Daflizar, 2017; Daflizar & Petraki, 2022; Gamble et al., 2012; Koçak, 2003; Yildirim, 2008). Findings from these studies indicated that learners seem to be ready to take responsibility in several areas of the language learning process.

Despite extensive research on teachers’ and learners’ beliefs of learner autonomy, to date, very few studies have combined teachers’ and students’ beliefs of autonomy within the same research context (Joshi, 2012; Lin & Reinders, 2019). Examination of both students’ and teachers’ perspectives would provide a

comprehensive understanding of the enablers and constraints of learner autonomy development and would guide recommendations for implementation in that context. Additionally, none of the aforementioned studies was conducted in underprivileged contexts. Most of the studies were conducted in well-resourced and privileged Asian institutional contexts (e.g., Ahmadianzadeh et al., 2020; Al-Busaidi & Al-Maamari, 2014; Amirian & Noughabi, 2017; Asiri & Shukri, 2018; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Chan et al., 2002; Choi & Lee, 2020; Doğan & Mirici, 2017; Gamble et al., 2012; Koçak, 2003; Salimi & Ansari, 2015; Wichayathian & Reinders, 2015; Yildirim, 2008).

In the Indonesian context, research on learner autonomy appears negligible. Limited studies have focused on teachers' beliefs of learner autonomy (Agustina, 2017; Darsih, 2018; Lengkanawati, 2017; Yuliani & Lengkanawati, 2017) or learners' beliefs on learner autonomy (Daflizar, 2017; Daflizar & Petraki, 2022; Lamb, 2004; Mardjuki, 2018) or the combination of teacher and learner beliefs of learner autonomy (e.g. Cirocki et al., 2019; Khotimah et al., 2019; Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati, 2019). After the 2013 curriculum reform, research findings were inconclusive as to whether teachers or students fully understand their roles and are ready to embrace this innovation (Agustina, 2017; Darsih, 2018; Lengkanawati, 2017; Yuliani & Lengkanawati, 2017). For example, Agustina (2017) concluded that most teachers from her study had positive perceptions about the benefits of developing learner autonomy and saw no cultural barriers to adopting this view. A study conducted by Yuliani & Lengkanawati (2017) revealed that most students were not accustomed to being autonomous learners, therefore, held negative attitudes toward the promotion of learner autonomy. Equally, analysis of Indonesian ELT materials suggests there is limited support for students and teachers for developing learner autonomy (Khaerudin & Chik, 2021)

While learner autonomy development has several language learning benefits including improved academic performance and lifelong learning, some researchers highlighted the necessity of developing learner autonomy in underprivileged contexts. For example, Kuchah & Smith (2011) and Fonseka (2003) advocate the need for developing learner autonomy as a 'rescue strategy and practical strategy'. Both research studies revealed the need of the teachers to address the underresourced classrooms in Cameroon and Sri Lanka by engaging students in selecting materials and resources and collaboratively creating English songs. Fonseka (2003) goes on to argue that ignoring the underresourced environments will destine the children to continue to be the underprivileged majority. Hence, the development of learner autonomy in that context can empower students with skills and strategies to take control of their learning, offer them opportunities to create their own conditions for learning and equip them with lifelong learning skills to be resilient in facing numerous challenges in their lives.

In line with the discussion of the above articles, Lamb's (2013) study in a relatively remote rural area in Indonesia further validated the evidence of learner autonomy practice in the context under investigation. His study reported that the learners also made use of learning resources available in their contexts such as listening to English songs, watching English TV and videos in internet cafes, and made daily use of mobile phone technology. The limited research in this context, the importance of viewing learner autonomy as a rescue strategy presented strong motivations to conduct this research in Indonesian underprivileged schools.

The Feasibility and Constraints of Developing Learner Autonomy

Several studies have investigated the feasibility or enabling factors and challenges of developing learner autonomy from the perspectives of teachers and students. Studies on teachers' beliefs, for example, have identified both enabling factors and hindrances for fostering student autonomy (e.g. Al Asmari, 2013; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Shahsavari, 2014; Wang & Wang, 2016). Findings from these studies show that most teachers are more concerned about the hindrances of promoting learner autonomy rather than feasibility of promoting it. For example, Wang and Wang (2016) conducted a study in one Chinese university involving 44 English teachers, investigating teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy using questionnaires, interviews, and email correspondence. According to the findings, teachers felt that students' lack of motivation prevented them from fostering learner autonomy. To illustrate further, in Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) study on teachers' perspectives, participants revealed that their view of students' limited ability to conduct

autonomous learning constrained them from implementing optimal practices for developing learner autonomy. This rationale for not promoting learner autonomy among their students may arise when teachers are unclear about how to develop autonomy and doubt their own knowledge and experience for initiating such practices resulting in the teachers' pessimism of enabling factors for developing learner autonomy.

Various constraining factors have been highlighted in these studies, such as social factors, psychological factors, and institutional factors. Other researchers categorised constraints in developing learner autonomy in terms of policy, institution, and language teaching methodologies (Benson, 2011); or teacher factors, learner factors and institutional factors (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Several studies have identified inappropriate teachers' practices, teaching methodology and assessment as institutional factors which may prevent the promotion of learner autonomy (Al Asmari, 2013; Nakata, 2011; Shahsavari, 2014; Wang & Wang, 2016). The institutional barriers included insufficient in-service training opportunities, rigid rules in the professional training and classroom teaching, not allowing much creativity (Shahsavari, 2014; Wang & Wang, 2016), exam-oriented educational culture (Nakata, 2011), and poor teaching facilities (Asmari, 2013).

In terms of teacher factors, Farahani's (2014) study reported several constraints ranging from teachers' doubt of learners' abilities, lack of teacher autonomy and lack of previous autonomous experiences, while Nga's study (2014) cited traditional teaching perspectives and educational policies. In terms of learner related factors, Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) study reported the following constraints in developing learner autonomy: students' lack of motivation and lack of skills for independent study, institutional factors such as lack of teachers' autonomy; low expectations of what learners can achieve while Nasri et al. (2015) highlighted learners' low English proficiency.

The review of the aforementioned literature identified two important gaps. First, the growing literature on beliefs of learner autonomy in a wide range of Asian countries, including studies in Indonesia, has focused on well-resourced environments, and elicited either teachers' or students' perspectives. Limited research has been devoted to comparing teachers' and students' beliefs regarding the feasibility of developing learner autonomy to provide a comprehensive picture and support in that context. Given the complexity of influencing and hindering factors in autonomy promotion, and the importance of teacher and student roles, this research is imperative.

In the Indonesian setting, there is an even stronger incentive to conduct the research, given the emphasis of learner autonomy in the curriculum. To address the research gaps and contribute to improvement in that context, the present study aimed at investigating both EFL teachers' and students' perceptions on the feasibility and challenges of developing learner autonomy in underprivileged senior high schools in Eastern Indonesia. The following research question is addressed in the study: *How do EFL teachers and students perceive the feasibility and challenges of developing learner autonomy and is there alignment between teachers' and students' perceptions?*

Methodology

Research Design

Considering the complexity of the concept of learner autonomy and the challenges in its implementation discussed in the literature, this present research utilised a qualitative approach with a focus on exploring the participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon, defined as a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2007). Based on the Indonesian curriculum 2013, teachers were expected to develop and promote learner autonomy in the classroom, hence, an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences of this phenomenon was considered an important goal. These perceptions include descriptions of "what" they experienced and "how" they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to gather participants' diverse perceptions of learner autonomy guided by their "lived experiences" of living, teaching, and learning in this disadvantaged environment (Moustakas, 1994).

The adoption of the qualitative approach addressed the multitude of studies on learner autonomy utilising quantitative methods such as survey research (e.g. Al-Shaqsi, 2009; Al Asmari, 2013; Chan, 2003; Duong, 2014; Phan & Hamid, 2017; Reinders & Lazaro, 2011). Using a qualitative lens in such context, comprising semi-structured interviews, enabled a comprehensive understanding of the unique dimensions of learner autonomy from the perspectives of the research participants (Creswell, 2014; Leavy, 2017).

Research Setting

The study was conducted in East Nusa Tenggara (ENT) province, one of underprivileged provinces in Indonesia. It is well-known for its relatively high incidence of poverty and is under-developed compared to other parts of Indonesia (BPS NTT, 2018). It was reported as one of the poorest provinces in Indonesia comprising 22% of its total population living in poverty, which is about 1.15 million people (BPS NTT, 2018). The research was specifically conducted in schools located in the two poorest regencies of this province: *Kupang* regency and *Timur Tengah Selatan* regency.

Most schools in these areas were located in remote and rural areas. The school infrastructure was far from being able to provide a conducive physical environment to student learning. Most school buildings looked quite old with broken roofs, floors, chairs, and desks. Some of the classrooms did not have sufficient chairs for students to sit on resulting in two students sharing one single chair. The heat seemed to be a daily challenge for both teachers and students to cope during summer since there was no air conditioning in the classrooms. The inexistence of electricity in these schools also proved another obstacle preventing teachers from using technological tools that require power.

Research Participants

The use of purposeful sampling in this study aimed to collect data from teachers and students from disadvantaged schools in this province. The participants in this study, comprising 32 EFL teachers and 30 students, were from 23 disadvantaged schools situated in *Kupang* regency and *Timur Tengah Selatan* regency. The teacher participants, consisting of 19 female and 13 male teachers, had over 5 years of English teaching experiences. They all had participated in teacher training regarding the implementation of Curriculum 2013 which emphasised the notion of independent learning. The teachers' training and teaching experience criteria were selected to eliminate inconsistencies in participant answers such as lack of knowledge and understanding of Curriculum 2013 concepts and to identify recommendations for future training. There were 30 student participants comprising both female and male students who came from six schools where six of the teacher participants taught.

Data Collection Procedures and Analysis

The data collection took place over the period of eight weeks in the aforementioned schools. These schools were categorised as underprivileged schools given their location and school accreditation, based on the quality standard of National Board Accreditation.

The research was approved by a university Ethics Committee prior to the data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their involvement, and they all volunteered to take part. Considering the age of the students, consent from both students and their parents or guardians were also obtained prior to the data collection. The interviews asked participants about their attitudes to learner autonomy, perceptions on the feasibility of learner autonomy, enabling and hindering factors in developing and practicing learner autonomy in these disadvantages contexts and suggestions for promoting learner autonomy.

Consistent with the study's qualitative approach, individual semi-structured interviews with teachers and focus group interviews were employed with the students. The interviews with teachers and students were conducted face-to-face and, at a time and location that best suited the participants. Both teachers and student

participants were given the option to be interviewed in either English or Bahasa Indonesia. All teachers and students chose to be interviewed in Indonesian, to allow more in-depth responses. To ensure confidentiality of the data, minimise any influences from the teachers and enhance students' privacy and freedom to express their views freely, the interviews with students were conducted in either vacant classrooms or libraries in the participants' schools, during recess or after school hours without the presence of their teachers.

The procedures of data analysis of this present study involved several steps. First, after the data was collected, both the interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim in Bahasa Indonesia. Thematic analysis was then adopted which entailed identifying, coding, defining, analysing, and reporting themes in rigorous detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following this stage, findings were reported using coded analysis and codes/themes were validated with participant quotes. Quotes were then translated in the English language for the purposes of the manuscript preparation. As both student and teacher population consisted of at least 30 participants, relative frequencies and percentages were calculated and presented in the following section to offer greater detail (Maxwell, 2010). The student and teacher perspectives were compared and contrasted to arrive at in-depth insights into participant beliefs and provide recommendations.

To ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research, in this current study data triangulation and investigator triangulation were employed to strengthen the credibility of the research findings. Data triangulation (triangulation of data sources) refers to the use of various perspectives or participant voices to compare and check the consistency of data obtained by divergent means in a qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 1999). Triangulation of multiple data sources enhances the credibility of research findings (Merriam, 2015; Yin, 2013). Therefore, data from teachers' interviews and students' focus groups were triangulated to yield more comprehensive understanding of learner autonomy implementation, expose various issues surrounding the understanding and attitudes towards learner autonomy and highlight similarities and differences in their views about learner autonomy. Additionally, investigator triangulation was employed in the design and analysis. This involves several researchers engaging in observations and analysing participants' responses, which enables consistency and reduction of potential bias arising from only one investigator or analyst (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this study, both authors were involved in the methodological design, data analysis, coding and agreement on the main themes.

Findings

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions about the Feasibility of Developing Learner Autonomy

The data indicate that only ten teachers (31%) were positive that learner autonomy could be implemented in their teaching contexts. The majority of these teachers referred to the requirement of the new curriculum as a basis for this feasibility. T3M, was the only teacher who reasoned that this possibility was due to the small size of students in each class.

Teaching a small number of students in class is more manageable. A teacher will find it easy to manage the class and provide an opportunity for each student to participate actively in class. For example, if we give them opportunities to practice their speaking, all of them have opportunities to participate in the task due to the small number of students. If there are so many students in class, it will be difficult for teachers to provide feedback on all their work during class. So, I think it is possible for us to implement learner autonomy if the class size is only 20 students. (T3M).

The remaining 22 teachers (69%) indicated their doubts regarding the possibility of developing learner autonomy due to various constraining factors which will be discussed in the ensuing section.

In contrast, all participating students (32 or 100%) were optimistic about the prospects of developing learner autonomy. They provided several contextual reasons for this belief: *availability of learning resources (15 students or 50%), students' willingness (nine or 33% students), support from English teachers (6 or 20 %), support from family (5 or 17% students), and meeting the global need for improving English competence (5 students or 17%).*

The possibility of the promotion of learner autonomy in terms of the availability of learning resources (15 students or 50%) was described in the following extract.

Learner autonomy is possible in our context because we have mobile phones and books available in the library for us to learn (FG4S1).

Additionally, students supported the feasibility of learner autonomy development on the grounds that it depends on students' willingness whether they want to pursue autonomous learning or not (9 students or 33%) and their recognition of English in meeting the global demand (5 students or 17%). This is shown in the following extracts respectively.

It depends on students if they want to learn autonomously or not. If they do not have books, they still can learn independently by borrowing the book from the teacher and make a copy. (FG6S3).

English is important for us. If in the future international trade takes place in our place where people from other countries come and trade in our country, of course, they speak English. Therefore, we need to have English ability so we will not be fooled by those who come to our country and talk in English. (FG2S2).

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions about the Challenges in Promoting Learner Autonomy

Regarding the challenges in promoting learner autonomy, both students and teachers acknowledged several constraints, which were organised into the following categories: *socio-economic factors, institutional factors, motivational factors, and cultural factors*. Table 1 below provides a categorisation of these constraints and distribution from the perspectives of teachers and students.

TABLE 1
Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Factors that Hinder the Development of Learner Autonomy

Categories	Percentage of teachers (N=32)	Percentage of students (N=30)	Sub-categories	Percentage (%) of teachers (N=32)	Percentage (%) of students (N=30)
Socio-economic factors	50% (16 teachers) *	46% (14 students) *	Lack of learning resources	50% (16 teachers)	33% (10 students)
			Students' low English proficiency	28% (9 teachers)	0% (0 students)
			Lack of parental investment in their children's education	25% (8 teachers)	0% (0 students)
			Inadequate time to study at home	9% (3 teachers)	13% (4 students)
Institutional factors	47% (15 teachers) *	13% (4 students) *	Lack of supportive teaching and learning resources	28% (9 teachers)	13% (4 students)
			Unconducive classrooms	22% (7 teachers)	0% (0 students)
			Limited time allocation for English instruction	18% (6 teachers)	0% (0 students)
Psychological factors	41% (13 teachers) *	20% (6 students) *	Low level of students' motivation	41% (13 teachers)	23% (7 students)
			Personal distractions	0% (0 teachers)	7% (2 students)
Cultural factors	41% (13 teachers) *	17% (5 students) *	The dominance of local language	28% (9 teachers)	0% (0 students)
			Learners' dependence on teachers	28% (9 teachers)	0% (0 students)
			Students' low esteem or shyness	0% (0 teachers)	17% (5 students)

Note. *The percentage of teachers and students adds up to more than 100% because a few teachers and students provided more than one view on the constraints on developing learner autonomy.

The challenges relating to socio-economic factors perceived by the teachers include *lack of learning resources* (50%), *students' low English proficiency* (28%), *lack of parental investment in education* (25%) and *inadequate time to study at home* (9%). The most dominant challenge raised by the teachers was the *paucity of learning resources to learn autonomously at home* (50%). These include sufficient use of dictionaries, textbooks and access to a computer at home. The following extract indicates this concern:

The first obstacle is the availability of learning resources—for instance, the availability of dictionaries. We require students to bring their dictionary [during English lessons], but often, many do not bring it to class. We usually try to make students active during the teaching and learning process and make them the centre of learning. To make them more active than teachers in the classrooms. However, most of the time, we as teachers are more active than students because we must explain things to them. We explain every word they do not understand because they do not have dictionaries [to help them find the meanings of the words]. (T22M)

Some teachers (28%) regarded *students' low English proficiency* as a barrier to promoting learner autonomy as shown in the following extract.

Sometimes when we use English only in class, students become silent. They sometimes say to me: 'Ma'am, please use both Indonesian and English' because we do not understand when you only speak

English. Therefore, if I teach them using English and I see that they are confused, I will translate it straight away into Indonesian. (T1F)

Lack of parental investment in education is another hindering factor raised by teachers (25%) due to little support and engagement from parents in their children's education. T21M, for example, commented that parents' low economic background contributed to lack of financial support for their children to copy worksheets for their learning.

The economic factor [contributes to the feasibility of learner autonomy] ...For example, sometimes, when I tell them to buy a dictionary, they say to me that they do not have money. I ask them to photocopy worksheets to use in class, but they say they do not have money. Sometimes we as teachers also make sacrifices [use our own money] again to be able to fulfil it all. We photocopy the worksheet for them and give it to them free of charge. (T21M)

From the students' perspectives, the socio-economic factors related to *limited learning resources* (33%) and *inadequate time to study at home* (13%). The limited learning resources include having no access to mobile phones and internet connection. They acknowledged that books can be sources of learning, but they are limited in providing all information they might need.

One of the hindering factors in developing learner autonomy is access to mobile phones. Many students here do not have proper mobile phones which they can use to connect to the internet, so there is a challenge for them to search for knowledge or material themselves from the internet. (FG1S6)

Interestingly, a large majority of students saw mobile phones as an enabling factor while 33% of the students saw it as a hindrance. It is possible that not every student has an advanced and well-connected mobile phone with access to data.

The *inadequacy of time at home* (13%) was reported to be part of living in a rural area whereby students held responsibility for helping their parents to earn money by working in the farm. This prevents them from engaging in out-of-class learning due to feeling tired and sleepy after working in the farm.

We cannot conduct autonomous learning because, living in a rural community, we do lots of housework to help our parents. Sometimes we cannot study at home because we need to go to the farm to help our parents to earn money. If we return from school at 3 p.m. and do the housework afterwards, we cannot study at home because we are tired and sleepy. (FG3S5)

Another set of challenges revealed by both the teachers (47%) and students (13%) were institution-based. The teachers saw these challenges in terms of *lack of supportive teaching and learning facilities and technological resources* (28%), *unconducive classrooms* (22%), and *limited allocation for English instruction* (18%).

The teachers saw limited availability of teaching facilities, such as audiovisual tools such as LCD projectors, computers, library facilities as a hindrance. For instance, T28F explained that her school only has two LCD projectors to be shared among many teachers. She explained:

I prefer to teach using LCD, but because there are only two portable projectors here, if someone is using it, I do not use it. To make it easier for students to take in the teaching and learning process, I print worksheets or teaching materials so that when I speak in front of the class, the students can follow my lesson by looking at their worksheets. (T28F)

Some students (13%) mentioned shortage of supportive learning resources at school prevents them from carrying autonomous learning. For instance, FG4S4 commented:

There are no supportive learning facilities here because we do not have a language laboratory. We need a language laboratory here. If there is a listening topic, we cannot do the listening because there is no facility. (FG4S4)

Students' low motivation was mentioned by both teachers (41%) and students (23%) as hindrance related to motivational factors. The teachers indicated this limitation in terms of students' views of English as a very difficult language to learn as shown in the following extract:

Their motivation to learn English is another challenge. Sometimes they say to me: Ma'am, for us, learning Indonesian is already difficult, and we still have difficulty speaking Indonesian, let alone learning English. Sometimes some of them also say: 'Ma'am, we were not born in England. We were born in Indonesia. So yes, some of them want to learn English, but some do not want to learn, even if they do not care about English. (T1F)

Students shared similar views as seen in the quote below:

I feel that there are many difficult English words that we must memorise, making me feel tired and stop learning English independently for a while. (FG4S2)

Apart from feeling demotivated to learn English autonomously due to perception of the difficulty of English language, two students (7%) contended that their hobbies hindered them from developing learner autonomy.

Another factor makes me not do autonomous learning at home because I often watch Korean movies. I really love watching Korean movies, so this hobby prevents me from doing autonomous learning. (FG2S2)

Cultural factors were also identified by both groups as challenges; however, teachers placed more weight into the cultural-related challenges compared to students. These hindering factors, according to the teachers, were associated with the *dominance of local language* (28%) that students often use at school and at home and *learners' reliance on teachers* (28%) as knowledge providers. The following extract illustrate these concerns respectively.

One of these challenges in promoting learner autonomy here is that the students usually use their mother tongue or their local language at school. Even Kupang Malay [non-standardised Indonesian used in Kupang], the students find it hard to understand because they use their native language at school. (T8F)

Students on the other hand (17%) noted that shyness/ low self-esteem in learning English might hinder their autonomous behaviour.

One of the challenges to developing autonomy is shyness and not feeling confident. Students seem shy to learn autonomously, so they sometimes still rely on others. (FG1S4)

Discussion

Students' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Feasibility of Promoting Learner Autonomy

The findings revealed that there is discrepancy among the teachers and the students in their perceptions on the feasibility of promoting learner autonomy. The majority of the teachers (69%) were pessimistic about the possibility of fostering learner autonomy due to challenges presented by their teaching environment. This finding aligns with previous studies in the Indonesian context (Lengkanawati, 2017; Ma'wa & Madya, 2021) and other contexts (e.g., Feryok, 2013; Inozu, 2011; Lai et al., 2016; Nakata, 2011; Wichayathian & Reinders, 2015) that revealed that the majority of teachers were doubtful about the feasibility of developing student autonomy. Only a small majority of teachers (31%) embraced the possibility of enhancing learner autonomy development in their teaching context suggesting the requirement of the curriculum as the reason of this feasibility. Although this positive belief may indicate that these teachers are willing to embrace innovation in their teaching as well showing their obedience to the curriculum policy, it is unclear if these teachers fully understand the dimensions of learner autonomy, nor how it should be implemented. This echoes Lee's et al., (2011) study on teachers' emotion and attitude to curriculum reform in China, which revealed that some teachers welcomed the reform as lip service only, but the majority lacked understanding about what good teaching is and ways to implement the innovation.

In comparison, all students (100%) were positive about the feasibility of developing learner autonomy. They saw this possibility due to the *availability of learning resources (50%)*, *students' willingness (33%)*, *their support from family (20% of students)*, *support from English teachers (17%)*, and *their understanding of the global need for improving English competence (17%)*. This finding differs from previous studies in the Indonesian context (e.g., Chirocki et al., 2019; Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati, 2019) which reported that most students believed that they were unprepared in engaging in autonomous learning. It is important to acknowledge that as student interviewees originated from 6 schools, the student voices might be linked to the teachers' positive perceptions towards learner autonomy in these schools. However, there was a mix of different students in each focus group to eliminate such influences.

Considering both teachers' and students' voices, the findings demonstrate a lack of consensus regarding the feasibility of developing learner autonomy. This is confirmed in perceptual differences in identified challenges in the following section. This mismatch in beliefs may be indicative of deeply-rooted differences between teachers and students. Teachers may be still attached to the authoritative roles in the classroom and may not have the skills or strategies to promote learner autonomy (Al Asmari, 2013; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Yunus & Arshad, 2015).

Students, on the other hand, seem optimistic and willing to embrace autonomous strategies, possibly because they may recognise that this will help them become successful learners and in turn help them to be professionally competitive. This awareness might be explained with Crabbe's (1993) argument about the psychological benefits of developing learner autonomy which indicates that students learn better when they are in charge of their learning. Hence, as evidenced in student responses, they might be psychologically aware of the need for lifelong learning and of their own responsibility to change their own lives through independent learning.

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions regarding the Challenges of Promoting Learner Autonomy

Socio-economic factors

The findings revealed that socio economic factors were considered by both groups as the major inhibiting factors in developing learner autonomy. Both the teachers and students saw these constraining factors in

terms of lack of learning resources and inadequate time to study at home due to the students' responsibility to help their parents on the farm. This uniformity in beliefs suggests that both groups are aware that their teaching and learning contexts are unfavourable for effective learning due to the presence of socio-economic challenges the students face both at home and school environments.

Despite the shared challenges, only the teachers saw the socio-economic disadvantage of the students' environment contributing to their low English proficiency. This finding is reported in the work of Wiraningsih and Santosa (2020) on the challenges identified by EFL teachers in the Indonesian context in developing student autonomy. This finding may suggest that the students did not see their low English proficiency as an inhibitor for developing learner autonomy. Students may consider this disadvantage as a reason for them to learn autonomously to improve their English ability. Little (1994) acknowledges that perceiving learner autonomy as a steady state achieved only by privileged learners - in this case, students with high proficiency is considered as a misconception, since learner autonomy development consists of different levels and degrees (Littlewood, 1999; Nunan, 1997). Jiménez Raya and Vieira (2015) assert that learner autonomy is a gradual process and can begin with small steps such as asking students to reflect on what they have learned in the lesson using their first language. Even in the most difficult settings, they argue, every teacher has the ability to promote student autonomy through various activities.

Institutional factors

The results indicate that both teachers and students agreed on the existence of institutional hindrances. Among the types of institutional constraints, lack of supportive learning resources was a shared challenge between the teachers and the students in this study. These conditions are common in many provincial areas of Indonesia: resources for either individuals or even groups of learners tend to be scant (Lamb, 2002; Solihin, 2020).

Lack of supportive teaching and learning facilities has been also reported in previous studies in the Indonesian context (Agustina, 2017; Lengkanawati, 2017) and other Asian contexts (Al Asmari, 2013; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018) but the situation is much more severe in these contexts. This shared concern between students and teachers indicates the importance of available learning resources in schools, on which students are dependent due to the parents' financial inability to assist with educational resources.

It is therefore imperative that the Indonesian government provides financial support for schools in disadvantaged provinces. It is only through appropriate education that children can improve their circumstances and give back to the country.

Psychological factors

In this present study, both teachers and students acknowledged the presence of students' low motivation as constraint in the promotion of learner autonomy. This finding confirms past research (e.g. Koad, 2022; Lau, 2017; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018) which reported that students' low motivation prevented them from conducting or enhancing autonomous learning. Apparently, both students and teachers saw motivation as a prerequisite for autonomous language learning. Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) also highlighted the learner attributes such as lack of motivation, or lack of required skills as one cause of EFL teachers being discouraged to promote learner autonomy even when they recognised its importance. From learners' perspectives, Koad (2022) reported that learners indicated that they face difficulties in managing their time from distraction.

This finding indicates the centrality of motivation in promoting learner autonomy. Teachers can play a significant role in engaging and motivating students in language learning. It is possible that engaging students in learner autonomy through negotiation of materials and topics or use of metacognitive strategies may also enhance students' motivation which in turn can lead to successful language learning and learning

independence (Daflizar, 2017; Wen-Cheng, et al., 2019). Thus, it is important for teachers to receive appropriate training and strategies to develop students' motivation and engagement in language learning.

Cultural factors

Findings in this present study show that only the teachers perceived cultural factors such as students' reliance on teachers as knowledge transmitters as hindrances. This finding is consistent with the findings in previous studies (Agustina, 2017; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Lengkanawati, 2019; Reinders & Lazaro, 2011). The students, however, did not see this aspect as a concern. This lack of consensus suggests that teachers' comfort and reliance on the current teaching modes and traditional learning classrooms might prevent them from teaching independent and creative thinking and involving students in negotiation strategies (Maulana et al., 2016; Reinders, 2010). This belief might indicate teachers' misunderstanding that learner autonomy means complete independence from the teacher. However, learner autonomy can be developed to different degrees and can be a gradual independence from the teacher as in the two aspects of 'proactive' and 'reactive' autonomy proposed by Littlewood (1999). Lengkanawati (2017) argues that professional commitment on behalf of the teachers is necessary for teachers to develop tasks that allow independent learning, and this can be promoted and discussed in relevant in-service and pre-service training on the implementation of Curriculum 2013.

The mismatch also suggests that there is a need for dissemination of these results to the context to assist them in working collaboratively on the curriculum and identifying students' needs and preferences. It also indicates the need for suitable professional training and intervention that involves collaboration between teachers and students. For example, teachers considered students' bilingualism, competence in local languages and students' low English proficiency as barriers to developing learner autonomy, however research has indicated that learner autonomy can be implemented at different language levels. Teachers' use of local languages and encouraging students' local language to simplify learning can offer opportunities for building student autonomy through negotiation (Copland & Neokleous, 2011; Macaro, 2001; Ryan, 2010).

Conclusion

To conclude, the study addressed an important gap in the literature which has neglected research on education in underprivileged contexts. The paper aligns with Fonseca's (2003) suggestion that educational practitioners have an obligation to improve education in these areas who need it the most. We considered learner autonomy as a 'rescue strategy' for empowering students with skills that can assist them in building resilience and improving their conditions and enhancing educational equity. To respond to the second research gap involving the combination of teachers' and students' voices on learner autonomy, this study examined both students' and teachers' perceptions in developing learner autonomy in an Indonesian underprivileged context. The findings offer novel insights into the nature of difficulties in rural disadvantaged contexts and contribute to international research on raising educational equity (Roberts et al., 2021). The findings demonstrate a mismatch between student and teacher perceptions of the feasibility of learner autonomy, with students having a more favourable attitude than the teachers. While students acknowledged the socioeconomic challenges, they showed willingness, maturity, and interest in developing learner autonomy, contradicting teachers' expectations and previous research that Asian students' lack the capacity to learn autonomously (e.g., Chan et al., 2002; Littlewood, 1999).

The study findings have several practical implications for EFL teachers, teacher trainers, and policy-makers in relation to the effectiveness and potential of developing learner autonomy in the context of disadvantaged schools. For EFL teachers, the study findings can provide an incentive to guiding students and involving them in the classroom decision making. These could be done using Reinders' comprehensive framework (2010) for learner autonomy development, which proposes several strategies: identifying

students' needs (identifying students' strengths and weaknesses), setting goals (providing students with examples of goals they need to achieve in learning English) (Moser, 2017), planning learning (providing students with choices of topics based on their interests), selecting learning resources (students can bring their own learning resources to share in class), selecting learning strategies (cognitive, meta-cognitive and affective strategies), practice (providing and offering opportunities to practice language and providing feedback), monitoring progress (practicing their reflection ability using portfolio), and assessment and revision (students put into practice what they have learned such as reading an English text without dictionary).

The study has implications for teacher trainers in the Indonesian context. The teacher responses may also reflect their lack of understanding of their role in promoting learner autonomy or in assisting students in their autonomy development. The findings also signify the need for teacher professional development in that context that might comprise practical strategies for integrating learner autonomy in response to the curriculum implementation. Equally, it is crucial that curriculum designers and policy makers adopt or allow a bottom-up approach in curriculum development and consider teacher and student obstacles in their provision of resources and design of appropriate curriculum recommendations (Richards, 2017).

As with any research study, the present study has several limitations. Considering the small study sample of this study, the findings may not be generalisable to all Indonesian teachers and students across all disadvantaged schools in Indonesia. Future studies could include larger samples to increase the reliability of the current findings. Additional follow-up research could investigate EFL teacher practices of learner autonomy through observations and video recordings in similar contexts to elucidate the challenges and obstacles encountered in the classroom utilizing Reinders' framework (2010) and propose appropriate training to address these limitations. Additionally, conducting longitudinal studies to examine how beliefs and practices may change at different points and explore why these changes occur might provide additional insights into autonomy development.

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