

## Fostering learner autonomy in a blended learning environment: EFL teachers' practices at Hanoi University of Industry

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** Learner autonomy, blended learning, EFL teachers' strategies

Learner autonomy (LA) is acquiring prominence in higher education, particularly in English language instruction, due to its favorable effects on the development of language proficiency, particularly in blended learning (BL) environments. This paper presents the findings of an investigation into the strategies adopted by instructors to nurture LA in a BL environment. Class observation and interviews were the study's primary data collection methods. During 15 lessons, three instructors were observed in an effort to determine how they promote learner autonomy. Teachers were interviewed to determine the motivations behind their utilization of such a method to cultivate learner autonomy. The findings of this study indicate that instructors employed a variety of strategies to cultivate learner autonomy, including organizational autonomy support, procedural autonomy support, and cognitive autonomy support. Cognitive autonomy-supporting strategies are the most frequently employed. Improving the quality of BL programs in educational institutions in order to nurture LA is an essential implication of the study for educators, curriculum developers, and educational administrators.

### Introduction

One of the key components of educational reform in Vietnam was the development of learner autonomy (LA) with the use of information communication technologies in a technology-enhanced learning environment. (*Decision 2080/QĐTTG*, 2017; MOET, 2008b). Therefore, the implementation of BL to support LA is highly recommended in education in Vietnam, especially in higher education (Nguyen, 2019). However, learning in a BL environment requires students to be more autonomous in face-to-face classes and the Learning Management system (LMS). In fact, the employment of BL requires students to switch from a teacher-centered and test-oriented at high school to a learner-centered approach, which is a big challenge for students and teachers in Vietnam (Tran, 2019). In the Vietnamese context, although there are several

studies aiming at investigating teaching practices in fostering LA, there are few studies about the effectiveness of those practices (Nasri et al., 2015). Moreover, most of the research focuses on LA-enhancing practices in traditional learning rather than in the BL environment. Taking that into account, this study aims to investigate the strategies employed by EFL teachers to foster LA in a BL environment at Hanoi University of Industry (HaUI) to fill this gap.

## Literature review

### *Definition of learner autonomy*

There have been various ways to define and interpret learner autonomy, but hardly any definition can describe it precisely due to its complex and multifaceted nature (Little, 2003; Benson, 2009; Teng, 2019). In 1981, Henri Holec first defined autonomy in language education as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p.3), and this has become the most cited definition in the literature of field (Benson, 2007, 2009). Since then, many attempts have been made to define LA in different ways and aspects, as well as make it more relevant to language teaching and learning. Despite some criticism and inconsistency in terminology, some consensus on LA has also been reached, as Teng (2019, p.31) pointed out:

- Autonomy is not an innate ability but a construct of capacity.
- Autonomy consists of learners' desire to take charge of their own learning.
- Autonomy is subject to change and is not permanent.
- Autonomy can happen both inside and outside the classroom.
- Autonomy involves both social and individual aspects.
- Autonomy can be fostered if one is aware of the learning process.

### *Fostering learner autonomy in language learning*

Depending on the social and cultural context, autonomy is viewed differently. As a result, the techniques for promoting it are diverse. This part summarizes Benson's (2001) six common techniques to foster LA: technology-based, resource-based, curriculum-based, classroom-based, teacher-based, and learner-based approaches.

*Technology-based approaches* emphasize the role of educational technologies in interaction with students. Although technology has the real potential to improve LA, the effectiveness of technology-based initiatives is highly dependent on the people involved, especially their teachers, who support their students in their learning process. (Nguyen, 2019).

*Resource-based approaches* focus on building autonomy via experimentation and discovery when learners interact with the materials provided. Although materials are seen as the most important tools in this approach, collaboration with others and teacher assistance when interacting with resources was critical in assisting students in reaping the benefits of materials (Carette et al., 2015).

*The curriculum-based approaches* emphasize the negotiation of learning content between the teacher and the students. According to Cotterall (2000), fostering LA is one of the most

important goals for language course designers, and language courses having the goal of improving LA should include mechanisms for gradually switching responsibility from the teacher to the learner in areas such as goal-setting, learning strategy selection, and outcome evaluation.

*Classroom-based* approaches focus on cooperative learning within classroom contexts to enhance LA. Learners can take charge of their learning via collaboration with their peers or teachers. (Benson, 2001).

*Learner-based approaches* place emphasis on equipping the learner with learning strategies and learning skills to develop LA (Benson, 2001, 2013).

*Teacher-based approaches* emphasize the role of teachers and teacher education in enhancing LA. These approaches assume that teachers play a fundamental role in enhancing LA because their beliefs, opinions, and professional experience greatly influence LA's growth in language acquisition environments (Benson, 2001; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012).

Reviewing the six methods for nurturing LA reveals that one of the most important elements in cultivating LA is the involvement of the teachers.

#### *Teacher Roles and Practices in Fostering LA*

LA can imply a high degree of learner freedom, but it is crucial to be aware that this freedom is "never absolute, always conditional and constrained" (Little, 1991, p.5). Thanasoulas (2000) also conveys that LA does not mean teachers become redundant. Teacher roles in fostering LA are diverse and complicated; however, some roles are emphasized more than others, including facilitator/helper, counselor, and manager of resources (Han, 2014). Tran and Vuong (2022) also emphasized that the most crucial external factor in fostering LA was the instructors.

Stefanou et al. (2004) defined three distinguished features of autonomy support which can help teachers fulfill the three roles mentioned above. Organizational support emphasizes ownership of the environment of students. Procedural autonomy support equips students with ownership of form. Cognitive autonomy support promotes student ownership of learning. The model of LA support by Stefanou et al. (2014) is adopted within the framework of this paper for detailed observation of teachers' practices to foster LA. The details of those supports are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1***Strategies Associated with the Different Features of Autonomy Support*

<i>Organizational Autonomy Support</i>	<i>Procedural Autonomy Support</i>	<i>Cognitive Autonomy Support</i>
Students are given opportunities to: Choose group members Choose evaluation procedure Take responsibility for due dates for assignments Participate in creating and implementing classroom rules Choose seating arrangement	Students are given opportunities to: Choose materials to use in class projects Choose the way competence will be demonstrated Display work in an individual manner Discuss their wants Handle materials	Students are given opportunities to: Discuss multiple approaches and strategies Find multiple solutions to problems Find multiple solutions to problems Have ample time for decision making Be independent problem solvers with scaffolding Re-evaluate errors Receive informational feedback Formulate personal goals or realign tasks to correspond with interest Debate ideas freely Have less teacher talk time; more teacher listening time Ask questions

*Blended learning definition*

Research shows that BL is commonly defined as the combination of "face-to-face instruction" and computer-assisted learning or computer-mediated instruction (Neumeier, 2005; Stracke, 2007; Gramham, 2012, 2013). Currently, with the emerging digital technology in teaching and learning, the term BL is more frequently used to refer to the combination of two components which are online and face-to-face learning and teaching (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Motteram & Sharma, 2009). This definition emphasizes the roles of web-based technology in BL environment. It indicates the employment of the "online" component is crucial in defining BL. Despite the high consensus on two components of BL, an agreement on the proportion of courses delivered online or face-to-face in BL has not been reached. Picciano (2013) pointed out that the implementation context considerably influences the way BL is defined, as different people in different contexts can have their own interpretation and implementation of BL in different contexts. In the context of this paper, BL environment is defined as the combination of (1) face-to-face classroom component and (2) online learning with the use of web-based technology, with 45% of online learning and 55% of face-to-face learning.

### *The potential of blended learning to learner autonomy*

Marsh (2012) mentioned the use of BL can enhance learners' autonomy. Hoang (2015) also concurred that BL has the potential to facilitate active and reflective learning. In BL, students have more freedom to choose the time and place and approach to study EFL with a wide range of online learning materials and learning tools (Joosten et al., 2013). Teachers also benefit from online assessments and reports since they can monitor students' learning progress regularly and conveniently with more thorough information about each individual. As a result, they can provide necessary support and scaffold students' learning.

Despite those significant benefits, effectively implementing this model is still challenging. For the success of BL, it is required that students should play an active part in learning and take charge of their own learning (Launer, 2010). However, in fact, the autonomy of learners is far lower than expected, and students may be too dependent on teacher-centered learning at high schools (Alebaikan, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to investigate whether EFL teachers be aware of their roles to have proper practices to scaffold students toward more autonomous learning in the BL environment.

### *Research Questions*

In order to find out what strategies EFL teachers adopt in fostering LA, the research aims to answer the following questions:

What do EFL teachers do to foster learner autonomy in the blended environment?

## **Methods**

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

Hanoi University of Industry (HaUI) is a public university in Vietnam providing multi-level and multi-branch disciplinary educational services. It is one of the first universities in Vietnam to employ BL in English language and education. BL has been implemented at HaUI since 2015, starting with General English courses delivered to non-language major students. The English language program for non-language major students consists of six BL courses; each course carries 5 credits which is equal to 75 teaching periods. 40 periods (1 period = 50 minutes) are carried out in face-to-face class, and the rest 35 periods are conducted online via Learning Management System (LMS). Students are required to study online before joining face-to-face lessons. There is also an online unit test after each lesson for students to revise their knowledge as well as monitor their learning progress. In-class lessons focus mainly on speaking and writing skills.

Ten teachers in the top 30 teachers having the highest student voting rate for good teaching practices in the school year 2019-2020 at HaUI are selected. After the discussion, five teachers agreed to take part in the project, but only three teachers were selected as formal participants based on two criteria. First, the participants reported they had applied some ways to promote LA. This criterion was established to guarantee that it was possible to investigate teachers' strategies and procedures to promote LA. Second, the participants are teaching different English courses and in their different stages of careers. This criterion aimed at diversifying the

background of participants, which can help explore the strategies from different perspectives. The table below presents the information of the three participants (the pseudonyms are used for all three teachers).

**Table 2**

*Summary of class observation participants' characteristics*

Teachers' pseudonyms	Gender	Years of teaching experience	English Course	Number of students in the course
Hue	Female	4 years	English for Electrical and Electronics Engineering	30
Minh	Female	6 years	English for Business	28
Huong	Female	15 years	English for Garment Technology and Fashion Design	25

#### *Data collection & analysis*

The study employed two main data collection instruments, including class observation and interviews, to find out teachers' strategies to foster LA in BL courses and to identify the reasons for those strategies to enhance students' autonomy.

The observation was used to gather live data about teachers' practices in the classroom setting. The major goal of observation is to learn how LA is applied in the case's actual environment (Yin, 2013). The class observation employed in this study has been adapted from the framework of Stefanou et al. (2004). This framework proposes that autonomy support can be provided in three different ways. Support for *organizational autonomy* helps students to take responsibility for their learning environment. Support for *procedural autonomy* can take the shape of techniques and fosters student control of form and presentation. Support for *cognitive autonomy* includes techniques that let students think independently, investigate concepts, and become independent learners.

Each teacher was observed five times (90 minutes) at the teacher's convenience. However, all of the first observations from the three classes are the first lesson of the course because this lesson is supposed to be the time teachers deliver the rules and course details and get to know their students. There are 15 observations in total throughout the course. Table 3 below summarizes the timeline for the class observation:

**Table 3***Summary of timeline of class observation*

<b>Week</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Minh</b>	<b>Huong</b>	<b>Hue</b>
1	90 minutes	Observation 1	Observation 1	Observation 1
3	90 minutes	Observation 2	Observation 2	
5	90 minutes			Observation 2
7	90 minutes	Observation 3	Observation 3	Observation 3
9	90 minutes	Observation 4	Observation 4	Observation 4
10	90 minutes	Observation 5	Observation 5	Observation 5

Along with class observation field notes, each observation was recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were employed in this study since it can facilitate two-way communication between the researcher and participants in which participants can easily discuss the topic. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 03 teachers. This type of interview has some strong points over the two other common types of interview. The semi-structured interview can take advantage of interview dialogue based on its knowledge-producing potential compared to a structured interview. In comparison with unstructured interviews, researchers have some control over the dialogue, allowing the focus to be kept on matters that are crucial to the study endeavor (Brinkmann, 2014).

The interviews with teachers focused on teachers' strategies to support LA that were found during a classroom observation. Moreover, practices that were carried out more frequently were further probed to find out the beliefs of teachers in performing them. Online interviews via Zoom were employed due to the social distancing policy during the Coronavirus pandemic. All of the interviews were done in Vietnamese and audio recorded before being transcribed and translated into English.

There is a huge amount of literature on qualitative data analysis, and researchers employ a variety of methodologies, including cross-cultural analysis, discourse analysis, grounded theory analysis, discourse analysis, content analysis, and ethnographic analysis (Bernard, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Merriam, 1998). To make sense of the qualitative data gathered for the current study, thematic analysis, which entails coding and categorization, was used (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2012).

Thematic analysis was chosen because it is an independent qualitative descriptive method that can be used to describe routines and practices as well as to learn about the individual experiences of a group of students. This strategy was chosen for the current study because the research aims to describe the techniques teachers use to promote LA. The theme approach's adaptability allowed the study to concentrate on specific examples, their unique characteristics, and their connections. (Flick, 2013). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to produce the



report. When preparing the report, enough data was presented to show how related they were. Extracts were included in each theme's analytical narrative explanation of the data. The responses to the research questions were better understood thanks to these excerpts.

### Results

The findings of the study demonstrate that teachers used a range of tactics to facilitate LA that addressed all three facets of learner autonomy. The most often employed techniques encourage cognitive autonomy.

#### *Organizational autonomy support*

Teachers generally give students all control regarding seating arrangement and choosing group members. Only when students are using the control for the wrong purposes, do the teachers intervene as a classroom management strategy to facilitate learning. Regarding strategies to foster learners' ownership of rules and evaluation procedures, teachers hardly provide students with any opportunities. Names of teachers and their in-class practices of learner developing learner autonomy regarding organizational autonomy support are illustrated in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Activities to foster organizational autonomy support*

<b>Students are given opportunities to</b>	<b>Hue</b>	<b>Minh</b>	<b>Huong</b>
Choose seating arrangements	✓	✓	✓
Choose group members	✓	✓	✓
Set rules		✓	
Select due time/dates for tasks	✓		
Set evaluation procedures			

All three teachers were observed allowing students to choose their own seating in most of the lessons. However, in one lesson, teacher Huong was observed requiring some students to move to change their seats to help them "concentrate on studying." She said, "Sometimes I just feel that some of them will try to sit in a corner or back of the class to avoid my attention. This really gets on my nerve, so I have to force them to move to another place." (Teacher Huong).

All of the teachers were found to provide students with opportunities to choose their own partners or group members to do preparation activities for the next class and group presentation. However, for in-class activities, the teachers usually assign group members. In the interviews, all teachers revealed that the reason for not allowing students to choose their own partners to carry out classroom activities lies in their concerns about class time limitation. Teacher Hue shared, "I really want students to be active and choose the partner or group they like for class activities. But whenever I ask them to move and find different partners rather than classmates sitting next to them, it takes them a lot of time to do it, or they are just not interested in this way of arrangement. So basically, this approach doesn't work." (Teacher Hue). Therefore, assigning groups or pairs for students in the class was time-saving and could help them work with



different classmates, which can help them develop teamwork skills. By contrast, for homework assignments or group presentations, they would let students decide themselves because students asked for it and they were active in doing so.

Teachers give their students few opportunities to set classroom and learning rules and select due time/dates for tasks. Only teacher Minh provided her students with opportunities to set rules in class and allowed students to change the due time for online learning in EOP (LMS for students to learn and exercise before class). She asked students to write their goals, expectations of the course, and the rules they want to have during the course on a piece of paper. For those rules which she found inappropriate, she discussed them more with students, as demonstrated in the following excerpt.

T: *One student in our class thinks that the teacher should allow students to sleep at the back of the class if they are tired or sleepy. What do you think about this rule?"*

Ss: *I think if you let students sleep, half of the class will do it, haha*

T: *Be serious, please. Okay, so if anyone feels tired or sick, please let me know, and I'll give you permission to be absent but not sleep in the class. Are you okay with that?*

Ss: *Yes, teacher.*

*Teacher Minh – Observation #1*

In the cases of teachers Hue and Huong, both teachers reported that teachers should be the ones who decide since the students' suggested rules were often inappropriate or ineffective for their learning. Teacher Huong revealed, "I sometimes ask students if there is anything that they want to change about the rules. Students are just silent or recommend some inappropriate ideas, such as if they are hungry, they can eat in class. Therefore, I think I just decide the rules because I know which rules are effective and suitable. It is okay to discuss with students, but I think it is not necessary." (Teacher Huong)

All three teachers were observed providing no opportunities to let students be involved in evaluation procedures. At the beginning of the course, all three teachers just informed students about how many tests they would take during the semester and the scores they needed to pass the course. In the interview, all three teachers shared the same opinion that when it was a safe choice for teachers to follow exactly the regulation of the university, they tended to think that there was no need to discuss this fixed process or they had no right to do it. "I think I have no right to modify or change the evaluation procedure. All of the teachers need to follow fixed procedures. Moreover, students do not know much about evaluation apart from tests and exams, so it will be quite hard for them to discuss it even if I give them a chance to do so." (Teacher Hue)

#### *Procedural autonomy support*

Support for procedural autonomy is lacking from the activities of all three teachers. Teacher Hue did not organize any activities for this kind of support. This lack of procedural support, particularly support related to materials, may indicate that teachers were totally in control of

choosing and using materials, one of the characteristics of the teacher-centered approach. Teachers' strong belief and reliance on textbooks somehow inhibit their practices to foster LA. Names of teachers and their in-class practices of learners developing learner autonomy regarding procedural autonomy support are illustrated in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Activities for procedural autonomy support*

Students are given opportunities to	Hue	Minh	Huong
choose materials/ resources			
choose ways of demonstrating competence		✓	✓
display work in an individual manner			
discuss their wants		✓	
handle materials			

Only teacher Huong and teacher Minh were found to provide students with opportunities to choose ways to demonstrate competence. Both teachers offered some freedom for students to choose how they would like to present their ideas. For instance, when students had to draw outfits for different special occasions, the teacher allowed students to choose to draw outfits on paper, on a computer, or on any tools that they were comfortable with. The teacher did not assign any specific tool for students. (Field note - teacher Huong). In other cases, teachers decide the presentation format, short talk, and conversation without discussing it with students. "You are required to present with PowerPoint slides for the presentation projects." (Teacher Hue– Observation #1). Teacher Hue later revealed why she did not provide students opportunities to demonstrate competence in the interview "it is a common practice for me to assign format for students, and I think there is no problem about that. My students never complain about the format that I choose for them."

Only teacher Minh provided students opportunities to discuss their wants in some ways. Teacher Minh asked her students to write their wants or expectations at the beginning of the course or get to know about students' wants about the deadline of some tasks. She said in the interview, "Students suggested a lot of ideas when I asked what they want to do or achieve in the course. I also frequently asked students about their workload at school to check if they wanted to change anything about the due date in class." (Teacher Minh)

No cases related to opportunities to choose materials/ resources, handle materials, and display work in an individual manner were observed. In the interview, two out of three teachers (teacher Minh and teacher Huong) reported that the material and resources were chosen carefully, so it was better to follow them without involving students in material selection. "We conduct thorough research before writing the textbooks for students. We conduct a need analysis with five stakeholders, including students, before designing the textbook, so basically, I think our textbook is suitable for the students we are teaching. Furthermore, I don't think that students know how to choose materials that are suitable for them." (Teacher Minh). The other teacher (teacher Hue) revealed there were too many activities and information in each unit, so she would

like to cut off some information rather than ask students to include the material of their interests.

### *Cognitive autonomy support*

All three teachers paid attention to cognitive autonomy support. They provided many activities to encourage students to discuss, debate, and solve problems. However, in terms of opportunities to formulate students' goals and re-evaluate mistakes, students were given no support. Students did not have chances to reflect on their progress or involve in the designing tasks so those tasks could match their personal goals. Names of teachers and their in-class practices of learners developing learner autonomy regarding cognitive autonomy support are illustrated in Table 6.

**Table 6**

#### *Activities for cognitive autonomy support*

<b>Students are given opportunities to</b>	<b>Hue</b>	<b>Minh</b>	<b>Huong</b>
discuss multiple approaches or strategies	✓	✓	✓
find multiple solutions to problems	✓	✓	✓
Justify solutions for purpose of sharing expertise		✓	
have ample time for decision making			
be independent problem solvers with scaffolding	✓	✓	✓
re-evaluate errors			
receive informational feedback			
formulate personal goals or realign task to correspond with interest			
debate ideas freely	✓	✓	✓
have less teacher talk time; more teacher listening time			
Ask questions	✓	✓	✓

Encouraging students to discuss multiple approaches or strategies to problems was the most frequently adopted strategy by all three teachers. They asked students to think of ways and strategies to discuss tasks in class. They frequently encouraged students to be active in the progress of learning. For instance, one part of the task is about giving a presentation. The teacher shows a video about a bad presentation. Then she asks students to point out the problems and encourages them to find a way to improve it. "Do you have other ways to open a presentation more impressively?"; "How many ways can you think of to conclude a presentation" (Field note - Teacher Hue). In the interview, all teachers emphasized the importance of making students think of their own approaches and strategies before analyzing the sample. Teacher Hue stated, "If I just provide them the sample or the key, students may be dependent on it, and they can deal with similar tasks in the future."

In many cases in the class, all three teachers provided opportunities to debate freely and ask questions. All three teachers did a great job of making students feel comfortable asking and

giving their opinions in class. Two interesting cases in class of teacher Hue and teacher Minh were observed when students even pointed out teachers' mistakes in a constructive way.

*Ss: Ms. Huong, I think that you may make a spelling mistake. It is "presser foot," not "pressure foot." And I suppose number 19 is "presser foot clamp screw," not "needle clamp screw."*

*T: Oh, let me see, you're right. It is "presser," not "pressure". And about number 19, other students, what do you think? Is it a "Presser foot clamp screw" or a "needle clamp screw"?*

*Ss: "presser foot clamp screw" because it holds the presser foot, not the needle.*

*T: You're correct. Thank you for pointing out my mistakes. Next time, who can point out not only the teacher's mistakes but other students' mistakes will be given bonus points.*

*Teacher Huong – Observation#4*

*S: Ms. Hue, "scratch" should be "scratched," and "fast charging" is a feature, not a component. It should be "fast battery charger":*

*T: Thank you, Nam, for correcting me. It's very useful information. Okay, so now let's move on to another pro of iPhone 7.*

*Teacher Hue - Observation#3*

All three teachers revealed the same strategies in building such kind of atmosphere in the interview. At the beginning of the course, teachers showed their friendliness by letting students know they would not criticize students' mistakes or make fun of them. They also instructed students on how to raise questions in polite and meaningful ways. Three teachers used bonus points to encourage students to participate in the lessons actively. They all believed that using bonus points was a useful way to motivate students to debate and ask questions.

All three teachers were found to use some strategies to scaffold students to handle the tasks. All three teachers usually guided students before each task and checked if they understood before asking them to handle the activity themselves. They usually give examples, ask students to brainstorm ideas, and locate key information to help students in more demanding tasks such as making conversation or free talk. "Now, look at the prompt in the textbook; please underline key information in conversation and think of the structure you will use to talk about that information. You can look back on grammar presentation because there are some useful structures there." (Teacher Minh - Observation#4). This suggests that teachers are flexible in the way they support students. They guided students based on the level of difficulty of the tasks. They knew how to scaffold students to deal with different types of tasks.

The time teachers talk was equal to the time students talk. The time for teachers to instruct students was supposed to be only a quarter of lesson time, and the rest of the time was allocated to practice and evaluation. However, in two-thirds of cases, teachers needed to talk and explain for a long time because students responded little. In a class, teacher Minh, for the free talk activity about the type of bank account suitable for students, the teacher brainstormed many types of bank accounts and their pros and cons to make sure students had enough ideas for their

free talk. She did ask three times if students understood the requirement and knew what to do. However, when some students worked in groups, they started to ask other students what their group was supposed to do, and they seemed to struggle to do the task. After 5 minutes, knowing that students were too slow in fulfilling the tasks, the teacher stopped and explained the task again. (Field note – Teacher Minh). Teachers explained in the interview that students' lack of attention could lengthen the time teachers talk time. Teacher Minh said, "I tried to keep instruction and guidelines short and simple and spend time for students practicing, but it did not work. My students sometimes ignore what I say, so I have to explain several times." This suggests to reduce teacher talk time and increase teacher listening time requires not only teachers' effort in motivating students to talk but also other techniques to engage in the lessons.

All three teachers were observed not employing any strategies to help the student build their personal goals or guide them to adjust the task to their preference. In the interview, teachers explained that "I think students need to achieve the objectives of the lesson, and that's enough. Goals for learning is something in the long-term that students have to set for themselves" (Teacher Huong); "I'm not sure if I should teach students how to set goals because it's not in the curriculum. Maybe, students can learn about it outside the classroom." (Teacher Minh). Teachers' answers indicated that teachers tended to think students should be responsible for setting their goals, and they are passive in making the tasks suitable for their interests.

Support related to re-evaluating errors and receiving informational feedback was hardly provided. All three teachers focus on correcting the mistakes of students. They often pointed out errors related to spelling, grammatical structures, word choice, and pronunciation. "Thank Lan for your talk. I have some comments for you. There are some words that you mispronounce.... Try to say that again. Repeat after me. There are some grammar mistakes related to subject and verb agreement, like she has not she have." (Teacher Minh-Observation#4). All three teachers reported in the interview that they would like their students to re-evaluate their errors, but it would take a lot of time, and most of the students could not recognize the mistakes without the help of teachers. "I think students should take time to re-evaluate their mistakes at home, not in class, because the time for the lesson is limited. It takes a lot of time if I ask them to do it in class. Some students with low proficiency cannot recognize mistakes without the help of friends or teachers." (Teacher Hue). The responses of three teachers suggest that they did not believe in students' ability to correct their own errors, and they thought that giving students the correction would be less time-consuming and more effective. The way teachers commented also focused on the errors rather than providing strategies to avoid those mistakes in the future.

Class observation data also indicated one interesting point all three teachers skipped students' self-assessment activity at the end of each lesson. Teachers did not devote time to this activity, although it was part of a lesson. They then explained that "I know that this part is good, but I prioritize time for other main activities in class which help students develop their language proficiency." (Teacher Minh); "Actually, both teachers and students do not care about this part. It is like an optional part. If students like to do it, so they do it, and if they don't, it's okay." (Teacher Hue). This lack of support for self-reflection may suggest that teachers only focus on activities with knowledge content rather than concerned about how student evaluate their

learning and how they feel about their learning progress.

## Discussion

Data from classroom observations and interviews generally revealed that teachers used different teaching strategies to support LA, covering all three aspects of LA support: organizational autonomy support, procedure autonomy support, and cognitive autonomy support. All three participants seemed to focus most on supporting students cognitively and least on supporting students to make choices regarding the procedure. In particular, teachers provide cognitive autonomy support, which encourages learner ownership of ideas, thinking, and learning in a variety of ways. Teachers encourage students to discuss multiple approaches or strategies and find multiple solutions to problems by letting them brainstorm ideas before each task instead of providing samples right away. After each task, teachers also ask students to suggest other ways to handle the tasks. Teachers also help students become independent problem solvers with scaffolding by asking questions to guide students to deal with the task themselves and providing some guiding activities (brainstorming, sentence building, rearranging the sentences to make a sample, etc.). Giving constructive feedback to students regarding their word choice and grammatical mistakes is also employed to help students realize mistakes and more independently avoid them in the future. The most significant cognitive support is promoting debating ideas freely and asking questions. Teachers employ several strategies to make the learning atmosphere friendly and comfortable. Teachers make it clear at the beginning of the course that they will not criticize or make fun of students' mistakes, so there is no need to worry about voicing their opinions. Teachers also encourage students to point out teachers mistakes by giving them bonus points.

This finding concurs with the results of several research including Intraboonsom (2020); Nguyen (2019); Tapinta (2016); Borg and Al-Busaidi, (2012), which found that cognitive strategies were one of the most frequent opportunities provided. This finding highlights some interesting differences from the study of Le (2011), which emphasized that many teachers do not want to encourage dialogic learning and information sharing. Thus, they give their students limited time to express their thoughts or ask questions. Le and Nguyen (2022) also pointed out that students did not have opportunities to discuss with their teachers their ways of learning English autonomously, and they expect their teachers to give them chances to work in groups and discuss how they can regulate their learning. The findings of this study revealed a gradual change in the classroom discourse where the relationship between teachers and students becomes more open and facilitative to LA. Students may even question a teacher's response or perspective, which is seen to be a challenge to the instructor's authority and may cause the teacher to "lose face" (Ngo, 2015; Nguyen & Griffin, 2010; Nguyen, 2011). This shift in power is a positive trend in moving from the teacher-centered approach to the learner-centered approach. Teachers did support students in voicing their opinions rather than maintaining their supreme power in the classroom.

To encourage organizational autonomy support, which focuses on learner ownership of the learning environment, all three teachers let students choose their seating arrangements with

some control. One teacher involves students in setting classroom rules as a way to promote LA. She also lets students select due dates for online learning when necessary. This finding concurs with the research of Nguyen (2019), as his research also pointed out that regarding organizational support, choosing group members, choosing due dates for tasks and assignments, and creating rules is the main practice while choosing evaluation procedures is often ignored.

Regarding procedural autonomy support, which focuses on encouraging learner ownership of form and learning output, teachers let students choose ways of demonstrating competence, such as how they will present (using PowerPoint slides, drawing pictures, etc.). Students also have the chance to discuss their expectations of the course to make them feel they have some power in the learning process. Three teachers also sometimes suggest additional learning resources (reference books, learning websites, etc.) as a way to enhance LA. This finding contradicts Nguyen (2019) since, in his research, opportunities to make a choice regarding forms or procedures were frequently observed.

## Conclusion

The findings of the study demonstrate that teachers used a variety of instructional strategies to enhance organizational autonomy, procedural autonomy, and cognitive autonomy in their classrooms. The most often employed techniques encourage cognitive autonomy. Regarding the effectiveness of those strategies, cognitive strategies are proven to be helpful in helping students be more confident to voice their opinions and be independent problem solvers for learning tasks.

The first limitation of this study lies in choosing participants. The researcher cannot conduct a questionnaire for all the teachers in the faculty. All three participants were selected based on questionnaire results assessing teachers each semester from the university rather than based on questionnaires conducted by researchers. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers conduct quantitative research in Phase 1 before moving to qualitative research in Phase 2. Moreover, there are only three teachers from three different majors taking part in the research. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to the whole teachers at the university. Another limitation of the study is that although it is a detailed investigation of teachers' strategies, students from those classes should be interviewed to prove the effectiveness of those strategies. In addition, teachers' perceptions and beliefs in LA significantly impact the strategies and practices of the teachers to foster it. Therefore, to further investigate strategies, the findings of this study could be complemented by investigations into teachers' beliefs and perceptions of LA to have a deeper understanding of the matter.

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### **Biodata**

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