

The roles of EFL Teachers in Promoting Learner Autonomy

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Abstract

This study is a descriptive-qualitative study which aimed to describe the roles of EFL teachers in promoting learner autonomy. Four EFL teachers in seventh grade junior high schools were selected as the subject of this study. The data were collected through questionnaire and observation techniques. In collecting the data, two kinds of instruments were used, namely, questionnaire and observation sheet. The result of this study revealed that in promoting learner autonomy, the teachers perform the roles as facilitator, counsellor, resource and manager/organizer. Considering the result of the study, the teacher should involve their students in the decision making process of learning activity, not only in selecting the technique or approach, but also in all aspects of learning process such as selecting objectives of the course, managing classroom and selecting the materials. Schools also need to support their teachers in developing innovative strategy especially in promoting learner autonomy. The schools should offer teachers with professional development programs on learner autonomy such as following workshops. For further researchers, considering the challenges met by the EFL faced by the EFL teachers in promoting learner autonomy is needed.

Keywords: Learner autonomy; the roles of English teachers; English as Foreign Language

Introduction

The shift of curriculum in Indonesia has influenced the various ways in which language teaching and learning are conducted. Since Curriculum 2013 emphasizes the role of the learner, learner autonomy is considered as one of the major changes. Considering that education is a life-long learning process, the concept of learner autonomy is important within the changing landscape of English teaching in the 21st century. This is the core competencies for learning and innovation that are believed could help students compete in today's digitally and globally interconnected world (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2016). In other words, learner autonomy can be described as those who understand why they are learning, accept responsibility for their learning, take the initiative in planning and executing learning activities and are willing to assess their own learning.

It is important for students to have learner autonomy because they will be able to learn from their own successes and failures by strategies that will help them to be more competent learners in the future (Joshi, 2011; Nakata, 2011; Şakrak-Ekin & Balçıkanlı, 2019). Onozawa (2010) gives three reasons for the importance of autonomy in education that is first, developing a lifelong ability to cope with the rapid social changes, second, fostering the learner's individuality, and third, developing the diversity of the learner's educational and

cultural background. Learner autonomy is also considered as a desirable goal in language education (Alonazi, 2017). Fumin and Lee (2012) stated that one of the main goals in education is assisting individuals to view learning as a lifelong process and learn in a self-directed way. This means that schools or teachers cannot always provide learners with all knowledge in their lives. It is better for them to be more responsible for their own needs and know to think how to learn. Therefore, it is time for teachers to think of the best ways how to teach their learners be autonomous by doing autonomous learning on their own, instead of spoon-feed their learners.

Teachers play important roles in promoting learner autonomy (Little, 2002). The teacher's roles in promoting autonomous language learning are identified into facilitator, counsellor and resource (Alonazi, 2017). A facilitator of learning is usually considered as a helper who makes learning easier to happen (Chiu, 2005). As a counsellor, teacher assists learners to talk to someone about their achievements, problems and the ways to solve these problems (Lin & Reinders, 2018; Kongchan, 2008). Teachers perform their roles as resource through assisting learners to be aware of a wide range of knowledge resources and learning strategies. The role as manager/organizer can be seen through creating opportunities for learners to learn spontaneously and creatively and to take their own initiatives to construct their knowledge. These roles would trigger the characteristics of autonomous learners such as responsible for their own learning, persistent, resourceful, and initiative (Lin & Reinders, 2018; Tran & Duong, 2018; Yan, 2012).

Being autonomous learners benefits students for their learning however, learners usually do not automatically take responsibility for their learning but they need teachers to help them to do that. They need their teachers to design the instruction which later will lead them to be autonomous learner. Moreover, Tran and Duong (2018) found that students feel the benefit of learner autonomy when their teachers are able to provide supportive factors that benefited them throughout the course which includes developed skills and awareness of learner autonomy, positive feedback on the use of portfolio, and teacher's autonomy-oriented role. However, least number of studies investigated the roles of teacher in promoting learner autonomy. Most of the studies focus on the students whether their perception or implementation (Joshi, 2011; Lamb, 2004; Tran & Duong, 2018).

Considering the importance of learner autonomy as well as teacher assistance in conducting autonomous learning, this study was carried out to describe the roles that EFL

teachers play in promoting learner autonomy. EFL teachers were observed to see how they play their roles in promoting learner autonomy. This study contributes to a better understanding of how teachers' view on their roles in promoting learner autonomy are demonstrated in their teaching practices

Materials and Methods

This study was a descriptive qualitative study with four junior high school teachers in Singaraja as the participants. The four EFL teachers were given code T-1, T-2, T-3, and T-4. The data were collected through questionnaire and observation techniques. Two research instruments were used namely questionnaire and observation sheet. The instruments were validated first through expert judgment. The questionnaires were administrated to gain the EFL teachers' knowledge about learner autonomy and their roles in promoting learner autonomy. The questionnaire for this research was designed as a/an agree-or-disagree statement for the quality of data collection. There were 25 statements which in the form of Bahasa Indonesia to make the statements clear and avoid misinterpretation. The results of the questionnaire then were confirmed through classroom observations to describe the real roles that they performed in promoting learner autonomy.

The dimensions used for the questionnaire and observation sheet were taken by drawing essential ideas related to the role of teacher to promote autonomous learning from experts (Riley, 1997; Voller, 1997; Scharle & Szabo, 2000; Wenden, 2002; Yang, 2005; Dam, 2008). It can be stated that there are four roles of teacher to promote autonomous learner such as: facilitator, counsellor, resource and manager. These dimensions then were represented through indicators. From these dimensions, the blue print can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Blue Print of Questionnaire and Observation Sheet

No.	Dimensions	Definition	Indicators	Item Number
1	Facilitator	a teacher who provides technical support (facilitates learners to plan and carry out their independent learning) and psycho social support (raises students' awareness and motivation of the importance of autonomous learning) which makes learning easier to happen	The teacher facilitates students to set up <u>their learning objectives</u>	1
			The teacher provides chance for students <u>to propose questions dealing with a topic</u>	2
			The teacher facilitates students to do exercise deals with the language <u>competence based on the topic</u>	3
			The teacher helps students to evaluate <u>their own learning and progress</u>	4
			The teacher gives individual or group <u>task after learning a topic</u>	5
			The teacher informs the topic and anything that is needed to be prepared <u>for the next meeting</u>	6
			The teacher raises students' awareness	7

No.	Dimensions	Definition	Indicators	Item Number
			about the importance of being autonomous for their own learning	
			The teacher motivates students to be autonomous by giving reinforcement	8,9
2	Counsellor	a teacher who provides advice and assistance to learners about their achievements, problems and the ways to solve them in order to help learners to be more self-directed	The teacher gives advice for students to improve their achievement in learning through the use of feedback	10
			The teacher gives advice for students who don't accomplish the task/homework and have lack participation in the class	11
			The teacher assists students to identify their learning difficulties	12
			The teacher assist students with difficulties by offering alternative learning strategies and activities	13
3	Resource	a teacher who encourages learner autonomy by assisting students to be aware of a wide range of knowledge resources and learning strategies	The teacher assists students to be aware of a wide range of knowledge resources	14,15,16
			The teacher assists learner to select their learning resources based on their level	17
			The teacher assists students to be aware of a wide range of learning strategies	18
4	Manager/ Organizer	a teacher who organizes the teaching materials, strategies and activities that is suitable for the learners' needs and level, creates opportunities for learners to learn creatively and to take their own initiatives in constructing their knowledge.	The teacher organizes different kinds of teaching materials including teaching media to create opportunities for students to construct their knowledge.	19,20
			The teacher organizes different kinds of strategies to create opportunities for learners to learn creatively	21
			The teacher organizes different kinds of activities to take students' own initiatives in constructing their knowledge.	22,23
			The teacher mentions the purpose of activities/tasks given and presents clear procedures of the activities so the students can clearly understand their responsibilities before doing the tasks	24,25

To analyse the data, the researcher followed three steps namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In short, the steps in analysing the data were: (1) the researcher collected the data through questionnaire and observation. Then, the researcher selected, identified and focused on the data by referring to formulation of the research problem. (2) After selecting the data, the researcher described those data into good sentences. (3) After describing data, the conclusion was drawn. In qualitative research, data can be categorized good data if the data are valid. Therefore, to get validity of data, the researcher used methodological triangulation technique that is using the same method on different occasions or different methods on the same object of study (Cohen, 2000).

Results and Discussion

The questionnaires were distributed to gain the data related to the EFL teachers' belief about their roles in promoting learner autonomy. The result can be seen in Appendix 1. Table 2. The Result of Questionnaire about The Belief of Teachers toward their Roles in Promoting Learner Autonomy. There were 25 items consist in the questionnaire. 24 out of 25 statements (96%) in the questionnaire were agreed by the four EFL teachers. They agreed that, as a teacher, they facilitated students' needs and difficulties. It is shown through statements number 1 to 9 which discussed about providing technical support such as facilitates learners to plan and carry out their independent learning. The teacher also provided psycho-social support such as raising students' awareness and motivation of the importance of autonomous learning which made learning easier to happen. The role as facilitator was described through the nine statements such as teacher facilitates students to set up their learning objectives, provides chance for students to propose questions dealing with a topic and facilitates students to do exercise deals with the language competence based on the topic. As facilitator, the teacher also helped students to evaluate their own learning and progress, gave individual or group task after learning a topic and informs the topic and anything that is needed to be prepared for the next meeting. These activities raised students' readiness for studying and awareness about the importance of being autonomous for their own learning. However, from 4 teachers, 1 of them (25%) disagreed with the statement number 1 that is giving students chance to set up their own learning objectives. This disagreement then was confirmed through interview and the result appeared that the disagreement was stated because the students in her class still need guidance in planning their study therefore, she needed to set up the learning objectives by herself. This finding becomes one of the challenges faced by the teachers in promoting learner autonomy.

The teachers' role as resource was shown through agreement with statement number 14 to 18. All of the teachers agreed that they encourage learner autonomy by assisting students to be aware of a wide range of knowledge resources and learning strategies. The teacher assisted students to be aware of a wide range of knowledge resources through suggesting other learning resources such as website and library that can be accessed by students in order to support their learning since the characters of autonomous learner are have strong desire to learn and resourceful. Therefore, they tried to find information from various resources.

Statement number 19 to 25 covers the role of teacher as manager/ organizer in promoting learner autonomy. All teachers (100%) agreed that they role as manager/

organizer. As manager/ organizer, teachers organized the teaching materials, strategies and activities that is suitable for the learners' needs and level. They created opportunities for students to learn creatively and to take their own initiatives in constructing their knowledge. The activities that indicated this role were organizing different kinds of games and activities in the classroom, providing clear instructions of the tasks assigned to students, explaining the purposes and the significance of the tasks assigned to students and giving their students opportunities to tell their opinions in their learning activities. With regard to the objective of the study, the results showed that the EFL teachers play multiple roles in order to promote learner autonomy that is facilitator, counsellor, resource and manager/organizer (Alonazi, 2017; Joshi, 2011). This finding is accordance with Lin & Reinders (2018) and Wenden (2002) who state that the teacher's roles in promoting autonomous language learning are facilitator, counsellor, resource and manager.

However, 1 EFL teacher (4%) disagreed with statement number 1 about facilitates students to set up their learning objectives. The disagreement then was confirmed in classroom observation and interview. It was related to the challenges faced by EFL teachers in promoting learner autonomy. The teacher assumed that students being passive because they afraid of making mistakes or corrected by others. They were shy and not confident enough to state their opinion whereas they have something to say in their mind. Therefore, based on the result of questionnaire, the four EFL teachers agree that in promoting learner autonomy they role as facilitator, counsellor, resource and manager/ organizer.

The data from questionnaire then were confirmed through conducting classroom observation to determine in what ways the concept of the roles of teachers in promoting learner autonomy was supported in the language classroom. Through observation, the implementations of their roles were observed. The result described that the four EFL teachers performed their roles as facilitator, counsellor, resource and manager/ organizer in their teaching and learning process. The result of classroom observation can be seen in Appendix 2 (Table 3. of Classroom Observation).

Based on table 3, it can be described that from 4 teachers, 2 of them (50%) show all the learning activities required to be called as facilitator. These activities such as facilitates students to set up their learning objectives. T-2 facilitates students to set up their learning objectives through prompting by giving clues of what they are going to learn today. She showed some pictures then asked some questions to students. Another way shown by T-3

who started the class with games related to today's topic. After conducting the games, the teacher together with students stated the objectives of today's learning. Through the activities explained before, the students will be organized because they are able to plan their learning. Facilitating students to do exercise deals with the language competence based on the topic and evaluating their own learning and progress can promote learner autonomy. It is because these activities facilitate student's desire to learn. By exercise and evaluation, they know how to make their speech fluent using certain tricks to fill in the gaps and finally, they can accommodate their language outcome to the actual language situation.

The four EFL teachers performed their role as counsellor by advising student who didn't accomplish the task/ homework. She mentioned the risks that students will be faced if they didn't accomplish the task/ homework for example, they will get extra homework. T-2 gave the first chance for students who have lack participation in the class to answer questions or give opinion. By pointing out, the students who have lack participation in the class will be motivated to involve in the class and be more self-prepared. The T-3 assists students to identify their learning difficulties by offering alternative learning strategies such as peer assessment. He asked the students to correct their friends' works. The students and teacher discuss the correct answer together and assess their friends' work. This activity promotes learner autonomy because it triggers resourcefulness of students as one characteristic of autonomous learner. The examples of learning resources are classroom learning experience and peer learning groups. In line with T-3, T-4 gave students chance to comment the performance of their friends during role play. By assessing one to another, they will be able to identify their own problem and find out the solution by themselves or from their friend suggestions. As autonomous learners are those who are able to learn from their mistakes, the students will tend to avoid making same mistakes so that they can be more responsible for and improve their own learning.

As a resource, T-1 showed this role through telling her students to find more information about the topic given in the school library so that T-2 and T-4. Since the school of T-3 supported with internet access and computer in the library, T-3 suggested his students to find more information about the topic that they didn't understand yet on the internet. The teachers also helped students to use different learning strategies. T-2 encouraged her students to listen attentively for those who prefer to listen to the explanation rather than taking note and vice versa. T-4 asked one of her students to re-explain when there are students who still don't understand yet about the task given. T-2 also encouraged her students to read kinds of reading since it is important to build their reading habit, support literacy program and to

avoid hoax news. In autonomy learning, it is a way to empower the students to search and explore more the knowledge through literacy habit. However, during observation, all teachers didn't show that they give task for students and ask to find the information through various resources such as on the internet. These findings then were confirmed through interview and it belongs as one of challenges faced by the teachers in promoting learner autonomy.

The role as manager/organizer was shown through organizing the teaching materials, strategies and activities that was suitable for the learners' needs and level. Teacher created opportunities for learners to learn creatively and to take their own initiatives in constructing their knowledge. In general, teachers were inclined to hold activities easy to control and implement, such as role plays and group discussions. It can be observed through how T-1 and T-4 organizing some activities in their teaching learning such as conducting games in the beginning of classroom activity. It has purpose to gain students' attention and motivation to learn. This will lead to promote students' desire to learn as one of the characteristics of autonomous learner.

In accordance with Joshi (2011), the EFL teachers regarded their role in the learning process as facilitators and that autonomy is considered to be the basis of both higher proficiency and performance as well as very useful in the process of learning. The teachers are supposed to facilitate students to learn, provide scaffolding, and teach students how to learn as the indicators to be called as facilitator (see the blueprint). Through facilitates students to set up their learning objectives, the students will have clear understanding of what they are going to learn and achieve in every meeting. Therefore, they will be able to manage their own learning. This finding is in line with Alonazi (2017) who defines autonomous learners as those who are capable of managing their learning. Giving positive reinforcement such as appreciation to students gives positive affect to raise self-confidence and motivate them to learn. It raises students' persistency since autonomy is not merely the act of learning by self at the given time but more precisely the ability to be capable of doing it eventually. By exercise and evaluation, they know how to make their speech fluent using certain tricks to fill in the gaps and finally, they can accommodate their language outcome to the actual language situation.

As counsellor, teachers should be aware of their learners' learning needs. The present study supports the finding of Lin & Reinders (2018) who said that autonomous learner is characterized as resourceful. The role as counsellor is to assist students to identify their

learning difficulties. By offering alternative learning strategies, it promotes learner autonomy because it triggers resourcefulness of students as one characteristic of autonomous learner. Resourcefulness for an autonomous learner means to gather and assess the internal and external resources needed for a learning experience. Effective communication is also important since it helps learners become more efficient learners (Yan, 2012).

Teachers seem to play the role of resource mostly through selecting and evaluating the resources according to the students' needs, using technology in their educational materials and suggesting websites, videos or online dictionaries that motivate students to use the target language outside the classroom. The present study supports the findings of Yan (2012) who say that this role is particularly appropriate for the students how are working independently but still are in need for help from the teacher. The teacher is supposed to be the language resource and should be responsible for providing necessary language input. Therefore, this role promotes students' autonomy characteristics such as resourceful.

The role as manager/ organizer in promoting learner autonomy covers planning, organizing and controlling (Ja, 2017). This present study has shown the step of planning performed by the EFL teachers through introduced the topic and learning objectives. Organizing can be seen when the teacher gave explanation or instruction to students to do something such as; read a text, observe a series of pictures, discuss a topic or do an exercise, and correct the students' task. It is also described through the using of learning media in teaching and learning process such as series of pictures, LCD and speaker to support the learning process. Controlling is when the teacher control students when they were discussing or doing exercise in the classroom. In playing this role, the teacher sometime plays also the other roles along together such as resources and counsellor. Every teacher has his/her own style in applying those roles. It implies that, every teacher has different style with other teachers and sometime a role is applied more dominate than other roles. Considering the significance of teacher roles in the promotion of autonomy in language learning, teacher autonomy was also needed (Benson, 2001). They have to know what makes learners are autonomous. It also determines the initiatives they take in their classrooms. They prepared anything needed starting from lesson plan and teaching material. In the classroom, after conducting certain strategy such as games or pair work, it followed by follow up activities so that the material that has been taught would be more understood by the students.

Through the roles that EFL teachers play, the characteristics of autonomous learners can be maintained so that, it will promote learner autonomy. There are some reasons of it. First, it is because autonomous learners are more motivated (Deci and Ryan, 2002). The more

autonomous the learners are, the more motivated they are. And then of course that affects their ability to learn the language, to learn the language well. Therefore, teachers should motivate their learners to continue learning even when they are not in the classroom, which would contribute to increasing their confidence with regard to their language and general communication skills. It resonates with Xu Jinfen and Xu Li (2004) who agree that the teachers should be able to motivate and encourage them to learn. Second, autonomous learners are more committed (Derrick, 2002). Involving students results on students more committed to their responsibility and that they could identify with what they are doing because they decided the learning themselves (Şakrak-Ekin & Balçıkanlı, 2019). They maintain activities that coincide with one have integrated self and establish goals which help to enhance motivation of the learners for action. Third, autonomous learners are more focused and take more risks (Derrick, 2002). They often were much more risk taking. They would decide to do things that maybe the teacher would never have dreamed that they could do, try to show it and develop a much more sophisticated use of the language. These benefits of being autonomous are line with Onozawa (2010) who identify three reasons for the importance of autonomy in education that is developing a lifelong ability to cope with the rapid social changes, fostering the learner's individuality, and developing the diversity of the learner's educational and cultural background.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that in promoting learner autonomy, the teachers performed their roles as facilitator, counsellor, resource and manager/ organizer. Through the roles that EFL teachers play, the characteristics of autonomous learners such as responsible of their own learning, persistent, resourceful and initiative can be emphasized so that, learner autonomy can be promoted.

To follow up the rapid change on the development of teaching learning process, schools are suggested to offer teachers with professional development programs on learner autonomy such as following workshops or seminar so it can be helpful in developing both learner and teacher autonomy. Considering the challenges met by the EFL teachers, an investigation about the challenges faced by the EFL teachers in promoting learner autonomy is needed.

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