

Teachers' Perceptions and Practices in Promoting Learner Autonomy in Under-Resourced EFL Schools: Enabling and Constraining Factors

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history: Submitted: September 16, 2026 Final Revised: Sept. 27, 2026 Accepted: September 29, 2026 Published: September 30, 2026 Keywords: Learner Autonomy; Autonomy-Supportive Teaching; Teacher Perceptions and Practices; Under-Resourced Schools; EFL Education	This qualitative case study examines how English teachers perceive and enact practices for promoting learner autonomy in under-resourced senior high-school EFL contexts and identifies factors that enable or constrain those practices. Eleven English teachers in Lebak Regency, Indonesia, participated in in-depth interviews, and two of them additionally participated in classroom observations. Interview and observation data were analyzed thematically. The findings show that teachers promoted learner autonomy through inquiry and resource exploration, active and reflective participation, opportunities for students to make selected learning-related decisions, and collaborative group work and peer support. Teacher commitment emerged as an enabling condition, whereas teacher-perceived student dependence on teacher direction and limited teacher knowledge of autonomy-supportive assessment were identified as constraining conditions. The observation data provided contextual support for selected reported practices but were not treated as representative of all participants. The study suggests that learner autonomy in resource-constrained settings can be supported through purposeful pedagogical use of available digital, printed, local, and interpersonal resources. It also highlights learner autonomy as a gradually developed, pedagogically supported, and socially mediated process rather than as independence from teachers or peers.



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INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy has become a central concern in second and foreign language education because it positions learners as active agents who can exercise increasing control over decisions related to their learning. Contemporary scholarship treats autonomy not as a fixed personality trait or as learning without a teacher, but as a multidimensional capacity involving willingness, ability, reflection, choice, self-regulation, and participation in decisions about learning (Littlewood, 1996; Oxford, 2015; Chong & Reinders, 2025). Earlier classroom-oriented work similarly emphasizes that autonomy develops through pedagogical conditions that enable learners to assume responsibility progressively rather than through the simple removal of teacher guidance (Crabbe, 1993; Dickinson, 1995). This distinction is important in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, where students often have limited opportunities to use English outside school and therefore continue to depend on classroom structures, teachers, and peers while learning to take greater responsibility.

The development of learner autonomy is therefore closely connected to the role of the teacher. Autonomy-supportive teaching involves creating opportunities for learners to make meaningful choices, identify and use learning resources, reflect on learning, participate in assessment, collaborate with others, and gradually assume responsibility within appropriately structured tasks. From this perspective, teacher support and learner autonomy are complementary rather than contradictory. The teacher remains a facilitator, resource person, and pedagogical designer who establishes conditions in which students can exercise greater agency (Littlewood, 1999; Ciekanski, 2007). Research on teacher cognition also indicates that classroom practices are shaped by teachers' beliefs, professional knowledge, prior experience, institutional expectations, and perceptions of what is feasible in their teaching contexts (Phipps & Borg, 2009). Consequently, understanding how teachers conceptualize and enact learner autonomy is essential for explaining why autonomy-supportive practices develop differently across educational settings.

Empirical research has repeatedly identified a gap between teachers' positive views of learner autonomy and the extent to which autonomy is implemented in classroom practice. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) found that teachers generally valued learner autonomy but identified contextual and learner-related constraints on its implementation. A larger study by Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) similarly showed that teachers viewed learner autonomy as desirable while being less confident about its feasibility because of curricular, societal, institutional,

and learner-related factors. Recent work continues to show that teachers' understandings of autonomy, their teaching competence, and professional development influence the practices through which autonomy is supported (Li, 2023). These studies suggest that learner autonomy cannot be adequately understood by examining learner characteristics alone; attention must also be given to what teachers actually do and to the contextual conditions that shape those practices.

The context becomes particularly important in schools where learning resources are constrained. Much learner-autonomy research has been conducted in higher education, technology-rich settings, self-access environments, or contexts in which learners have relatively broad access to learning materials. Yet autonomy does not necessarily depend on abundant material resources. Kuchah and Smith (2011), for example, demonstrated that a pedagogy of autonomy can emerge in difficult circumstances through collaborative organization, locally feasible activities, negotiated responsibilities, and creative use of limited resources. Their work challenges the assumption that learner autonomy requires highly individualized or technology-intensive learning. It also suggests that resource constraints may shape the forms that autonomy-supportive pedagogy takes, making it necessary to examine how teachers adapt learning activities to the resources, classroom conditions, and learner characteristics available to them.

This issue is highly relevant to Indonesian EFL education. Indonesian educational policy has increasingly emphasized student agency, responsibility, creativity, and active participation, including through the current curriculum orientation represented in Kurikulum Merdeka (Anggraena et al., 2025). Nevertheless, policy expectations do not automatically translate into autonomous classroom practice. Research with Indonesian secondary-school learners has shown that readiness for autonomy is uneven and that students may differ in their willingness and preparedness to participate in decisions about their learning (Cirocki et al., 2019). Studies in Indonesian EFL settings have also highlighted the continuing importance of teacher support and classroom design in creating opportunities for learners to take greater responsibility (Lengkanawati, 2017). Thus, the question is not simply whether autonomy is desirable, but how it can be enacted within the actual constraints of Indonesian school environments.

Despite the expanding literature, three limitations remain particularly relevant to the present study. First, a substantial proportion of research on teacher beliefs and learner autonomy relies on questionnaires or teachers' self-reported practices; fewer studies combine teachers' accounts with classroom observation to examine how reported practices are enacted. Second, much of the teacher-focused literature has been conducted in tertiary or relatively well-resourced contexts (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019), leaving less evidence from resource-constrained secondary-school settings. Third, studies often examine either teachers' beliefs, autonomy-promoting practices, or barriers separately, whereas less attention has been given to how reported practices and enabling and constraining contextual conditions operate together within the same case. The broader review of learner-autonomy research by Chong and Reinders (2025) likewise underscores the conceptual and methodological diversity of the field and the need for context-sensitive evidence about how autonomy is operationalized in practice.

Accordingly, this study addresses these gaps by examining English teachers' reported and observed practices for promoting learner autonomy in under-resourced senior high-school contexts in Lebak Regency, Indonesia. In this study, "under-resourced" is treated as a context-specific operational condition characterized by limitations in English-language books or learning materials, the absence of free Wi-Fi access for students, and the absence of a language laboratory, rather than as a universal classification of school disadvantage. By combining interviews with classroom observations, the study seeks to identify not only what teachers report doing but also how selected autonomy-supportive practices are enacted in classroom settings. It further examines contextual conditions that teachers perceive as enabling or constraining these practices. The study therefore contributes a contextually grounded account of learner autonomy as a pedagogically supported and socially mediated process that may be developed even when material resources are limited. The study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do teachers promote learner autonomy in an under-resourced school context?
- 2) What factors enable or constrain teachers' efforts to promote learner autonomy in an under-resourced school context?.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine English teachers' reported and enacted practices for promoting learner autonomy in under-resourced senior high-school contexts. The case-study approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand pedagogical practices as they occurred within their real educational settings and to interpret those practices in relation to the contextual conditions that enabled or constrained learner autonomy. The design also allowed evidence from teachers' accounts and classroom observations to be considered together, thereby providing a contextualized understanding of both perceived and observed practices (Yin, 2014).

Research Context and Participants

Eleven English teachers from senior high schools in Lebak Regency voluntarily participated in the study. All eleven teachers participated in the interviews, while two teachers additionally volunteered for classroom observation. For the purposes of this study, an under-resourced school was operationally identified by limitations in English-language books or learning materials, the absence of free Wi-Fi access for students, and the absence of a language laboratory. These criteria were used as context-specific operational indicators in this study rather than as a universal classification of under-resourced schools.

Participants were anonymized using the codes Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and so forth. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. These procedures were intended to protect participants' confidentiality and their right to participate voluntarily.

The participant group therefore comprised 11 English teachers, and all 11 contributed interview data to the study. Recruitment was voluntary, consistent with the procedure documented in the original manuscript; therefore, no stronger sampling label is claimed here. The adequacy of the 11-participant interview sample was considered in relation to the focused aim of the study, the specificity of the participant group, the relevance of participants' teaching experience to the phenomenon under investigation, and the depth of qualitative inquiry rather than statistical representativeness. This rationale is consistent with the concept of information power, which emphasizes that qualitative sample adequacy depends on the study aim, sample specificity, quality of dialogue, use of theory, and analytical strategy (Malterud et al., 2016). Within this case, the 11 interviews enabled comparison of recurring and contrasting teacher accounts, while classroom observations of two participants served as a supplementary source for examining how selected reported practices were enacted in classroom settings.

Data Collection

Data were generated through in-depth interviews and classroom observations. The interviews explored teachers' perceptions of the practices they used to promote learner autonomy, together with the opportunities and challenges they encountered in under-resourced school settings. Classroom observations were used to document how autonomy-supportive practices were enacted during teaching and learning, including activities that provided students with opportunities to search for information, participate actively, make learning-related decisions, collaborate with peers, and assume responsibility for aspects of their learning. Using these two sources made it possible to compare teachers' reported practices with practices observed in classroom contexts.

All 11 teachers participated in in-depth interviews. The interviews focused on three domains derived from the research questions: (1) teachers' understandings and perceptions of learner autonomy, (2) teaching-learning practices used to provide students with responsibility and decision-making opportunities, and (3) contextual factors perceived to support or constrain autonomy in under-resourced school settings. Two of the 11 interviewed teachers additionally volunteered for classroom observation. The observations focused on the enactment of autonomy-supportive practices, including opportunities for students to search for learning resources, ask and answer questions, make learning-related decisions, work collaboratively, provide peer support or feedback, and assume responsibility for classroom tasks. Thus, the interview dataset ($n = 11$) constituted the primary source for examining teachers' perceptions and reported practices, whereas the observation subset ($n = 2$) provided contextual evidence of selected classroom practices.

Data Analysis

Interview and observation data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for candidate themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Rather than treating these phases as rigidly linear, the analysis was understood as an iterative process in which the researcher could move between coding, theme development, and review as patterns were refined (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

In the revised analytical description, interview and observation material was first examined for segments relevant to the two research questions. Initial codes captured reported or observed autonomy-supportive practices and contextual conditions that appeared to facilitate or constrain those practices. Related codes were then collated into candidate themes, which were reviewed against the available interview and observation evidence, refined for internal coherence and distinction from other themes, and assigned descriptive names. The final themes were organized to address (a) the practices used to promote learner autonomy and (b) the enabling and constraining factors associated with those practices. Representative interview excerpts and classroom-observation evidence were then selected to demonstrate how each theme was grounded in the dataset.

Thematic analysis was applied across the complete interview dataset from the 11 teachers together with the available classroom-observation material from two participants. Coding focused on segments that addressed the research questions rather than on generating numerical frequencies. Codes were compared across the 11 interview accounts to identify recurring patterns as well as variations in how teachers described autonomy-supportive practices and contextual constraints. Observation material was then considered alongside the interview themes to examine whether selected practices were also evident in classroom enactment. The manuscript does not claim the use of qualitative-analysis software, a second independent coder, or inter-coder reliability because these

procedures are not documented in the available research record. This reporting choice is consistent with reflexive thematic analysis, in which methodological transparency and coherence between the research questions, coding process, theme development, and interpretation are more important than introducing reliability procedures that were not part of the original analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Trustworthiness and Research Ethics

The use of interviews together with classroom observations provided data-source triangulation by allowing reported practices to be considered alongside evidence of classroom enactment. In thematic research, transparent documentation of how data are coded, themes are developed, and interpretations are linked to evidence is important for demonstrating credibility and analytical traceability (Nowell et al., 2017). Accordingly, the revised reporting makes explicit the progression from the research questions to coding, theme development, and the use of representative evidence. Consistent participant codes were used to preserve confidentiality while allowing readers to trace evidence across the findings.

Trustworthiness was supported primarily through data-source triangulation between the 11 teacher interviews and classroom observations of two members of the same participant group. The interviews provided cross-participant evidence concerning perceived and reported practices, while the observations supplied contextual evidence regarding the enactment of selected practices. During reporting, themes were linked to representative participant quotations and observation evidence so that interpretations could be traced back to the dataset. All 11 teachers participated voluntarily and provided informed consent, and participant identities were protected using the codes Teacher1 through Teacher11. The ethical procedures documented for this study therefore comprised voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymization of participant identities.

RESULTS

The analysis of interviews with 11 English teachers, supplemented by classroom observations of two participants, generated two overarching sets of findings corresponding to the research questions. The first set concerns the practices teachers reported and, where observation data were available, enacted to promote learner autonomy. The second set concerns conditions that teachers perceived as enabling or constraining these practices. Interview data constitute the primary evidence across all themes, while observation data are used only as contextual support for selected classroom practices. To maintain analytical transparency, the findings below distinguish between teachers' reported accounts and evidence documented during the observation subset.

Table 1. Thematic Summary of Teachers' Practices and Enabling/Constraining Factors in Promoting Learner Autonomy

Research focus	Theme	Primary evidence	Illustrative evidence
Practices for promoting learner autonomy	Inquiry and use of learning resources	Interviews: 11 teachers; observation subset used as contextual support	Teacher11 and Teacher4 interview accounts; classroom observation of independent resource searching
Practices for promoting learner autonomy	Active and reflective participation	Interviews: 11 teachers; observation subset used where available	Teacher2 interview account on peer feedback and reflection
Practices for promoting learner autonomy	Student participation in learning-related decisions	Interview evidence from several teachers; observation subset used as contextual support	Teacher2 and Teacher3 accounts of choices about seating, groups, resources, and roles
Practices for promoting learner autonomy	Collaborative group work and peer support	Interview evidence; observation subset used as contextual support	Teacher1, Teacher2, and Teacher3 accounts of group work and peer assistance
Enabling factor	Teacher commitment to autonomy-supportive practice	Interview evidence across participants; observation subset used as contextual support	Teacher1 and Teacher2 accounts illustrating persistence, guidance, and transfer of responsibility
Constraining factor	Teacher-perceived student dependence on teacher direction	Teacher interviews and classroom-related accounts	Teachers described students as often waiting for explanation or guidance before acting independently
Constraining factor	Limited knowledge of autonomy-supportive assessment	Most teacher interviews; observation subset used as contextual support	Limited use of self-assessment, peer assessment, and learner reflection on progress

A. Practices Used to Promote Learner Autonomy in Under-Resourced Schools**1. Inquiry and use of digital and non-digital learning resources**

Across the 11 interviews, teachers consistently described information-seeking activities as one way of shifting part of the learning responsibility from the teacher to students. Students were asked to locate information related to a topic by using textbooks, dictionaries, their immediate surroundings, and internet-based resources when access was possible. Teacher 11 described this practice as follows: *"We give students a chance to find out the information related to the topic by themselves. Their autonomy will be seen when they are looking for the information they need. After that, we check and discuss it in the classroom."* This account illustrates a sequence in which students first search for information independently and subsequently receive teacher confirmation or clarification.

Teacher 4 provided another example from descriptive-text instruction. Students were first directed to observe objects and plants in the school environment, identify the English names and characteristics of those objects, and then select one object as the basis for a descriptive text. This example shows that teachers did not equate learner autonomy solely with access to digital technology; locally available materials and the school environment were also used as learning resources.

The classroom-observation subset provided contextual support for this pattern. In one observed activity, students preparing a talk show about plans after graduation were required to search for relevant language expressions, consult job-interview videos, examine grammar examples, and use online or printed dictionaries before requesting teacher confirmation. The observed practice was therefore consistent with interview accounts describing students as being expected to explore available resources before relying on direct teacher explanation.

Resource limitations also shaped how these activities were organized. Interview accounts indicated that internet-based tasks at school were often completed collaboratively because free Wi-Fi was unavailable. Students sometimes pooled resources to obtain mobile data for information searching and task completion. Within the boundaries of the present data, this finding shows that limited digital infrastructure altered the mode of access to learning resources rather than eliminating information-seeking activities altogether.

2. Opportunities for active and reflective participation

The 11 teachers reported providing students with opportunities to participate actively through questioning, answering, expressing opinions, and responding to peers. Teacher 2 described a reflective speaking activity involving students from the English debate extracurricular program. After a student presented an opinion, classmates were invited to ask questions and identify strengths and weaknesses in the performance. Teacher 2 explained: *"The purpose of asking students in the debate club to participate in speaking activities is to help them become accustomed to practicing English speaking. I also want them to recognize their strengths and weaknesses through feedback from their peers, so they can use that feedback to improve their performance. At the same time, it encourages the audience members to develop the confidence to evaluate and provide constructive feedback to their peers."*

Teacher 2 also reported involving students in reflection on the classroom learning environment. Approximately every two months, seating arrangements were reconsidered, and students' suggestions and preferences were included in the decision. In the teachers' accounts, these practices provided students with opportunities not only to participate in classroom activities but also to articulate judgments about their own or their peers' learning experiences. The evidence is therefore interpreted here as teacher-created opportunities for active participation and reflection rather than as direct measurement of changes in students' autonomy.

3. Student participation in learning-related decisions

Several teachers reported allowing students to make decisions about selected aspects of classroom learning and management. Teacher 2, for example, involved students in choosing songs to be used as icebreakers and sought their views about seating arrangements. Teacher 3 reported allowing students to select group members and learning resources for a class assignment. In the reported talk-show task, students distributed roles within their groups, selected resources such as job-interview videos, and explored expressions that could be used during the performance.

The observation subset provided supporting evidence that selected learning decisions were delegated to students in classroom activities. Rather than implying that students controlled all aspects of instruction, the data indicate a more limited and structured transfer of responsibility: teachers established the curricular task and general learning objectives, while students were given choices concerning resources, roles, group organization, or aspects of task implementation. This distinction is important because the evidence supports opportunities for learner decision-making within teacher-defined instructional boundaries.

4. Collaborative group work and peer support

Group work and peer assistance were repeatedly described as practical strategies for supporting learner participation in classrooms with varying levels of English proficiency. Teacher 1 summarized the perceived value of peer learning by stating, *"Learning from friends seems to be more effective than learning from teachers."* Teacher 2 similarly reported using peer tutoring, explaining, *"I ask my smart students to help their friends."* These

accounts suggest that teachers used peer interaction to distribute learning support beyond direct teacher explanation.

The classroom-observation subset also documented structured collaborative activities. In one reading activity, students worked in groups assigned to different paragraphs of a text. Each group developed questions for another group and responded to questions based on its assigned paragraph. In another classroom activity described in the dataset, students collaboratively prepared and performed a talk show, including a question-and-answer session. Teacher 3 explained that students developed their own concepts around the assigned theme and shared their knowledge with classmates before the teacher provided additional explanation or clarification. Taken together, the interview and observation evidence indicates that collaboration was used not simply to divide tasks but to create opportunities for students to explain, question, assist, and learn from peers.

B. Enabling and Constraining Factors in the Promotion of Learner Autonomy

1. Teacher commitment as an enabling condition

Teacher commitment emerged from the interview data as an enabling condition for sustaining autonomy-supportive practices despite limited resources. In the teachers' accounts, commitment was reflected in persistence in providing students with opportunities to make decisions, solve problems, reflect, and attempt tasks before receiving direct assistance. It was also reflected in teachers' willingness to adapt instructional strategies while maintaining the intended learning objectives.

Teacher1 described the importance of remaining consistent with learning goals while adjusting instruction when a particular strategy did not correspond to students' needs. The dataset also contains examples of teachers withholding immediate answers and instead giving analogies, prompts, or guidance that encouraged students to search for expressions or solutions themselves. Evidence from the observation subset similarly showed teachers providing structured opportunities for students to take responsibility for parts of classroom tasks. These findings characterize teacher commitment as sustained pedagogical effort to create repeated opportunities for learner responsibility, rather than as a personality trait measured independently in this study.

2. Teacher-perceived student dependence on teacher direction as a constraining condition

Teachers also described a persistent expectation among some students that the teacher should explain material, provide examples, and determine the steps required to complete learning tasks. Because students were not interviewed in this study, this theme is reported as a teacher-perceived pattern rather than as a direct statement of students' own conceptions of learning. According to the teachers' accounts, some students tended to wait for explanation or guidance before attempting to understand material, locate alternative resources, or solve learning difficulties independently.

From the teachers' perspective, this dependence increased the pedagogical effort required to transfer responsibility gradually from teacher to learner. The finding therefore identifies a tension between teachers' attempts to provide opportunities for autonomous action and their perception that some students remained accustomed to teacher-directed learning. No claim is made here that this pattern represents all students or that it was independently verified through student interviews.

3. Limited knowledge of autonomy-supportive assessment as a constraining condition

Most teachers reported uncertainty about how learner autonomy could be identified and assessed and about how assessment activities could themselves be designed to support greater learner responsibility. Their accounts suggested limited familiarity with observable indicators of learner independence and with assessment approaches that involve students directly in judging or monitoring their own learning.

The available classroom-observation evidence was consistent with this reported limitation. Assessment activities were largely teacher-directed, while explicit opportunities for self-assessment, peer assessment, or systematic reflection on learning progress were comparatively limited. On the basis of these data, the constraint is best characterized as limited teacher knowledge and use of autonomy-supportive assessment practices, rather than as evidence that such practices were entirely absent.

Overall pattern of the findings

Across the 11 teacher interviews, the findings show a recurring pattern in which learner autonomy was promoted through structured opportunities for students to search for resources, participate and reflect, make selected learning-related decisions, and collaborate with peers. The two classroom observations provided contextual support for selected reported practices but were not treated as representative of all 11 teachers. At the same time, teachers identified three conditions that shaped these practices: sustained teacher commitment as an enabling condition, teacher-perceived student dependence on teacher direction as a constraint, and limited knowledge of autonomy-supportive assessment as another constraint. These findings answer the two research questions while remaining within the evidentiary boundaries of teacher interviews and the limited observation subset.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that learner autonomy in under-resourced EFL classrooms was promoted through a combination of inquiry and resource exploration, active and reflective participation, opportunities for students to make learning-related decisions, and collaborative group work. At the same time, the extent to which these practices could be sustained was shaped by teacher commitment, teachers' perceptions of students' dependence on teacher direction, and teachers' limited knowledge of autonomy-supportive assessment. Taken together, these findings suggest that learner autonomy in resource-constrained settings is not best understood as students learning independently from teachers or peers. Rather, it appears as a gradually developed capacity that is enabled when teachers deliberately redistribute selected forms of responsibility while continuing to provide structure, guidance, and access to learning resources.

A central finding concerns teachers' use of inquiry-oriented activities and multiple learning resources. Participants described encouraging students to search for information in textbooks, dictionaries, their immediate surroundings, and internet-based sources before seeking teacher confirmation. In an under-resourced context, this pattern is particularly important because it shows that autonomy-supportive pedagogy does not require unrestricted access to sophisticated technologies. What matters is whether students are given meaningful opportunities to locate, select, and use resources for a learning purpose. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that learner autonomy can be fostered through resource-based and technology-supported approaches when technology is integrated as a means for learner control rather than as an end in itself (Ding & Shen, 2019; Tsai, 2021; Pyo & Lee, 2025). Recent evidence from Indonesia likewise indicates that resource, technology, learner, classroom, and teacher approaches can operate together in the development of EFL learner autonomy (Rahmasari et al., 2025).

The present findings extend this literature by showing how resource use can be adapted when access itself is constrained. The reported practice of students working together when internet access was limited illustrates a form of pedagogical adaptation in which scarcity did not simply function as a barrier; it also shaped how learners and teachers organized participation. This should not be interpreted as suggesting that inadequate infrastructure is educationally desirable. Rather, the evidence indicates that teachers can design tasks that preserve opportunities for agency even when material conditions are less than ideal. In this sense, the contribution of the study lies not in claiming that resources are unimportant, but in showing that the autonomy-supportive value of a learning environment depends partly on how available resources are pedagogically organized.

The findings on active and reflective participation further indicate that learner autonomy was supported through opportunities to ask and answer questions, express opinions, evaluate peers' performances, and reflect on aspects of classroom learning. These practices shift some cognitive and evaluative responsibility from the teacher to students. Such a shift corresponds with the broader conception of autonomy-supportive teaching, in which teachers attempt to understand students' perspectives, provide meaningful choices, minimize unnecessary control, and create conditions in which students can act with a greater sense of volition (Reeve, 2006; Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Experimental EFL research similarly demonstrates that autonomy-supportive teaching can strengthen learner autonomy by increasing perceived choice, competence, intrinsic motivation, and involvement in decision-making (Alrabai, 2021).

However, the findings also indicate that autonomy support in these classrooms was not equivalent to the withdrawal of teacher guidance. The teachers continued to structure tasks, provide prompts, clarify misconceptions, and intervene when students needed assistance. This combination is pedagogically significant. Autonomy-supportive teaching is most effective when student choice is accompanied by appropriate structure rather than when learners are left to manage complex tasks without support (Reeve, 2006; Reeve & Cheon, 2021). More recent intervention research also shows that teachers can learn autonomy-supportive practices such as perspective taking, supporting students' interests, communicating value, and reducing controlling instruction (Reeve & Cheon, 2024). Thus, the practices observed in this study are better interpreted as a gradual transfer of responsibility than as a binary movement from teacher control to complete student independence.

Student participation in learning-related decisions represents another important dimension of this gradual transfer. Teachers reported involving students in choices concerning group membership, learning resources, classroom arrangements, activity formats, and roles within collaborative tasks. Although these decisions may appear relatively small, they provide repeated opportunities for students to experience ownership and to recognize that their preferences can influence the learning process. This finding is consistent with autonomy-supportive teaching research, which emphasizes the role of meaningful choice and student voice in fostering self-determined engagement (Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Cheon et al., 2023). In the Indonesian context, teacher support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness has also been positively associated with students' autonomous motivation, although the relative strength of autonomy support may vary according to cultural and classroom conditions (Maulana et al., 2016).

This contextual point is particularly relevant to the present study because the teachers described students whom they perceived as accustomed to teacher-directed learning. The findings should therefore not be interpreted as demonstrating, from students' own perspectives, that students held teacher-centered conceptions; students were not interviewed in this study. Rather, the interviews reveal a recurrent teacher perception that some students

expected teachers to explain content, provide examples, and determine the steps of learning. Such perceptions help explain why teachers may regard the transfer of responsibility as a gradual process. Research on autonomy support in EFL contexts similarly shows that teachers often face tensions between the pedagogical value of autonomy and learners' prior expectations, motivation, or readiness to assume greater responsibility (Işık & Balçıkanlı, 2020). The implication is that learner autonomy should be cultivated progressively through repeated opportunities for decision-making, reflection, and guided responsibility rather than assumed to emerge simply because students are given freedom.

Collaborative group work and peer support were also prominent in the findings. At first glance, collaboration may seem conceptually different from autonomy if autonomy is equated with individual independence. The present findings instead support a relational interpretation: students can exercise agency while working with others, sharing resources, negotiating roles, explaining material, asking questions, and providing peer support. Collaborative activity can therefore reduce exclusive dependence on the teacher without requiring students to learn in isolation. This is consistent with work showing that peer interaction and collaborative learning can support autonomy by distributing sources of knowledge and responsibility across learners. The finding is also aligned with evidence that peer assessment can reduce dependence on the teacher and strengthen learners' confidence, although not every dimension of autonomy necessarily improves through peer assessment alone (Shen et al., 2020).

The role of teacher commitment emerged as the principal enabling condition across these practices. In this study, commitment was reflected in teachers' persistence in creating opportunities for decision-making, inquiry, reflection, collaboration, and problem solving despite contextual constraints. This finding suggests that learner autonomy is partly dependent on teachers' willingness to maintain an autonomy-supportive orientation over time. The importance of this orientation is consistent with the wider autonomy-support literature showing that teachers can learn and refine autonomy-supportive practices and that such practices are associated with beneficial motivational, behavioral, and classroom outcomes (Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Cheon et al., 2023; Reeve & Cheon, 2024). In under-resourced settings, commitment may be especially consequential because teachers must often adapt tasks to the resources that are actually available rather than rely on ideal instructional conditions.

At the same time, teacher commitment alone appears insufficient. A notable constraining factor was teachers' limited knowledge of assessment practices that could support learner autonomy. Participants indicated uncertainty about how student independence could be identified and assessed, while the available observation evidence suggested that assessment remained largely teacher directed. This creates an important tension: classroom activities may provide students with choice and responsibility, but if assessment remains predominantly controlled by teachers, opportunities for learners to monitor, judge, and regulate their own progress remain restricted. Empirical evidence indicates that peer assessment can contribute to learner autonomy by decreasing teacher dependence and enhancing confidence (Shen et al., 2020). Accordingly, autonomy-supportive assessment should be viewed not merely as a method for assigning scores but as a learning process through which students can interpret criteria, evaluate performance, use feedback, and reflect on subsequent learning decisions.

Technology should also be interpreted cautiously in relation to these findings. The teachers used digital resources, but the study does not support the conclusion that technology itself produced autonomy. Previous studies demonstrate that technology-enhanced, flipped, mobile-assisted, and online environments can facilitate learner autonomy when learners are required to make decisions, manage learning activities, use resources strategically, and reflect on progress (Ding & Shen, 2019; Tsai, 2021; Pyo & Lee, 2025). In the present study, similar autonomy-supportive processes occurred through both digital and non-digital resources. The implication is that the pedagogical design surrounding technology is more important than the mere availability of devices or internet access. This distinction is particularly relevant in under-resourced schools, where technological access may be uneven and where an overemphasis on technology could obscure feasible non-digital routes to learner agency.

Overall, the findings contribute to the learner-autonomy literature in three ways. First, they show that learner autonomy can be promoted in materially constrained school settings through pedagogical adaptation, including the purposeful use of local, printed, interpersonal, and digital resources. Second, they suggest that autonomy in these classrooms is socially supported rather than purely individual: student agency was developed through interaction with teachers and peers, structured group work, peer support, and negotiated classroom decisions. Third, the findings reveal a mismatch between autonomy-supportive classroom activities and the less developed use of autonomy-supportive assessment. This mismatch suggests that strengthening learner autonomy requires coherence across instruction, participation, and assessment rather than the isolated use of individual strategies.

These contributions should nevertheless be interpreted within the boundaries of the study. The primary evidence consisted of interviews with 11 teachers, while classroom observations involved only two members of the participant group. Moreover, claims about students' conceptions are based on teachers' accounts and limited classroom evidence rather than direct student interviews. Consequently, the findings illuminate how teachers understand and enact learner-autonomy support in this particular under-resourced context; they do not establish how students themselves interpret these practices or demonstrate causal effects on measured levels of learner autonomy. Future research could therefore combine teacher and student perspectives, use longitudinal classroom

observations, and examine changes in learner autonomy following sustained autonomy-supportive instruction and assessment.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that English teachers in under-resourced senior high-school contexts can create opportunities for learner autonomy through inquiry and resource exploration, active and reflective participation, involvement in selected learning-related decisions, and collaborative group work. Across the 11 teacher interviews, these practices were described as ways of gradually transferring selected responsibilities to students while teachers continued to provide structure, guidance, and clarification. The two classroom observations provided contextual support for selected practices but were not treated as representative of all participating teachers.

The findings further indicate that the promotion of learner autonomy in resource-constrained settings is shaped by both enabling and constraining conditions. Teacher commitment emerged as an important enabling condition because teachers described sustained efforts to adapt activities, provide choices, and encourage students to attempt tasks before receiving direct assistance. At the same time, teachers perceived some students as remaining dependent on teacher direction, while limited teacher knowledge of autonomy-supportive assessment restricted opportunities for students to monitor, evaluate, and reflect on their own learning. Because students were not interviewed directly, the finding concerning student dependence should be understood as a teacher-perceived pattern rather than as a direct representation of students' own conceptions.

Within the boundaries of this qualitative case study, the findings suggest that learner autonomy does not necessarily depend on abundant technological or material resources. Rather, autonomy-supportive opportunities may be created when teachers make purposeful use of available digital, printed, local, and interpersonal resources and design tasks that allow students to participate, make choices, collaborate, and assume increasing responsibility. The study therefore highlights learner autonomy as a pedagogically supported and socially mediated process rather than as individual independence from teachers or peers. Future research should therefore incorporate student voices, extend observations across a larger number of classrooms and schools, and employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs to examine how sustained autonomy-supportive instruction and assessment influence the development of learner autonomy in resource-constrained EFL contexts.

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