Teachers' Level of Autonomy: Freedom of EFL Teachers Perceived in Secondary Classroom

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Abstract: This qualitative case study explores the teachers' level of autonomy in seven areas of teaching, namely instructional materials, course content, teaching methodology, assessment, classroom management, lesson planning, and school curriculum. Five EFL secondary teachers in Serang participated in this study. Data were gathered through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews and analyzed using content analysis. The finding revealed that the teachers perceived a high level of autonomy concerning course content, classroom management, and assessment. Regarding instructional materials, teaching methodology, lesson planning, and school curriculum, the teachers perceived a medium level of autonomy. However, they expressed a burden from the amount of authority they hold, due to a lack of guidelines, especially in lesson planning. The article concludes by considering several key implications for the government to provide sufficient training and to support teachers to learn with their peers through the existing teaching working groups available in their respective schools and regions.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia, there is a limited body of research exploring the extent to which these teachers exercise autonomy within their professional practice. Historically, these teachers in Indonesia have had minimal freedom in shaping their instructional approaches. One clear example of this is the exam-oriented education system, which created a negative washback effect. Teachers were compelled to focus primarily on test preparation, thereby stifling creativity and innovation in the teaching and learning process (Sulistyo, 2007). Additionally, classroom activities often became administrative tick-box exercises rather than meaningful pedagogical planning (Hairunisya, 2018; Turi et al., 2017). Teachers were required to design detailed, multi-component lesson plans to satisfy external regulatory bodies, but these plans were often disconnected from reality. These documents pertained to classroom

instruction and functioned more as compliance requirements than as practical teaching tools.

Recently, the concept of teacher autonomy has been given high priority by the government as a response to the era of Society 5.0, through the recent curriculum reforms known as the Emancipated Curriculum, which is now officially recognized as the National Curriculum (Kurikulum Nasional). The transformation requires a shift in teaching and learning paradigms—from traditional, content-based instruction to approaches that emphasize problem-solving, creativity, collaboration, and emotional intelligence (OECD, 2019). This shift causes teachers to increasingly act as facilitators of learning, guiding students through complex, real-world challenges. Additionally, in this case, teacher autonomy becomes increasingly important, as educators are given more flexibility to design curricula and learning strategies that meet the diverse needs of learners in a rapidly changing world.

Furthermore, developing teacher autonomy requires more than structural freedom; it necessitates a conscious awareness of one's pedagogical beliefs and the ability to critically evaluate and adapt instructional strategies. As it has been found by (Nihayah et al., 2023a), even though teachers have been granted adequate autonomy, they still need clear guidelines and sufficient support from the government. However, much of this literature tends to focus on

To address this gap, the present study investigates how much autonomy EFL teachers perceive themselves as presenting a profile of autonomous teachers. The perceived autonomy was measured based on the seven areas of pedagogical practice proposed by (Cirocki & Anam, 2021), consisting of instructional materials, course content, teaching methodology, assessment, classroom management, lesson planning, and school curriculum. Specifically, it examines (1) the level of teacher autonomy among EFL teachers concerning their engagement in the secondary classroom and (2) teachers' perception of the freedom they perceive in the secondary classroom.

THEORETICAL SUPPORT

This section elaborates on the conceptualization of teacher autonomy from different viewpoints.

Teacher Autonomy as a condition for the development of learner autonomy

The concept of teacher autonomy stems from a shift in teacher education from a focus on the teacher who implements methods formulated by experts to one that emphasizes the teacher as a self-directed learner and practitioner (Little, 1995). introduced this term into language education through his paper, which was informed by contributions from extensive work on teacher roles in self-access settings (Crabbe, 1993) and the assignment of decision-making responsibility to students (Dam, 1995). The paper then contributes to the implementation of this practical work within the theoretical construct of teacher autonomy.

Some scholars consider teacher autonomy an essential requirement for fostering learner autonomy. (Little, 1995) believed that teacher autonomy is "a prerequisite for the

development of learner autonomy" (p.175). Moreover, Little claims that an essential factor in developing learner autonomy is like (Crabbe, 1993, p. 178) mentioned in his study, which is "the nature of the pedagogical dialogue" between teacher and learner regarding setting up learners' objectives, selecting learning materials, and contributing to the assessment of their progress. Regarding the provision of all these things, teachers should be autonomous in their own practice.

Moreover, acknowledges that the level of learner autonomy depends upon the level of permission teachers provide. Since learner autonomy influences a profound shift from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered learning, teachers play a crucial role as facilitators, assisting learners in monitoring their progress, evaluating their accomplishments, and setting new self-assessed learning objectives. In this case, teachers play an essential role in developing learner autonomy, which they can either facilitate or hinder.

Little was also one of the pioneers in addressing teacher education matters within the literature on learner autonomy. As (Little, 1995) argues, "language teachers are more likely to succeed in promoting learner autonomy if their own education has encouraged them to be autonomous" (p. 180). From this standpoint, teacher autonomy can be compared to learner autonomy, with the main distinction being the focus on responsibility and control. Learner autonomy pertains to individuals' responsibility and control over their own learning. In contrast, teacher autonomy refers to educators' responsibility and control over the educational process, including control over their teaching practices. Therefore, teacher autonomy can be enhanced by educational interventions similar to those that foster learner autonomy.

The above perspective regarding teacher education, suggested by Little (1995) is more relevant to the pre-service teacher context, based on the idea of the teacher as a learner of the craft of teaching. Responding to this idea, (Thavenius, 1999) claims that the autonomous teacher is one "who reflects on her teacher role and who can change it, who can help her learners become autonomous, and who is independent enough to *let* her learners become independent" (p.160). Based on her statements, (Thavenius, 1999) highlights that teachers should also be aware of their role in developing learner autonomy. Besides involvement in in-service training and classroom practice, teachers should also be open to self-introspection to foster learner autonomy.

Based on the above exploration, teachers hold an essential role in fostering learner autonomy. Their role as facilitators and the process of pedagogical dialogue with their learners can assist learners to the extent that they become autonomous in their learning. This can be achieved as long as teachers are also autonomous in their teaching and learning. Additionally, teachers' engagement in teacher education related to the development of learner autonomy may provide an opportunity for self-introspection to foster learner autonomy.

Teacher Autonomy as Professional Freedom

In foreign language education, the concepts of professional freedom and teacher autonomy have been explored by (Benson, 2000) and (Mackenzie, 2002). They criticized

the assumption that developing learner autonomy involves transferring control from teachers to learners. Teachers work under conditions that require them to follow educational policy, institutional rules and conventions, and conceptions of language as an educational subject matter that condition what counts as foreign language teaching and learning. Benson (2000) emphasizes that a crucial aspect of teacher autonomy is when teachers can create opportunities within their work environment for students to have more authority over their learning, thereby going against the grain of traditional educational systems.

Regarding viewing teacher autonomy as professional freedom, Mackenzie (2002) suggests that teachers be involved in curriculum development as the initial step to increase their autonomy within their teaching and learning context. Moreover, Lamb (2000) argues that teachers can empower themselves by seeking spaces and opportunities for maneuvering when faced with constraints on their teaching practice. Barfield et al (2002) suggest that teachers work collaboratively to address limitations and convert them into favorable circumstances for transformation. Vieira (1997) refers to these efforts as a "moral and political activity." It presupposes that "teachers are both willing and able to exert some control over educational settings by mediating between constraints and ideals" (p. 222).

Furthermore, according to (Crabbe, 1993), teachers have "the right to exercise their choices in teaching and learning" and thus cannot become "victims of choices" made by others (p. 443). So, teachers should have unrestricted autonomy in determining the level of control they have over their teaching and professional development (Benson, 2000), feel confident while making well-informed decisions about their classrooms, and be able to develop and employ their own theories derived from their professional expertise, ingenuity, and confident (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

According to the above definition, autonomous teachers are expected to be independent, analytical, intrinsically motivated, responsible, confident, decisive, and strategic.

Teacher Autonomy as the Capacity for Self-directed Teacher-learning and Teaching

Continuing Little's definition of teacher autonomy, McGrath (2000) provides a more lucid clarification by identifying two distinct elements of "autonomy": "the ability to govern one's own life," which for teachers encompasses "self-directed professional development" and "freedom from control by others" (p.100). The concept of teacher autonomy can be defined as a professional ability that enables teachers to manage the procedures involved in teaching and to manage their own professional growth. This conception also aligns with the ideas in the broader field of teacher education literature, including teacher development, teacher research, reflective practice, and action research.

Further, (Smith & Erdoğan, 2008) suggest an additional distinction in self-directed professional development. They point out that self-directed professional development encompasses two dimensions: professional action (self-directed teaching) and professional development (self-directed teacher learning). These two dimensions are distinct. Even if teachers are independent and autonomous in their teaching practices, it does not necessarily

mean that they learn in a self-directed manner. On the other hand, teachers can gain information and expertise from a wide range of sources beyond their teaching responsibilities. Moreover, "freedom from control by others" is viewed as a means to exercise autonomy for professional development and informed action.

Acknowledging that these two dimensions are interconnected and mutually reinforcing is crucial. If the teacher attempts to teach in a self-directed manner, they will most likely need to acquire new knowledge and skills. Instead, teachers are required to apply recently learned knowledge and abilities in practical settings. In practicing self-directed teaching, teachers, according to , consistently fulfill the job of a mediator. (Little, 1995, p. 178) acknowledged that:

> *"The curriculum that she presents to her learners is hers and no one else's; however closely she may seek to follow a prescribed programme, she can only communicate her necessarily unique interpretation of it".*

Teachers' instructional methods are shaped by their personal interpretation of the predetermined curriculum. They have the option to either adhere to the curriculum entirely or make changes to it, as they have the freedom to enhance their students' language skills and encourage independent learning. Therefore, they continually facilitate a balance between the mandated curriculum and various limitations, while also considering their students' needs. Teachers' recognition of their function as mediators is the first step towards achieving autonomy.

Teachers engage in ongoing reflection and critical analysis of their teaching to ensure that they meet the requirements of their learners. This reflection provides insights for making future adjustments to self-directed teaching and identifying areas where additional learning is needed for self-directed teacher development, particularly in areas where knowledge and skills may be lacking.

In summary, teacher autonomy can be defined as the combination of two interconnected and complementary aspects: self-directed teacher learning and self-directed teaching. Practitioners must fulfill the job of a mediator, carefully and tastefully asserting their independence from others. Moreover, this study will follow these two dimensions to define and develop teachers' autonomy.

Teacher Autonomy in English Language Teacher Education in Indonesia

Teacher autonomy refers to the degree of control and independence educators have over their professional decisions, including instructional methods, curriculum design, and professional development. In the context of Indonesia's English Language Teacher Education (ELTE), this concept has gained increasing attention due to the evolving educational policies and the demand for high-quality English language education. Moreover, strengthening teacher autonomy in Indonesia is particularly important, as English teachers often work in varied and demanding environments that span urban and rural areas, where resources, student competency levels, and institutional support differ significantly (Lie, 2007)

Teacher autonomy in curriculum implementation is essential for successful learning (Benlahcene et al., 2020; OECD, 2019). However, Indonesia's education system has

historically been highly centralized, with national policies governing curriculum design, assessment practices, and classroom standards. Consequently, teachers often lack autonomy, adhere to regulations, and frequently neglect the enhancement of their pedagogical methods (Bjork, 2004; Kusanagi, 2014). While recent reforms, such as the Emancipated Learning initiative, aim to grant teachers more flexibility, the lingering influence of rigid educational frameworks continues to constrain teacher decision-making (The Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019). This lack of teacher autonomy can be a serious obstacle without adequate training and mentoring strategies (Nihayah et al., 2023).

Cultural factors also contribute to teachers' lack of autonomy. The hierarchical structure of many Indonesian schools, where administrators often dominate decision-making, limits teachers' opportunities to voice their perspectives and make autonomous choices (Bjork, 2004). Additionally, disparities in resources and professional development opportunities between urban and rural areas further exacerbate these challenges, leaving many teachers, particularly in remote regions, ill-equipped to meet the specific needs of their learners (Sulistyo, 2007).

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative design to explore the level of autonomy perceived by EFL teachers in secondary classrooms. A case study was deemed appropriate for its capacity to capture complex, context-bound phenomena in real-life settings (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2003). The approach aligns with Creswell's (2007) emphasis on understanding processes and meaning-making through a bounded system, particularly when the researcher seeks to explore "how" and "why" questions within a specific educational context. As a small-scale, interpretive inquiry, the objective was not generalizability, but rather to produce thick, descriptive, and transferable knowledge about teacher reflection within the Indonesian EFL secondary education context (Alwasilah, 2011).

This study involved five in-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers from a public senior high school in Serang, Indonesia. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities and ensure ethical compliance throughout the research process. The selection of participants followed a purposeful, criterion-based sampling strategy (Patton, 2015), which is well-suited for qualitative inquiries that seek an in-depth understanding from information-rich cases.

Moreover, the data for this study were collected through a questionnaire adapted from (Cirocki & Anam, 2021) and semi-structured interviews. The first data from the questionnaire were utilized to answer the first research question regarding teachers' level of autonomy. In contrast, interview data were used to address the second research question, which explored teachers' perceptions of seven areas of teaching: instructional materials, course content, teaching methodology, assessment, classroom management, lesson planning, and school curriculum.

Moreover, data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The questionnaire used to collect the data consisted of 49 items, to which participants responded using a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Before data analysis, responses to 16 negatively worded items (i.e., 12, 14, 20, 24,

25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 37, 39, 43, 44, 48, 49) were reverse-scored to align with the responses to positively worded items for a unified analysis. In positively worded items, the scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), while in negatively worded items, the scale was reversed. Means and standard deviations were calculated and presented in descending order to highlight areas of high, moderate, and low teacher autonomy. Responses were then categorized into three autonomy levels: low (1.00–2.70), moderate (2.71–4.40), and high (4.41–6.00).

Once the numerical data had been gathered, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all five participants. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, the participants' first language, to ensure clarity, comfort, and depth of expression. The open-ended interview questions were designed to explore further themes concerning how EFL teachers perceived freedom related to seven areas of teaching. Examples of probing questions included: *When choosing textbooks, do you have the freedom to select the ones that best suit your teaching needs? Do you have the freedom to arrange the order of the material to be taught? Is there a requirement to follow the flow of content/material in the textbook? Do you make your own assessment criteria?*

All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The researchers then translated the transcriptions into English to maintain consistency across data sources and ensure conceptual alignment with the reflective journal content. This dual-mode data collection approach provided rich, triangulated insights into the level of teacher autonomy and the amount of freedom they perceived in their teaching practice in secondary classrooms.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this study, teachers' level of autonomy is based on seven areas of pedagogical practice, consisting of instructional materials, course content, teaching methodology, assessment, classroom management, lesson planning, and school curriculum. The results of the quantitative analysis showed that, out of a total of five teachers, three were categorized at the moderate level of teacher autonomy, with mean scores ranging from 4.14 to 4.36. In contrast, only two teachers indicated experiencing high levels of autonomy, with mean scores ranging from 4.42 to 4.46. The findings showed that while a majority of teachers perceive some degree of autonomy in their teaching practices, only a small proportion feel they have substantial freedom to engage in self-directed instructional approaches.

According to the overall data, teachers reported high levels of perceived autonomy in four teaching areas, with moderate levels in the remaining areas. The mean scores, listed in descending order, were as follows: course content (M = 4.68), classroom management (M = 4.66), assessment (M = 4.6), teaching methodology (M = 4.51), instructional materials (M = 4.31), lesson planning (M = 3.94), and school curriculum (M = 3.54). Figure 1 illustrates the overall trends of the level of autonomy in seven areas of pedagogical practice.
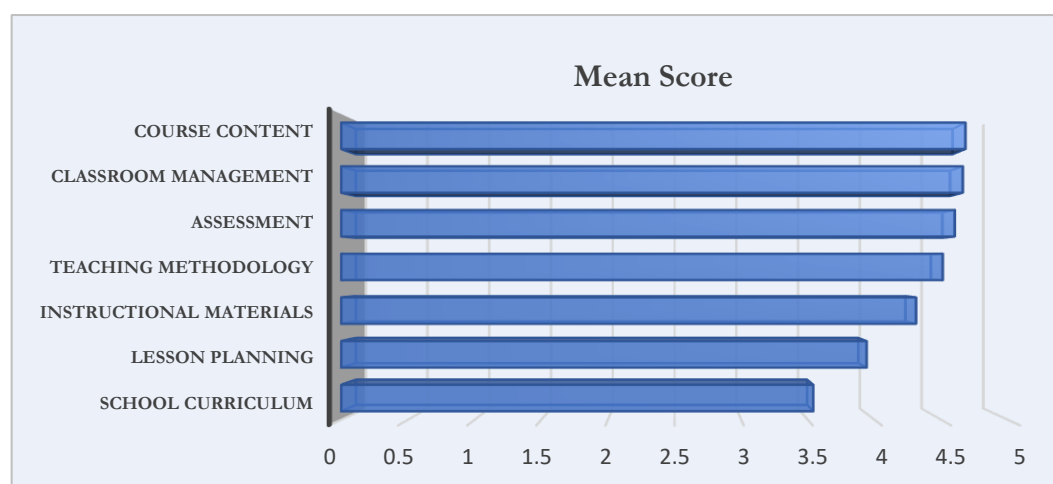

Figure 1. Teachers' level of autonomy in seven areas of teaching

High Level of Autonomy: Course Content, Classroom Management, and Assessment

According to the above data, teachers demonstrated the highest autonomy in course content. Moreover, data from semi-structured interviews added that all teachers admitted they had sufficient freedom in course content. From analyzing the participants' answers in semi-structured interviews, two main points emerged: positive support from school principals and the ability to take agentic action.

Anna (pseudonym) shared related to "positive support from school principals"

"The school has provided me with a reasonable level of freedom, for instance, using a wide range of material based on student needs."

Moreover, all teachers reported that teachers with the same grade level were bound to the same syllabi. In a particular case, as mentioned by Ridwan, instead of following the syllabus provided by the Ministry, he and other teachers agreed to adapt by adding new content based on the students' needs in his class. Ridwan shared related to "the ability to take agentic action"

"We chose to teach writing application letters and CVs because we considered the specific needs of our students, who are more likely to pursue employment rather than continue their studies at university. Since this content was not included in the government-provided textbooks, we sourced it from other sources".

The above finding concurs with Benson's (2007) statement that teacher autonomy encompasses the capacity to make informed decisions about what and how to teach, with

course content being a key area for pedagogical freedom. The overall data findings related to course content are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers perceived autonomy in course content

Number	Statements	M	SD
2	Selecting activities/tasks for my lessons is my sole responsibility	6	0
9	I choose the content for the lessons I teach.	5.6	0.55
16	I decide on the language skills I teach in my class.	5.4	0.55
23	I determine how content is sequenced and delivered in my class.	5.4	0.55
30	I have the freedom to set objectives for my teaching	5.2	0.45
37	I do not have to follow the content in the coursebook strictly.	2	0
44	I am expected to teach the content in the coursebook to ensure my students' progress.	3.2	1.64
Average		**4.68**	**0.53**

Moreover, as illustrated in Table 2, another finding related to classroom management yielded a second high score. It indicated that teachers had considerable freedom in this area. From analyzing the participants' answers in semi-structured interviews, one theme emerged: teachers have their own way of managing the classroom.

Table 2. Teachers perceived autonomy in classroom management

Number	Statements	M	SD
5	I set standards of behavior that my students must follow in the classroom.	5.8	0.45
12	I am not required to follow a class reward system set by the school to motivate students.	2.6	1.52
19	I have the freedom to promote healthy competition among my students	5.6	0.55
26	My school does not want students to sit in rows; I can use other types of seating arrangements during my lessons	2.8	1.79
33	I establish classroom work procedures for all my lessons	5.2	0.45
40	I have the freedom to use English at all times in the classroom.	5.8	0.45
47	I have the freedom to decorate my classroom the way I want	4.8	0.84
Average		**4.66**	**0.86**

Jane shared her typical class that utilizes games as a platform to improve student engagement in the classroom.

> *"I have my own way in managing my classroom, I usually utilize a variety of games in terms of dividing students into groups or simply make them engage in speaking activities".*

Ridwan shared his particular rules in his lesson.

> *"I have special rules in my lesson; mobile phones are only used when there are technology-integrated activities, other than that, they are collected in front of the class".*

Those typical classes conducted by teachers align with Varghese et al. (2016), who describe classroom management is defined as a process in which teachers create and maintain an environment that allows students to engage in learning. This also indicates that

teachers are free to determine every detail of the activities and rules, as long as they meet the students' needs.

Furthermore, regarding assessment, it found that teachers showed a high level of autonomy in this area. The overall data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Teachers perceived autonomy in assessment

Number	Statements	M	SD
4	I design my own tests to check my students' knowledge.	5.8	0.45
11	I establish my own criteria for assessing my students' performance	5.4	0.55
18	I have the freedom to design formative tasks that prepare my students for summative assessments.	5.6	0.55
25	My school allows me to decide how many tests I must administer in my classroom	2	1.22
32	I have the freedom to promote self-assessment among my students.	5.4	0.55
39	My school does not set assessment criteria that must be adhered to whenever I assess my students.	3.4	1.95
46	I have freedom in promoting peer assessment among my students	4.6	1.52
Average		4.6	0.97

Moreover, the autonomy they perceived was influenced by the implementation of the new policy in the Emancipated Curriculum, which is now officially called the National Curriculum. One of the participants, Lisa, justified that her autonomy had changed since the policy was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. She shared:

"*In the previous policy, we could not develop all assessments in the school. We could only prepare the midterm exam (PTS), but for the final exam (PAS), it was made under a local teacher professional group called Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran (MGMP). So, every school in this city would have similar questions. But today, it is different; teachers have the freedom to make all assessments, and I think it helps me so much.*"

In addition, Mia also shared a similar experience by saying

"*From the past three years, the teachers in this school have freedom to develop our own assessment, starting from deciding the number of questions and selecting the form of assessment, such as multiple choice, short essay, or true/false question. We only need to consider allocated time and the question difficulty level*".

In addition, Nisa also showed her positive response to the policy by stating,

"*I am happy that our school principal also gives us room to develop our own assessment. Since then, my fellow teachers and I who teach at the same grade tend to make online assessments using CBT or Google Forms, which helps minimize the use of paper-based tests*".

The three interview extracts above showed how the teachers became more autonomous as they were able to negotiate over curriculum design and assessment methods with others (McGrath, 2000). It indicated that teacher autonomy was not merely exercised in isolation but was enacted through collaborative professional dialogue, reflecting a shared sense of agency within the school community. This supports the view that autonomy is a socially mediated construct, as argued by (Smith & Erdoğan, 2008), who emphasized

that teacher autonomy can be strengthened through collegial interaction and joint decision-making processes.

Medium Level of Autonomy: Teaching Methodology, instructional material, lesson planning, and School Curriculum

Regarding the teaching methodology and instructional materials, Tables 4 and 5 indicate that the teachers demonstrated a medium level of autonomy. In this case, the school principal has given teachers the freedom to choose the methods they can use in teaching practice and the instructional materials they can use in class, as long as they meet students' needs. However, in actual practice, particularly regarding teaching methods, some teachers still limit the strategies they implement in teacher-centered teaching.

Table 4. Teachers perceived autonomy in teaching methodology

Number	Statements	M	SD
3	In my teaching, I have the freedom to use imaginative approaches to make the teaching-learning process more interesting and effective	5.6	0.55
10	I am allowed to adopt an eclectic approach to teaching, where I combine the best elements of different schools of philosophy	5.8	0.45
17	l am allowed to employ methods and approaches to teaching I find useful	5.8	0.45
24	I have some say in the extent to which I use educational technology in the teaching-learning process	1.2	0.45
31	My school does not expect me to use a traditional method of teaching where students sit in rows and I take centre stage.	3.2	1.30
38	I am allowed to deliver student-centred lessons where I decide on the development of skills and practices that promote lifelong learning and independent problem-solving.	4.4	1.34
45	I have the freedom to use methodologies and environments that engage students in active and exploratory learning	5.6	0.55
Average		4.51	0.72

Table 5. Teachers perceived autonomy in instructional materials

Number	Statements	M	SD
1	I am allowed to select instructional materials for my teaching.	5.4	0.55
8	I make decisions on instructional materials that I use to support struggling learners.	5.2	1.3
15	I am allowed to use supplementary materials to accelerate student learning.	5.2	1.30
22	I am allowed to use diverse materials to maximize student learning.	5.8	0.45
29	I do not have to follow specific criteria prepared by the school while selecting coursebooks for my students.	2	0
36	I am invited to evaluate the appropriateness of pedagogical materials supplied to or available in the school that are relevant to my subject.	4.2	1.48
43	I am not expected to routinely use a specific coursebook; therefore, using a wide range of materials is advocated in my school.	2.4	2.07
Average		4.31	1.02

Lesson planning also appeared to be a somewhat problematic area in this study. As the statistical analysis indicated, lesson planning scored relatively low, as shown in Table 6. Even though the National Curriculum offers teachers flexibility in selecting or adapting government-provided teaching modules, the broad and vague learning outcomes in English language instruction present a significant challenge, directly impacting teachers' autonomy in lesson planning. For instance, Ridwan shared that:

"The learning outcomes in English are too general, making it harder to determine the material to teach, unlike in other subjects."

This issue directly impacts teachers' autonomy in lesson planning, as the lack of clearly defined learning objectives forces them to make independent decisions regarding content selection and instructional strategies. While greater flexibility can empower teachers to tailor lessons to student's needs, the absence of structured guidelines may also create uncertainty and inconsistency in lesson planning. According to (Ryan & Deci, 2000), teachers perceive autonomy as crucial for fostering motivation and engagement in the classroom. However, a lack of clear guidelines can lead to stress and reduced effectiveness as teachers struggle to balance autonomy with the need for structure and coherence in their teaching practices.

Table 6. Teachers perceived autonomy in lesson planning

Number	Statements	M	SD
6	I decide on the format of my lesson plans	4.8	2.17
13	I have the freedom to include whatever information I want in my lesson plan.	5	0
20	I do not have to follow strict guidelines (set by the school/regional office/or Ministry of Education) while completing my lesson plans	2.6	0.89
27	I am not required to prepare my lesson plans in a specific format	3.2	1.64
34	I can make modifications to the structure of the lesson plan template in my school.	5	1.22
41	I can choose to prepare lesson plans only for a specific number of classes a week	3.8	1.30
48	I have some say in the learning objectives for my lessons and can identify these for myself.	3.2	1.79
Average		**3.94**	**1.29**

Finally, regarding the school curriculum, teachers stated that they had limited influence over it. Although the teachers were invited to the discussion regarding the curriculum with the school principals, their role was limited to simply listening to and accepting the decisions that the school principal had already made. As Lisa mentioned that

"All teachers have been invited to the discussion of the curriculum by the school principals. We listened and we agreed to whatever decisions were made."

Table 6. School curriculum

Number	Statements	M	SD
7	I am invited to contribute to discussions regarding the implementation of the school curriculum	5	1.22
14	Curricular decisions regarding formative assessment and its implementation in my classroom are within my control.	3	1.58

21	My school encourages me to suggest changes/modifications to the curriculum to improve the functioning of the school.	4	1.73
28	I am not expected to use the same teaching materials as my colleagues to ensure consistency /uniformity across all groups in the same grade.	2.8	1.30
35	I can propose changes to my school's teaching policies.	4	1
42	I am invited to check whether the school curriculum meets the needs of my students and enhances their choice through partnerships that function through the efficient and effective use of the resources available	3.6	1.82
49	I am involved in the process of evaluating the school curriculum; the process is not limited to the management team	2.4	0.55
Average		3.54	1.32

CONCLUSION

The present study examines the freedom that EFL teachers perceive in the secondary classroom setting. First, it examines the level of autonomy that teachers perceive in seven areas of teaching, including instructional materials, course content, teaching methodology, assessment, classroom management, lesson planning, and school curriculum. Second, it uncovers teachers' perspectives on exercising teacher autonomy in their teaching practice. From both the data, questionnaire, and interviews, it was revealed that of the total of five teachers, two were categorized as having a high level of autonomy. In contrast, the rest were classified as having a medium level of autonomy. In particular, the teachers expressed that they no longer felt constrained in three key areas: course content, classroom management, and assessment. They had the freedom to utilize a variety of materials, maintain a clean environment to provide a more engaging classroom, and develop their assessments to meet their students' needs. However, giving teachers more authority in teaching does not mean leaving them unattended without adequate assistance, as noted by (Bjork, 2004), especially in the context of designing their lesson plan.

The findings of the present study have substantial implications for the government to provide capacity-building activities, including providing training to teachers that will allow them adjust their teaching based on government's expectation in recent curriculum implementation as well as supporting teachers to learn with their peers through the existing teaching working groups available in their respective schools and regions.

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