

Entertaining but Fading: Realities and Challenges of Fostering Learner Autonomy among Indonesian EFL Pre-Service Teachers

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Article information	Abstract
<p>Article history: Received: 2 Nov 2023 Accepted: 2 Dec 2025 Available online: 16 Dec 2025</p> <p>Keywords: EFL pre-service teacher education Learner autonomy Teaching practices Teaching practicum Teacher professional development</p>	<p>Within the stream of publications in the area of learner autonomy (LA), many have inquired about teachers and students' perspectives and classroom practices, overlooking EFL pre-service teachers as possible future educational resources. This study scrutinizes the dynamics of how the notion of LA is mirrored in Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers' teaching practices and the constraints to their LA enactment. Nested in an exploratory case study, six Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers voluntarily gave their consent to partake in this study. The data were gleaned from four evidence-rich data gathering instruments: written reflective narratives, classroom observations, teaching diaries, and semi-structured interviews. Enacting an abductive analysis approach, the findings reveal that, despite pre-service teachers' seeming efforts to deliver engaging instruction, they disclosed a lack of ability to create more autonomy-supportive instruction in their classrooms owing to student, pre-service teacher, and institutional-based constraints. The nuanced examination of these constraints unveiled a complex negotiation that shaped the extent to which pre-service teachers were able and willing to establish autonomy-supportive instruction. These reported findings offer three vital suggestions for the development of EFL pre-service teacher education.</p>

INTRODUCTION

The concept of learner autonomy (henceforth, LA) which underscores learners' active agency in taking control of their learning processes and responsibilities (Holec, 1981), has consistently held a prominent position in educational discourse, particularly within the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy. Its far-reaching contributions to the enhancement of students' language proficiency (Little, 2020) and its role in nurturing lifelong learning values such as self-directedness, social responsibility, and critical awareness (Jiménez-Raya et al., 2007), have firmly entrenched it as an enduring educational cornerstone in the context of EFL

teaching and learning (Benson, 2012, 2013; Jiménez-Raya et al., 2017; Khotimah et al., 2019; Khotimah et al., 2023a; Manzano-Vázquez, 2015).

Empirically speaking, there has been a stream of publications devoted to examine various aspects of LA, including uncovering assorted measures to promote LA, unpacking perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs towards LA, and delineating the practices of LA in the EFL classrooms. Most of them are lensed from teachers and students' perspectives, undermining pre-service teachers as the potential educational agents for future education. Failing to better prepare EFL pre-service teachers might bring detrimental impact on the sustainability of LA development in EFL education ecology (Khotimah et al., 2023a). Furthermore, the existing body of literature has only focused on building awareness of the importance of pre-service teachers' professional development for autonomy (Khotimah et al., 2023a), confirming the impact of autonomy support on pre-service teachers' teaching (Perlman, 2011), exploring pre-service teachers' development of autonomy and empathy in teaching (Borges & Castro, 2022), and unpacking pre-service teachers' cognition about LA, including pre-service teachers' perceptions of LA and LA supports (Khotimah et al., 2023b), their willingness, ability, and opportunity to promote LA (Manzano-Vázquez, 2020) experiences to take control of their teaching, conduct agentic behavior, and negotiate identities in their teaching practices (Teng, 2019), and their teachers' expectation pertaining to LA (Ok, 2016).

Most of those studies have suggested insightful takeaways for LA development in EFL context from the pre-service teachers' cognitive aspect using self-reported data that possess less values in generating situated understandings. The extended empirical scrutiny on how LA is reflected and operationalized in pre-service teachers' classrooms as well as the associated constraints, ingrained in pre-service teachers' firsthand classroom observation, remains underexplored (Chinpakdee, 2022; Khotimah et al., 2023b). This might hamper teacher educators, researchers, nested education stake holders, as well as pre-service teachers to understand, reflect, and evaluate the actual practices behind the classrooms four walls to inform their future pedagogical decisions, concerns, as well as potential policies. Thus, this study aimed at contributing to this empirical void with two guiding research questions:

1. How is LA construct reflected in the EFL pre-service teachers' teaching practices?
2. What factors hinder their LA support in their classrooms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section revisits the underlying theory, frameworks, and empirical studies that foreground the research's foci.

Teaching practices as pre-service teacher education initiative for LA

The importance of educational experiences in shaping teachers' perspectives and practices in LA has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. Teachers who experienced an autonomy-supportive learning environment during their initial education are proven to disclose

autonomy-supportive behaviors in their teaching praxis. Researchers in this area (Khotimah et al., 2023a; 2023b; Little, 1995; Teng, 2019), emphasize the need for programs that cultivate teachers' capacity for autonomy from the earliest stages of their professional formation, especially during their pre-service teacher education. This attention stems from the awareness that various factors have an important bearing on pre-service teachers' passion and commitment to the profession. These include their past and present learning experiences—both as students and as pre-service teachers—as well as their language ideology shaped by their belief about English language learning.

Through this process, pre-service teachers should receive intentionally planned educational initiative, exposing them to the multifaceted fundamental knowledge and abilities necessary to support LA in the classroom (Benson, 2013; Jiménez-Raya & Vieira, 2008; Manzano-Vázquez, 2016). These essential capacities may be best learned through their classroom teaching practices. With effective guidance, teaching practices serve as an efficient platform for gaining insights into classroom dynamics, leading to pedagogical innovations and identity formation (Peynado et al., 2022). For instance, pre-service teachers' inner dialogue during the teaching practices that unfolds between their identities as learners and their evolving roles as future educators assumes a pivotal role in shaping their professional identity (Nue & Manara, 2022), including their identity as future autonomy-supportive teachers. Their reflection of their professional socialization was also helpful to mediate them conceptualize their professional selves (Ardi et al., 2023).

Furthermore, Little (2004) identifies three critical elements that EFL pre-service teachers need to learn prior to their teaching practices. At the outset, pre-service teachers should be exposed to an in-depth comprehension of language learning as a complex and interconnected process with social-interactive and individual-cognitive components. Second, educators should work on improving pre-service teachers' classroom management skill sets, devoting particular emphasis to enhancing their capacity to navigate the target language. This entails mastering scaffolding techniques and adeptly initiating and overseeing negotiations within the classroom. Lastly, pre-service teachers should be trained to develop the capacity to support both individual and whole-class learning. This entails the acquisition of skills related to planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning outcomes. Importantly, the cultivation of these skills should mirror the techniques and processes that teachers are expected to deploy in their own classrooms.

Learner autonomy and autonomy support in EFL classrooms: Key principles

The concept of LA has evolved from its early association with self-access learning and independent study to a broader understanding that emphasises learners' ownership of their learning for their own benefit (Little, 2020). While Holec (1981) defined LA as “the ability to take charge of one's own learning,” assigning learners responsibility for setting goals, selecting activities and materials, monitoring progress, and evaluating outcomes, his view, rooted in self-instruction (Little, 2020) and individual-cognitive processes (Holec, 1981, has been critiqued for overlooking classroom learning dynamics. Little (2020) argues that LA is better understood as a teaching–learning dynamic in which learners plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate

their learning in collaboration with teachers and other possible social factors, highlighting its inherently social and dialogic nature. In practice, learners' autonomous capacity cannot be separated from the teachers' facilitative role; teachers serve as a supportive facilitators or catalysts who help learners develop their capacity to take control of their learning. In the EFL context, Khotimah et al. (2019), drawing on Dang (2012), further characterise LA through three interconnected processes: initiating (identifying goals, setting objectives, planning activities, and seeking learning opportunities), monitoring (self-regulating and collaborating with peers), and evaluating (reflecting on and assessing learning progress and outcomes).

Since the promotion of LA in the EFL classroom comprises both individual cognitive and social interactive dimensions (Little, 2007), it is essential to recognize the role of teachers as a fundamental social element of students' learning, providing autonomy support. In this respect, a plethora of empirical work has been devoted to suggesting conceptual and practical pedagogical interventions to support LA. Grounded in the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), Reeve and Cheon (2021) propose a framework known as Autonomy-Supportive Instructional Behaviors (ASIB), encompassing seven key components: 1) taking the students' perspective, 2) inviting students to pursue their interests, 3) presenting learning activities in need-satisfying ways, 4) providing explanatory rationales, 5) acknowledging negative feelings, 6) relying on invitational language, and 7) displaying patience.

Focusing on the EFL context, Little (2020) extends three pedagogical principles to build an autonomy-supportive classroom that, linguistically, could help students become confident and fluent users of the target language. These tenets include appropriate target language use, learner control, and reflection. In practice, teachers employ the target language as the medium of instruction, either orally or in writing, with appropriate and helpful mediation. Secondly, students are empowered to take active participation in controlling their learning, such as by setting learning goals, planning their learning process, and choosing their learning strategies and activities. In this sense, language learning and language use are two interdependent elements, akin to two sides of the same coin (Little, 2020). Lastly, students are encouraged to engage in reflection, such as self-reflection and peer reflection or assessment. These principles underscore the importance of dialogic learning interaction (Alexander, 2020) in the target language whereby students are treated as fully agentic partners, playing their role as communicators, experimenters with language, and intentional learners.

The notion of autonomy support extends to an array of aspects related to the interactions between teachers and students. These involve providing choices, promoting student initiative, minimizing undue control (Ryan & Deci, 2020), and exhibiting attributes like friendliness, helpfulness, and understanding (Ahmadi-Azad et al., 2021). Moreover, an extensive corpus of research provides evidence of the instructional approaches that have been successful in supporting students' LA and increasing learning engagement. These instructional approaches include encouraging students to take risks and fostering a positive attitude towards learning (Işık & Balçıkanlı, 2020; Tomita & Sano, 2016), inspiring the design of challenging tasks (Lengkanawati, 2017), equipping students with learning strategies and metacognitive skills (Tomita & Sano, 2016), promoting collaboration and peer interaction (Işık & Balçıkanlı, 2020; Lengkanawati, 2017; Shi & Han, 2019), valuing student perspectives, involving students in

decision-making (Han & Huang, 2022), implementing effective evaluation methods (An & Mindrila, 2020), incorporating reflective practices (Lengkanawati, 2017), and providing language advice and motivation (Işık & Balçıklı, 2020). The collective findings of these studies present a rich and nuanced understanding of autonomy support within the context of EFL classrooms, highlighting the pivotal role of teachers in empowering and facilitating students to take ownership of their language learning while respecting their need for autonomy (Khotimah et al., 2023b).

EFL (Pre-service) teachers' constrains to foster LA

Translating the construct of LA into EFL classrooms is not as straightforward as conceptualizing its desirability and feasibility in practice. Even though the (pre-service) teachers' perceptions are deemed crucial in determining pedagogical practice, perceptions and practices have a complex relationship that does not guarantee congruency (Chang, 2020). In pedagogical practice, teachers, students, as well as pre-service teachers, encounter diverse contextual phenomena that may create tension between what has been idealized and what actually occurs, sometimes serving as constraints to the application of LA. It becomes evident that despite teachers' strong grasp of LA principles and their commitment to fostering LA development, these teachers encountered challenges when translating their theoretical knowledge into practical implementation (Chinpakdee, 2022).

The documented empirical evidence outlines various contextual barriers experienced by teachers in their attempts to infuse LA into EFL classrooms. For example, in Turkey, Işık and Balçıklı (2020) revealed institution-based constraints (crowded classes, poor technological infrastructure, an overloaded curriculum, and limited class time) and learner-based constraints (low motivation and a teacher-directed learning culture), hindering teachers' autonomy support in the classroom. In Mainland China, Teng (2019) highlighted perceived factors that diminish Chinese pre-service teachers' ability to exercise agency in creating autonomy-supportive classrooms during their teaching practicum. These factors encompass the systems and structures of the practicum environment, pre-service teachers' prior knowledge and experiences, dispositions, and opportunities for interaction with peers and school teachers. Lin and Reinders (2019) also recognized that teachers disclosed less behavioral readiness, as opposed to psychological readiness, to foster LA, owing to professional training inadequacy, students' learning behaviors, and institutional factors such as limited class time and teaching workload. Furthermore, Chang (2020) identified barriers to fostering LA in Taiwanese classrooms, including students' low motivation, passive learning attitudes, low English proficiency levels, and curriculum demands. In the Indonesian context, Lengkanawati (2017) uncovered that teachers perceived some constraints that could make LA difficult to develop among Indonesian learners in general. These constraints comprise limited time allotted for the implementation of the curriculum, learners' lack of autonomous learning experience, too much focus on national examinations, and insufficient proficiency in English. Furthermore, Yulianto (2019) discovered that lack of students' motivation and incapable teachers as salient barriers to promoting LA.

METHOD

Research design

To better understand how the notion of LA was reflected in pre-service teachers' teaching and the factors that may have affected their willingness to include LA in their instruction, we employed an exploratory case study within an interpretative paradigm. An exploratory case study is workable since it has the capacity to deeply examine the complex dynamics of a person, entity, or group in its social context (Yin, 2015). Six EFL pre-service teachers who had engaged in teaching practices during their initial education were the focus of this investigation.

Context and participants

Clustered within the collectivism culture of eastern countries, Indonesia has been considered susceptible to the handed-down, teacher-centered approach (Ho et al., 2004). In the classroom, teachers are frequently pictured as authoritative figures whose responsibilities are mainly to deliver knowledge, control the teaching and learning process, and examine students' learning, wherein the students are expected to be submissive knowledge recipients (Ho et al., 2004; Khotimah et al., 2023b). This study took place in an English education department of a public university in the eastern part of Indonesia. Established under the teacher training and education faculty, this department aims at preparing future EFL teachers for primary and secondary schools. With its respective reputation in the eastern part of Indonesia, its students came from different places and ethnicities with various socio-economic backgrounds. Relevant to the study's objective, we purposefully sought out pre-service teachers who had teaching experiences in primary or secondary schools during their study, had completed theory and practical-based courses, and were willing to give access to field observation. We used snowballing technique to recruit the potential participants with the help of the president of the student union in the department in the initial phase of recruitment. In the following step, we requested that current participants recommend any friends or acquaintances who would fit our requirements. Six EFL pre-service teachers (4 males and 2 females, aged 22 to 23 years), coming from three different tribes, gave their consent to participation. These participants, Amir, Budi, Cica, Dina, Edo, and Farid (pseudonyms), were final-year department students who fulfilled all coursework and gained off-campus experiences. These included teaching practice and practicums, involving students from primary to secondary levels. These experiences were university-facilitated or undertaken voluntarily through service learning.

Therefore, the rationale for selecting these six participants is multifaceted. Their practical teaching experience in primary and secondary schools provides invaluable insights into real-world classroom dynamics, essential for the study's objectives. Additionally, having completed both theoretical and practical-based courses, these participants possess a comprehensive understanding of pedagogical theories and their application, ensuring a rich data source. Their willingness to allow field observations enables the collection of authentic and comprehensive data. Furthermore, the participants' diverse cultural backgrounds, representing three different tribes, add depth to the study by incorporating varied perspectives

and experiences. While the findings from this small sample cannot be generalized to all pre-service teachers, they offer significant insights into the diverse factors and experiences that influence teaching practices in culturally varied settings.

To meet the research ethics, the participants were fully informed about the research profile and protocols before the research commenced. This included the nature of their participation, potential benefits and risks, participants' safety and confidentiality, monetary compensation, and data collection protocols. We also requested that they provide written consent as a legal proof of their voluntary participation.

Data collection and analysis

We employed a variety of evidence-rich data collection tools, such as written reflective narratives, teaching diaries, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews, to address the research questions and better understand the context. In addition to situated classroom observations, students written reflections, teaching diaries, and semi-structured interviews were enacted to garner pre-service teachers' narratives. Their narratives served as the primary data source, offering a window into their lived and thinking experiences and their practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) during their teaching practices. The narratives help pre-service teachers revisit their past experiences and values, enabling them to reinvent themselves or to make meaning of their life trajectory (Weber & Mitchell, 1995), thereby deepening the essential links between social structures and human actions. Drawing on a similar perspective, we gleaned pre-service teachers' narratives to understand their thinking experiences during their teaching practices, particularly how they created a learning environment supportive of their students' LA development.

In the initial step, we requested participants to write their retrospective narratives. These written reflective narratives were aimed at understanding their overall experiences in their teaching practices. To maintain the focus of their narratives, we provided a guiding narrative frame (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008), requesting them to recount the details of their experiences, including their teaching philosophy (effective EFL teaching, teaching objectives, and teachers' and students' roles), the contextual background of their teaching (how often they taught, where they taught, and what students they taught), pedagogical design (what materials, what teaching methods, what teaching activities, and what tests), and their teaching reflection (what makes their teaching effective and ineffective). To gather a situated understanding of how pre-service teachers teach their students in the classroom, we conducted classroom observation twice for each participant. We took notes on critical incidents and video recorded the overall process. To gain more insight, we also requested that they submit teaching diaries that also provide authenticated information on how they organize their teaching. Lastly, they were invited to one-on-one recorded semi-structured interviews to clarify and extend the data from written reflective narratives, classroom observations, and teaching diaries.

The analysis was first conducted within each participant and then across the participants. In the initial phase of the data analysis, we did repeated reading the written reflective narratives, teaching diaries, and classroom observations notes, watching the recorded classroom

observations, and listening to the recorded semi-structured interviews for data familiarity. We transcribed the observed critical incidents from all data collection instruments per research participant and translated the Indonesian data into their English equivalent. During the analysis, we used an abductive approach that included an iterative process of moving back and forth between the deductive (theory-driven) and inductive (data-driven) approaches (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). This approach facilitated us to equally engage with the theoretical underlying and empirical data that are instrumental to gaining comprehensive understanding (Thompson, 2022). In practice, we utilized nested theory, framework, and published empirical evidence to generate a code manual pertaining to autonomy support and the contributing factors that hinder autonomy support in the EFL classroom (deductive). We then summarized and developed codes based on the data (inductive). Following this step, we used the code manual and generated further codes (deductive), as well as interactively connecting the codes and developing and legitimizing representative themes. The entire analytical process was incremental throughout the field investigation phase and summative once the data had been completely collected. The findings were presented on the basis of emerging themes.

As a faculty member in the English education department of a public university where the participants underwent their pre-service teacher education, the first author was given the option of playing an emic role in the study as she engaged with the participants and gathered data. Through this insider's view, we were able to go further into the participants' stories and develop a more complex picture of their experiences. The second and third authors, who had extensive experiences as mentors in teacher professional development programs across Indonesian universities, took on an outsider's perspective and were immersed in collaborative data analysis and theoretical and methodological deliberations.

FINDINGS

This section presents the research findings based on the research questions. The findings from the written reflective narratives, classroom observations, teaching diaries, and semi-structured interviews with the six pre-service teachers are interactively displayed by citing some representative excerpts and retelling the reflective narratives and the situated observation. All the excerpts in Indonesian have been translated into their English's equivalent.

RQ1. How is LA reflected in the EFL pre-service teachers' teaching practice?

The data indicate that participating pre-service teachers require further preparation to create an autonomy-supportive learning environment in their teaching practice. They had insufficient capacity to foster learner autonomy in a meaningful way within their teaching practices. In practice, their teaching is illustrated in three overarching themes: 1) prioritizing enjoyable and engaging instruction, though often lacking depth in meaning for language learning, 2) frequently employing a teacher-centered teaching pattern, and 3) demonstrating deficiencies in literacies and skills of mediation strategies. Table 1 encapsulates the emerging themes with the codes for each theme, the participants, as well as the data sources.

Table 1
Pre-service teachers' teaching practice

No	Themes	Codes	Participants	Data Sources
1	Prioritizing enjoyable and engaging instruction, though often lacking depth in meaning for language learning	Incorporating warming up activities, games, and songs, yet struggling to contextualize them to the learning topic	Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	WRN, CO, TD, SSI
		Offering a routine verbal compliment	Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	CO, SSI
		Promoting learning relevance through English's benefits and student reflection	Amir, Edo.	CO, SSI
2	Frequently employing a teacher-centered teaching pattern	Focusing on the teacher as the central figure of activities and the source of learning	Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	WRN, CO, TD, SSI
		Learning is dominated by collective activities (more drilling), with minimal individual and collaborative involvement	Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	WRN, CO, TD, SSI
		Maintaining traditional classroom arrangement	Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	CO, SSI
		Not actively promoting student initiatives, learning ownership, and regulation	Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	WRN, CO, TD, SSI
3	Demonstrating deficiency in literacies and skills of mediation strategies	Focusing only on language learning, neglecting language use	Budi, Farid, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid	WRN, CO, SSI
		Teaching English solely through vocabulary clusters (drilling)	Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	WRN, CO, SSI
		Overusing students' L1 (Sasakish or Indonesian) as the medium of instruction, even for simple words and phrases	Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	CO, SSI

Note. WRN = written reflective narratives; CO = classroom observations; TD = teaching diaries; SSI = semi-structured interviews.

Prioritizing enjoyable and engaging instruction, though often lacking depth in meaning for language learning

The all data sources reveal that the participating pre-service teachers attempted to make their instruction more entertaining and engaging. They focused on giving more fascinating instruction since they realized that primary students had shorter attention spans and were more prone to boredom. They endeavored to incorporate both play and learning simultaneously into their instruction. For example, Dina reflected that *"I often inquired why they didn't seem enthusiastic and then invited them to sing and play some games."* Amir pondered, *"In a nutshell, my class blends learning with playing by engaging students in physical activities where their movements function as both methods of learning and playing."* The pre-service teachers used a variety of methods to engage the students throughout the class, including songs (Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, and Farid), jokes (Amir, Farid), claps (Amir, Edo), games (Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, and Farid), informal conversations (Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, and Farid), and colorful papers and flashcards (Cica, Farid). Moreover, the classroom observations and semi-structured interviews indicate that they also acknowledged the students' need for verbal compliments and frequently provided praise to those who responded correctly.

Additionally, we discovered that Amir and Edo were attempting to establish the relevance of the learning across the six participating pre-service teachers. They strived to make their students realize the importance of English in their lives.

Excerpt 1

T: "Nanti kalau ketemu turis ditanya, "What is this?" kalian jawabnya? (*If you run across a tourist later and they ask, "What is this?" How might you answer*)

Ss: "That is nose"

T: "Nah... gitu ya" (*Yup..., that's right*)

T: "Jadi nanti kalau ketemu turis ndak bingung. Pak guru ndak mau nanti kalau kalian ketemu turis ndak bisa jawab, harus bisa jawab ya." (*I don't want you to be puzzled when you subsequently meet tourists. I want you to speak with them.*)

T: "Pak guru orang Indonesia, tapi pak guru belajar ngomong Bahasa Inggris" (*Despite being Indonesian, I'm learning to speak in English*)

(Amir, Classroom observation)

The above-mentioned excerpt gave a sample of how Amir and Edo advocate the importance of English for the students' lives. Amir and Edo both encouraged students to reflect at the conclusion of the instruction period. They requested that their students share their joys and lessons learned before providing general remarks to encourage the students to strive for improved learning. At the same time, Budi, Cica, Dina, and Farid frequently stressed how crucial it was for students to review what they had learned in class and use it at home. They also asked students to do their homework tasks conscientiously.

Nevertheless, their intention to enhance students' enjoyment and satisfaction in the learning process did not necessarily coincide with a focus on the substantive aspects of language acquisition and learning. They experienced difficulty contextualizing those techniques with the learning topics and delivering them in a more meaningful way. Their songs, games, claps, jokes, and informal conversations were only prompted to attract students' attention, lacking their roles to mediate students' language learning. For example, Cica's colorful papers were primarily used for lottery games rather than functioning as educational materials. Amir and Diana utilized traditional Indonesian clapping games, such as "*Tepuk Semangat*" and "*Tepuk pramuka*," as attention-grabbing techniques for their students. Farid and Budi adapted English games like "*Simon Says*" into an Indonesian version called "*Ibu Berkata*." Edo began his classes by inviting students to sing the Indonesian national anthem. Similarly, the verbal compliments they provided to students appeared unconstructive. They frequently employed routine phrases like "*good job*," "*nice*," "*good*," and "*smart*," which might come across as formulaic.

Frequently employing a teacher-centered teaching pattern

The data analysis denotes that the participating pre-service teachers' teaching bared more teacher-centered pattern. First, participating pre-service teachers played as a central figure of activities and the source of learning. They decided the overall learning activities during the teaching-learning process and served as the dominant language resource that students were

exposed to. In the written reflective narratives, teaching diaries, and semi-structured interviews, they considered themselves as “*controller and material provider*” (Amir), “*material provider and motivator*” (Budi), “*material provider and facilitator*” (Cica), “*motivator and problem solver*” (Dina), “*speaker and material and task provider*” (Edo), and “*material provider and facilitator*” (Farid). Edo, for example, recounted.

Excerpt 2

As for me, in my role as a teacher, I predominantly act as a speaker in front of the class. I deliver the knowledge or content that I've prepared, and the students receive and listen to the material. For example, when I display the LCD screen at the front of the class and explain the topic, the students listen and pay attention to my explanation. Occasionally, I engage students actively in the classroom by asking them to answer questions I pose or by having them role-play the individuals in conversations I've prepared.

(Edo, Written reflective narrative)

These self-reported data placing pre-service teachers as the central figure of learning echoes the data from the classroom observations wherein the classrooms were observed more teacher-centered.

Moreover, the teaching and learning activities were primarily characterized by traditional methods. From the recorded classroom observations, approximately two-thirds of the teaching hours for all pre-service teachers were dedicated to conventional approaches, including explanations (lecturing), drilling, and collective exercises.

Excerpt 3

After that, when I introduce the lesson, I don't immediately use English. ... Then, I write the Indonesian names on the board and we work together to figure out their English equivalents. I let them try to guess the pronunciation while I finish writing on the board. Later, we read the English words. In addition, I like to switch roles with the students during the lesson. This means that I read the Indonesian words while they read the English ones, on and on until we completed with the last words.

(Cica, Written reflective narrative)

Cica's reflection is a sample of instructional methods employed by pre-service teachers in their respective classrooms. It reveals a predominant focus on collective and drilling teaching techniques, with limited emphasis on personalized or collaborative learning activities. Individual activities mainly revolved around students writing on the whiteboard and completing exercises, while collaborative learning primarily involved peer dialogues. Students were not provided with ample opportunities to explore and experiment with the language or co-construct knowledge through collaborative work. Furthermore, they adhered to a traditional seating arrangement where students were organized in straight rows, facing the front of the classroom where the teacher stood.

The pre-service teachers' written reflective narratives, classroom observations, teaching diaries, and semi-structured interviews also indicate a lack of active encouragement for students' initiatives and the promotion of their metacognitive skills. Students were not empowered to participate in the decision-making process regarding the selection of materials, activities, and tasks. For example, Budi stated in his written reflective narratives that *"I always decide which activities I will use in class when teaching English."* Additionally, the students were also not empowered to learn how to regulate their English learning. The pre-service teachers tended to focus on teaching *'what'* to learn rather than *'how'* to learn.

Demonstrating deficiencies in literacies and skills of mediation strategies

Teaching English to young learners with low English proficiency, the pre-service teachers demonstrated a deficiency in both literacy and mediation strategy skills. Their classrooms predominantly emphasized language learning while somewhat neglecting practical language use. Their approach to teaching English primarily circled around vocabulary instruction through repetitive drilling or guessing game. Consequently, students had limited exposures to using vocabulary in context. Furthermore, it was evident that the pre-service teachers lacked sufficient knowledge and skills on how to effectively mediate English learning for students. A common practice among them was excessive translation into the students' first language, be it Indonesian or Sasakish. This overreliance on the first language extended to even simple phrases or words.

Excerpt 4

T: *"Hari ini kita akan belajar mengenai Bahasa..."* (Today, we will learn about the language...?)

Ss: *"Bahasa Inggris"* (English)

T: *"Bahasa Inggris dengan menyebutkan nama nama tubuh kita. Mungkin bahasa Indonesia gampang ya? Apa ini"* (English, by mentioning the names of our body parts. Maybe it's easy in Indonesian, right? What is this?)

Ss: *"Hidung"* (Nose)

T: *"Apa ini?"* (What is this?)

Ss: *"Pipi"* (Cheek)

T: *"Apa ini?"* (What is this?)

Ss: *"Pipi"* (Cheek)

T: *"Makasih"* (Thanks)

(Amir, Classroom observation)

The aforementioned findings collectively imply that the pre-service teachers examined in this study may be characterized as currently lacking the necessary proficiency to adeptly integrate the concept of LA into their instructional practices within the classroom.

RQ2. What factors hinder their LA support in their classrooms?

Enquiring for the reasons that might hinder pre-service teachers to provide autonomy support in their classroom, three projecting themes of barriers emerged from the analysis: 1) students-based constraints, 2) pre-service teachers-based constraints, and 3) institutional-based constraints.

Table 2
Factors constraining them to promote LA in the teaching practices

No	Themes	Codes	Participants	Data Sources
1	Student-based constraints	Having a low level of English proficiency	Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	RN, TD, SSI
		Encountering low learning motivation and passive approach to learning	Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	TD, SSI
		Coming from disadvantaged family with limited educational literacy	Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	TD, SSI
2	Pre-service teacher-based constraints	Believing that LA is not feasible for young learners with low level of English	Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	SSI
		Believing that the key aspect of teaching English to young learners is ensuring their happiness	Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	RN, TD, SSI
		Experiencing gaps in knowledge about LA and scaffolding strategies	Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	CO, SSI
		Bearing the status of intern/temporary teachers	Edo, Farid.	SSI
		Experiencing past and ongoing learning experiences with teacher-centered approach	Amir, Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid.	RN, SSI
3	Institutional-based constraints	Encountering prescribed syllabus	Budi, Farid	RN, SSI
		Having limited teaching time	Cica, Diana, Edo.	SSI
		Managing a heavy teaching workload (teaching some classes)	Edo.	SSI
		Dealing with unsupportive teaching facilities	Cica.	TD, SSI

Note. WRN = written reflective narratives; CO = classroom observations; TD = teaching diaries; SSI = semi-structured interviews.

Student-based constraints

The findings highlight some student-based issues that prevent pre-service teachers from creating autonomy-supportive English classroom. Firstly, student's poor levels of English proficiency provide a significant barrier. They recognized that this restriction limits their ability to actively participate in independent learning activities as well as hinders effective communication in the target language.

Excerpt 5

I am aware that their context or background [Low English proficiency] influences the effectiveness of their communication and language use. That's why I choose a language that they can easily understand by mixing Indonesian, Sasak, and English for drilling and so on.

(Budi, Semi-structured interview)

Akin to Budi, the other pre-service teachers believed that since their young students had low level of English, their first language is the fastest and simplest way to mediate student-teacher connection and boost up motivation. They considered that their students were only ready to be reactive to their instruction.

Another hurdle is that Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, and Farid counted that students frequently showed little interest in the learning process and were likely to play a more passive role. Therefore, they preferred to design drilling and other spoon fed techniques that allowed them to promptly observe active student participation. Budi further stated, *“I chose the language that they understand to mediate my teaching, I didn’t want them to have any trouble understanding that might discourage them.”*

Pre-service teachers maintained that the situation is exacerbated harder given the socioeconomic backgrounds of many students, especially those originating from low-income households with limited educational literacy. They pointed out that a significant portion of their students came from families engaged in farming, Indonesian laborers abroad, fishing, or construction work, occupations associated with relatively lower levels of literacy. Once, Farid narrated during the SSI that *“English is still foreign in their region, so if someone uses English, it’s still subject to ridicule, as if they’re pretending...”* They assumed that the support to nurture the autonomy behaviour in the classroom can frequently be wanting in this situation.

Pre-service teacher-based constraints

Based on the data, it becomes evident that several pre-service teachers-based constraints hinder the establishment of autonomy-supportive classrooms. All the participating pre-service teachers hold the belief that implementing LA is not feasible for young learners with low levels of English proficiency.

Excerpt 6

Yes, that is real. To me, firstly, I need to get connected with my students. I want to be their friends then they want to follow my instruction. I haven’t teach them to be proactive, I just focused on them to be able to respond well to my lesson. The teacher becomes the central figure of the lesson. When I’m teaching adults, things are different. But it also relies on how proficient they are in English. It can be simpler for those with strong English skills. In their age, it’s difficult to make them autonomous.

(Amir, Semi-structured interview)

This perspective, as sampled by Amir, often acts as a deterrent to the integration of autonomy-supportive strategies. They collectively held the view that students should first attain a strong command of English before delving into the complexities of regulating their own learning. In this respect, pre-service teachers’ typical belief that ensuring young learners’ enjoyment is the most important goal in teaching them English frequently took precedence over autonomy-focused educational goals (Budi, Cica, Diana, Edo, Farid). Amir observed things differently and believed that *“when teaching young learners, the initial step is to ensure they*

are happy and engaged as an introduction, and then proceed to more serious aspects, such as teaching them the strategies.” He came to the conclusion that engaging students would help him teach more important material.

From their observed teaching and their self-reported data, pre-service teachers frequently encountered knowledge gaps about LA and scaffolding techniques, which provide practical difficulties when seeking to be more autonomy-supportive teachers. For instance, Budi, Cica, Diana, and Edo argued that determining learning goals and choosing learning materials and activities are solely teachers’ pedagogical responsibilities. They believed that students did not have the capacity to contribute to such decisions. Consequently, it was apparent that they played as overpowering teachers, deciding all aspects of teaching and learning. Another example, when questioned about the frequent use of L1 as the dominant medium of instruction, Budi, Cica, Diana, and Farid said they were not aware of other scaffolding techniques. Amir and Edo, on the other hand, asserted that they had some understanding but acknowledged that they frequently lost it and found it challenging for them to put it into practice.

Short-term positions as interns also raised pedagogical barriers for Edo and Farid. Realizing their temporal position as teachers, they feel less in control of their classrooms, discouraging them from having contextual sensitivity for effective pedagogical decisions. Given the formal learning experiences, all of the participating pre-service teachers also acknowledged that their current and prior learning experiences, which, to them, are firmly rooted in a teacher-centered approach, have had a substantial impact on their pedagogical practices.

Institution-based constraints

Even though less salient compared to the abovementioned constraint, the findings nonetheless suggest some institutional-based restrictions. These obstacles include predetermined curricula, a constrained teaching period, a heavy workload, and substandard classrooms. Budi and Farid concluded that the prescribed syllabus had reduced their creativity and flexibility to encourage autonomy. “*All was covered in the predetermined syllabus,*” Farid said during the semi-structured interview. “*It’s like, I just simply need to do as written in the syllabus.*” Furthermore, pertaining to the teaching allotment, Cica, Diana, and Edo found it too short. They experienced difficulty designing personal and group learning activities because of the limited teaching time. Edo in particular struggled to manage his demanding teaching job, which forced him to teach many classes. His ability to think about creating a more autonomy-supportive learning environment was adversely constrained by this workload. Lastly, Cica was troubled by the school’s inadequate teaching facilities since she was unable to spark her creativity.

DISCUSSION

Inquiring to understand EFL pre-service teachers’ teaching practices through the prism of LA, this exploratory case study yielded empirical findings substantial for the development of EFL teaching and learning. The first research question delved deep into how the principles of LA are reflected in pre-service teachers’ teaching practices. On the whole, the data enunciate

that the participating pre-service teachers appeared to disclose a lack of ability to create more autonomy-supportive instruction in their classrooms. Although they attempted to demonstrate fine-grained pedagogical techniques, such as incorporating games, songs, personal conversations, humor, friendliness, helpfulness, understanding (Ahmadi-Azad et al., 2021), and other entertaining methods into their instruction, their teaching often lacked relevance for EFL teaching and learning. They used those methods to merely attract students' attention, needing the capacity to use those methods to facilitate EFL learning. Their teaching practices gave the impression that they had some awareness of the importance of presenting learning activities in satisfying ways and taking students' perspectives into account (Reeve & Cheon, 2021), but possessed limitations in translating it into an effective practice. This conclusion echoes the previous empirical evidence in the context of in-service teachers (Chinpakdee, 2022), suggesting some disparities between cognitive and practical aspects. Psychologically speaking, their teaching practices were more to address the need for relatedness and have not addressed the need for competence and autonomy (Decy & Ryan, 1985). This is in contrast with in-service teachers' teaching, where the teachers managed to address the need for competence and autonomy while at the same time possessing some shortcomings to support students' need for relatedness (Khotimah et al., 2022).

They also frequently showed a teacher-centered teaching pattern wherein they positioned themselves as the central figure for learning activities and sources, encouraged more collective learning activities through drilling, maintained traditional seating arrangements, and did not actively promote students' initiatives and learning ownership. Even though pre-service teachers showed some effort in fostering a positive attitude toward learning (Işık & Balçıklı, 2020; Tomita & Sano, 2016), valuing students' perspectives (Han & Huang, 2022; Reeve & Cheon, 2021), providing language advice and motivation (Işık & Balçıklı, 2020), and attempting to engage their students in reflective practices (Lengkanawati, 2017) as to what Amir and Edo performed, the autonomy support reported in some empirical studies, including teachers' ability to offer choices (Khotimah et al., 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2020), encourage students to take risks in learning (Işık & Balçıklı, 2020; Tomita & Sano, 2016), design challenging tasks (Lengkanawati, 2017), equip students with metacognitive skills (Tomita & Sano, 2016), promote collaboration and peer interaction (Işık & Balçıklı, 2020; Lengkanawati, 2017; Shi & Han, 2019), involve students in decision-making (Han & Huang, 2022), and implement effective evaluation methods (An & Mindrila, 2020), were less observed. This is plausible since in-service teachers are privileged with more teaching experiences that might shape and reshape their teaching identity than the pre-service teachers who are in the phase of learning and preparing. Furthermore, the participating pre-service teachers' limited autonomy-supportive practices likely stem from a deeper issue in their professional preparation (Khotimah et al., 2023b). As also reflected in the findings of the second research question, the participating pre-service teachers' education did not sufficiently cultivate an LA mindset or equip them with the pedagogical skills needed to translate such a mindset into classroom practice. Without explicit grounding in the principles of learner autonomy, it is unsurprising that their teaching tended to prioritise superficial engagement over meaningful learner agency, and that autonomy-supportive strategies were largely absent. To address this, pre-service English teacher education programmes must deliberately incorporate conceptual and practical training in autonomy. They need explicit instruction on LA mindsets in EFL teaching and learning, as well as on the autonomy-supportive strategies necessary to enact these mindsets in practice.

Furthermore, the data indicate that pre-service teachers also demonstrated deficiency in mediation literacies and skills. They constantly focused on language learning and, at the same time, neglected language use. They tended to mediate language learning through the excessive use of drilling and students' L1 (Sasakish and Indonesian). In contrast to Alexander's proposal (2020) and Ryan & Deci's seminal work (2020), the pre-service teachers' students were not granted ample opportunity to be agentic partners who intentionally explore the language, experiment with the language, and construct their understanding either individually or collaboratively. These findings signify that the pre-service teachers' were not cognizant of the importance of both language learning and language use as interdependent elements (two sides of the same coin) for a successful EFL classroom (Little, 2020) and the omnipresence of mediation strategies in teaching English to young learners. It appeared that they needed a reflective comprehension of language learning as a multifaceted development in which the social-interactive and individual-cognitive facets are reciprocally interdependent and mutually empowering (Little, 2004). The results show that although earlier research indicated that in-service teachers were cognitively prepared to support autonomy but faced challenges in putting it into practice (Chinpakdee, 2022), this study adds to the body of knowledge indicating that Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers require both cognitive and practical preparation in order to support LA in the classroom.

The second research question conceded an all-inclusive understanding of the factors that might impede the participating pre-service teachers from providing autonomy support in their EFL classrooms. The findings insinuate that the pre-service teachers' above-mentioned pedagogical practices were contingent upon a multifaceted interplay and internal critical analysis of contextual constraints. This intricate process was jointly informed by student-based constraints, pre-service teacher-based constraints, and institutional-based constraints. The nuanced examination of these constraints unveiled a complex negotiation that shaped the extent to which pre-service teachers were able and willing to establish autonomy-supportive instruction.

Pre-service teachers observed that their students who possessed a low level of English proficiency, encountered low motivation and passive learning behavior, and were coming from families with limited socioeconomic amenities were impediments to their autonomy support. This student's contextual background was corroborated by pre-service teachers' personal beliefs, judging that LA is not feasible for young learners with low levels of English. Their expectations were therefore limited to making their students reactive to their instruction. Existing studies also penetrated similar findings, identifying students' low level of English proficiency (Chang, 2020; Lengkanawati, 2017), low motivation (Chang, 2020; Işık & Balçıkanlı, 2020; Yulianto, 2019), and passive learning attitude and behavior (Chang, 2020; Işık & Balçıkanlı, 2020; Lengkanawati, 2017; Lin & Reinders, 2019) as the hindering factors to promote LA. This not uncommon presupposition, however, juxtaposes the empirical evidence concluding that nurturing LA is workable for young learners with various contextual backgrounds, even at the very beginning of their EFL class (Little, 2007, 2020). Learners were adept and keen to select what and how to learn on their own initiative, irrespective of their age or level of English capacity (Little et al., 2017). The pre-service teachers' belief that happiness is the key principle in teaching English to young learners also contributes to their pedagogical decisions. Driven by such beliefs, their teaching endeavor was mostly devoted to making students pleased and

motivated to learn, neglecting some essential principles for language learning. Moreover, they admitted that they possessed knowledge gaps about LA and scaffolding strategies and experienced teacher-led teaching approaches in their past and ongoing learning experiences. These findings also lend support to the previous studies (Khotimah et al., 2023b; Lin & Reinders, 2019; Teng, 2019; Yulianto, 2019), reporting pre-service teachers' incomprehensive understanding of LA and emphasizing (pre-service) teachers' past and ongoing learning experiences as one of the instrumental factors contributing to their support in the classroom.

Within the pre-service teachers-based constraints, this study extends a new finding wherein the pre-service teachers' status as temporary teachers might also diminish their sense of teaching ownership, hampering their ability to exercise their creativity to provide autonomy support. It means that pre-service teachers' inner dialogue that unfurls between their perceived identity as intern teachers and other situated factors assumes a pivotal role in shaping their pedagogical practices (Nue & Manara, 2022). Lastly, pre-service teachers' teaching practices were not resistant to institutional-based constraints. As has been documented in the previous studies (e.g., Chang, 2020; Işık & Balçıklı, 2020; Lengkanawati, 2017; Lin & Reinders, 2019), some of them ruminated that the prescribed syllabus, limited teaching time, teaching workload, and inadequate teaching facilities impeded their behavioral actions and initiatives to promote LA. Overall, in congruence with research elsewhere (e.g., Chinpakdee, 2022), it appeared that the pre-service teachers' pedagogical choice to promote LA was based on what they assumed and believed was really achievable and efficient given the pedagogical circumstances in which they were working at the time.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Nested in an exploratory case study employing evidence-rich data gathering instruments, this study illuminates the dynamics of how the notion of LA is mirrored in Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers' teaching practices and the constraints to their LA enactment. It has enriched the body of literature and has strong relevance to pre-service and in-service teacher development and EFL teaching and learning. The results show that, despite their attempt to provide engaging teaching, the participating pre-service teachers disclosed a lack of ability to create more autonomy-supportive instruction in their classrooms owing to some student-based constraints (low level of English proficiency, low motivation, passive approach to learning, and less socioeconomic amenities and educational literacy family background), pre-service teacher-based constraints (beliefs on LA, knowledge and skill gaps on LA and scaffolding strategies, identity as intern teachers, and past and ongoing learning experiences), and institutional-based constraints (prescribed syllabus, limited teaching time, teaching workload, and unsupportive teaching facilities). The nuanced examination of these constraints unveiled a complex negotiation that shaped the extent to which pre-service teachers were able and willing to establish autonomy-supportive instruction. This conclusion signifies that while in-service teachers were reported to have cognitively the necessary preparation to provide autonomy support but experience some hurdles to behaviorally translate it into practice, this study extends the insight that Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers need both cognitive and practical preparation to endorse LA in the classroom.

These reported findings extend three vital suggestions to the area of EFL pre-service teacher education that all stakeholders including the Ministry of Education, institutional policy makers, curriculum developers, teacher educators, and other relevant parties should take into consideration. First, there is a substantial need to provide EFL pre-service teachers with a sound understanding of the complexity and principles of EFL teaching and learning and the necessary practical knowledge, as well as skills on how to empower their students to have more agency and ownership in their learning trajectory (Benson, 2013; Jiménez-Raya & Vieira, 2008; Little, 2007, 2020; Manzano-Vázquez, 2016), and more importantly, about mediating strategies. Second, pre-service teachers should be armed with knowledge and skill sets to engage in individual and collaborative critical and constructive reflection that may help them to foresee and navigate contextual constraints in more effective ways. Lastly, given the importance of developing autonomy-supportive teachers and the difficulty of doing so, we require collective, sustainable, and deliberate endeavors in which the process is subject to continued support, monitoring, and assessment to assist pre-service teachers in shaping and reshaping their personal and professional teaching identities and adeptly exercising their potential agency.

Despite the profound contribution offered, this study is not without limitations. Its scope, which only involved EFL pre-service teachers from one university in Indonesia, may limit its generalizability for all Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers. The inclusion of pre-service teachers from various universities could better picture the Indonesian pre-service teachers' readiness to endorse LA in EFL classrooms. The inquiry focusing on their self-initiating teaching practices that did not include the role of pre-service teachers' teacher educators, peers, and more experienced school teachers in their teaching practices may have limited power to understand their dynamic roles in pre-service teachers' pedagogical decisions. Such a study, therefore, warrants further investigation.

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