English Teachers' Perspectives of Learner Autonomy in Online Reading Comprehension in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The objectives of this research were focused on English teachers' perspectives on learner autonomy and to what extent English teachers felt their learners were autonomous in online reading comprehension in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. These research questions were answered by using observation, interview, and Likert-scale questionnaire in the form of qualitative method. The sample of this study was 26 English teachers in 4 elementary schools and 5 junior high schools in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The results of the study showed some points on learner autonomy, such as: (1) the importance of learner autonomy, (2) the way English teachers promoted learner autonomy, (3) the challenges and responsibilities of English teachers to implement learner autonomy, (4) English teachers' observation to learners' autonomy in online reading comprehension, (5) learners' activities in online reading comprehension strategy, and (6) English teachers' preparation in online reading comprehension class. This research concluded that the degree of learners' autonomy during the pandemic was higher rather than before the COVID-19 pandemic due to some reasons.

Keywords: *English teachers perspectives; learner autonomy; online reading comprehension*

1. INTRODUCTION

Many teachers and educators have been interested in independent foreign language learning for decades since it requires learners to be aware of their own thinking, to have their own thoughts and strategies, and to direct their motivation towards useful outcomes (Surya et al., 2021; Ariebowo, 2021; Kosnik et al., 2016). Informal learning does not take place in the classroom or on a fixed schedule and it is not simply the result of creating a more welcoming atmosphere in the classroom or as an impromptu activity. Therefore, it has been linked with other models such as incidental learning (Guler & Esen, 2021; Thi & Lien, 2022). One of the main goals of education evolution is to improve learners` ability how to learn, namely

learner autonomy. Many previous researchers believed that autonomy could not be taught, but they can create opportunities to foster learners' autonomy (Cira & Lopez, 2020; Iswandari, 2021; Syafryadin et al., 2022; Wedawati et al., 2020). Learner autonomy should be established in a continuous process through social interaction with teachers and classmates. This process allows learners to pursue their autonomy based on the knowledge they have already acquired (Le & Nguyen, 2022). As a result, learners will be able to control the foreign language learning process by determining the learning goals, defining the contents, and progressing through the learning process, selecting methods or techniques, checking the acquisition progress (knowledge, time, place, etc.), and evaluating the results (Irgatoglu et al., 2022).

Learners who take responsibility for their own learning have a positive effect on their lives outside of the classroom, which allows them to engage in civil society and contribute to society (Forzani et al., 2021). However, teachers need to know who their learners are, their degree of autonomy in learning, and whether or not they are ready to learn independently (Lin & Reinders, 2019). Learners who are autonomous are able to take responsibility for their own learning; however, their learning practices and levels of autonomy may differ due to individual differences as well as differences in context, time, and culture (Grant et al., 2020).

Learner autonomy is the ability and willingness of learners to make choices independently. Fidyati et al. (2021) considered learner autonomy as learners' ability to take responsibility for their own learning. With this in mind, previous researchers propose the following attributes to autonomous learners, such as (1) learners set objectives and perceive their goals, (2) they use and experience the freedom to select relevant resources based on their objectives, (3) they have insight into their learning styles and are able to choose their strategies, (4) they can develop their learning plans, and (5) learners are guided and facilitated by their teachers in an environment that promotes easy learning.

Learner autonomy is affected by a number of factors. The factors supporting learner autonomy are the teacher, the learner, the learning, and the learners' training process. First, the teacher's role as a facilitator, teacher, educator, and source of knowledge is fundamental for learners becoming autonomous because a teacher has the capabilities to guide and direct them. Second, learners themselves also contribute to their autonomy, since they must possess sufficient knowledge to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning. Besides, knowledge of cognition, affective behavior, and learning context must be known and acted upon so that learners can achieve predetermined learning goals. The third factor is the learning process to determine whether the learner is an

autonomous learner or not because learning activities are included in the learning process that supports autonomous learning (Pratama & Kuswardani, 2021).

Previous research has argued that there is a gap between the theoretical debate about learner autonomy and teachers' perceptions and practices although many studies have found learner beliefs about learner autonomy are done in elementary school (Melvina et al., 2021;Chen, 2021). Emmad & Pena (2020) said that without teachers knowing how to promote learner autonomy, a classroom becomes a place where students attend to pass exams that are imposed upon them. In this sense, the teacher has a moral obligation to assist learners in becoming more independent and autonomous. Teachers' voices influence the actual classroom practice as they significantly impact how teachers make professional decisions, and interpret and deal with problems.

Researchers conducted previous research that had shown that in order for young learners to feel independent and responsible for their assignments, they are exposed to a variety of activities that form their autonomy. These activities include independent activities, project-based assignments, independent assignments, and other learning activities. If young learners continue to be intrinsically motivated in classroom, teachers should provide them with various interesting language activity since a very young age (Alzubi & Singh, 2017) criticized that 'the most successful learning occurs when the learner takes charge of their learning, performs experiments, asks questions, collaborates with other people, seeks out new knowledge, and plans new actions.' As learners of a language, self-autonomy aids them in taking responsibility for their own progress, building an understanding of how language works, understanding the target language more effectively, setting clear goals, and adapting to their strengths and weaknesses through the use of strategies and resources. In the context of elementary school, if young learners have learning autonomy, they love to study without anyone having to force them and it can stimulate their endless curiosity which will lead to lifelong learners as a goal of today's teacher. Along similar lines, (Sockett & Toffoli, 2012) described the ability for teachers to demonstrate autonomy through experimentation is essential since many previous research indicates that reading comprehension declines the children motivation to go to school while as a teacher, you must be able to invest personal resources, express affection, and enjoy time to increase learners' behavioral and emotional engagement in the context of classroom (Shirzad & Ebadi, 2019).

Based on the preliminary study in elementary schools, the researchers found some facts. First, learners receive stereotyped notes and questions from teachers in most cases. Young learners become heavily dependent on teachers, which prevents them from developing their English skills. English is not their

first language, so they cannot utilize their creativity in developing their receptive and productive skills. In turn, they are anxious, shy, demotivated, and fearful of making mistakes. It is important that EFL classrooms at all levels of education promote learner autonomy, because young learners are aware that they will not benefit from being passive, and the desire to learn English without being dependent on teachers. Second, teachers' decision to take responsibility for learning causes learners to be passive and disinterested. Then, learners believe that they cannot think for themselves and make decisions for themselves in class. Third, young learners lack the sense of belonging and trust that they feel in their classmates because of the lack of face-to-face interactions in the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the social nature of learning, participation in a social group and interaction with group members may negatively affect learning outcomes in the COVID-19 pandemic. Fourth, young learners who are not used to online learning can feel the psychological distance, dissatisfaction, and failure in online courses due to a lack of autonomy and language skills.

Related to digital citizenship in the classroom, the 21st century brings rapid changes resulting from information and communication technologies, such as mass media, and the media has become the voice of our society today (Villamizar & Mejia, 2019; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019). English-language media materials are helpful for language learners to learn the language quickly and easily (Sakai et al., 2008). This research chose reading comprehension as the variable to see whether media can improve learners' English skills. A reader's comprehension of a text is defined as the process of combining information from a text and their own background knowledge to gain an overall understanding of the text (Ogodo et al., 2021).

Reading comprehension occurs when a text's complete meaning is constructed through the combination of various sources of information, such as prior knowledge, linguistic information, situational information, and task context (Koris & Pal, 2021). Previous research has shown that the use of technology can enable students to improve their essential content and world background knowledge by reading online articles about their own culture (Yanti et al., 2021). Previous research in reading comprehension showed that young learners must learn to read and read to learn. To achieve this goal, young learners should read proficiently as well as engage and be motivated to read throughout elementary school (Martha et al., 2021). When teachers support young learners' need for autonomous reading activities, it allows them to opt for reading materials that they find interesting and grasp the value of reading text to achieve reading competency (Xie, 2020) and as a result, learners can exchange cultural views with speakers of the target culture and activating their prior knowledge (Ningsih & Yusuf, 2021).

This study aims to develop learner autonomy to learn the target language more efficiently based on English teachers' perspectives since the autonomy of learners does not imply intrinsic capability. The problems of the study proposed were:

1. What are English teachers' perspectives on learner autonomy in times of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. To what extent do English teachers feel that their learners are autonomous in online reading comprehension in times of the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. METHOD

This qualitative method aimed to investigate English teachers' perspectives of learner autonomy in online reading comprehension as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A needs assessment and a descriptive nature guided this exploratory research (Almendo, 2020). The sample for this research was 26 English teachers in 4 elementary schools and 5 junior high schools in North Sumatra, Indonesia. In this research, two parts were examined.

The first part of this research used a set of Likert scale questionnaires as the data collection instrument. The questionnaire was developed based on the learner autonomy indicators in the review of literature and field observation in the ICT-based English learning process (Karimi & Dastgoshadeh, 2018) such as (1) the importance of learner autonomy, (2) the way English teachers promoted learner autonomy, (3) the challenges and responsibility of English teachers to implement learner autonomy, (4) English teachers' observation to learners' autonomy in online reading comprehension, (5) learners' activities in learning autonomy in online reading comprehension strategy, and (6) English teachers' preparation in online reading comprehension class. In this section, English teachers chose the closest option on the Likert scale to gather more specific details about their self-definition of learner autonomy with the 5-point Likert scale, from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". The researchers then calculated the results by using the frequency and percentage of each statement.

The second part of this research used focus group interviews to identify English teachers' domain-specific knowledge about learner autonomy, such as (7) English teachers' perspectives on learner autonomy and online reading comprehension. Interview data were collected from English teachers by using Google form online survey on the subject of Academic reading, which included 30 learners in each class. The first interview was conducted to see learners' learning plans and whether they were familiar with the e-book material during the first and the second week, and to ensure that all learners were completely fully enrolled in the online reading comprehension course. The second interview was conducted from the fourth week until the sixth week to see learners' learning experiences in the online reading courses during the period. In addition, the researchers solicited the opinions and

comments of two specialists in the field of English education to discuss the design and presentation of online reading comprehension materials, the nature of the elements involved in the questionnaire, both in terms of content and type and the time required for completion of this research.

As the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, the researchers decided to reshape their research to analyze the level of autonomy and the perspectives to use language learning strategies in online reading comprehension before and during COVID-19 in the discussion section. According to the confidentiality standards, a statement explaining the purpose of the research was provided to the participants (Macewan & Arthur, 2014). Primary data was collected by legal standards and ethical considerations, and participants provided the consent forms (Manzano Vazquez, 2018). After preprocessing and analyzing the data, the researchers used triangulation data to verify data validity by using different methods of evaluating the data from the same source. Participants in this research were observed, questionnaires were filled out, as well as interviews were conducted (Beach, 2017).

3. RESULTS

The data analysis technique in learner autonomy and online reading comprehension in times of the COVID-19 pandemic by using questionnaires which were calculated in frequency and percentage was shown in the table below:

Table 1. The importance of learner autonomy based on English teachers' perspectives

No	Statements	Frequency	Percentage
1	The importance of setting one's own goals made learning more meaningful as it enabled choice and decision making at various educational levels for learners.	16	61%
2	Asking learners what they liked best helped to create a better climate in the classroom and motivate them.	12	46%
3	Some learners were very familiar with information technology and could be of great help to English teachers in choosing such materials.	13	50%
4	Learners remembered things better when they explained themselves than when the learning experience took place.	15	57%
5	Learner feedback was important for understanding whether the teacher understood the topic.	16	61%
6	Autonomous pedagogy, which allowed learners to take responsibility for setting learning goals and methods, must also enable them to work comfortably in the right space and time, depending on their own	14	53%

	preferences.		
7	It increased learner's responsibility for record keeping and self-assessment.	18	69%
8	Engaging learners in making decisions about what they wanted to learn could promote learner autonomy.	17	65%
9	Confident language learners were more likely to develop autonomy than unconfident learners.	15	57%

This finding proved that autonomous learners were active participants in social learning processes and active interpreters of new information about what they had already known and in unconventional ways. Supporting autonomy included providing choices, encouraging independent problem solving, involving learners in decision-making, and minimizing the use of pressure (Yusnidar et al., 2021). In general, supportive autonomy was about finding ways to encourage, support, and increase learners' inner approval of their classroom activities.

Table 2. The way English teachers promoted learner autonomy

No	Statements	Frequency	Percentage
1	I promoted learner autonomy actively in my lessons by using worksheets.	15	57%
2	I encouraged learners to reflect on their learning.	17	65%
3	Collaborative learning and peer learning were promoted wherever possible.	17	65%
4	I encouraged learners to go the extra mile and not be afraid to make mistakes so they would be confident to work by themselves.	16	61%
5	I asked learners to research certain topics and be ready to discuss them in the next lesson.	13	50%
6	I was constantly giving homework and assignments to be completed and taking them to the classroom.	10	38%
7	I did my best to encourage my students in reflecting on their personal learning preferences and learning strategies.	9	34%
8	I asked learners to choose which activities they would like to do in certain situations.	12	46%
9	I spent quite a lot of time with learners to explain the benefits and the different ways of developing autonomy.	17	65%
10	I promoted learner autonomy by not answering the questions they had and telling them to find the answer themselves.	21	80%

11	The self-directed learning projects in the courses I taught were good examples of promoting learners' autonomy.	22	84%
12	I encouraged peers to evaluate learners' work at the classroom level.	17	65%
13	I asked learners to tell me what they had learned during the week, what they found easy and difficult lessons, and what they should do to improve their comprehension.	19	73%
14	I conducted English activities out of class to promote autonomy.	18	69%
15	I encouraged learners to become teachers and researchers.	16	61%

This finding proved that learners often displayed different attitudes in the classroom. Sometimes they could be active and cooperative, and sometimes they could adopt a passive and cautious attitude. One key aspect that English teachers needed to consider in the classroom was the importance to support learner autonomy. Supportive autonomy was the interpersonal behavior that English teachers provided during instruction to identify, nurture, and develop learners' inner motivations (Rahmah et al., 2021). Thus, supportive autonomy referred to an atmosphere where learners were not bound to behave in a particular way and were instead encouraged to be themselves.

Table 3. The challenges and responsibility of English teachers to implement learner autonomy

No	Statements	Percentage	Frequency
I.	**The challenges of English teachers to implement learner autonomy**		
1	Limited space within the curriculum.	15	57%
2	Lack of prior experience of learners in autonomous learning.	16	61%
3	Lack of motivation among learners.	11	42%
4	Learners' dependence on English teachers.	11	42%
5	Limited learners' contact with English outside the classroom.	18	69%
6	Learners' focus on passing tests.	14	53%
7	Lack of relevant resources for English teachers and learners.	18	69%
8	Lack of learners' ability to exploit resources.	16	61%
9	Learners' limited English proficiency.	18	69%
10	Lack of curricula and materials.	17	65%
11	Lack of English teachers' autonomy.	8	30%

12	English teachers' limited expectations of what learners could achieve.	9	34%
13	Weaknesses in identifying learners' need.	8	30%
14	Limited exposure to English use.	15	57%
15	Lack of experience in learners' autonomy.	16	61%
II.	**The responsibility of English teachers to implement learner autonomy**		
16	The textbooks and materials in reading comprehension.	22	84%
17	The evaluation of study.	15	57%
18	The type, amount, and the frequency in reading comprehension.	24	92%
19	The topics in reading comprehension based on grade level.	23	88%
20	The identification of students' learning styles.	24	92%

This finding proved that ineffective monitoring of learners' learning by English teachers negatively affected learners' outcomes. Many inexperienced learners failed to make meaningful decisions about how to guide their learning. Learners' existing negative experiences during formal learning could prevent them from making conscious decisions about their learning (Maharani et al., 2019). There were important factors such as the learner's goals, the context of the learning situation, and the existing cultural values of the learner society that played an important role in the use of language learning strategies for language learners. Therefore, English teachers could not say that a particular learning strategy was better than others since language learning strategies were teachable and specific to each learner's learning context.

Table 4. English teachers' observation to learners' autonomy in online reading comprehension

No	Statements	Frequency	Percentage
I.	**What kind of the learners' behaviors to the autonomous online reading comprehension?**		
1	Understood the meaning of information on a website by reading the search summaries of the website.	16	61%
2	Used knowledge of how a webpage was structured to help you found the information.	17	65%
3	Checked out the results of a search to see which link might be most helpful.	14	53%
4	Analyzed a website to determine if the information was pertinent to my question.	13	50%
5	Putting together information from multiple	13	50%

	websites in a way that made sense to others.		
6	Developing or revising a new question was one way to modify a research question. Strategies include making it more specific, making it less specific, or making it less specific.	12	46%
7	Made a list of questions you wanted to ask about content before reading/searching.	17	65%
8	Found information on a website by using the search engine located within the site.	18	69%
9	Instead of getting distracted by unimportant details on a website, learners focused on exactly what they needed to know.	16	61%
10	Checked the reliability and trustworthiness of the information on a website.	15	57%
11	Provided a prediction about where learners might go if they clicked on a website link.	14	53%
12	If learners knew they would be graded, they should use the internet to find out information about the topic.	14	53%
13	Before researching a topic on the internet, ensured learners to consider whether they were familiar with how to find information about it.	18	69%
14	Whenever learners became confused about something they were reading on the internet, they should scroll back to previous screens.	16	61%
II.	**What kind of the learners' feeling when doing autonomous online reading comprehension?**		
15	Learners felt tense when they conducted research on the internet.	20	76%
16	English teachers sometimes worried that other learners did not reflect on what they read on the internet.	21	80%
17	It was more convenient for learners to read on the internet during free time than read a book.	23	88%
18	English teachers believed that learners without internet access were missing out on important information.	24	92%
19	Learners felt confident when reading comprehension from the internet because they could find information quickly on the internet.	14	53%
20	Some learners could not stop searching on the internet because they were eager to find the	10	38%

	answers.		
21	Learners were confident that they could open a web address directly by typing the address.	19	73%
22	Learners felt confident in understanding internet related terms/words.	23	88%
23	Learners felt successful in internet research because they could choose their own resources.	15	57%
24	Learners could easily understand the information they read and they searched on the internet.	17	65%

This finding proved that this questionnaire could assess learners' perceptions of English teacher's support for autonomy as well as their autonomous and controlled motivations, and their interest, cognitive capacity, and cognitive choices. Supportive autonomy could increase the child's motivation to control as well as the child's motivation for self-control, which appeared to be driven by the child's motivation to please the new teachers, who were very supportive of them (Febyanti et al., 2022). It seemed that if English teachers acknowledged their learners' feelings and minimized the use of guilt and shame strategies, learners would be more likely to learn with strong will and sense of competence, unless they were motivated to respond to external pressures or internal obligations.

Table 5. Learners' activities in learning autonomy in online reading comprehension strategy
(Strongly Agree: 5; Agree: 4; Unsure: 3; Disagree: 2; Strongly Agree: 1)

No	Online Reading Activities	Frequency	Percentage
1	Specified a purpose for reading.	18	69%
2	Planned a reading process.	21	80%
3	Previewed the text.	20	76%
4	Predicted the text contents.	17	65%
5	Verified predictions.	17	65%
6	Generated questions about the text.	18	69%
7	Located answers to questions	19	73%
8	Compared text to existing schemata.	22	84%
9	Summarized textual information.	23	88%
10	Generated inferences.	24	92%
11	Noticed and analyzed text structure.	25	96%
12	Re-read the text.	25	96%
13	Used discourse markers to understand textual relationships.	13	50%
14	Checked comprehension accuracy.	12	46%
15	Tracked reading difficulties.	19	73%

16	Repaired comprehension failures.	15	57%
17	Critiqued a text or point of view.	11	42%
18	Reflected on and discuss what had been learned.	17	65%
19	Categorized words and information.	10	38%
20	Modified incorrect predictions.	18	69%
21	Understood and used figurative language.	8	30%
22	Recognized and repaired miscomprehension.	13	50%
23	Understood literary and academic forms.	12	46%
24	Followed directions.	15	57%
25	Integrated text information with existing schematic knowledge.	22	84%
26	Evaluated characters, narrators, or authors in the text.	16	61%
27	Read for information at a rapid speed.	14	53%
28	Identified tone or emotion in a text.	12	46%
29	Generated inferences.	12	46%
30	Drew factual conclusions.	21	80%
31	Judged reliability of source.	12	46%
32	Distinguished fact from fiction and opinion.	20	76%
33	Identified the main ideas.	22	84%
34	Judged propositional content.	13	50%

This finding proved that autonomous learners had insight into their learning styles and strategies. They acted proactively to understand the task at hand and when learners took a responsibility for their learning, motivation to learn could increase, which achieved better results (Rahmasari, 2022). This ability determined the success of foreign language learners. The goal of language learning was the ability to use language. Language learning was therefore the process of learning how to communicate using language. Young learners were not only involved in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes, but they were also responsible for learning language as the primary means of communication in school.

Table 6. English teachers' preparation in online reading comprehension class
(Strongly Agree: 5; Agree: 4; Unsure: 3; Disagree: 2; Strongly Agree: 1)

No	Statements	Percentage				
		5	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
I.	**I always ensured the learners before online reading comprehension class to…**					
1	Identified a purpose for reading.	46%	23%	18%	13%	0%
2	Planned the steps I would take to understand the text.	52%	27%	15%	6%	0%
3	Previewed the text.	54%	20%	16%	9%	3%
4	Predicted what the next part of the text was about.	62%	23%	11%	4%	0%
II.	**As we began the online reading comprehension class, I always ensured the learners to…**					
5	Checked their predictions by comparing their understanding to what the text said.	73%	12%	13%	2%	0%
6	Asked some questions about the text to other learners.	65%	16%	17%	2%	0%
7	Noticed the learners' answers to the questions that they shared in groups.	73%	18%	6%	3%	0%
8	Connected what the learners had already known to new information in the text.	82%	11%	5%	2%	0%
9	Occasionally summarized portions of the text occasionally.	80%	10%	8%	2%	0%
10	Guessed the main ideas based on what the text said.	82%	9%	5%	4%	0%
11	Tried to understand how parts of the text are linked.	78%	12%	10%	0%	0%
12	Noticed how the writer organized information in the text.	54%	20%	19%	7%	0%
13	Re-read passages to ensure the understanding of information.	65%	24%	9%	2%	0%
14	Guessed the meanings when they encountered a new word or phrase.	70%	16%	12	2%	0%
III.	**After conducting online reading comprehension class, the lists of activities that I observed were…**					
15	Looked up unfamiliar words in a dictionary or glossary when necessary.	68%	12%	13%	7%	0%
16	Noticed the words and the phrases that signaled the new ideas.	50%	28%	16%	6%	0%
17	Checked the learners' understanding as	62%	20%	15%	3%	0%

	they moved through a text.					
18	Questioned the author and sometimes critiqued the text.	57%	24%	16%	3%	0%
19	Checked to see if the learners had met their goals for reading	83%	15%	2%	0%	0%
20	Encouraged the learners to think about what they had learned from reading.	68%	10%	19%	3%	0%

This finding proved that this strategies identified to promote independent reading autonomous were of particular importance for teaching practice and for English teachers' professional development in initial and in-service training. It had been found that to improve learners' English competency, learners must actively seek out resources, assess their skills, and set specific goals before learning English. Fostering children's autonomy meant listening to and accepting children's opinions, and it required English teachers to communicate safely, encourage children to share thoughts, ideas, suggestions and perspectives, listen carefully, and accept negative emotions of the children.

Table 7. English teachers' perspectives on learner autonomy and online reading comprehension

No.	Category	Illustrative Opinions
I.	**English teachers' perspectives on learner autonomy**	
1	Learning objectives	*The learning objectives were derived from the curriculum framework which was top-down in nature. Due to the fact that learners were not permitted to choose their learning materials in the classroom, however, they were allowed to do so outside of the classroom as part of their learning projects.*
2	Learners' behavior in learning	*We needed to promote autonomous learning because of the passiveness of learners' attitude in learning when they were asked to express their opinions.*
3	Learners' responses	*It provided feedback to English teachers so they could adapt teaching to the needs of their students.*
4	English classroom activities	*I also discussed the appropriateness of the activities and reviewed the suggested assessments with learners. Some certain activities had been approved and initial assessments might be modified.*
5	Learners' need of learning strategy	*Some achievements in English classroom due to learners' autonomy were learners' self-checking of meanings of words in the materials, self-researching for completing the assigned tasks (for example, assignments, presentations, and projects), and self-organized activities.*
6	Collaborative topic	*Some learners suggested possible topics based on their*

	in English classroom	*subject. The learners worked piece by piece on their topic, bringing their work to class for review and editing by other learners.*
7	Learners' motivation	*Based on my experience, students always asked for reassurance that they were on the right track, and often not because they were confused. Therefore, I found that their learner autonomy was quite low.*
8	English reading materials	*The need to define a module plan before the course was taught could limit learner autonomy. In the case of modules approved by a higher authority, learners were not allowed to modify them in accordance with their wishes.*
9	Network sharing	*A majority of the learners engaged in active participation in their virtual classes, presenting their own ideas without needing to prompt their English teacher or attach notes. They were also getting better at finding information on their own and reading independently.*
10	Independent learning	*I promoted leaner autonomy in my classes because I wanted them to be independent learners. To foster learner autonomy, I encouraged them to work on project work and studied on their own at home or in the library outside of the classroom setting.*
11	Enhanced knowledge level	*While independent learning was helpful and allowed you to learn at your own pace, it was not enough since interaction with others was necessary, as well as comparison of your knowledge level with others. Every success was depended on the efforts of the learners.*
II.	**English teachers' perspectives on online reading comprehension**	
12	The interesting media	*I would have preferred to read if the screen layout of this site was more appealing.* *An outline helped learners to have an overview and comprehensive understanding of the text.* *I would like to see some videos to illustrate the article to understand the text better.*
13	The accuracy of information	*If the information was accurate and well-presented, learners would return to the website and they would need to know if the information was valid.*
14	The critical media	*English teachers believed that helping students to understand the media they encountered every day was an important reason to get their hands on digital literacy. It helped us to analyze and synthesize information in understanding personal lives, relationships, and the larger environment in which we lived and interacted.*

15	Self-evaluation learning	Learners not only discovered information on the web, but also developed solutions and created digital presentations of their work. You switched from a simple book report to a video report linked to the book cover through a QR code affixed to the back of the cover.
16	Future career	Learners who had a basic skill set related to the use of digital technology and who applied these skills, would be better in their future careers and more marketable.
17	Trained English skills	Online reading comprehension offered a lot of videos where learners could listen to English speakers and it helped them a lot in practicing their listening skills.
18	Source of knowledge	In addition to being free and open-source, online reading comprehension was also a good way to share and learn new things at any time and from anywhere. Online reading comprehension gave me an idea of how other people from around the world thought and learned. You got lots of information coming from different sources, you just had to choose what was best and stay focused on your learning.
19	The needs of learners' choices	Digital literacy is often seen as an important part of building learners' capacity to be thoughtful readers and interpreters of media messages.

This finding proved that learners who had the ability to learn independently must stick to their learning orientation and goals (Stevani & Tarigan, 2023). In addition, they must have the opportunity to deal with difficult situations and improve their learning. Not only they should have fun learning, but also they must be flexible, active, and willing to ask questions. Likewise, English teachers were facilitators, organizers, and providers of learning resources, feedback, and encouragement, creating a positive learning environment. Furthermore, English teachers needed to explore how students saw, reflected, and evaluated their learning progress. Improving students' initiative was considered one of the important factors determining the success of autonomous foreign language learning.

4. DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to assess learners' autonomy based on English teachers' perspectives during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, the degree of learners' autonomy during the pandemic was higher rather than before the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was in line with (Davies et al., 2020) stated that the learners perceived the value of autonomous learning. However, the finding of this study was not in line with (Klimova, 2021; Aisyah et al., 2021) claimed that before the COVID-19

pandemic, learners were more tended to trust in their abilities to learn something independently from their teachers and peers. They had the potential to study independently outside of the classroom. Second, learners consciously constructed knowledge and information to conclude, make new assumptions, access different sources to understand the text, and motivate themselves when they were encountering some problems in their studies.

Third, in terms of learner autonomy, the level of willingness and confidence due to online reading comprehension were both lower than before. At the same time, learners were also well aware of the idea of autonomous learning, but they had to take certain steps to complete their learning independently. Furthermore, this finding is inconsistent with (Kassem, 2022) stated that learners seemed to take more responsibility for their learning and many felt that their failure had been the main factor in the effectiveness of online learning. Fourth, another problem in autonomous learning was that learners were easily distracted by pop-ups or ads, their desire to play games, listened to music, and so on. These stimuli were strong enough to distract learners' attention from learning activities. To tackle this problem, learners as internet users must make a firm commitment to learning and they must be wise to restrain their desire for entertainment while performing their assignments. Studying in a quiet environment was strongly encouraged to maintain a cozy atmosphere. Besides,

learners need to foster their strong self-discipline to maintain motivation, commitment, and persistence in learning, so English teachers should provide them with constructive and communicative feedback. This finding was correlated with (Krishnan et al., 2021) showing that the concept of autonomy came from a Western context and therefore it did not fully correspond to Indonesian English teachers as well as learners' understanding was shaped by Indonesian context. Fifth, learners' confidence in independent work in foreign language learning was still low since they needed English teachers' explanations. They also preferred to have direct feedback over written feedback in online learning, and they relied on English teachers' roles in interpretation, supervision, and support. This finding contradicted (Maru et al., 2021) said the statement that learners had the power and right to self-study so that they were responsible for taking control of their learning. Sixth, the physical environment had become an important factor in creating a good learning environment because the urgency of online learning had pushed learners to learn in their own space. Learners sometimes chose to study individually instead of in groups because the pandemic forced them to keep their distance from others and prevented them from interacting face to face with their peers.

Seventh, in terms of online reading comprehension, both English teachers and learners valued the website for its extensive reading opportunities. Students

were exposed to authentic reading materials that had been selected by English teachers to suit their reading styles. Only in this way, they could deepen their knowledge on topics that were not covered in English textbooks. The authentic material in the online reading website was able to archive so it could help learners re-access information. This was similar to (Borova et al., 2021) emphasized that autonomy represented in learners' online reading comprehension strategy through the monitoring process was dominated by the need for teacher's guidance in all aspects. Learners consciously checked the relevance of the reading strategy, checked the significance of the information, and tested their weaknesses in reading ability. However, they were not completely free from their English teacher's guidance to solve the problems they met in the online learning classroom. Eighth, most of learners believed that the materials provided online learning package had already met their expectations and it was exactly the same as the materials provided in the lesson plan. Learners claimed that their English teachers helped them by assigning homework and asking questions directly to them. Some learners demonstrate that they could boost their confidence when their English teachers provided them with additional practice materials and instructions and these resources help them complete various tasks independently. Ninth, the use of social media and YouTube videos had helped learners to improve their learning,

which had been encouraged by their English teachers. A large number of learners also found that research projects had helped them to improve their critical thinking, boosted their confidence, and enhanced their understanding of teamwork which ultimately caused them to develop autonomy and responsibility in them. This was consistent with Mahlaba (2020) viewed that the teacher's role was necessary to guide learners in autonomous learning since teachers could not assume that learners were naturally self-directed. These online reading activities indicated that English teachers had begun building learner autonomy, although learners had not yet become autonomous learners since they still received instruction for every activity they were assigned by their English teachers, which meant that learners were not yet completely autonomous. This correlated with (Hati et al., 2021) found that learners who were autonomous used more strategies for language learning while fewer autonomous learners used fewer strategies. Similarly, in this research, it was found that autonomous learners engaged in a variety of language learning activities to achieve English language proficiency and autonomous learners tended to engage themselves in more activities rather than less autonomous learners.

5. CONCLUSION

This research identified both empirical and practical implications for learners to autonomously develop their skills and aspects of language, especially in online

reading comprehension. Based on reading comprehension practice, learners would slowly develop reading habits and created self-realized which were essential to facilitate language learning by introducing structure, words, language use, and other grammatical element into online reading texts. This research recommended English teachers to train their learners to become more autonomous learners during online courses since it was a practical development. Furthermore, online learning provided learners with access to resources such as electronic books, photographs, recordings, and other conversational materials that they were responsible to complete the individual tasks independently with minimal supervision. By increasing English teachers' confidence in their learners, learners became more independent in their lives, resulting in higher proficiency and skills. As a means of encouraging autonomous learners in online classrooms, this research also examined the role English teachers played as knowledge providers, facilitators, managers, resources, and advisors.

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