Research Article

Taiwanese Teachers' Beliefs Toward EFL Learner Autonomy and Their Practices in High School

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Abstract

This study examines English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' beliefs and actual practices regarding promoting learner autonomy (LA) in the high school classroom. The participants in the study were 20 EFL high school teachers from central Taiwan. To triangulate the data and provide more comprehensive results, this study adopted a sequential quan-qual mixed methods research design: a mixed methods research (MMR) design that collects quantitative data first, followed by qualitative data. Teachers' beliefs and factors affecting their actual practices were elicited through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Findings show that most teachers recognize the importance of LA. However, the questionnaire results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. The qualitative data suggest that the phenomena result from (1) students' low motivation (2) passive learning attitude and (3) the pressure teachers face due to the high school teaching demands. Although teachers engage in some classroom behaviors that promote autonomy, these practices are rather limited. Finally, directions for LA instruction are discussed.

Objective: This study examines EFL teachers' beliefs and actual practices regarding promoting LA in the high school classroom.

Methods: The participants in the study were 20 EFL high school teachers from central Taiwan. To triangulate the data and provide more comprehensive results, this study adopted a sequential quan-qual MMR design: a mixed methods research design that collects quantitative data first, followed by qualitative data. Teachers' beliefs and factors affecting their actual practices were elicited through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Results: Findings show that most teachers recognize the importance of LA. However, the questionnaire results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. The qualitative data suggest that the phenomena result from (1) students' low motivation (2) passive learning attitude and (3) the pressure teachers face due to the high school teaching demands.

Conclusion: Although teachers engage in some classroom behaviors that promote autonomy, these practices are rather limited. Finally, directions for LA instruction are discussed.

Keywords: learner autonomy, teachers' beliefs, classroom practices

1 INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy (LA), defined by Benson as the capacity to take control of one's learning process, is widely acknowledged as a desirable goal in second and foreign language (L2) acquisition. However, as argued by Borg and Al-Busaidi[1], analyses of language teachers' understandings of this concept are lacking. This represents a gap in the literature, as teachers' instructional behaviors have a powerful influence on student learning[2], and teachers' beliefs impact these behaviors. Skott posits that "*beliefs are expected to significantly influence the ways in which teachers interpret and engage with the problems of practice.*"[3] Consequently, teachers' interpretations of LA will impact the extent to which they promote it and, subsequently, the opportunities that learners have to develop autonomous learning skills.

Over the past few decades, fostering LA has been viewed as a pivotal objective in language education. Nonetheless, an inquiry arises: What are the concrete strategies employed by instructors to nurture their students' self-directed learning capabilities? According to Benson[4], LA can manifest itself in two primary domains: (a) beyond the confines of the classroom setting (e.g., self-access resources, computer-assisted language learning, distance education) and (b) within the classroom environment (e.g., learner involvement in selecting instructional materials or establishing learning goals). The latter aspect, which entails promoting autonomy within the classroom context, can only be achieved through instructors' teaching methodologies, and these methodologies are heavily influenced by the instructors' pedagogical beliefs. Phipps and Borg underscore the significance of language teachers' beliefs[5], asserting that these beliefs exert a profound influence on teachers' instructional decisions. However, it is noteworthy that teachers' beliefs do not always align with their actual classroom practices. This raises the question: What are the obstacles that impede the development of LA in the classroom setting?

While the majority of language teachers do not dispute the importance of LA, an inquiry arises: What are Taiwanese high school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' beliefs regarding LA and to what extent do they actively promote LA in their practices? Are there discrepancies between their beliefs about the importance of LA and their actual classroom practices? This research endeavors to address these queries.

In summary, this study has three primary objectives: To investigate the perspectives and beliefs held by high school EFL teachers regarding the promotion of LA within their classroom contexts. To explore the instructional practices and strategies employed by these teachers to foster LA.

To examine whether a discrepancy exists between the teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices aimed at nurturing autonomy. Furthermore, if such a discrepancy is identified, the study aims to uncover the underlying factors and obstacles that contribute to this divergence.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Learner Autonomy

LA is a multifaceted concept that has been the subject of extensive research and evolving definitions over several decades. Introduced by Henri Holec, regarded as the pioneer of LA, the concept was originally defined as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p.3). Since then, numerous revisions and interpretations of this definition have emerged.

Initially, LA was characterized as self-instructional learning, an ability to learn independently without the intervention of teachers[6] and a detachment from direct teacher control[6,7]. Subsequently, it was described as the capacity to engage in rational "decision-making processes" over learning activities[8], an ability to determine what and how to learn[9], and an ability to self-regulate and control one's learning activities[10]. Ultimately, it was regarded as "the capacity to make and carry out choices"[11]. Collectively, these definitions underscore the notion that autonomous learning requires learners to possess the ability to recognize and manage their learning process responsibly and effectively.

It is worth noting that various terms, such as self-directed learning, self-regulated learning, and independent learning, have been used interchangeably with autonomous learning in many studies[12-14]. While these terms may literally imply self-instruction or individual pursuits, autonomous learning does not necessarily equate to learning in isolation without the involvement of teachers and peers. Instead, it

necessitates a collaborative and interdependent relationship between teachers and learners, working towards shared goals[15,16]. This aligns with Schuster's assertion that "*LA is the product of interdependence rather than of independence.*" as humans are inherently social beings[17].

Furthermore, a significant distinction can be made between "proactive" and "reactive" autonomy, primarily differentiated by whether learners generate their own directions[11]. Proactive autonomy is exhibited when learners actively participate in setting their own learning goals, whereas reactive autonomy does not involve the creation of independent directions. Instead, reactive autonomy necessitates guidance from instructors to facilitate and enable learners to independently organize resources and set goals.

Littlewood[11] posits that proactive and reactive autonomy are two sides of the same coin, both equally important across different educational contexts. Reactive autonomy is regarded as a preliminary step towards the development of proactive autonomy. Additionally, Borg and Alshumaimeri emphasizes the necessity of aligning the various aspects of autonomy with the specific characteristics and needs of learners in different contexts[18].

Consequently, it is imperative to consider contextual factors, such as learners' backgrounds, language proficiency levels, preferred learning styles, and strategies, when formulating guidelines for fostering LA[19]. These contextual considerations enable the tailoring of approaches to promote both proactive and reactive autonomy in a manner that effectively addresses individual learners' needs.

2.2 Teachers' Beliefs
The concept of belief has been defined in numerous ways within the literature, often being used interchangeably with terms such as attitudes, values, judgments, opinions, ideologies, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, dispositions, personal theories, internal mental processes, rules of practice, and perspectives. Researchers have aimed to capture the essence and characteristics of beliefs in a way that accurately reflects their nature.

Pajares[20] defined belief as "an individual's judgment of the truth or falsity of a proposition, a judgment that can only be inferred from a collective thought of what human beings say, intend, and do" (p. 310). Additionally, belief is conceptualized as an attitude that guides both teachers' thoughts and behaviors, consistently influencing their classroom practices[21,22]. In summary, an individual's beliefs exert a significant influence on their actions.

Teachers' beliefs and personal theories are described as "the rich store of knowledge that teachers have that affects their planning and their interactive thoughts and

decisions"[23]. These beliefs are gradually developed through making sense of complex environments and responding to them by forming a complex system of personal and professional knowledge and theories, which, as Kagan[24] describes, are often tacit and unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the subject matter being taught.

Meirink et al.[25] further stated that teacher conceptions and perspectives are an interrelated set of intentions, beliefs, and actions, which can be used interchangeably (p.90). According to Rokeach and Kliejunas's notion[26], beliefs are composed of three elements: a cognitive component (knowledge), an affective component (capability of arousing emotion), and a behavioral component (activated action).

Teachers' beliefs and perspectives on teaching and learning are closely related to their previous experiences or knowledge. While some studies suggest that teachers may change or modify their beliefs as they acquire wisdom or experience critical incidents that challenge them[27-29], other studies indicate otherwise, leaving no definitive answer as to whether teachers' beliefs change over time.

However, evidence suggests that teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching: (1) maybe powerfully influenced (positively or negatively) by teachers' own experiences; (2) act as a filter through which teachers interpret new information and experience; (3) interact bi-directionally with experiences; (4) can exert a persistent long-term influence on teachers' instructional practices[5]. Similarly, it is evident that language teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning: (1) have a powerful effect on their pedagogical decisions; (2) strongly influence what and how they learn during language teacher education; and (3) can be deep-rooted and resistant to change[5,29,30]. In short, teachers' beliefs have strong implications for their teaching practices and future development as educators.

2.3 Teacher Beliefs and Practices
Research on teachers' beliefs has caught significant attention in the field of language teaching over the past two decades. One sub-area of this research topic, which is the focus of the present research project, is the discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. Borg, a leading researcher on teachers' beliefs in language teaching, and his colleague Phipps, highlight the importance of language teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning[5]:

(1) They have a powerful effect on teachers' pedagogical decisions.

(2) They can be deep-rooted and resistant to change.

(3) They are not always reflected in what teachers do in the classroom.

Phipps and Borg' study[5], which focused on the tensions

between teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and practices, found that many teachers do not implement what they believe to be the best teaching practices in the classroom due to "student expectations, preferences, and classroom management concerns" (p.387). The authors also discovered that positive teaching experiences play a crucial role in teachers' pedagogical choices. While teachers may be aware of teaching strategies supported by research, if they do not have positive experience with the success of those methods, the strategies may remain ideals in their minds. Instead, teachers may prefer to adopt practices that they know will generate positive and effective outcomes based on their prior experiences.

Similar findings have been reported in studies examining teachers' readiness to promote autonomous language learning in their classrooms. Chan[31] and Lai et al.[32] found that while teachers generally have positive attitudes towards promoting language learners' self-directed learning ability, there is still a strong preference for a relatively dominant teacher role among teachers, which compromises the student's role in autonomous learning. Chan concludes that certain limiting factors in the education environment may impede the promotion of LA in the classroom[31].

Further evidence of the belief-practice discrepancy has been reported in various contexts. Bullock's study in Ukraine concluded that "teachers' overall attitudes to self-assessment were positive[33], but implementation posed problems" (p.121), potentially due to classroom management issues, students' attitudes, or insufficient time and support. Similarly, Wang and Wang's study in Mainland China indicated that while most EFL teachers understood the features and importance of LA[34], its actual implementation was inhibited by various contextual challenges regarding students, teachers, the institution, and even Chinese culture.

Although research on LA in language classrooms within the local context is scarce, related studies in other fields have yielded similar findings. Chan[31] explored why high school teachers did not implement practices that reflected their beliefs regarding reading technology integration. Despite believing in the importance of technology integration, very few teachers implemented those beliefs in the classroom due to a lack of sufficient support, time, and professional knowledge regarding implementation. As Chen noted, "all participants reported high levels of agreement on constructivist concepts, but the participants' instruction remained teacher-centered and lecture-based, and their technology use was to support such instruction" (p.72).

Liu[35] conducted a similar study with more than one thousand elementary school teachers regarding their beliefs about learner-centered teaching and the extent to which they integrated technology into learner-centered instruction. The results indicated conflicts between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. Both studies – one using a qualitative method with a small sample of high school teachers and the other using a quantitative research instrument with a large sample – observed conflicts between teachers' beliefs on the importance of technology integration in the classroom and their actual classroom practices.

Based on these findings, it is plausible to presume that similar conflicts could also exist in language classrooms. Hence, there is a need to examine whether such conflicts exist between language teachers' beliefs and practices, particularly in relation to promoting LA. Additionally, if such conflicts are identified, it is crucial to explore the underlying causes and identify suggestions for implementing improvements to align teachers' beliefs with their instructional approaches. Understanding the contextual factors and challenges that contribute to this discrepancy is essential for developing effective strategies to bridge the gap and support teachers in implementing practices that align with their professed beliefs.

2.4 Relevant Studies on Perceptions and Practices of LA

Yıldırım Ö[36] conducted a qualitative study by interviewing four Indian students aged 20-22, who were studying engineering at a university in the USA. Three main categories emerged: aspects of language learning where the teacher had more responsibility, aspects where the student had more responsibility, and aspects where both teacher and students shared responsibility.

The results revealed that students generally considered the teacher as the main authority figure in the language classroom. They described their ideal teacher as someone who knows everything, provides instructions, identifies mistakes, and guides what students should do. Students reported that the teacher had more responsibility for correcting grammar mistakes, ensuring accuracy, planning the course, setting objectives, deciding on content and activities, and evaluating the course. However, they acknowledged that deciding what to learn outside the classroom and evaluating their own learning were areas where they had more responsibility than the teacher. Lastly, increasing students' interest in language learning and ensuring progress were identified as areas of shared responsibility between teachers and students. To raise interest, students suggested that teachers should provide interesting, enjoyable, and meaningful ways of language learning.

Shahsavari[37] conducted a study using the same instrument adopted from Borg and Al-Busaidi as in the present study. The results indicated that teachers believed learners did not take responsibility for their learning or act autonomously because they perceived teachers as the

main figure in classrooms and the primary role in learning belonged to teachers[1]. If teachers tried to hand over some responsibilities, learners perceived those teachers as inactive or inexperienced. This highlights how classroom culture and societal dynamics play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of both teachers and learners. Additionally, some teachers stated that they were not allowed to be creative in their teaching and had to follow rules to avoid problems with the administration, indicating a lack of teacher autonomy.

Chan's study at Hong Kong Polytechnic University indicated that teachers felt they had the main responsibility for methodological decisions[31], but they were generally positive about LA as a teaching goal and students' right to make decisions about their own learning. However, they cited curriculum constraints and time management issues as barriers to providing opportunities for learners to develop decision-making skills and autonomy. Notably, teachers who perceived their students as less capable felt more responsible and exhibited more controlling behaviors, providing less support for LA.

Al Asmari's study at Taif University English Language Center, involving 60 teachers[38], highlighted the importance of providing learner training and integrating it as an essential component of teaching to develop LA.

Alrashidi[39]. Exploring LA: Secondary School EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in the Saudi context. This research study explored the beliefs and reported practices related to LA among 76 Saudi secondary school EFL teachers. The results indicated that the teachers held positive perceptions regarding various features of LA. The findings revealed that while most teachers expressed a favorable desire to implement LA principles in their teaching practices, they were less optimistic about the feasibility of effectively developing these principles in practical implementation.

Despite the teachers' positive perceptions of LA and their efforts to offer opportunities for promoting it, they encountered challenges in fostering autonomous learning behaviors among their students. These challenges were attributed to factors related to student characteristics, such as motivation, language proficiency levels, and dependence on the teacher, as well as institutional constraints, specifically the limited time available for instruction due to the demands of the syllabus[39]. This study highlights the discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and their perceptions of the feasibility of implementing LA in practice, as well as the various factors that contribute to this discrepancy, including student-related and institutional factors.

3 METHOD
3.1 Research Design
This study explores Taiwanese EFL high school teachers'

beliefs and actual practices regarding promoting LA in the classroom. To triangulate the data and provide a comprehensive understanding, the study adopted a sequential quantitative-qualitative mixed methods research (MMR) design. This involves collecting quantitative data first, followed by qualitative data.

For the quantitative component, a survey questionnaire was utilized as an effective tool for examining the psychological constructs of interest, such as learner beliefs, learning strategies, and learner motivation[40]. As the study aims to explore EFL teachers' beliefs and self-reported classroom practices, a survey was deemed suitable for providing valuable insights and operationalizing these constructs[41].

While the survey questionnaire was appropriate for gaining insights into teachers' beliefs on EFL autonomy and potential discrepancies between beliefs and practices, relying solely on quantitative data may be insufficient for a deeper understanding of such discrepancies. As Chapman et al.[42] explains, the limitation of quantitative data is that "it is difficult to come to a deeper understanding of processes and contextual differences" (p.45).

To complement the quantitative survey and address this limitation, semi-structured interviews were employed to obtain richer and more elaborate findings from different angles. As Nakata[19] concluded, a sequential quantitative-qualitative MMR design is suitable when there is a need for follow-up qualitative data to elaborate, explain, or confirm initial quantitative results (p.71).

3.2 Research Instruments and Steps
The process of gathering data for this research was divided into two phases – quantitative data collection (survey questionnaire) and qualitative data collection (semi-structured interviews). In the initial phase, a questionnaire comprising both closed-ended questions employing Likert-type scales and open-ended inquiries was disseminated. The objective of this questionnaire was to explore the perspectives of teachers regarding the role of LA and the extent to which they implement relevant pedagogical practices within their classrooms to foster such autonomy. In December 2023, 20 copies of this questionnaire were distributed to EFL instructors in Taiwanese high schools, and all 20 copies were duly returned.

The second phase of data collection included conducting semi-structured interviews with selected participants. 8 of the teachers agreed to participate in these semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in the interviewees' native tongue, Mandarin Chinese, with each interview spanning approximately 15-20 minutes. The interviews were conducted using a list of questions from an interview guide, and the interviewer followed up on the information

mentioned in the interviews. These interviews helped the researcher clarify some issues that emerged from the questionnaires and further explore the teachers' answers in terms of the practices they actually implement in the classroom.

3.3 Participants

The study's participants were EFL teachers at a high school located in the central region of Taiwan. At the time of the research, all participants were engaged in teaching one to two general English courses, each spanning a duration of 12 to 16h per week. The majority of these teachers possessed a minimum of three years of experience. All the participants were from Taiwan and spoke fluent English.

3.4 Instrument

The researcher modified the tools being based on the ideas of the researchers Borg and Al-Busaidi[1]. The questionnaire utilized in this study adopted the English Language Teachers' Beliefs about LA Questionnaire implemented from LA: English Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices. ELT Research Paper, 12-07. Borg and Al-Busaidi[1]. There are five major sections in the questionnaire.

In the 1st section of the questionnaire, 37 Likert-scale items addressing 10 constructs were employed to find out teachers' overall perceptions of LA regarding technical perspectives on LA, psychological perspectives on LA, social perspectives on LA, political perspectives on LA, the role of the teacher in LA, the relevance of LA to diverse cultural contexts, age and LA, proficiency and LA, the implications of LA for teaching methodology and the relationship of LA to effective language learning[1].

In the 2nd section of the questionnaire, teachers' views on the feasibility of student involvement in decision-making and learning to learn skills in students were focused on. The 3rd section was based on teachers' beliefs about how autonomous they perceived their learners were and complete the sentence by providing the evidence to support their argument.

3.5 Data Analysis

A mixed methods approach was adopted in this study. Therefore, both quantitative data, from the questionnaires, and qualitative data from the interviews were gathered in the data collection procedure of the study. The closed-ended questionnaire data were subjected to statistical analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 26.0). Descriptive statistical procedures were employed to examine the data and draw pertinent conclusions.

Conversely, the open-ended questionnaire responses and the data obtained from the interviews underwent qualitative thematic analysis[43]. This process entailed a careful reading of the data, identification of key issues, and subsequent

organization of these issues into broader categories. During the interview process, the questions from the questionnaire provided an initial structure under which specific responses could be categorized.

Given the mixed methods approach, a comparison between the questionnaire and interview data was also conducted to elucidate the quantitative findings with qualitative insights. This facilitated a deeper understanding of the underlying rationale behind the EFL instructors' responses to the questionnaire and their underlying thought processes.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Findings on the Perceptions of EFL Instructors on LA

The descriptive statistics for the 37 items in Section 1 of the questionnaire are presented below in Table 1. The mean score for beliefs on the importance of LA is 4.65, which is shown in Table 2. The mean score indicates that most of the research participant value the importance of LA. In addition, the researcher further presents the ranking of participants' responses according to the mean score of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement.

4.1.1 The Ranking of Strongly Agree Statements

The following statements received the highest mean scores among the items.

(1) Statement No.6 Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn. (Mean=4.85, Std.=0.192)

(2) Statement No.15 LA cannot be promoted in teacher-centered classrooms. (Mean=4.75, Std.=0.142)

(3) Statement No. 33 Motivated language learners are more likely to develop LA than learners who are not motivated (Mean=4.70, Std.=0.186)

4.1.2 The Ranking of Strongly Disagree Statements

The following statements received the least highest mean scores among the items

(1) Statement No.20 LA is only possible with adult learners. (Mean=1.35, Std.=0.126)

(2) Statement No. 23 LA is a concept which is not suited to non-Western learners. (Mean=1.65, Std.=0.156)

(3) Statement No. 34 The proficiency of a language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy. (Mean=1.70, Std.=0.136)

4.1.3 Interview Findings

In the interview section, the participants had the opportunity to comment on about the reason why they consider LA important, and the reasons they mentioned can be classified into three main categories:

(1) Promote life-long learning (7 participants); a few examples include the following:

a. It LA is important because students can't depend on

Table 1. The Final Version of the Questionnaire Had Four Sections

Section 1	contained 37 Likert scale items addressing key themes relevant to LA and which teachers responded to on a five-point scale of agreement.
Section 2	To ask teachers for their views about the feasibility of (a) involving learners in a range of course decisions (for example about course objectives) and (b) developing in learners' certain abilities associated with LA (for example monitoring their own progress).
Section 3	I think high school students are autonomous because they _____ I think high school students are not autonomous enough because they _____ I think high school students are totally not autonomous because they _____

Table 2. Descriptive Data for Autonomous Beliefs

Variable	M	SD	*n*
Autonomous beliefs	4.65	0.31	20
Valid N.			20

Table 3. Paired-Sample t-Test statistics Between Autonomous Beliefs and Autonomous Practices

		n	M	SD
Pair 1	Autonomous Beliefs	20	4.658	0.31
	Autonomous Practices	20	2.446	0.43

teachers for their lifetime (participant No.2).

b. Students should cultivate LA so they can learn how to depend on themselves (participant No.3).

c. LA is a metacognitive ability which can help student know what to learn when they under the process of autonomy learning plan. It can be transferred to any learning contexts in the future, which is a life-long learning ability. (participant No.6).

(2) Enhance learning motivation (5 participants); a few examples include the following:

a. Through LA and the desire to learn, students could be more motivated to improve (participant No.6).

b. LA is vital, and it is highly connected with the students' level of motivation (participant No.8).

c. With LA, students can learn what they are interested in, which can enhance their learning motivation. (participant No.4).

(3) Improve self-reflection ability (4 participants); a few examples include the following:

a. LA is important because it helps students become more aware of their learning problems (participant No.2).

b. It is important for students to reflect on their own learning and be aware of and responsible for their learning progress (participant No.1).

c. LA is important. Students with learners' autonomy can constantly monitor and reflect upon their learning path. Besides, they will modify and do some adjustment to their learning (participant No.5).

4.2 EFL High School Teachers' Teaching Practices that Promote LA

The participants had the opportunity to provide examples of the practices they have implemented in the classroom to promote LA.

4.2.1 Findings of the Responses

(1) Shoulder learning responsibilities:

a. Ask students to preview and bring a question to the class to participate the discussion. (2 participants)

b. Ask students to teach teammate to reach a better learning outcome. (1 participant)

c. Ask students to take notes in advance before attending the class. (2 participants)

(2) Enhance students' in-class participation:

a. Have students participate in the group project. (2 participants)

b. Share videos or articles they personally enjoy in class. (4 participants)

c. Encourage students to ask question and answer questions in discussion. (2 participants)

(3) Introduce learning resources:

a. Introduce online resources (4 participants)

b. Introduce library (1 participant)

c. Introduce learning tools and strategies. (4 participant)

(4) Give students control:

a. Introduce student choice of what extra reading they want to present and share

b. Introduce peer assessment and self-assessment

c. Ask students to be teaching assistants and prepare and teach vocabulary in the class. (1 participant)

4.3 The Discrepancy between These Teachers' Teaching Beliefs and Their Actual Practices. Desirability and Feasibility of LA

4.3.1 Questionnaire Findings

The last issue examined in this section was how the teachers rate the beliefs of LA and feasibility of LA concerning the development in learners of a range of abilities that are commonly seen as indicators of LA. To explore whether there are discrepancies between the teachers' autonomous beliefs and their actual classroom practices, the researcher conducted an independent *t*-test between the two variables, and the results are presented below in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 4. Paired-Sample *t*-test Results

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. D.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confident Interval of the Difference		*t*	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Upper	Lower			
Pair 1	Beliefs-practices	2.20	0.57	0.098	0.60	1.00	15.01	19	0.000

Table 5. The Reasons behind the Discrepancy

Main Themes	Examples
Lack of motivation	'Students cannot learn on their own mainly because they are not motivated.' 'Students have little motivation to work and this in turn affects their autonomy.' 'The students are not motivated.'
Students' passive attitude	'Students need constant direction in every task. Unable to work alone.' 'They are fully dependent on their teacher and cannot think independently.' 'The students expect to be told what to do by teachers.'
Low English proficiency	'The majority of them are at such a very low level of understanding English.' 'Most of students do not have enough proficiency to study on their own. Their level is to low.' 'Students seem preoccupied with what the answers are and not how to arrive at an answer.' 'The English proficiency of my students is too low.'
Curriculum demands	'The examination in Taiwan is still test-driven. Therefore, it's difficult to lead students to spend a great amount of time exploring things without directly helping them enter college immediately.' 'The periods of compulsory course are reduced greatly due to the new curriculum. With fewer teaching hours, it is challenging for teachers to cover everything ideally.' 'There is no time in the curriculum to add extra activities which develop autonomy.' 'LA is not assessed in our tests'. 'We have a curriculum to follow so that there is no room, also no time to undertake other activities which may promote learners' autonomy.'
Limited knowledge about the strategies to promote LA	'I lack the resources necessary to develop LA.' 'There are little workshops that train teachers to know how to guide students or create learning task for promoting LA.' 'I am not confident in promoting LA even though I know it is important.' 'With the new curriculum which demand for LA, the government actually provide little workshops regarding this area.' 'I do not know enough about how to promote LA.'

The tables summarize the responses here; the higher ratings for the belief regarding the importance of LA are again evident and a comparison of the scales overall shows that the difference between teaching beliefs and feasibility ratings (belief M=4.65, feasibility M=2.44) was statistically significant (*n*=20, *t*=15.01, *P*=0.000)

4.3.2 Interview Findings

A synthesis of the 8 interviewees' reasons and opinions to further explain the hidden reasons behind the wide discrepancy between the teachers' beliefs on the importance of LA and their actual practices related to promoting LA in the classroom. The examples from the interview responses can be classified into the following main categories in Table 5.

In general, the reasons cited during the interview data aligned with the results obtained from the open-ended questionnaire items. However, a notable discrepancy emerged regarding the primary factor hindering teachers' engagement in promoting autonomous practices within the classroom setting. While the open-ended questionnaire data indicated that curriculum demands were the predominant reason for teachers' reluctance to implement such practices,

the interview responses revealed that most teachers attributed this challenge to students' low motivation.

According to the teachers' perspectives shared during the interviews, they perceive their students as lacking interest in language learning and being disinclined to invest additional time and effort in language learning activities outside the classroom environment. Consequently, the teachers view encouraging autonomous learning as a futile endeavor. This sentiment is further exacerbated by their students' passive learning attitudes and the demands imposed by the fixed high school curriculum. As a result, the teachers exhibit minimal interest in identifying strategies to foster LA.

Synthesizing the findings from both the questionnaire and interview data, it appears that students' lack of motivation, the constraints of a fixed curriculum, and the teachers' limited knowledge were the primary factors contributing to their lack of interest in promoting LA within the classroom context.

5 DISCUSSION
5.1 EFL Teachers' High Regard for LA

The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data

analysis revealed that the EFL teachers in this study highly recognize and value the importance of LA in language learning. The majority of teachers do not deny the significance of LA and believe it is a crucial ability for language learners to cultivate. This finding is consistent with previous research by Chan[31], Lai et al.[32], as well as a recent study by Melvina and Suherdi[44] conducted in Indonesia.

5.2 The Discrepancy Between EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Actual Classroom Practices

Despite the teachers' positive beliefs regarding the importance of LA, the results indicate a discrepancy between these beliefs and their actual practices within the classroom setting. The quantitative data revealed a statistically significant difference between the teachers' beliefs and their reported classroom practices. The qualitative data further substantiated the existence of this discrepancy, attributing it to either learner-related constraints, such as low motivation and passive learning attitudes, or institutional constraints, such as the pressure to adhere to a predetermined curriculum.

These findings echo the research by Borg and Al-Busaidi[1], which investigated factors hindering teachers from promoting LA in the classroom. They identified the dominant causes as "learner factors (lack of motivation; lack of skills for independent learning) or institutional factors (overloaded curriculum, limited resources)" (p. 287). Similarly, Borg and Alshumaimeri's study highlighted learner characteristics (e.g., lack of motivation or appropriate skills) as a primary reason discouraging EFL teachers from promoting LA, even when they acknowledge its importance[18].

5.3 EFL Teachers' Limited Perspectives on How to Promote LA in the Classroom

The data obtained from the open-ended questions and interviews suggest that while teachers engage in some classroom behaviors that promote autonomy, these practices are relatively limited. Additionally, many teachers may conflate the notion of promoting LA with adopting a more student-centered teaching approach. Benson, in his synthesis of seminal studies in the area of LA[4], outlines five different types of practices associated with the development of autonomy:

Resource-based (independent interaction with learning materials)

Technology-based (interaction with educational technologies)

Learner-based (direct production of behavior and psychological changes)

Classroom-based (learner control over the planning and evaluation)

Curriculum-based (planning and evaluation of curriculum)

With regard to the practices implemented by teachers in the current study to promote LA, most focused on the resource-based method – introducing relevant language learning resources (e.g., self-access centers, websites, games) and encouraging students to engage with them in their own time. However, it is suggested that teachers could engage in more classroom-based practices (e.g., giving learners control over lesson topics, activity types, content) or curriculum-based practices to foster LA more effectively. These practices could potentially increase engagement and motivation among language learners in Taiwan.

To inspire language teachers to engage in more autonomy-promoting practices in the classroom, professional development workshops could be a viable option. In Borg and Al-Busaidi's study in Oman[1], which also found a discrepancy between language teachers' valuation of autonomy and their actual classroom practices, a series of four 90-minute workshops were conducted. These workshops provided teachers with opportunities to engage in discussions defining LA, learn about practices that promote autonomy, share successful strategies with colleagues, and develop plans to implement LA in their classrooms (p. 287). The study concluded with positive feedback from the teachers who attended the workshops, expressing a feeling of readiness and "a sense of purpose and momentum" (p. 291) to take on the task of implementing more LA practices in the classroom. Since teachers in Taiwan similarly hold high regard for LA but lack feasible and concrete ideas on how to promote it, such workshops might offer strong inspiration to initiate a change.

6 CONCLUSION

This research project aimed to explore the beliefs of high school EFL teachers regarding the importance of LA, as well as the classroom practices they implement to promote such autonomy. Additionally, it sought to determine whether a discrepancy exists between teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices. The study adopted a mixed-methods design, involving the collection of quantitative data through a questionnaire with closed-ended and open-ended questions, as well as qualitative data obtained from semi-structured follow-up interviews.

The quantitative questionnaire was distributed to 20 EFL teachers in central Taiwan, while 8 of these teachers participated in the follow-up semi-structured interviews, which aimed to clarify and expand upon the questionnaire responses.

The results revealed a unanimous agreement among the teachers regarding the importance of LA in language learning. Most of the participants did not refute the significance of LA and believed it to be a crucial ability for language learners to cultivate. However, the quantitative data indicated a statistically significant discrepancy between

the teachers' beliefs and their reported classroom practices. The qualitative data further substantiated the existence of this discrepancy, attributing it to factors such as students' low motivation, passive learning attitudes, and the pressures faced by teachers due to high school teaching demands.

The open-ended questionnaire responses and interview data suggested that while teachers engage in some classroom behaviors that promote autonomy, these practices are relatively limited. Additionally, many teachers may conflate the notion of promoting LA with adopting a more student-centered teaching approach.

Based on these empirical findings, several recommendations can be proposed:

6.1 Teachers' Side
EFL teachers should endeavor to broaden their autonomy-supporting classroom practices. Instead of solely offering language learning resources, they can engage in discussions with learners regarding their reasons for language learning, their expectations, and their plans for achieving their goals. Furthermore, teachers can design classroom activities or tasks that inspire students' interests and increase their motivation, thereby fostering greater autonomy.

6.2 Institutional Side
Institutions could offer professional development workshops for language teachers, providing a platform for sharing successful autonomy-supported classroom practices and inspiring other teachers to implement similar approaches. These workshops could facilitate collaborative learning, action planning, and the exchange of effective strategies for promoting LA.

Overall, the implementation of more diverse classroom practices that actively engage learners in the learning process and decision-making may lead to better outcomes regarding the promotion of LA in the language classroom. By addressing both teacher-related and institutional factors, a more comprehensive approach can be taken to bridge the gap between teachers' beliefs and their actual implementation of autonomy-promoting practices.

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Conflicts of Interest
The author declared no conflict of interest.

Author Contribution
The author contributed to the manuscript and approved the final version.

Abbreviation List
EFL, English as a foreign language
LA, Learner autonomy
MMR, Mixed methods research

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