

Vietnamese high school teachers' beliefs about promoting EFL learner autonomy in writing skills development

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Given that Vietnamese high school students continue to be passive knowledge receivers in their learning of writing although learner autonomy can make these students more active and independent writers, this qualitative study was conducted to explore six EFL teachers' beliefs about the necessity and viability of developing learner autonomy in writing classrooms at one public high school in Vietnam. Results from seven interview questions showed that all the teachers recognised the necessity of building up learner autonomy in EFL writing learning, and appreciated the potential contribution of learner autonomy to writing skills development. However, only half of the teachers saw positively the viability of promoting writing autonomy, while the other half was sceptical about its feasibility. The teachers elucidated the advantages and barriers in fostering learner autonomy in EFL writing learning pertaining to teachers' roles, learners' responsibilities, and school environment. Based upon the findings, recommendations are made for teachers to promote learner autonomy in writing skills development.

Introduction

Profoundly dominated by Confucian perspectives, English teaching and learning in the Vietnamese EFL context is conventionally viewed as having the core mission of teachers' knowledge transmission to their students, rather than empowering students for independent roles in language acquisition (Nguyen, 2014). More specifically, Duong (2021) problematised that "Vietnamese students studied English primarily by learning vocabulary by heart, reading English texts, and memorizing grammatical or sentence structures" (p. 307). Inferentially, Vietnamese schools are framed in a solid skeleton wherein authority is not diffused; that is, interdependence and activeness are not encouraged. Consequently, students are not promoting their learner autonomy in this educational system, although developing learner autonomy is seen as one of the most important educational goals and as "one of the key competences for lifelong learning" (Vázquez, 2015, p. 60). So as to be good participants in the knowledge-based community of the existing 21st century, students need to rely mostly on their own inquiries (Truong, Nguyen & Luu, 2019).

In these days, Asian students, including students in Vietnamese schools, are expected to be more active and autonomous in their language learning (Duong, 2021; Le, 2018; Nguyen, 2014; Nguyen, 2016; Tran & Duong, 2020; Truong, et al., 2019), which is not much different from Western students' innate learning preferences (Littlewood, 2000). Yet, Pham (2008) revealed a dilemma occurring in numerous Vietnamese educational settings, "Vietnamese teachers are not happy to transfer their roles as a knowledge transmitter to a learning facilitator" (p. 3); alongside, many Vietnamese EFL teachers

“show a lack of trust in the ability of students to take ownership of their own learning” (Nguyen, 2016, p. 14). Their unwillingness can derive from difficulties they are likely to confront, in matters such as the curriculum, exams, and subject content (Little, 1991). Similarly, Yasmin and Sohail (2018) listed a plethora of factors hindering the feasibility of promoting learner autonomy, including teachers’ little trust in learner abilities, the examination system, a lack of teacher autonomy, traditional teaching practices, a dearth of relevant resources for teachers and learners, fixed curricular, and shortage of time. Given that “insufficient ability to take responsibility and engage in independent work may have negative effects on [high school] students’ performance in higher education” (Alrashidi, 2022, p. 103), language teachers are encouraged to stimulate students to identify the objectives, to seek the contents and progressions, to opt for learning strategies, to monitor the path of language acquisition, and to evaluate what has been acquired so far (Duong, 2021; Lengkanawati, 2017; Truong, et al., 2019). On the other hand, students need to be more sensitively responsible for their learning with the guidance and orientation from their teachers (Duong, 2015; Truong, et al., 2019).

An overarching picture of Vietnamese high school students’ writing ability has been depicted recently by Pham and Truong (2021), that they were unable to compose their written texts, even just a perfect simple sentence. These authors also pointed out the main culprit of this scenario, that under a traditional writing pedagogical practices, Vietnamese high school teachers urged their students to learn sample texts by rote, or to do controlled exercises like transformation, ordering, sentence completion, or multiple-choice. Nguyen (2022) posited that such writing instruction in Vietnamese high schools seemed to oppose the National Foreign Languages Project prescribed by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET, 2006) that “learners are expected to use the target language creatively and independently and to be able to achieve communicative purposes in different situations” (p. 79). It is such a dominant examination-oriented teaching culture (Nguyen, 2022), and a teacher-centred classroom atmosphere (Trinh & Nguyen, 2014) that has deprived these schoolers of opportunities to nourish their own writing competency, autonomy, motivation, and engagement. At high school leaving, Vietnamese students are still struggling with English writing, notwithstanding their acquisition of linguistic knowledge (Truong, 2022). Linguistically circumscribed teaching and learning without a good focus on social and cognitive awareness, self-efficacy and independence has been mostly misconstrued and malfunctioned in Vietnamese educational settings for ages. Thus, it is vital to urgently transform Vietnamese EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices about learner autonomy in high school students’ writing skills development.

Khanalizadeh and Allami (2012) presumed that students’ low writing performance and that writing is the least developed language skill in an EFL pedagogy could be partly due to the effect of the teachers’ beliefs about writing and its teaching. As teachers play such a critical role in fostering learner autonomy, their beliefs have also become a key concern in education (Nguyen, 2014), since to understand how teachers approach their work, the thinking they operate from should be understood (Richards, Gallo & Renandya, 2001). Although ample research (Gultom, Purbani & Triastuti, 2022; Ibrahim, Saad, Tahir & Primsuwan, 2018; Priyatno, 2017; Sidupa, 2016; Yeung, 2019) has been conducted to examine teachers’ perceptions, beliefs and practices about value and issues of promoting

learner autonomy in writing skills development, there seems to be a scarcity of studies on the subject of Vietnamese high school teachers of EFL writing. Thus far, this paper attempts to explore Vietnamese high school classroom teachers' beliefs about promoting their students' autonomous learning of writing skills, and to see how they recognise the necessity of building learner autonomy as well as its viability including advantages and barriers. In response to this aim, one research question is addressed:

What do Vietnamese high school teachers believe about the necessity and viability of promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development?

Method

Research site and participants

The participating community consisted of six English teachers at one public high school in Ho Chi Minh City of Vietnam. Five out of the six participants excluding M5 were female. Their ages ranged from 26 to 40 years, with teaching experience ranging from two to 15 years. All had obtained bachelor degrees in English language or TESOL. Positively, all the teacher participants held their awareness of learner autonomy notion at medium and high levels, and they also received training programs on learner autonomy, which helps establish the reliability and validity of their verbal responses in interviews (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

Coded teacher	Gender	Age (years)	Teaching experience (years)	Educational qualification degree	Self-awareness level of learner autonomy notion*	Self-rated frequency of attending workshops, seminars, webinars**
F1	Female	31	10	Bachelor	Medium	Medium
F2	Female	29	5	Bachelor	Medium	High
F3	Female	37	13	Bachelor	High	High
F4	Female	40	15	Bachelor	Medium	Low
M5	Male	26	2	Bachelor	Medium	Medium
F6	Female	36	11	Bachelor	Medium	Low

* Level is marked by the self-rated awareness of learner autonomy (1=Not at all aware; 2=Slightly aware; 3=Moderately aware; 4=Very aware)

** Level is marked by the self-rated attendance frequency of workshops, seminars, and webinars on learner autonomy in the past five years (1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Sometimes; 4=Often; 5=Always)

Research instrument: Description, collection and analysis procedures

The researchers used interviews, one of the most effective ways of exploring perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes in greater depth than other instruments (O'Hanlon, 2003), to collect data. The interviews were semi-structured, whereby "the researcher uses the same set of questions but has the flexibility to probe for more answers by asking additional questions" (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 157). The seven interview questions teachers (Table 2) were adapted from Nguyen (2014), including two main themes and seven sub-themes, namely

necessity (Qs: 1-2) and viability (Qs: 3-7) of promoting autonomous writing learning (Table 2).

Table 2: Description of the interview content

Theme	Sub-themes	Question details
Necessity	General belief	Q1. Is it necessary for high school students to develop writing skills autonomously? Why (not)?
	Benefits	Q2. What are benefits of promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development?
Viability	Extent	Q3. Is it feasible to promote learner autonomy in your writing class? To what extent?
	Advantages	Q4. What are probable advantages in promoting high school students' autonomous learning capacity of writing skill?
	Difficulties	Q5. What are difficulties and challenges in promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development?
	Teachers' roles	Q6. What roles do you think teachers should fulfill in promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development?
	Teaching-learning activities	Q7. What possible approaches should be implemented in promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development?

The researchers interviewed the six teachers individually (code names in Table 1). Interview sessions were carefully planned in terms of time, place and questions because at that time these interviewees had much pressure from their school duties. Interviews, the researchers were audio recorded, and the interviewers asked and rephrased the questions and gave further prompts as needed for interviewees to fully grasp the questions and ensure the relevance of their opinions.

The analysis procedure followed Creswell's (2012) guidelines, involving transcription – “converting audio-tape recordings into text data” (Creswell, 2012, p. 239), then translation of the L1 transcripts into English, finally organisation of the qualitative data by the pre-set themes and sub-themes. To guarantee trustworthiness and transparency of cross-English qualitative research, the researchers utilised the conceptual equivalence-based parallel-translation model which involves reflections (Demeke & Ryan, 2021) and thus minimises subjectivity of the translation procedures and triangulates the interpreted results (Sutrisno, Nguyen & Tangen, 2014). Table 3 depicts how the original texts in the source language (Vietnamese) were rendered and reproduced into effective translated texts in the target language (English).

Results

All six interviewed teachers confirmed the vitality of promoting learner autonomy in EFL writing skills development (Table 4). Each teacher advocated different reasons, which were divided into two groups.

First, F1 echoed that writing is of importance but high school students' performance was troublesome; thus, their independence on this productive skill should be focused.

Table 3: Translation procedures for interview results

Participants	Rationale for the involvement	Criteria for translation	Stages for two-month parallel-translation process
Two researchers: Having competence in both L1 and English	Being the most critical involvement to undertake cross-language research based on the knowledge of and familiarity with the local culture and language (Sutrisno, et al., 2014)	Emphasising the <i>conceptual equivalence</i> – comparability of ideas between two languages rather than <i>linguistic equivalence</i> – similarity of linguistic expressions between two languages	<i>Stage 1:</i> The two researchers A and B translated the six L1 transcripts into English ones independently.
Six interviewees: All being EFL high school teachers with EFL or TELF qualifications	Involving reflections of translation where the respondents' experiences were rechecked on their own (Demeke & Ryan, 2021)		<i>Stage 2:</i> The researcher B invited a qualified Vietnamese university lecturer as the third-party translator for the six L1 transcripts, explaining to her the intended meaning and its context in L1.
One third-party translator: A lecturer in translation studies at a leading Vietnamese university	Increasing transparency of transference of the findings to the readers of the research (Demeke & Ryan, 2021) Minimising any subjectivity and biases (Sutrisno, et al., 2014)		<i>Stage 3:</i> The first intensive discussion among the two researchers A and B, and the third-party translator was conducted to compare the translation of meanings at the sentence level, clarify the tensions, and tentatively select the best version of translated transcripts. <i>Stage 4:</i> Six individual discussion meetings were carried out with the six interviewees, asking them to recheck their voices in English. If any differences occurred, the researchers would notice them to rectify later. <i>Stage 5:</i> The two researchers organised the final intensive discussion with the third-party translator to evaluate, adjust where necessary, and double-check before producing the official version of high-quality English transcripts.

Table 4: Teachers' beliefs about the necessity for promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development

Sub-theme	Key findings	Participants	No.
Necessity for promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development	Yes	F1, F2, F3, F4, M5, F6	6
	Reasons: Writing skill is important, but students' writing performance is not good.	F1, F2, F4, M5	4
	Reasons: Writing is a long process, but in-class controlled exercises are unhelpful.	F2, F3, F6	3

Excerpt 1

I reckon that because writing is an important skill, and the facts show that most high school students cannot finish a writing task well. Therefore, they should learn and practice independently outside the class. (F1-Q1)

Similarly, M5 voiced that until high school students can write something independently, their management of any writing themes is not possible:

Excerpt 2

Indeed, students need to learn more actively and autonomously outside the classroom to be a possibly good writer, handling any given writing topics. Writing is a vital language skill to any English learners. What they have been taught at school is only a basis of language forms, writing genres. Thus, they must take up time to practice and control their writing process fluently under time pressure. (M5-Q1)

F2 and F4 stressed that whatever efforts students can make in writing skills development at high school can help them survive university life with academic essays, assignments, etc. For example,

Excerpt 3

You know, writing is important to students, if they possess a good writing ability at high school, they then are capable of writing academic essays at their university level. After that, they can seek a well-paid job in the near future. (F2-Q1)

Second, F3 and F6 stressed that writing is a complicated and prolonged process of integrated elements, but in-class teaching is literally inadequate, confessed by F2:

Excerpt 4

[...] The assistance and transmission of writing instructions from the teachers inside classrooms is insufficient. Contrariwise, they need to practice more by themselves outside the classrooms. (F2-Q1)

Excerpt 5

It is undeniable that the hardest skill in English learning is writing that requires high school students' competency to receipt the information, process it, and at least, produce it. Seriously, learning writing is inadequate within sixteen 45-minute-periods of learning in the classroom. Writing is the long processes, which needs more time, more effort, and more guidance. Hence, the teacher needs to sensitively guide these students how to write freely, get students to become more active and independent in their learning process. (F3-Q1)

Table 5: The teachers' beliefs about benefits of promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development

Sub-theme	Key findings	Participants	No.
Benefits of promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Help students more directive and active in writing process 	F1	1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Help students control their writing progress, autonomously know how to tackle any writing topics 	F3, F4, M5	3
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Help students more independent in their writing learning through self-planning, self-controlling and self-evaluating 	F2, F6	2

As Table 5 displays, all six interviewees appreciated potential values of promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development at the high school by three salient benefits. First,

F1 reckoned that fostering learner autonomy may make her students more directive and active in the writing process:

Excerpt 6

It can help students more directive and active in their writing process from selecting ideas to constructing and organising them. Hence, their writing ability can be enhanced. (F1-Q2)

Second, F2 believed that her students could use independent learning strategies for their writing acquisition providing that they were encouraged to learn autonomously:

Excerpt 7

If students are encouraged to be more autonomous in their writing learning, they can use independent learning strategies like self-planning and self-monitoring. Consequently, they can control time and writing speed. (F2-Q2)

In addition to F2, F6 stated that the core of promoting writing autonomy was to help students become more independent in their writing, through self-planning, self-controlling and self-evaluating; evidently,

Excerpt 8

Promoting learner autonomy may help students be more independent in their writing learning, through self-planning, self-controlling and self-evaluating their writing performance via different steps such as idea brainstorming, organisation and revision, etc. (F6-Q2)

Third, F3, F4 and M5 tallied that learner autonomy might catalyse advantageous conditions to assist students to control writing progress and autonomously know how to tackle any writing topics; for example,

Excerpt 9

When students become active and strategic writers under the help from the teachers, they are able to control their writing progress, actively know how to tackle any writing topics. Consequently, they are able to write effectively as much as possible. (F3-Q2)

Table 6: The teachers' beliefs in the viability extent of promoting learner autonomy in EFL writing skills development

Sub-theme	Key findings		Participants	No.
Viability extent of promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development	Direction 1:	▪ Perplexing to conclude due to factors	F1	1
	Doubtful about the viability	▪ Not easy to enact	M5	1
		▪ Very difficult to implement	F6	1
Viability to some extent	Direction 2:	▪ If students are aware of necessity of learner autonomy and writing skill	F2, F4	2
		▪ If students have positive learning attitudes	F3	1

From Table 6, the response comprised two directions. The first group of teachers (F1, M5 and F6) reckoned that it was difficult to implement this practice at the high school, and

they felt doubtful about its viability. The second group (F2, F3 and F4) believed that promoting learner autonomy in writing instruction at the high school was feasible to some extent.

For the first group, F1 reckoned that it is enigmatic to come to an end whether this practice was feasible or not, then advocated that this practice was subject to different factors such as schooling, teachers and students. F1 eventually admitted that consequently learner autonomy may not reflect its potential. Similar to F1, M5 contended that it was not easy to enact fostering of learner independence on EFL writing learning in his class, then problematised it by some causal factors from the teacher, students, the ministerial ELT curriculum, and materials.

Excerpt 10

I think that it is not easy to boost my students' writing autonomous learning. It stems from many factual things such as teachers, learners, curriculum, materials, etc. By anyway, it is necessarily important to help them become more creative and active in learning writing, not only at school but also at home. Thus, in reality, I usually adapt and supplement writing tasks under the same topic for my students to write more after class. And, it is actually challenging task. (M5-Q3)

Similar to M5's "not easy" description, F6's description used the words "very difficult". She confirmed that organising her students to become autonomous writers could occupy "too much time":

Excerpt 11

From experience, I think that getting my students more autonomous in their writing learning is very difficult and it faces challenges. Most especially, it takes too much time to train them to become autonomous learners. (F6-Q3)

The second group consisting of F2, F3 and F4 had a more positive view that promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development might be feasible to some extent. F2 and F4 suggested that if their students grasped the necessity of learner autonomy and the significance of writing skill, its viability could be assured. F2 enunciated that:

Excerpt 12

I think it is possible to some extent if students are aware of the necessity of autonomous learning and the vitality of writing skill, and they are ready to become more independent in their learning process of this skill. (F2-Q3)

Moreover, F3 added that development of her students' writing autonomous learning could be visualised if they held their own positive learning attitudes and self-sought appropriate learning strategies. To illustrate it, F3 echoed that:

Excerpt 13

Promoting my students to become active learner writers may be feasible to some extent in my class. Indeed, I can reduce my prominent role in the class and increase autonomy of my students. Of course, they must have positive attitudes towards writing learning and seek appropriate learning strategies, and do more writing tasks at home. (F3-Q3)

Table 7: The teachers' beliefs about the advantages in promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development

Sub-theme	Key findings	Participants	No.	
Advantages in promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development	1. School environment	▪ Benefits from ICT (information and communications technologies)	F1, F2, F3, M5, F6	5
		- many learning resources for students	F1	1
		- keep track of students' writing progress	F2	1
		- seek supplementary materials for teacher	F2	1
		- seek referential materials for teacher	F3	1
		- seek referential materials for teacher	F3	1
		- establish online group-work for students	M5	1
		- establish online group-work for students	F6	1
		- modify existing teaching approaches		
		- seek referential materials for students		
		▪ One-paragraph practice	F6	1
		▪ Many learning strategies for students	F4	1
2. Teachers' roles	▪ Motivation got from good writing students	F1	1	
	▪ Strong desire to change class atmosphere	M5	1	
3. Students' responsibilities	▪ Some good students helping weaker students	F3	1	
	▪ Smart and agile high school students	F4	1	

As depicted in Table 7, each teacher revealed distinct advantages in boosting high school students to develop their independent writing capacity. If the teachers took advantage of these merits, the viability of this pedagogical action could be achieved.

With reference to school environment, all teachers except F4 considered that ICT could bring numerous benefits to both students and teachers in promoting writing autonomy effectively. For example, F1 pointed out the Internet could offer “much more” towards learning resources for their students.

Excerpt 14

Nowadays, there are many channels, especially the ICT, my students can learn much more and effectively from these resources if the teacher supports them to get access. (F1-Q4)

F2 also acknowledged the value of ICT for seeking supplementary teaching materials as a substitute for tightly-controlled, form-based activities from the textbooks. Using ICT she could keep track of her students' gradual writing progress.

Excerpt 15

Besides, I can use *Facebook* or *Gmail* to keep tracks of my students' writing progress. Moreover, I am also able to search supplementary materials via the Internet to modify or replace the tightly-controlled writing tasks in the textbooks which are mostly adhered to grammar and vocabulary rather than writing skills. (F2-Q4)

Sharing a view quite similar to F1 and F2, F3 conjectured that ICT might help her look for reference materials, and online group-work tasks might be facilitated:

Excerpt 16

I find out that challenges outweigh advantages; yet, I will name two main strong points. First, students nowadays get much exposed to technological devices and consequently the opportunities for them to learn writing skill autonomously considerably increase and of course I must suggest them how to learn with the ICT such as the ways to seek referential materials, establish an online group to work together with their classmates. (F3-Q4)

However F4, not mentioning the intensive functions of ICT, identified other teaching and learning-related advantages, i.e., there existed an array of different learning strategies for high school students to select and follow:

Excerpt 17

Students have many learning strategies to keep their learning writing skill autonomously, providing that they must identify the most appropriate strategies to their own learning pace, interest and need. (F4-Q4)

M5 recognised a valued aspect of ICT in modifying his existing teaching approaches:

Excerpt 18

The second advantage is I can make use of information technology to modify my existing teaching approaches and make my students participate more in writing activities inside classroom. (M5-Q4)

This was similar to F6, who agreed that the ICT could deliver diverse reference sources for her students to support their writing learning independently.

Excerpt 19

I think that the biggest advantage is that high school students can exploit the Internet with different useful referential sources for their independent learning outside class. Through ICT application, they can learn writing in many ways maximum, within themselves or with their friends, even learn with foreigners. (F6-Q4)

Another schooling-related advantage was identified by F6, that writing in high schools “stops at one-paragraph level” so that her students could practise without much pressure:

Excerpt 20

Besides, at high school context, writing skill only stops at one-paragraph level so students can autonomously learn without being much apprehensive and this is a basic level for them to develop writing performance gradually. (F6-Q4)

For teacher-related advantages, F1 confidently described that some students in her class were good at writing, which motivated her to enact a learner autonomy trend:

Excerpt 21

Advantageously, firstly I note that some of the students are good at writing skill and these students accordingly have their certain motivation, efforts and even autonomy. This is a motive helping me to concentrate on supporting such these students. (F1-Q4)

Similarly, M5 confirmed his strong desire to change writing class scenarios:

Excerpt 22

The first advantage is that I have a strong desire to change the writing class atmosphere since I become an English teacher here. I want my students to write English confidently no matter how it is good or not. According to my viewpoint, until they are more confident and motivated, they can be better in writing performance. (M5-Q4)

Regarding student-related convenience, F3 supposed that good student writers could assist the less able classmates in collaborative activities:

Excerpt 23

[...] Second, in my class, some students have good writing ability although there still are many weaker students on this skill. I can change the class configurations like having good students to work in group of the weaker students and the writing results will be equal to all members. (F3-Q4)

In addition, F4 positively viewed that many of high school students seemed intelligent and sensible:

Excerpt 24

[...] I feel that many of my students are smart and agile. If teachers encourage them positively, it is certain that they can learn writing better and even learn it actively. (F4-Q4)

Schooling environment factors such as restricted ELT curricular and textbooks issued by the Vietnamese MOET were identified as challenges obstructing the success of promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development. These problems were named by all teachers except F3. Firstly, F1 and F4 agreed that teachers must follow the mandated curricula and materials strictly; for example, F4 in excerpt 25.

Excerpt 25

For the curriculum and teaching materials, high school teachers including me are always responsible for accomplishing ELT curriculum demands and rely primarily on the textbooks compiled by the Vietnamese MOET. (F4-Q5)

In another point, F3 and M5 noted that the time allocation for writing skills development is very limited, being only sixteen 45-minute periods in the whole academic year. Besides, the teachers' key duty was to manage all writing exercises given in the textbooks. M5 admitted that,

Excerpt 26

Time allocation for each writing period in particular and for the whole curriculum in common is actually too short. Simply, covering all writing tasks in the textbooks takes up the allocated time. So, I and possibly other teachers can be in pressure to support

students to enhance their self-study capacity as teachers cannot be absent in this issue. (M5-Q5)

Table 8: Teachers' perceptions of the barriers in promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development

Sub-theme	Key findings	Participants	No.
Barriers in promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development	1. School environment: Restricted ELT curriculum, materials	F1, F2, F4, M5, F6	5
	▪ Strict compliance	F1, F4	2
	▪ Insufficient time for writing immersion	F3, M5	2
	▪ Many tightly controlled writing exercises	F6	1
	2. Teachers' roles:	F1, F2, F3, F4, F6	5
	▪ Lack of time to train students step-by-step	F1	1
	▪ Difficult to obtain alternative tasks, materials	F2, F3, F6	3
	▪ Many other schooling duties	F4	1
	3. Students' responsibilities		
	▪ Many bad student writers (knowledge-skill)	F1, F2, F3, F4, F6	5
▪ Many uninterested and lazy students	F1, F2, F3, F4, M5, F6	6	

Similarly, the primary focus of writing activities upon language accuracy within tightly-controlled tasks was controversial in EFL writing education:

Excerpt 27

Of course, it is undeniable that most of the writing tasks are only for consolidating the learnt vocabulary, grammar and text structures. For my students, their attributes can hardly help them much increase learner autonomy of this difficult skill. (F6-Q5)

In addition, all teachers except M5 realised that lack of time was one of the most common issues they confronted in promoting learner autonomy in EFL writing classes. For example, F1 stated that she needed more time to train students to learn writing independently:

Excerpt 28

Learner autonomy is a developmental process, rather than a settled construct. I need much more time to build my students' writing autonomous learning step-by-step. (F1-Q5)

Whereas, F2, F3 and F6 worried that they could face difficulty in searching for alternative materials and writing tasks in an acceptable time. For example, F3 advocated:

Excerpt 29

As for myself, I am devoid of much time to facilitate this thing [build up students' learning autonomous of writing skill in reality]. In fact, I need considerable quantity of time to design writing activities, search extra out-of-class writing activities and tasks for them to further practice, notice their self-study to support and evaluate. (F3-Q5)

F4 declared that she must accomplish all decreed schooling duties hectically during the academic years:

Excerpt 30

[...], English teachers at high schools get normal stuck into schooling duties including myself. Thus, I am sure that not many teachers like me intentionally think about it. (F4-Q5)

Table 8 also identifies barriers related to students' responsibilities. All six participants recognised the problem of high school students becoming demotivated and "lazy and disinterested". Also, the high school students were deficient writers in terms of linguistic and topical knowledge, reported by all teachers except M5. For example, from F2:

Excerpt 31

[...] The next factor is that most of high school students are bad at writing skills as they are immature in every aspect of writing such as vocabulary, grammar, structures, even ideas. Besides, writing skill is not involved in any tests and exams; therefore, many of them get lazy and disinterested in it. (F2-Q5)

More specifically, F4 described these students:

Excerpt 32

First, most of them are those who are not as decisive and motivated as university students. They are really slack, and indifferent to their writing improvement. Also, this student group's vocabulary and grammar sources and social knowledge challenge both teacher's and students' efforts to make teaching and learning writing more effective. (F4-Q5)

M5 postulated that high school students were still looking forward to help, guidance and instructions from their teachers:

Excerpt 33

[...] many students' laziness and unwillingness to learn and practice and expend time for writing skill on their own. By straight words, they seem to rely much on their teachers but lack of their own motivation and activeness. (F5-Q5)

Table 9: Teachers' perspectives about the teacher roles adapted to promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development

Sub-theme	Key findings	Participants	No.
Modified teacher roles to promote learner autonomy in writing skills development	1. Facilitator	F1, F2, F3	3
	▪ Increase student-student interaction	F1	1
	▪ Assign further outside-class practice		
	▪ Knowledge provider persisted but dominant		
	▪ Guide writing steps	F2, F3	2
	2. Flexible between knowledge providers and tutors	F4, M5, F6	3
	▪ Provide language input		
	▪ Tutor how to write and manage writing steps		

As depicted in Table 9, three teacher interviewees (F1, F2 and F3) espoused that high school teachers should act as a facilitator in EFL writing learning. To illustrate, F1 thought

that teachers needed to modify the existing interactional patterns in their writing classes, by increasing student-student interactions, asking them to practise writing at home. Especially, F1 reiterated that the knowledge transmitter role “should be continued but moderated sensitively”.

Excerpt 34

Practice of scaffolding is the key to helping high school students to develop learner autonomy. It means that teachers should modify the current interactions in the writing class. For example, there should be an increase of interactions among students replacing the prominent teacher-student interaction. And, they can assign writing homework on the similar topics for students to further practice. Yet, the role of writing knowledge providers of students should be continued but moderated sensitively. Remember it is not a dominant one in an independent writing class but facilitator. (F1-Q6)

F2 and F3 also avowed the facilitator role as vital for development learner autonomy, in which teachers should guide students how to write step by step. Consequently, students could manage their writing process independently. For example, F2 shared that,

Excerpt 35

Learner autonomy is not in-born attribute but is developed by the teachers. I must say that to foster learner autonomy in writing ability development, teachers' role is critical. Teachers should guide and orient their students. Sometimes, teachers do not need to guide, the students can do, and at that time they are autonomous. If teachers guide totally, it does not reflect autonomy. Let's imagine, it will be the same as giving them fish rather than teaching them how to catch. In short, teachers need to impart knowledge and instruct them how to write thoroughly. (F2-Q6)

Also revealed from Table 9, three other teachers including F4, M5 and F6 agreed that high school teachers should be more flexible in enacting the roles of knowledge providers, facilitators, and tutors. Specifically, they thought that these teachers needed to provide their students with sufficient writing knowledge of language and topics, and tutor them how to process their writing actively. For instance, F4 said that,

Excerpt 36

I consider that high school teachers should perform a flexible role set like a guide, a facilitator, a tutor but the knowledge provider is more important and impossible to be absent. For this, we cannot throw them into the river and ask them to swim without teaching how to swim. By anyway, teachers should instruct students how to write and manage the writing process rather than providing language input primarily. (F4-Q6)

Finally, F6 declared that teacher's key role in this field was to prepare students to be ready to develop their independent writing ability:

Excerpt 37

I totally believe that a flexible combination between a knowledge transmitter and an active facilitator enables high school students to learn writing as autonomously as possible. But the former should still be prioritised. Teachers is responsible to foster learner autonomy because self-study does not mean we let students alone, do whatever they like but to prepare them to be ready to develop their ability independently. (F6-Q6)

Table 10: Teachers' perspectives about the activities implemented in promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development

Sub-theme	Key findings	Participants	No
Modified teaching approaches for promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development	1. Curriculum-based: Textbook and curricular adaptation, for	F1	1
	▪ Creating extra writing activities	F2, F4, M5	3
	▪ Exploiting students' self-study activities at home	F2	1
	2. Learner-based:		
	▪ Using portfolio		
	- increasing students' involvement in self-assessment	M5	1
- promoting self-regulation			
▪ Carefully guiding writing process	F4	1	
3. Technology-based: ICT applications, for			
▪ Establishing online group-work	F3, F6	2	
▪ Designing creative writing activities	F3, F6	2	
		F6	1

Table 10 shows that all teacher interviewees had their positive perceptions towards remodeling their current teaching activities towards promoting learner autonomy in EFL writing skills development. For example, F1 suggested that high school teachers should adapt the prescribed textbooks and curriculum content; for instance, creating self-study resources, exploiting students' self-study time:

Excerpt 38

Teachers' support should focus on creating resources such as extra relevant activities and exercises beyond the prescribed curriculum. As a result, we can further offer fluent free-writing activities besides tightly-controlled accuracy tasks of the textbooks. Due to time insufficiency, we should make use of students' self-study at home, asking them to prepare in advance, before they attend class. Class time is for practice and discussion to practice their skills and reactions. Learner autonomy promotion is effectively done. (F1-Q7)

Related to students, F2 and M5 proposed use of portfolios, which could be implemented in Vietnamese EFL writing education. Through collecting what they had written in the whole academic year, students could gain opportunities to evaluate their writing progress by themselves (F2), and to self-regulate their learning behaviours (M5) so that mistakes could be minimised and their writing ability improved.

Excerpt 39

We can apply portfolios during the whole academic year to promote student involvement in assessment, responsibility for self-assessment and for their own learning progress. To benefit from the portfolios in this aspect, the teachers, at the beginning of the semester, ask students to put their writing papers in portfolios. Thus, the portfolios enable them to keep their learning progress as they have the opportunity to assess themselves. (F2-Q9)

Besides, F4 considered that autonomous writing may be fostered by meticulously guiding students with the process approach:

Excerpt 40

According to my viewpoint, the best approach to foster high school students' autonomous writing learning is we should guide them about writing steps from collecting ideas, drafting to finalising the writing text. [If] they familiarise this writing process, they can take control of their writing behaviours quickly. (F4-Q7)

Related to technology, F3 and F6 considered ICT as the most useful way to establish online writing group work, such as peer feedback and discussion of ideas. F6 supplemented that ICT could help them design writing tasks and exercises creatively, stating,

Excerpt 41

I suggest that high school teachers should apply the ICT for their writing teaching. For example, they can design creative writing tasks with it, or they can use it to facilitate group work among students like online feedback. (F6-Q7)

Discussion

Teacher beliefs about the necessity of promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development in the Vietnamese high school context

As mentioned earlier, Vietnamese high school students have been struggling with writing English, especially in any subsequent higher education, owing to the long-standing “spoon-feeding” teaching culture in the Vietnamese context, which has led to their low writing competency and engagement (Pham & Truong, 2021; Nguyen 2022; Truong, 2022). This was openly admitted by all the interviewed teachers. Corresponding with the most recent Vietnamese MOET mandates and the Vietnamese students' growing desire for active and independent learning, Vietnamese EFL high school teachers need to rejuvenate their thoughts and actions about promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development. Luckily, all of them displayed their positive belief about the contribution of fostering the students' writing autonomy in conjunction with the use of self-directed, self-planning, self-controlling, self-evaluating strategies to their writing skills development.

Numerous previous studies (e.g., Gultom, Purbani & Triastuti, 2022; Ibrahim, et al., 2018; Priyatno, 2017; Sidupa, 2016; Yeung, 2019) have proven that students' writing ability and motivation could improve when they became more autonomous writers in a learner-centred learning milieu. In such an environment they can be offered opportunities and freedom to select content and materials, establish learning goals, determine learning directions, and evaluate learning progress. Given “teacher beliefs are cognitive tools that powerfully shape or control a teacher's behaviors, instructional choices, material development, etc.” (Pham & Truong, 2021, p. 2), the teachers' aforementioned positive beliefs in the necessity of promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development may, hopefully, be an impetus for them to transform their role, teaching style, and pedagogical literacy for a dynamic EFL writing instruction.

Teacher beliefs about the viability of promoting learner autonomy in EFL writing skills development in the Vietnamese high school context

While half the teachers believed positively in the feasibility of promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development, to some extent, others were sceptical of it. Advantages, obstacles, and expectations in this field were comprehensively addressed by these interviewed teachers, regarding school environment, teachers' roles, and students' responsibilities.

When it comes to the school environment-related factor, rigid ELT curricula, the accuracy-based, controlled tasks adhered to in textbooks, and limited time allocation for writing skills development partially weakens their willingness to foster learner autonomy in EFL writing classes. Benson (2007) asserted that a rigidly structured curriculum and a low-quality textbook might obstruct flexibility and negotiation and preclude learner autonomy. It is suggested that the teachers should adapt and supplement writing activities which not only are relevant to the prescribed curricular but also encourage the students' active involvement inside and outside the writing classroom. Accordingly, five of the six teachers recognised the potential value of ICT which could help tackle this issue. They perceived that ICT may offer many online learning resources for their students' out-of-class writing practice, render reliable reference sources for students to start autonomous writing learning, and supplementary teaching materials as a substitute for tightly-controlled, form-based activities in the textbooks. ICT tools, based upon their innovative beliefs, could create many diverse opportunities for online collaborative learning and online peer feedback. Indeed, Rinekso and Kurniawan (2020) affirmed that ICT accelerates students' motivation, provides a great opportunity for them to learn autonomously and collaboratively, and helps both the teachers and the students get exposed to a variety of authentic materials. Another favourable contextual condition facilitating the promotion of learner autonomy in writing skills development is avoidance of "too much pressure", for example, high school students being asked to produce a single paragraph or a group of sentences, creating less pressure than larger scale writing activities.

Regarding the teachers' role-related factor, five out of the six teachers stated that lack of time was one of the most common issues they faced in promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development. They needed extra time to train students to write independently, and to seek alternative writing tasks and materials, although they still retained their authority role in their writing lessons. However, all the teachers became aware that in promoting autonomous writing learning among the students, they would be changing their role from being the only source of information to being counselor, facilitator, and active participants in learning resources developments (Al-Asmari, 2013; Xu, 2015). The teachers also considered modifying the existing interaction patterns in their writing classes, by increasing student-student interactions, and encouraging students to practise further at home. Students must become more autonomous and active both inside and outside the writing classroom. Coupled with this stance, it is suggested that the teachers should offer key linguistic and topical inputs, instruct how to write a paragraph step by step, organise collaborative activities, and especially avoid focusing solely on controlled tasks from the textbooks, which means in-class time needs adjusting to guide

the students' learning, respond to their learning problems, and offer active learning opportunities (Camilleri, 1999). In short, high school teachers should be more flexible in enacting their role in promoting autonomous writing learning, providing psychological, social and technical support for their students (Zhuang, 2010).

In respect of the students' responsibility-related domain, all the six teachers agreed that most of the high school students were not only linguistically and topically deficient, but also indolent and unmotivated writers. They tended to look for all help, guidance and instructions from their teachers. Truong, et al. (2019) opined that autonomous learners need to manage their own learning process "without being reminded by their teachers or waiting for the teachers' instruction" (p. 120). Nevertheless, teachers applauded the scenario that more capable student writers could assist the less capable classmates, which is seen as a favourable condition to enact learner autonomy in writing skills development in the high school context. An autonomous student writer has the ability to "reflect on his or her own learning, take initiative towards their own learning, set goals and evaluate their own progress" (Riihimäki, 2013, p. 21) as well as "the willingness to be responsible for their own learning" (Sinclair, 2000, p. 5), both inside and outside the classroom (Duong, 2021). However, success in fostering students' autonomous responsibilities, abilities, and attitudes in writing skills development relies on the teachers' critical and supportive role in developing confidence, motivation, and abilities so that they can learn independently, effectively, and become active agents in any learning environment like writing learning (Littlewood, 1996). Therefore, teachers need to raise their students' awareness of the necessity of learner autonomy, learning outcomes, learning strategies, and learning materials in writing skills development in response to the curricular content and interest, and then provide well-timed scaffolding, guidance, and constructive feedback.

In addition to views on advantages and barriers in promoting learner autonomy in writing skills, teachers informed on initiatives to optimise learner-centred pedagogical behaviour, such as using peer feedback and portfolios, and applying ICT for teaching and learning writing. Teachers need to enact the process approach frequently to require students to practise active writing steps like brainstorming, planning, drafting, revising, and editing involving peer feedback activities. Yeung (2019) believed that this approach helps to weaken dependence on teachers, increase self-reliance in writing, and enhance reflectivity and metacognitive knowledge about writing. There is potential to foster autonomous skills and attitudes like self-reflection, inner-directed exploration and self-discovery (Faraj, 2015). Accordingly, the target approach should be explicitly introduced inside the class and iteratively practised outside the class, which may replace the traditional product approach that involving the students passively doing guided exercises, imitating model texts by filling in gaps, completing texts, or writing parallel texts. Regarding peer feedback, it is beneficial for developing writing ability, critical thinking, learner autonomy, engagement, and social interaction amongst the students (Saeli & Cheng, 2021; Wakabayashi, 2013) via "the students reading, critiquing and providing feedback on each other's writing" (Hu, 2005, pp. 321-322). It is imperative that the teachers facilitate writing peer feedback among their students thoroughly to reduce tensions in their feedback communication and foster willingness for autonomous peer learning (To & Panadero, 2019) by some forms of scaffolding like rubrics and checklists (Panadero, Romero & Strijbos, 2013).

Teachers also proposed the use of writing portfolios for the students' writing skills development. Portfolios, theoretically and practically, build up students' responsibility for constructing meaning and sense of ownership of learning (Lucas, 2007), and involve active and autonomous tasks like setting up learning goals and reflecting on learning progress, based upon the teachers' reliable guidance and support (Tavakoli & Ghoorchaei, 2019). As proposed by Chelli (2013), teachers should inform their students about clear and focused goals and train self-assessment strategies for their writing samples in portfolios, such as "the use of rubrics and checklists to guide them in assessing themselves" (p. 223). Last, it seemed positive that the teachers were aware of the benefits of ICT in promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development, namely offering digitalised collaborative and authentic writing activities. The Internet and technological devices allow teachers to develop meaningful activities and enrich learning resources (Rinekso & Kurniawan, 2020), in lieu of tightly-controlled writing tasks in the current textbooks; consequently, students may enhance their writing motivation and get more exposure to autonomous and active learning for writing skills. Dang (2012) viewed ICT as providing facilitative opportunities for promoting learner autonomy in both face-to-face classrooms and outside of the class for both individual or collaborative learning modes. However, application of ICT in promoting students' active and autonomous writing learning might be difficult, requiring teachers to upgrade their digital literacy, skills, and professional knowledge continually (Melvina, Lengkanawati & Wirza, 2020).

Conclusion

The findings indicated that all the six interviewed teachers acknowledged the necessity for promoting EFL learner autonomy in writing skills development in the high school context, allowing students to become more directive, creative and independent in their writing. Yet, its viability was perceived at a low level or even in doubt, due to three main hindrances, including (a) the unfavourable contextual environment with rigid Vietnamese ELT curricula, albeit having some innovative policies, and accuracy-focused textbooks containing tightly-controlled writing tasks; (b) teachers' lack of time, and (c) students' weak linguistic and topical inputs and low writing motivation.

On the other hand, teachers also identified advantageous conditions for reinforcing the viability of promoting learner autonomy in writing skills development in high school contexts; for instance, teachers being willing to transition their roles from a being the sole transmitter of knowledge, to performing multiple roles in EFL writing classes such as a sensitive input provider, a facilitator, a tutor, and a participant. Such innovative beliefs, the powerful cognitive navigator of classroom actions, could promote autonomous writing learning effectively at Vietnamese high schools. Success in developing learner autonomy in writing classes individually and collaboratively may occur if the teachers (a) take advantage of the ICT prudently in search of authentic learning sources and meaningful tasks; (b) apply the process approach to train the students how to write paragraphs actively; and (c) enact trained peer feedback and portfolios to activate their self-planning, self-evaluating, self-regulating, and self-controlling skills. These needs for urgent changes in current practices were found in the teacher interviews.

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Please cite as: Truong, M. H. & Nguyen, T. P. T. (2023). Vietnamese high school teachers' beliefs about promoting EFL learner autonomy in writing skills development. *Issues in Educational Research*, 33(2), 798-820. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier33/truong.pdf>