

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the study. Seven subheadings are elaborated in this chapter, namely background of the study, objectives of the study, significance of the study, the scope of the study, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper.

1.1 Background of the Study

Autonomy is one of the words commonly used in various aspects of life. In psychology and politics, autonomy means the ability to make informed and uncoerced decisions. Meanwhile, in language classroom, autonomy means a certain degree of freedom to make one's own choices. However, Holec (1979) defined learner autonomy as the learners' willingness and capability to plan, apply, monitor, control, and decide their learning strategies and output supported by their teachers. To foster learner autonomy, teachers must understand the principles and techniques to implement learner autonomy effectively (Al-Busaidi & Al-Maamiri, 2014). Learner autonomy practice has been developed as a response to the demand of the 21st Century education environment concerning teaching and learning theories, learning styles, strategies, and approaches (Blidi, 2017).

In the worldwide pandemic situation due to the Covid-19 outbreak that has shifted the education system from traditional teaching to online learning, learner autonomy tends to be crucially important in the teaching and learning process. This situation urges the teachers and students to do everything online from home (Lengkanawati et al., 2021). Online learning can enable the flexibility of teaching and learning anywhere and anytime although it is not always efficient (Hodges et al., 2020). The shift in learning from teachercenteredness to learner-centeredness requires the teachers to give more attention to students' attributes (Priyatno, 2017). Teachers are required to equip students to implement learner autonomy, including mastering the technology

and digital literacy, critical thinking skill, independence, and problem-solving (Baru & Mataram, 2020).

There are concepts of learner autonomy and the new education regulation breakthrough in *Surat Edaran No. 1 Tahun 2020* called *Merdeka Belajar*. It has the same principles in the learning process. This policy was made based on the Program's research for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018, where Indonesia was in the low performance quadrant with high equity. Further, it was found that the gender gap in performance inequality in learning performance between women and men is not large. Female students outperformed male students in all areas of PISA (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019). *Merdeka Belajar*, or the so-called independent learning, is one of Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture's (Kemdikbud) programs to create a supportive learning environment for students and teachers. It includes four central policies, including 1) National Standard School Examination (USBN), 2) National Examination (UN), 3) Lesson Plan (RPP), and 4) New Student Admission Zoning Regulation (PPDB) (Kemdikbud, 2020). *Merdeka Belajar*, or freedom to learn focuses on both students' and teachers' freedom to choose and implement learning approaches that fit students' needs without any pressure mentally and physically to achieve the goals of national education. It also supports students' independence to gain more skills that strengthen their knowledge, characters, creativity, and responsibility related to *UU Sisdiknas Tahun 2003*. It aims to expand students' potency to have faith in God and noble character, healthy, knowledgeable, skilful, creative, independent, democratic, and responsible (Kusumaryono, 2020). Hence, the concept of *Merdeka Belajar* or freedom to learn and learner autonomy emphasize the independence and flexibility of teachers to maximize their potency in learning process.

As the impact of the rapid advancement of technology, curriculum revitalization and the proper use of technology are urgently needed in educational milieu (Nastiti & Abdu, 2020). It is challenging for teachers to form superior human resources who are ready to face the industrial era 5.0 (Lestiyani, 2020).

In other words, internet development has resulted in some significant technological changes where students can access and gain information from the internet through their gadgets or laptops. Further, students are expected to have leadership competency, digital literacy, communication skills, emotional intelligence, problem-solving expertise, and good teamwork. Teachers should prepare themselves to equip students according to their characteristics (Budiati, 2018; Dolot, 2018;). Considering the role of education to face the current development and aligning with the concept of *Merdeka Belajar*, teachers must have strong willingness to learn and adapt to the changes to prepare students with future skills to survive in life. Furthermore, it is necessary to investigate teachers' beliefs to foster learner autonomy by utilizing technology in online learning.

To provide learner autonomy in online learning environments, teachers should understand learner autonomy. It will affect what teachers do in the classrooms and how they promote learner autonomy to their students. There are extensive literature on teachers' beliefs exists, both in education generally (Calderhead, 1996; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996) and specifically in language teaching (Borg, 2003, 2006; Freeman, 2002). According to Johnson (1994) language teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning have a powerful effect on teachers' pedagogical decisions. Moreover, Freeman and Richards (1996) states teachers' beliefs strongly influence what and how teachers learn during language teacher education. Teachers' beliefs can be deep – rooted and resistant to change (Almarza, 1996; Pickering, 2005).

Some scholars also state their understanding about teachers' beliefs. Barillaro (2011) argues that it is essential to explore teachers' beliefs when they implement learner autonomy. Moreover, teachers' beliefs are difficult to change if the teachers do not have the opportunity to consider and discuss their beliefs (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017; Nguyen, 2014). Shahsavari (2014) states that teachers' awareness will affect in selecting methods, material, and activities.

Furthermore, Andreu (2007) also stated that when teachers have new perspectives and attitudes about the students as the centre of learning, they will become autonomous. The mindful insight on teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy will help the teachers to make decisions about students' language ability and foster learner autonomy in online learning classrooms.

A study on teachers' beliefs on learner autonomy is very beneficial for current education needs. Some researchers had investigated this topics such as teachers' beliefs which affecting teaching and learning goals (Borg, 2001; Mansour, 2013; Nguyen, 2014). Some researchers also have studied the importance of teachers' understanding in the EFL classrooms in the global context. For instance, research that Begum has conducted (2019) in Bangladesh University, Asmari (2013) in Arab university, and Nguyen (2014) in Vietnam, found that teachers' beliefs in fostering learner autonomy influence the success of the teaching and learning process. In addition, Yuzulia (2019) conducted a study to investigate teachers' perceptions about the concept of learner autonomy and to find the strategies to implement learner autonomy used by experienced and novice English teachers. In a somewhat similar vein, Lengkanawati (2016), in her study, also found a learner autonomy in the Indonesian context which had not been well perceived or sufficiently applied as a tool for effective teaching and learning. She also stated that it is necessary to explore teachers' beliefs regarding learner autonomy principles.

Moreover, the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak, online learning is considered the safest and most suitable method to sustain the teaching and learning process without any physical interaction (Putra & Irwansyah, 2020). To implement online learning, the teachers must be ready for e-learning and promote learner autonomy to create successful online teaching and learning outcomes to handle the online learning process. Therefore, this study describes that learner autonomy is pivotal.

Furthermore, studies which discussed the teachers' beliefs in fostering learner autonomy by utilizing technology in online learning are considered rare. Therefore, this study intended to investigate the teachers' beliefs in fostering learner autonomy by using technology, particularly in EFL online learning,

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EFL TEACHERS' BELIEFS IN FOSTERING LEARNER AUTONOMY BY UTILIZING TECHNOLOGY IN ONLINE CLASSROOMS

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through interviews, classrooms observation, observation sheets, and questionnaires.

1.2 Research questions

Based on the background of the study, the following questions will be answered:

1. What are the EFL teachers' beliefs in fostering learner autonomy in the terms of their understanding of its concept, characteristics of autonomous learners, and the utilization of technology in online classrooms?
2. What technological tools do the EFL teachers use to foster learner autonomy in online classrooms?
3. How do the selected technological tools help the EFL teachers to foster learner autonomy in online classrooms?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study was investigated the teachers' beliefs in fostering learner autonomy in the terms of their understanding of its concept, characteristic of autonomous learners, and the utilization of technology in online classrooms, technological tools implemented in online classrooms, and how the selected technological tools help foster learner autonomy in online classrooms.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study was focussed on teachers' beliefs in fostering learner autonomy by utilizing technology in online teaching and learning. This study was explained the definition of learner autonomy, teachers' beliefs in learner autonomy, characteristics of autonomous learners, fostering learner autonomy in Asian and Indonesian context, perspectives on learner autonomy, approaches in fostering learner autonomy, approaches in fostering learner autonomy, fostering learner autonomy: teachers' roles, and ICT in 21st century language teaching.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study's implication is expected to contribute insights for institutions, teachers, and researchers regarding the teachers' beliefs in fostering learner

autonomy by utilizing technology in the online classrooms and influencing their online teaching practices in implementing learner autonomy in online classrooms. Through this study, the author tries to open a new insight on the learning and teaching process particularly in fostering learner autonomy by utilizing technology in online classrooms. Furthermore, it might be helpful for those who are interested in conducting a similar study in the future.

1.6 Clarification of Key Terms

- Teachers' beliefs

Teachers' beliefs can be defined as prepositions about all aspects of teachers' work which teachers hold to be true or false (Philips and Borg, 2009: 381). While for Barillaro (2011), teachers' beliefs are the beliefs that teachers have in teaching and learning influencing teachers' behaviours and actions. Skott (2014) defines teachers' beliefs as ideas that are considered to be true, and it affects teachers' practices. In this study, teachers' beliefs in the utilization of technology to foster learner autonomy in online classrooms is defined as the beliefs of the importance of technology which help students to be autonomous learners who can control and monitor their learning progress to achieve the learning goals.

- Online learning

Online learning is made online via *Internet* connectivity through a learning management system (Hullet, 2018). Students in online learning were separated physically from the teachers. Online learning can be conducted anywhere and anytime, as long as the learner has internet connectivity. In this study, online learning is conducted by utilizing some technological tools, media or online application.

- Learner autonomy

Learner autonomy can be defined as "the ability to take charge of own learning" (Holec, 1981). Little (1991) defines learner autonomy as a matter of learner psychological relation to the process and content of learning – a scope for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action. According to Benson and Voller (1997), learner

autonomy is the ability to take responsibility by one self or take self-managed responsibility, and it can be an indicator for predicting academic performance. In this study, learner autonomy is defined as the learners' willingness and ability to be responsible towards their learning in the terms of implementing, managing, and evaluating their learning goals with the support of their teachers by utilizing technology.

- **Technology in EFL online classrooms**

Technology means any practical application of knowledge, especially in a particular area, or accomplishing a task using technological processes, methods, or knowledge (Isman, 2012). Moreover, Karimah (2019) defined technology as a system created by humans as means to achieve their goals. This system is manifested in material objects like machines or devices, and humans operate, maintain, and use it. In this study, technology in EFL online classrooms was used such as video conferences: *Zoom meeting, Google Meet, Cisco WebEx, and Microsoft Teams*. Social media such as *WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram*. Web-based online resources such as *YouTube, Podcast, Blog, and British Council*. Presentation tools such as *PowerPoint, Padlet, and Prezi*.

- ***Merdeka Belajar***

Merdeka Belajar, or freedom to learn, is one of Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture programs in the early 2020. It aims to create a supportive learning environment for students and teachers by giving the freedom to innovate and learn independently and creatively (Kemdikbud, 2020). In this study, *Merdeka Belajar* is defined as students' ability to monitor their learning progress and evaluate it. Related to the *Merdeka Belajar* and learner autonomy, there are some similar concepts that emphasize students' freedom and ability to improve their learning through several methodologies or learning strategies that are suitable for learners.

1.7 Organization of the Paper

Chapter I provides the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, clarification of key terms, and paper organization.

Chapter II explains related theories and literature. It consists of several parts: the definition of learner autonomy, teachers' beliefs on learner autonomy, the relation of learner autonomy to the philosophy of *Merdeka Belajar*, approaches in fostering learner autonomy and teachers' roles in fostering learner autonomy.

Chapter III discusses the methodology in conducting the research. It contains the method and design of the study, site, data collection, and data analysis describing how the data would be presented and analysed in the following chapter.

Chapter IV presents the findings of the research in the form of findings and discussion.

Chapter V consists of conclusions of the research, implications and recommendations for future research.