EFL TEACHERS' STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' AUTONOMY IN VOCABULARY LEARNING

Nguyen Thi Thuy Linh[1i]**,**
Phuong Hoang Yen[2]
[1]MA, Can Tho University,
Can Tho, Vietnam
[2]Asoc. Prof. Dr.,
Can Tho University,
Can Tho, Vietnam

Abstract:

Learner autonomy is now regarded as a desirable objective in language teaching. The objective of the study was to identify ELT teachers' strategies in promoting EFL high school students' autonomy in vocabulary learning. Besides, this research attempts to find out the challenges that ELT high school teachers employ in promoting EFL students' autonomy in vocabulary learning. A questionnaire and an interview were used in this study to find out the strategies adopted by the teachers in the current research as well as the challenges they face. The findings of this study revealed that English language teachers frequently promoted autonomous learners in their classrooms. They usually implemented different teaching strategies, which can be categorized into three groups involving students in a student-centered atmosphere; playing various roles in the classroom; and equipping students with the strategies to learn vocabulary. Additionally, the results demonstrated that teachers faced challenges such as learners' lack of independent learning abilities, rules and regulations implemented in schools, and teachers' lack of fundamental ways to promote autonomous learning. Finally, it is hoped that the proposed pedagogical implications will contribute to the innovation of promoting learner autonomy in vocabulary learning in the context of high school in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam.

Keywords: challenges, EFL teachers, learner autonomy, strategies

1. Introduction

Learner autonomy is defined as a learner's readiness and competence in taking accountability for suggesting, implementing, monitoring, and assessing his/her learning

---
[i] Correspondence: email nttlinh619@gmail.com

in cooperation with, and without support from the teacher (Benson, 2007). The significance of learner autonomy in language learning has been proved in several studies. It not only enhances the learner's motivation but also leads to more effective learning (Jiao, 2005). However, the effectiveness of promoting learner autonomy in teaching still has many limitations, especially in vocabulary learning.

Vocabulary is central to English language teaching because, without sufficient vocabulary, students cannot understand others or express their ideas. Wilkins (1972) claimed that "*without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed*". Vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in every area of communication including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Vocabulary enhancement plays a core role in improving language capacity and learner autonomy in vocabulary learning is indispensable for success in language learning.

Learning vocabulary is a complicated process. It necessitates the learners' ability to pronounce and spell a word while speaking or writing. It is also essential that they comprehend the meaning of a word when hearing or reading it. Knowing a word entails being able to use it correctly in a sentence. It requires learners to constantly improve their vocabulary if they are to pursue language improvement. Therefore, the way teachers structure their teaching and learning practices has a significant impact on their student's ability to acquire autonomy.

However, research on learner autonomy and vocabulary acquisition has not received the same attention within Vietnam as in other countries, especially in the Mekong Delta. Scholars in the Mekong Delta have recently become interested in the concept of learner autonomy, though most have chosen to examine it as its whole (Nguyen, 2018; Tuyen & An, 2019; Dang, 2021), rather than focusing on vocabulary learning in particular. Furthermore, the studies are conducted at universities rather than high schools. In reality, ELT teachers in high school are facing difficulties in enhancing their learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning. The challenges of promoting learner autonomy in learning vocabulary are immense, and developing effective strategies is critical. After realizing the importance of learner autonomy and vocabulary learning, I recognize that it is important to conduct a study to address the challenges that ELT teachers face when promoting EFL high school students' autonomy in learning vocabulary. This study comes up with the strategies the teachers' practice to enhance learner autonomy in learning vocabulary as well.

2. Literature review

2.1 Learner autonomy

Holec (1981) defined learner autonomy as "*the ability to take charge of one's own learning*" (p.4). Gathercole (1990) described autonomy as "*when the learner is willing to and capable of taking charge of his own learning*". 'Independence' plays an important role, which means learners should have been able to choose their own goals as well as materials, resources,

methods and tasks. According to Gathercole, learner autonomy is concerned with the investigation of why, what, and how learners are able to learn independently.

2.2 Characteristics of autonomous learners

Within the context of education, Wenden (1998) stated that there are seven main attributes characterizing autonomous learners:

- autonomous learners have insights into their learning styles and strategies;
- take an active approach to the learning task at hand;
- are willing to take risks, i.e., to communicate in the target language at all costs;
- are good guessers;
- attend to form as well as to the content, that is, place importance on accuracy as well as appropriacy;
- develop the target language into a separate reference system and are willing to revise and reject hypotheses and rules that do not apply; and
- have a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language.

Autonomous learners are individuals who understand why they are studying certain topics, accept responsibility for their learning, take the initiative in organizing and carrying out learning activities, and are prepared to assess their own learning. Learners' active participation and responsibility for their own learning process are essential for foreign language teaching (Dam, 1995).

2.3 Vocabulary learning and learner autonomy

Vocabulary knowledge is essential to language development and use. However, the extent of vocabulary knowledge is so vast that determining the true meaning of "vocabulary" can be challenging at times. Hornby (1995) defined vocabulary in three senses that cover a) the total number of the words which make up a language; b) all the words known to a person or used in a particular book, subject, etc.; and c) a list of words with their meaning. As Read (2000) points out, there are several factors to consider when attempting to comprehend the nature of vocabulary knowledge, including what a word is, whether vocabulary consists of single words or larger lexical items, and what it means to know a word or an item, and the nature of the construct used to measure vocabulary. From the definitions above, it can be concluded that vocabulary is the total number of words that are needed to communicate ideas and express the speakers' meaning.

Vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in every area of communication. Research has shown that second language readers rely heavily on vocabulary knowledge. Regardless of how well learners understand grammar and pronunciation, they will be unable to communicate effectively until they have an adequate vocabulary. This is due to the fact that the lexicon carries more of a text's meaning than grammar. In reality, grammatical faults lead to ungrammatical utterances, whereas improper vocabulary use has an impact on the communicative act. To put it another way, vocabulary is one of the linguistic components that influence the development of communicative competence as

well as learners' language skills. (Meara & Jones, 1990; Schmitt, 1998; Moir & Nation, 2002; Brown, Waring, & Donkaewbua, 2008; Schmitt, Wun-Ching, & Garras, 2011).

2.4 EFL teachers and autonomy in vocabulary learning

Benson (2003) proposed five broad guidelines that teachers who want to foster autonomy in their classrooms might follow:

1) Be actively involved in students' learning;
2) Provide options and resources;
3) Offer choices and decision-making opportunities;
4) Support learners;
5) Encourage reflection.

Teachers play a larger role in education than students in traditional language teaching. However, because the decision of incorporating autonomy in language learning usually comes from the teacher, autonomy fostering depends essentially on the teachers' redefinition of their own role (Hill, 1994). As opposed to the traditional role of teachers, in a learner-centered, communicative and autonomous classroom, the teacher's role should transition from teacher-centered to learner-centered, with the learner at the center of the program (Yan, 2012).

2.5 Strategies in promoting EFL students' autonomy in vocabulary learning

Researchers have come up with potential strategies that assist to promote EFL students' autonomy in vocabulary learning.

First, involving students in a student-centered atmosphere, where teachers can encourage students' inventiveness, contribution, and self-evaluation, is one of the effective ways to increase learner autonomy in learning (Hargreaves, 2014; Li, 2015; Yeung, 2016; Kassem, 2019).

Second, teachers who desire to promote learner autonomy should play various roles in the classroom. A shift in teaching practices is necessary for a student-centered approach. The teacher can no longer set the sole direction for the class's activities and subject matter. Teachers must take into account the needs and expectations of their students and be flexible when these things change over the course of the semester. (Conklin, 2013).

Last but not least, at the same time, learners need to be trained in learning strategies to learn vocabulary, go back to their learning goals, and assess their progress. Continuous goal-setting and self-monitoring are excellent techniques to boost self-efficacy and raise learners' confidence in their capacity to achieve a certain objective. (Bandura, 2012).

2.6 Challenges in promoting EFL students' autonomy in vocabulary learning

Scholars have claimed that challenges that teachers encounter in fostering learner autonomy may be related to three major factors: the contexts, students, and the teachers themselves. The major difficulty for instructors in assisting learners to become

independent is working with institutes and policymakers (Alibakhshi, 2015). Additionally, the fact that learners are unmotivated, reliant on teachers, and have little English language proficiency is also a difficulty (Almusharraf, 2018). Moreover, Borg and AlBusaidi (2012) also argued that teachers also felt hindered by a full curriculum in which content and assessment were centrally defined.

3. Material and Methods

A quantitative questionnaire was designed and used to seek the answers to the two questions with regard to the strategies and challenges in promoting learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning. According to Edwards (1991), a questionnaire is beneficial as "*respondents will have time to ponder privately before they reply, especially if questionnaires can be taken away and returned later*". Additionally, questionnaires can be utilized to obtain a general picture of the characteristics of a large population sample (Dőrnyei, 2003). The questionnaires were delivered in hard copies. And the questionnaires were designed based on five-point Likert-scale type (1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Unsure, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree) adopted by Liu (2007) to support the validity of the data in this study. For the quantitative data analysis, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 20 for Windows was employed. The layout of the questionnaire is presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.2: The layout of the questionnaire

Cluster 1	Strategies for promoting learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning	Question 1-12
Cluster 2	Challenges in promoting learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning	Question 13-28

There were 99 teachers who are ELT high school teachers in a city in the Mekong Delta participating in the questionnaire. They were randomly selected for this study. After being fully informed of the purpose of this study by the author, all of them volunteered to join and respond to the questionnaire. The participants all graduated from university and got a bachelor's degree in language education. Regarding teaching experience, the 99 teachers participants are from 23 to 58 years old and more than half of them have been teaching English in high schools for at least 5 years.

4. Results

4.1 Teachers' strategies in promoting learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning
A Descriptive Statistics test was run to investigate the average level of participants' agreement on mentioned strategies in improving learner autonomy in vocabulary learning mentioned in the questionnaire. Table 4.1 displays the results of the test.

Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics of participants' agreement on mentioned
strategies in improving learner autonomy in vocabulary learning

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Strategies	99	1.00	5.00	4.02	.74

The mean score of participants' agreement was high (*M=4.02*, *SD=.74*)). The results indicated that the teachers' agreement on mentioned strategies in improving learner autonomy in vocabulary learning is at a high level (Oxford, 1990).

Then, an Independent Sample T-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of male and female participants regarding their strategies in promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning. The results indicated that no difference between the two means was observed (*t*=0.96; *p*=0.44). Participants' strategies in promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning are the same, taking gender into consideration.

The official qualitative data can be categorized into 3 themes of strategies in improving learner autonomy in vocabulary learning including *(1)* involving students in a student-centered atmosphere; *(2)* playing various roles in education; *(3)* equipping students with the strategies to learn vocabulary, go back to their learning goals and assess their progress.

A. The strategy of involving students in a student-centered atmosphere

The quantitative data revealed that involving students in a student-centered atmosphere brings a positive impact on promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning. The results of the first theme of the strategies consisting of five items are shown in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Teachers' responses to the strategy of
involving students in a student-centered atmosphere

	Items	N	Mean	SD & D (%)	Neutral (%)	A & SA (%)
1	Learner-centered classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.	99	4.13	4.95	6.93	86.13
2	Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.	99	3.76	13.86	20.79	63.36
3	Independent study in the library is an activity that develops learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.	99	3.75	15.85	16.83	67.32
4	Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.	99	4.10	5.94	11.88	82.18
5	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed.	99	3.79	11.88	25.74	62.38

As can be seen in Table 4.2, 86.1% of the teacher participants believed that learner-centered classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy in vocabulary learning (*M=4.13; SD=.90*). They stated that learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy in vocabulary learning (*M=3.76; SD=1.12*). Additionally, in Item 3, 67.3% of the teachers agreed that independent study in the library is an activity that develops learner autonomy in vocabulary learning (*M=3.75; SD=1.04*). Also, they believed that involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy. (*M=4.10; SD=.94*). It can clearly be seen in Item 5 that learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed (*M=3.79; SD=1.10*). In summary, the results showed that EFL teachers well accepted the strategy of involving students in a student-centered atmosphere in promoting high school students' autonomy in vocabulary learning.

B. Teachers' responses to the strategy of playing various roles in the classroom

The quantitative data revealed the agreement on the theme of playing various roles in the classroom of the teacher participants. The results of this cluster of the questionnaire with four items were shown in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3: Teachers' responses on the strategy of playing various roles in the classroom

	Items	N	Mean	SD & D (%)	Neutral (%)	A & SA (%)
6	Learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together.	99	4.10	4.95	10.89	84.16
7	Reading comprehension tasks can help promote learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.	99	4.15	8.91	6.93	84.16
8	Listening to authentic audio can help promote learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.	99	4.01	6.93	12.87	80.2
9	Interactive activities in class can help promote learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.	99	4.03	4.95	12.87	82.18

As presented in Table 4.3, Item 7 received the most positive responses, which indicated that reading comprehension tasks can help promote learner autonomy in vocabulary learning (*84.2% agree; M= 4.15; SD=1.03*). Noticeably, only five out of 99 participants disagreed on Items 6 and 8 (*4.95% disagree*). The majority of the teachers perceived that learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together and interactive activities in class can help promote learner autonomy in vocabulary learning. In conclusion, the results unveiled a large number of the teachers' agreement on the strategy of playing various roles in education when they promote learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning.

C. The strategy of equipping students with the strategies to learn vocabulary, go back to their learning goals and assess their progress

The quantitative data pointed out that the strategy of equipping students with the strategies to learn vocabulary, go back to their learning goals, and assess their progress brings a positive impact on promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning. The results of the third theme of the strategies consisting of three items are shown in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4: Teachers' responses to the strategy of equipping students with the strategies to learn vocabulary, go back to their learning goals and assess their progress

	Items	N	Mean	SD & D (%)	Neutral (%)	A & SA (%)
10	Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy.	99	4.13	7.92	12.87	79.21
11	To become autonomous, learners need to be trained in the ability to evaluate their own learning.	99	4.06	9.91	9.9	80.19
12	Students need to be trained in strategies for learning vocabulary.	99	4.31	4.95	7.92	87.13

As clearly seen in the excerpts, participants acknowledged the undeniable positive attitudes to the use of the strategy of equipping students with the strategies to learn vocabulary, go back to their learning goals, and assess their progress. In fact, there were 86 over 99 participants (*87.1%)* believed that students need to be trained in strategies for learning vocabulary in order to promote learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning. The test results also showed that out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet and learner-centered classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy in vocabulary learning, receiving the highest mean score among the four domains (*M=4.13; SD=.99*). Besides, the majority of the teachers perceived that to become autonomous, learners need to be trained in the ability to evaluate their own learning (*80.19 % agree; M=4.06; SD=0.97*). In conclusion, the results unveiled a large number of the teachers' agreement on the strategy of equipping students with the strategies to learn vocabulary, go back to their learning goals, and assess their progress.

4.2 Teachers' challenges in promoting learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning

First, a Descriptive Statistics test was run to investigate the average level of participants' agreement on mentioned challenges in improving learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.

Table 4.5 displays the results of the tests.

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics of participants' agreement
on challenges in promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Challenges	99	1.00	5.00	3.66	.65

The mean score of participants' agreement was high (*M=3.66; SD=.65*). The results indicated that the teachers' agreement on mentioned challenges in improving learner autonomy in vocabulary learning is at a high level.

An Independent Sample T-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of male and female participants regarding their challenges in promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning. The results indicated that no difference between the two means was observed (*t=0.96; p=0.44*). Participants' challenges in promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning are the same, taking gender into consideration.

A paired-sample T-test was run to test which aspects the participants believed to be more challenging in promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning: from the students or from the teachers. The result indicated that no difference between the two means was observed (*t=0.71; p=.48*). Participants assumed that the challenges from the students and the teachers are the same.

Besides, another paired-sample T-test was run to test which aspects the participants believed to be more challenging in promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning: from the students or from the institutes. The result indicated that no difference between the two means was observed (*t=1.40; p=.17*). Participants assumed that the challenges from the students and institutes are the same.

After that, one more paired-sample T-test was run to test which aspects the participants believed to be more challenging in promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning: from the teachers or from the institutes. The result indicated that no difference between the two means was observed (*t=-0.51; p=.61*). Participants assumed that the challenges from the teachers and the institutes are the same.

A. Challenges from students
The quantitative data revealed that there was a high level of challenges from the students in promoting autonomy in vocabulary learning. The results of the theme of the challenges consisting of eight items are shown in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6: Descriptive statistics of participants' agreement on challenges
from students in promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning

	Items	N	Mean	SD & D (%)	Neutral (%)	A & SA (%)
13	Promoting autonomy is easier with beginning language learners than with more proficient learners, especially with vocabulary learning.	99	3.12	32.32	23.23	44.45
14	Learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning can be enhanced by all proficiency of learners.	99	3.93	6.06	14.14	79.8

15	Students' lack of ability to monitor their learning makes it hard for teachers to promote learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.	99	3.93	9.09	12.12	78.79
16	The proficiency of a language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy in vocabulary learning.	99	2.44	57.57	19.19	23.24
17	Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence.	99	3.91	8.08	15.15	76.77
18	Students are not aware of the objectives of learning vocabulary which makes them fail in improving autonomy in vocabulary learning.	99	4.02	9.09	8.08	82.83
19	Students who are not aware of the importance of vocabulary tend to fail in practice autonomy in vocabulary learning.	99	4.00	7.07	11.11	81.82
20	Inactive students do not succeed in enhancing autonomy in vocabulary learning effectively	99	3.73	15.15	23.23	61.62

As can be seen in **T**able 4.6, over 80% of the teacher participants believed students who are not aware of the objectives of learning vocabulary (M=4.12; SD"===_ and the importance of vocabulary tend to fail to practice autonomy in vocabulary learning (*M=4.02; SD= …*). They stated that it is hard for inactive students to enhance their autonomy in vocabulary learning (*M=3.73; SD=…*) and therefore, it is easier for confident language learners to improve their learning autonomy (M=3.91; SD=…). Additionally, in Item 16, only nearly 24% of participants agreed that the proficiency of a language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy in vocabulary learning (M=2.44; SD=…). In other words, the proficiency of learners has an influence on promoting their autonomy in vocabulary learning. In summary, the results showed that EFL teachers well accepted the mentioned challenges, which include students' lack of awareness of vocabulary's importance and objectives, inactive students, and their proficiency.

B. Challenges from teachers
The quantitative data revealed the agreement on the theme of challenges from the teachers. The results of this cluster of the questionnaire with three items were shown in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7: Descriptive Statistics of participants' agreement on challenges
from teachers in promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning

	Items	N	Mean	SD & D (%)	Neutral (%)	A & SA (%)
21	Teachers lack strategies to promote learners' autonomy.	99	3.61	17.17	21.21	61.62
22	Teachers do not have enough time to promote learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning.	99	3.80	13.13	15.15	71.72
23	Teachers think that they are not responsible for enhancing learners' vocabulary.	99	2.50	54.54	21.21	24.25

As can be seen in Table 4.7, over 70% of the teacher participants believed they do not have enough time to promote learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning (M=3.8; SD"===. They also claimed that a lack of strategies to promote learners' autonomy prevents them from promoting learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning (*M=3.61; SD=…*). In summary, the results showed that EFL teachers well accepted the mentioned challenges, which include students' lack of awareness of vocabulary's importance and objectives, inactive students, and their proficiency.

C. Challenges from institutes

The quantitative data pointed out that the challenges from the institutes bring a negative impact on promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning. The results of the third theme of the challenges consisting of five items are shown in Table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8: Descriptive statistics of participants' agreement on challenges
from institutes in promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning

	Items	N	Mean	SD & D (%)	Neutral (%)	A & SA (%)
24	Learner autonomy in vocabulary learning cannot be promoted within a mixed-level classroom.	99	3.20	33.33	20.20	46.58
25	Current assessment methods do not promote self-study of students' vocabulary.	99	3.89	9.09	23.23	66.87
26	Current instructional time is not enough to carry out activities that stimulate LA in vocabulary learning	99	3.89	11.11	17.17	71.72
27	Current materials are not interesting to students.	99	3.59	19.19	21.21	59.6
28	Current studying programs make students overloaded.	99	3.84	15.15	13.13	71.72

As clearly seen in the excerpts, participants acknowledged the certain challenges from the institutes in promoting learner autonomy in vocabulary learning. In fact, there were about 71 over 99 participants (*71.72%)* believed that current instructional time is not enough to carry out activities that stimulate LA in vocabulary learning and that current studying programs make students overloaded. The test results also showed that current assessment methods do not promote self-study of students' vocabulary (*M=3.89; SD=.99*). Besides, the majority of the teachers perceived that current materials (*M=3.59; SD=1.11*), and mixed-level classrooms (*M=3.2; SD=1.24*) make it hard for teachers to promote learner autonomy in vocabulary learning. In conclusion, the results unveiled a large number of the teachers' agreement on the challenges from the institutes in promoting students' autonomy in vocabulary learning.

5. Discussion

First, the results of strategies coincide with the previous scholars' views. The findings suggested that involving students in a student-centered atmosphere can help to promote learner autonomy, especially in vocabulary learning. This finding is in line with the results of previous studies (Hargreaves, 2014; Li, 2015; Yeung, 2016; Kassem, 2019). Besides, teachers should play various roles in the classroom so that they can improve learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning. Teachers should reconsider their responsibilities in the classroom and encourage student participation in learning activities. Indeed, this view completely coincides with the previous authors' views on learner autonomy. Many scholars have suggested that teachers have many roles in the classroom (Hill, 1994; Riley, 1997; Voller, 1997; Garner & Miller, 1999; He, 2003; Xu, 2007; Yan, 2012). Last but not least, equipping students with the strategies to learn vocabulary, go back to their learning goals, and assess their progress is believed to be integral in enhancing learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning. According to Bandura (2012), learners need to be trained on the ways how to learn vocabulary effectively, reflect on their learning goals and assess their learning. Most importantly, as students continue to learn outside of the classroom without the teacher's direct supervision, it becomes apparent that they have autonomy in their learning. Teachers, therefore, must offer resources, learning strategies, and opportunities for students to evaluate their own learning.

Second, after careful synthesis and analysis, the challenges are classified into challenges from three main factors including teachers, students, and institutes. These challenges strengthen the credibility of previous studies. a lot of the challenges are allegedly caused by the teachers themselves. They acknowledge that they are not sufficiently confident in their capacity to help students become better self-learners because they are unsure about their strategy. This is in line with the justifications provided in the Literature Review (Alibakhshi, 2015; Wiraningsih & Santosa, 2020). Furthermore, teachers agreed at a high level that they did not have much time, the main reason being that they felt hindered by the full curriculum. Indeed, teachers, according to Borg and AlBusaidi (2012), felt constrained by a fixed curriculum that had centrally determined content and assessment. Furthermore, participants pointed out challenges caused by the students. The findings indicated that the main challenges include low or mixed language proficiency, lack of student motivation, lack of initiative, lack of interest in the subject, pressure from a heavy curriculum, and lack of motivation to prevent teachers from enhancing student autonomy in learning. As Almusharraf (2018) mentioned in his study, the fact that learners are unmotivated, reliant on teachers, and have little English language proficiency is challenging. Moreover, the teachers expressed that the curriculum, the assessment policies, and the large and mixed size of the class bring issues when promoting learner autonomy in vocabulary learning which are grouped into challenges from the institutes. This result is consistent with earlier research,

particularly Alibakhshi's (2015), who believed working with institutions and policymakers is the main challenge for teachers in helping students become autonomous.

6. Conclusion

The present study was primarily conducted to identify ELT teachers' strategies in promoting EFL high school students' autonomy in vocabulary learning. Besides, this research attempts to find out the challenges that ELT high school teachers employ in promoting EFL students' autonomy in vocabulary learning.

The results highlighted that teachers frequently improved their learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning. Analysis of the strategies of teachers in promoting learner autonomy in vocabulary learning demonstrated that teachers use a lot of strategies named "involving students in a student-centered atmosphere", "playing various roles in the classroom"; and "equipping students with the strategies to learn vocabulary". No matter what strategies teachers employ to improve their students' capacity for autonomy in general and vocabulary learning in particular, it makes students love English and understand the necessity of English is the key to success.

Regarding challenges, the data from the questionnaire revealed that teachers face various challenges, originating from themselves, from the students, and from their institutes. The results demonstrated that teachers faced challenges such as students' inability to learn independently, rules and regulations implemented in schools, and teachers' lack of fundamental strategies to promote autonomous learning. The three components of challenges are all at the same level. The results demonstrate that no factor causes more difficulties than other factors. As a result, overcoming obstacles requires considerable work and collaboration from three different groups.

7. Recommendation

Further research should be implemented on a larger sample population so that the results of the study can be generalized to all groups of high school students in Vietnam. Because research on the topic of learner autonomy is of great interest in higher education, while high schools are still limited, and the present research focused on the teacher's perspective, further study can continue investigating the area of improving the autonomy of high school students from the student's perspective.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)
Nguyen Thi Thuy Linh is an English teacher at Can Tho Tourism College, Can Tho, Vietnam. She is currently an MA student at Can Tho University, Can Tho, Vietnam. Her research interests include English teaching skills, strategies, and learner autonomy.

Phuong Hoang Yen is an Associate Professor in Education, at the School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Can Tho, Vietnam. Her research focuses on English language education, learner autonomy, and student employability.

References

Alibakhshi, G. (2015). Challenges in promoting EFL learners' autonomy: Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives. *Issues in Language Teaching*, 4(1), 98-79. doi: 10.22054/ilt.2015.3464

AlMusharraf, N. M. (2018). Learner Autonomy and Vocabulary Development for Female Learners of English as a Foreign Language: Teachers' Perspectives. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 10(4), 56. doi:10.5296/ijl.v10i4.13402

Bandura, A. (2011). *On the Functional Properties of Perceived Self-Efficacy Revisited. Journal of Management, 38(1), 9–44.* doi:10.1177/0149206311410606

Benson, P. & Voller, P. 1997. *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning.* London: Longman.

Benson, P. (2003). Learner autonomy in the classroom. In D. Nunan (Ed.), *Practical English language teaching* (pp. 289-308). New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Benson, P. (2007). Autonomy in language teaching and learning. *Language Teaching*, 40(1), 21–40. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444806003958

Borg, S, & S. Al-Busaidi. (2012). Teachers' beliefs and practices regarding learner autonomy. *ELT Journal 66*. 3, 283 – 292.

Dang, T., Le, V., & Ha, T. (2021). Factors Affecting Motivation of English-Majored Students Towards Learning English at A University in The Mekong Delta, Vietnam. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(6). doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v6i6.3952

Dőrnyei, Z. (2003). *Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration, and processing*. Routledge.

Edwards, J. (1991). *Evaluation in adult and further education: A practical handbook for teachers and organisers*. Workers' Educational Association.

Jiao, L. (2005). *Promoting EFL learner autonomy*. Sino-US English Teaching, 17, 27-30.

Hill, B. (1994). Self-Managed Learning: State of the art. *Language Teaching*, 27, 213-23. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444800000185

Le, A, T, N. (2018). Investigating EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Practices Regarding Learner Autonomy at Dong Thap University. *Journal Of Social Sciences and Humanities, 127(6B).* doi: https://doi.org/10.26459/hueuni-jssh.v127i6B.4531

Li, X. (2015). A study on college English teachers' role in developing learner autonomy. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies*, 5(2), 435–441. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0502.27

Meara, P., and Jones, G. (1990) Eurocentres Vocabulary Size Test, 10KA (Zurich: Eurocentres). *TESL Canadian Journal*, 3 (1), 69-79.

Nguyen, T., T., H and Khuat, T., T., N. (2003). Learning Vocabulary Through Games: The Effectiveness of Learning Vocabulary Through Games. *The Asian EFL Journal, 5 (4).*

Riley, P. (1997). The Guru and The Conjurer: Aspects of Counselling for Self-Access. In P. Benson, & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning* (pp. 114-131). New York: Longman.

Tuyen, L., & An, H. (2019). Learner Autonomy: Practices Used and Challenges Encountered by EFL Teachers In Fostering Learner Autonomy at Tertiary Level. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 35(4). doi:10.25073/2525-2445/vnufs.4402

Schmitt, N. (1998). *Tracking the Incremental Acquisition of Second Language Vocabulary: A Longitudinal Study., 48(2), 281–317.* doi:10.1111/1467-9922.00042

Voller, P. (1997). Does The Teacher Have a Role in Autonomous Language Learning? In P. Benso n, & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp. 98-113). London: Longman.

Wilkins, D. A. (1972). Linguistics And Language Teaching. London: Edward Arnold

Wiraningsih, P., & Santosa, M. H. (2020). EFL Teachers ' Challenges in Promoting Learner Autonomy In the 21st Century Learning. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language, 10 (2)*, 290-314. https://doi.org/10.23971/jefl.v10i2.1881

Xu, J. F. (2007). The theory and practice of university foreign language autonomous learning. *Beijing: China Social Sciences Publishing House*.

Yan, S. (2012). Teacher's Roles in Autonomous Learning. *Journal of Sociological Research*, 3(2), 557-562. https://doi.org/10.5296/jsr.v3i2.2860.

Appendix: Questionnaire

Section 1: Personal information

a. Your gender:
    A. Male
    B. Female

b. Your age: _____

c. Your highest Degree:
    A. Bachelor's Degree
    B. Master's Degree
    C. Other: _____

d. Years of experience in teaching English:
    A. Less than 3 years
    B. From 3 years to 5 years
    C. More than 5 years

e. Years of being an English teacher in high school:
    A. Less than 3 years
    B. From 3 years to 5 years
    C. More than 5 years

Section 2: Strategies in promoting learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning

Please answer the following statements by putting (√) in a box, according to the following scale: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), 5 (strongly agree)

	Statement	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1	Learner-centered classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.					
2	Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.					
3	Independent study in the library is an activity that develops learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.					
4	Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.					
5	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed.					
6	Learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together.					

7	Reading comprehension tasks can help promote learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.					
8	Listening to authentic audio can help promote learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.					
9	Interactive activities in class can help promote learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.					
10	Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy.					
11	To become autonomous, learners need to be trained in the ability to evaluate their own learning.					
12	Students need to be trained in strategies for learning vocabulary.					

Section 3: Challenges in promoting learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning
Please answer the following statements by putting (√) in a box, according to the following scale: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), 5 (strongly agree).

	Statement	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
13	Promoting autonomy is easier with beginning language learners than with more proficient learners, especially with vocabulary learning.					
14	Learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning can be enhanced by all proficiency of learners.					
15	Students' lack of ability to monitor their learning makes it hard for teachers to promote learner autonomy in vocabulary learning.					
16	The proficiency of a language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy in vocabulary learning.					
17	Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence.					
18	Students are not aware of the objectives of learning vocabulary which makes them fail in improving autonomy in vocabulary learning.					
19	Students who are not aware of the importance of vocabulary tend to fail in practicing autonomy in vocabulary learning.					
20	Inactive students do not succeed in enhancing autonomy in vocabulary learning effectively					
21	Teachers lack strategies to promote learners autonomy.					
22	Teachers do not have enough time to promote learners' autonomy in vocabulary learning.					
23	Teachers think that they are not responsible for enhancing learners' vocabulary.					
24	Learner autonomy in vocabulary learning cannot be promoted within a mixed-level classroom.					
25	Current assessment methods do not promote self-study of students' vocabulary.					
26	Current instructional time is not enough to carry out activities that stimulate LA in vocabulary learning					
27	Current materials are not interesting to students.					
28	Current studying programs make students overloaded.					