

## **TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE ON LEARNER AGENCY: A CASE STUDY IN INDONESIA HIGHER EDUCATION**

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#### ABSTRACT

Learner agency is a students' ability to make choices and act according to their choices through how to make a difference in their lives (Mercer, 2011). For this reason, teachers must understand and support learner agency so that students become independent learners. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' knowledge on characteristics of learner agency and classroom activities in promoting learner agency. This study was under paradigm of qualitative research and case study was employed as the research design. The participants in this study were English teachers at a university located in West Java province, Indonesia. Questionnaire and interview guideline were used as the research instruments to get the data about teachers' knowledge and classroom activities in promoting learner agency. The finding summarized that teachers comprehend about the characteristics of learner agency in the aspects supports students' collaboration, supports students' awareness, supports students' belief and attitude, and supports students' culture. However, there are some activities of characteristics of learner agency that are not carried out by teachers in the classroom. Regarding the findings of this research, the teachers have a role and responsibility in building learner agency. Therefore, there are classroom activities that can promote learner agency by building reading habits, introducing AI and other links to access international databases.

**Keywords:** *learner agency, teachers' knowledge, case study* 

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Based on government provisions in increasing the value of education for young people in Indonesia, the government set higher education standards in 2005 (Bumela, 2021). Today's education is increasingly experiencing many changes that are adapted to growing needs. This can be done by changing the teacher central into a student central. In this case, students are required to develop the ideas given by the teacher and explore them self-taught. This capability is known as learner agency.

Before knowing the meaning of learner agency, we should know the meaning pf agency. Benson (2011) stated that agency is a student's ability to their learning objectives. In line with Little & Erickson (2015) defines agency as the capacity to act and interact with a sociocultural environment. Then, Teng (2019) stated that agency is a construct like motivation and intelligence. Therefore, it can be said that the concept of agency is considered important in independent learners because students are actively involved in class consciously to manage the learning strategies they want.

Several experts have explained learner agency in various definitions. Mercer (2011) stated that learner agency is a student's ability to make choices and act according to their choices through how to make a difference in their lives. In line with Liu & Chao (2017) stated learner agency refers to an individual's capacity to take control, perceive and act on a given ability, often involving a community of practice. Then, Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao, & Mercer (2021) stated that learner agency refers to the feeling of ownership and sense of control that learners have over their learning. In other words, students who have learner agency are believed to be able to control their learning independence. Starting from manage their learning needs, choosing and acting according to the



desired learning strategy choices. However, learner agency cannot completely arise by themselves for each student. Back again that the role of the teacher is one of the factors that trigger students to develop their learners. The teacher plays a role in triggering or directing students to have a desire in learning. However, a change still has an effect on oneself, but it does not rule out that there are outside influences that help attract these changes. Therefore, the influence of the teacher's ability can also attract students to improve their learning abilities. To meet these demands, higher education must support the development of learner agency by knowing how learner agency emerges in higher education and what challenges students and teachers experience.

In Indonesian higher education, especially in the English language education department, teachers are encouraged to develop learner agency in learning English skills. The goal is to become independent learners without being completely dependent on the teacher. Although human agency theory has existed since the 1980s, research examining learner agency in English as foreign learning is still in the development stage (Maretha & Waluyo, 2022). Therefore, this study aims to determine teachers' knowledge about learner agency when teaching English skills, especially in teaching reading, writing and speaking, as well as to find out classroom activities teachers carry out in promoting learner agency in the classroom. In the process of student learning activities, there are characteristics of learner agency based on Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao, & Mercer (2021) which include: learner agency supports students' collaboration, learner agency supports students' awareness, learner agency supports students' and culture.

There are several ways to support learner agency based on Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao, & Mercer (2021) theory. First, the teachers must be able to manage the class and collaborate with the students during English learning process. It is because each students have their characteristics and something unique in themselves, especially in learning English in the class. Second, the teachers must support their students in learning English, so that students are confident in their potential or their abilities. Third, the teachers ask some feedback from their students after meeting or learning English, such as asking for suggestions or massages and impressions during English learning and making adjustments to their practices and curriculum which can lead to better learning changes. Fourth, teachers can use the first language to develop their writing in the second language. This way can make it easier for students to understand the importance of learning English without being limited by their knowledge of English. Fifth, create a learning community that can building learner agency. Considering that learner agency is not an identity owned by students, this method can be used to achieve learning goals together. Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao, & Mercer (2021) stated that agency comes from sociocultural interactions. Therefore, the community was created with the aim that students understand learning and this allows teachers to see their students grow in a confident attitude towards their abilities and become lifelong learners. Sixth, use technology for learning, such as laptops, computers, gadgets, the internet, and others. Students who can use mobile technology will search and find materials, information, and answers from trusted sources via the internet. Therefore, students will be motivated to participate in learning English in class by utilizing learning resources as an opportunity to develop learner agency and they can maximize their potential. Thus, they can develop the capacity to grow, adapt and develop. Last, Manyukhina & Wyse (2019) explain that to support learner agency, teachers should provide opportunities for students and choices in their learning interests, creating meaningful learning experiences that can help meet their learning needs.

Other ways to support learner agency, for example, this research discuss English classroom activities in writing skill and speaking skill. Zyphur (2020) stated that speaking and writing have the potential to change our reality with its effect on listeners or readers. In line, Scanlon & Connoly (2021) stated that learner agency is a student's core ability to develop speaking and reading skills, as well as students' ability to understand student identity in learning. Learner agency in English learning



is known to be closely related to individual experiences in learning, and their future plants and is located in a particular sociocultural context (Yang, Li, Zhou, & Li, 2020). Therefore, learner agency can be useful for the student learning process in the future. Liu & Chao (2017) also stated that collaboration plays an important role to develop agency. For example, collaboration with use of mobile technology or the internet which is useful for searching websites, links, and other databases to find student reading information. For example, collaboration with use of mobile technology or the internet which is useful for searching websites, links, and other databases to find student reading information. In addition, teachers can take advantage of technology that is currently widely used, namely artificial intelligence technology (AI). By utilizing existing material resources, students who are aware of their learning needs will be motivated to seek information and operate the information sources provided by the teacher. Other examples are the teacher provide material in the form of text for students to read independently. This activity is expected to change students' reading habits and support students' learner agency. Student reading activities are not only for reading course activities but reading activities are also carried out for writing courses and speaking courses. Writing courses are considered a difficult problem for second language learners (Fath & Sahayu, 2022). It is because in, writing, many aspects need attention. Fath & Sahayu (2022) cited in Harmer (2001 & 2007) explain things that should attention in writing, such as lexical, accentuation, arrangement of content, spelling, and sentence structure in writing. Not only writing courses but speaking courses are also things that are still considered difficult for students. Speech is generated by selecting content (conceptualization) and encoding it by applying the selected vocabulary and grammatical structures, and generating ideas audible (articulation) (Håkanson & Bøhn, 2023). Therefore, other learning media are needed to support students writing and speaking processes, such as utilizing AI to support students' writing processes and to support students to become good speakers. Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao, & Mercer (2021) stated that learner agency will materialize and emerge from the interaction of factors at a certain place and time. That way, the student's learner agency will grow over time.

Learner agency has characteristics that can categorize whether students have Learner agency abilities or not. Jing & Benson (2013) explained agency is characterized by connecting agency through action and eliciting human thinking capacities. In line with Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao, & Mercer (2021) stated that agency is not only from oneself (individual) but also comes from social relationships between individuals and others. In order words, agency can be characterized by individual processes in learning that are formed and developed through mutual relationships with other people. Blair (2009) cited in Van Lier (2008), suggests that there are 3 characteristics of learner agency, such as: 1) learner agency involves self-regulation and learner initiative, 2) learner agency interacts with the sociocultural context, and 3) learner agency includes self-awareness of responsibility. In line Liao (2019) proposed there are 3 (three) core characteristics of LA in student learning, namely: 1) learner agency involves students' initiative abilities or student self-control in their learning; 2) learner agency is the ability of students which includes students' understanding of their obligations in learning; and 3) a stronger and leaner learner agency will play an active role in learning and depend on each other in taking action to achieve certain goals. Then, Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao, & Mercer (2021) explain there are five characteristics of learner agency, such as: 1) learner agency supports students' collaboration, 2) learner agency supports students' awareness, 3) learner agency supports students' motivation, 4) learner agency supports students' belief and attitude, and 5) learner agency supports students' culture.

In the learning process to promote learner agency, there are challenges that students may face in the class. Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao, & Mercer (2021) explained the challenges that may occur, such as teachers' lack confidence in their ability to implement an innovation to students, students may not be sure what they are asked to do, and conditions in the school do not support change. These



challenges can be met with a strong commitment to promote learner and other support to implement it. Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao, & Mercer (2021) stated that teachers must be able to find solutions to the challenges faced by teachers in the learning process.

Previously, the study conducted by Chaaban, Qadhi, & Du (2021) investigated student teachers' learner agency in a teamwork setting at Qatar University. The title of the research is "Student Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Influencing Learner Agency Working in Teams in a STEAM-Based Course". The findings have important educational implications for promoting student teachers' agency in similar educational contexts. The next previous study was written by Fath & Sahayu (2022) in Indonesia. The title of this research is "Promoting Learner Agency and Reflective Thinking by Eliminating Direct Corrective Feedback in Writing". This study aimed to promote learners' agency by eliminating the corrective feedback in writing class and encouraging learners' reflective thinking. The findings also supported that language produced by the learners is complex, dynamic, and more individual.

From the explanation above, the researchers took data from the teachers at universities in Indonesia who teach in the English language education department. The researchers investigate teachers' knowledge of characteristics of learner agency and classroom activities in promoting learner agency in English class. The results of this research are expected to provide readers with a better understanding of the importance of promoting learner agency in learning English. (1819 words)

#### **METHOD**

This research is under the paradigm of qualitative research and case study was used as the research design. The purpose of this research is to portray teachers' knowledge about characteristics of learner agency and classroom activities that can promote learner agency in Indonesia higher education. Case studies in this research also aim to understand teachers' knowledge about characteristics of learner agency and classroom activities that can promote learner agency. According to Yin (2018), case studies are conducted by researchers to focus on situations in depth by understanding the perspective of a person and the environment being studied.

This research was conducted in one of universities located in West Java province, Indonesia. Two teachers were invited as participants in this research and the categories to choose the participants can be seen based on the following points as follows: (1) the research participants teach in the English language education department, (2) the research participants teach in the reading skill, speaking skill and wiriting skill, (3) the research participants voluntarily invited to the research, and (4) the research participants have at least 8 years teaching experience.

Questionnaires and interviews were used as the research instruments to get the data. These questionnaires use close-ended questions consisting of 22 questions by Google Form to get the data about teachers' knowledge on characteristics of learner agency. These questionnaires were adopted from Larsen-Freeman, et al. (2021). There are five themes in this research, as follows: 1) learner agency supports students' collaboration, 2) learner agency supports students' awareness, 3) learner agency supports students' motivation, 4) learner agency supports students' belief and attitudes, and 5) learner agency supports students' cultures. The interview guide was used to get the information about classroom activities that can promote learner agency. Interviews were conducted using question and answer face to face between the interviewer and the participants according to the agreement between the interview process. The list of interviews adopted by Teng (2019) and Interviews were also conducted within two days, first on June, 20<sup>th</sup> 2023 and second on July, 5<sup>th</sup> 2023. Data analysis in this research uses the steps proposed by Creswell (2012), including: (1) collecting data, (2) preparing data for data analysis, (3) reading data, (4) coding data, and (5) coding text.



# FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section focuses on two main findings related to the research question. These findings are aimed at two people who are teachers in Indonesia higher education. The first part explains the results of teachers' knowledge on learner agency, and the second part explains the results of classroom activities that can promote learner agency. The results of the research show that there are differences of opinion between participant 1 (P1) and participant 2 (P2). This can be seen from the table of several activities that are characteristics of learner agencies and explained by the results of interviews from both participants. Last, there are various opinions regarding the classroom activities carried out by the two participants that can promote learner agency.

## 1. Teachers' Knowledge on Learner Agency

Based on Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao, & Mercer (2021) theory, there are 5 characteristics of learner agency, such as: 1) learner agency supports students' collaboration, 2) learner agency supports students' awareness, 3) learner agency supports students' motivation, 4) learner agency supports students' belief and attitude, and 5) learner agency supports students' culture. Below is explained how teachers understand learner agency through the characteristics of learner agency. The results of statements regarding the characteristics of learner agencies were obtained using a questionnaire. Then, supported by interview results regarding teachers' knowledge about the concept of learner agency.

## Learner Agency Supports Students' Collaboration

In the learning English process, teachers must be able to collaborate with students. It aims to create an active classroom atmosphere and to build good interaction between teachers and students. The following table 4.1 shows the results of the questionnaire learner agency supports students' collaboration.

	Questions	P1		P2	
No		Ye s	No	Ye s	No
1	I see myself as a partner with my students in the teaching- learning ecology.	V		$\checkmark$	
2	I teach my students to adapt the language they use to the situation in which they are communicating	V		$\checkmark$	
3	I have a somewhat flexible approach to managing lessons.			$\checkmark$	
4	I make use of technology (where it is available) to enable students to generate their own content and direct their learning.	$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$	
5	I teach what students show me that they have not yet learned and are interested in learning.		$\checkmark$		

Table 4. 1 Learner agency supports students' collaboration

Based on the questionnaires above, it is known that P1 dan P2 comprehend the knowledge of learner agency in the aspects of supporting students' collaboration. Only one excerpt did not have experience what the students had not learned and was interested in learning. It is in accordance with Larsen-Freeman, et al. (2021) theory, who stated that the teachers must be able to manage classes and



collaborate with students in different ways. Then, P1 and P2 being a good partner in learning with the students, teaching the students to use mixed language (L1 and L2) when communicating in the class, using technology when learning the English language.

# Learner Agency Supports Students' Awareness

After collaborating with the students, the teachers and students are both aware of their needs in learning and teaching English classes. Teachers are expected to understand the situation in the classroom when learning, including what students feel when learning English. The following table 4.2 shows the results of the questionnaire learner agency supports students' awareness.

No		P1		P2	
	Questions	Ye s	No	Ye s	No
6	I am conscious of who participates in the class, who does not, and why.	$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$	
7	I see it as part of my role to prepare my students for challenges and opportunities in life beyond the classroom.	$\checkmark$			
8	I make use of feedback, including learner-driven feedback, as appropriate.		$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	
9	Students reflect on what they have learned, what has gone well, what they have found difficult, and how they can move their learning forward.		$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	
10	Students' curiosity is encouraged.		$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	

Table 4. 2 Learner agency supports students' awareness

Based on the questionnaires above, it is known that P1 did not has experience learner agency in the aspects supports students' awareness. P1 only do some of activities that can promote learner agency, such as conscious of who participates in the class, who does not, and why; and see it as part of my role to prepare my students for challenges and opportunities in life beyond the classroom. Meanwhile, P2 do all the activities it can students' awareness in learning based on the statement in table 4.2 above. It is supported by Larsen-freeman, et al. (2021) theory, each student has different characteristics, the atmosphere in the class is lively and not monotonous. So, this needs to be done by teachers when teaching English in class.

## Learner Agency Supports Students' Motivation

After the teachers realize that something they needed to learn, the teachers finally motivated to be active when teaching English in class. So, students are encouraged to be active in learning English in class. The following table 4.3 shows the results of the questionnaire learner agency supports students' motivation.

			P1		2
No	Questions	Ye	No	Ye	No
		S		S	



11	I seek to cultivate an attitude of inquiry among my	2	2		
	students.	N	N		
					-

Table 4. 3 Learner agency supports students' motivation

Based on the questionnaires above, it is known that P1 dan P2 comprehend the knowledge of learner agency in the aspects of supporting students' motivation. in line with Teng (2019) stated agency is a construct like motivation and intelligence. This is done by doing activities seek to cultivate an attitude of inquiry among my students.

## Learner Agency Supports Students' Belief and Attitude

Students and teachers have beliefs and attitudes in learning. This is intended to obtain a positive learning experience. The following table 4.4 shows the results of the questionnaire from learner agency supports students' belief and attitude.

No	Questions	P	P1		2
	Questions	Yes No	No	Yes	No
12	Students believe that they can be successful.			$\checkmark$	
13	Students feel that it is safe to make mistakes.			$\checkmark$	
14	Students feel that their opinions are welcome.				
15	I am comfortable with not being certain about the outcome of an activity.				
16	I provide opportunities for my students to self-assess.				
17	I am open to learning with and from my students.			$\checkmark$	
18	My students and I have a mutually respectful relationship.	$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$	

 Table 4. 4 Learner agency supports students' belief and attitude

Based on the questionnaires above, it is known that P1 dan P2 carry out activities that can promote learner agency in supporting students' belief and attitudes. It supports by Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao, & Mercer (2021) theory who explained that teachers must support students in learning so that students are confident in their potential, especially in English learning. Only one participant did not experience students believe that they can be successful, provide opportunities for my students to self-assess, and open to learning with and from my students.

## Learner Agency Supports Students' Culture

Every student has characteristics and habits that are brought from their environment into learning activities, especially in English learning. To find out (whether or not) the learner agency supports students' culture, the researcher submitted questionnaires with four statements. The following table 4.5 shows the results of the questionnaire from learner agency supports students' culture.

	No Questions	P1		P2	
No		Ye	No	Ye	No
		S	110	S	110



19	Students choose topics, texts, and activities that match their interests.	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	
20	Students set personal goals and learn how to work towards meeting them.			
21	Students work with me to design certain aspects of their course.	$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$
22	Students bring items of interest from their lives outside school and share them in the classroom.			

Table 4. 5 Learner agency supports students' culture

Based on the questionnaires above, it is known that P1 does not carry out all activities that can promote learner agency in the aspects of supporting students' culture. Meanwhile, P2 conducts activities that can promote learner agency in the aspects of supporting students' culture. It is supported by Little & Erickson (2015) who define agency as the capacity to act and interact with the sociocultural environment. There is only one activity that P2 does not do in promoting learner agency in the aspects of supporting students' culture.

After knowing the results of the characteristics of learner agency by questionnaires, there was further explanation from the two participants regarding teachers' knowledge on learner agency. It is known that P1 comprehend on learner agency, whereas P2 only comprehend on independent learner. The following are quotes from both participants:

#### Excerpt 1:

"I know the concept of learner agency, but I have only known this concept for the last 2-3 years by attended several webinars, including a webinar from several world experts including a webinar from Oxford University which talked about how the important of learner agency, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic when online learning is very dependent on the independence of its students." (P1, Interview guide on June, 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023)

#### Excerpt 2:

"I don't understand what the concept of learner agency is like, but I understand what an independent learner is. Independent learning, especially nowadays, should be able to be done by everyone, especially by the students. The students have access to the internet and everyone can access the internet and the resources are numerous. I am sure that actually students can outperform lecturers if they use technology well." (P2, Interview guide on July, 5<sup>th</sup> 2023)

Based on the interview findings described above, there are differences between the two excerpts. P1 comprehend the concept of learner agency by looking at phenomena that occur when teaching English in class. Then, P1 began to explore the concept in various ways. Meanwhile, P2 did not comprehend what the concept of learner agency was like. Meanwhile, P2 comprehend the meaning of independent learning carried out by their students by utilizing the available facilities as learning media.

## 2. Classroom Activities that can Promote Learner Agency

Zyphur (2020) stated that speaking and writing have the potential to change our reality with its effect on listeners or readers. In line with Scanlon & Connolly (2021) stated that learner agency is a student's ability to understand student identity in learning. In the English learning process, there are several ways that can be done to build learner agency, and in this point, answers are found from classroom activities that can promote learner agency. The findings were obtained from the results of interviews between two Indonesian higher education teachers. There are differences of opinion between P1 and



P2 regarding classroom activities that can promote learner agency. The following is a quote for further explanation:

## Excerpt 1:

"Learner agency actually wants to make students not completely dependent on the teacher, or do not relay on me as a teacher. So, I want they can make their self-learn. Then, I introduce AI technology to students, world databases, and some links they might be able to visit. Such as: how to build their literature, how do they find good references and how do they visit websites or digital libraries" (P1, Interview guide on June, 20<sup>th</sup> 2023)

## Excerpt 2:

"I provide reading material first and examples based on the material to be discussed next meeting. For example, next week we will discuss about curriculum. Then, I will provide the reading material and send it on the WhatsApp group and be asked questions that offend or get answers from the reading material. Then, usually provided links related to the material." (P2, Interview guide on July, 5<sup>th</sup> 2023)

Then, P1 and P2 explained another classroom activity carried out to promote learner agency. There are differences of opinion between P1 and P2 as explained in the quote below.

## Excerpt 1

"I accustom students to having a reading habit. I provide reading materials for students to read independently at home. Then carry out a joint evaluation of these activities results. Students are expected to be able to navigate well by introducing AI to students. For example, in writing project courses, they make project paper-based articles" (P1, Interview guide on June, 20<sup>th</sup> 2023)

## Excerpt 2

"In speaking courses, I provide examples of several links related to how to give good speaking. It is same when I teaching writing courses, I provide examples of texts, sources of articles that they can read. So that later there will be a question-and-answer (QnA) process and an evaluation of the reading that has been red" (P2, Interview guide on July, 5<sup>th</sup> 2023)

The results of the interviews showed that it was known that both participants had quite a long experience of teaching English. Thus, both participants have their own ways of promoting learner agency in the classroom. Among them are providing English reading texts as material that will be discussed in class, as well as building students' reading habits so that students like reading. Apart from that, the two participants did not forget to take advantage of currently developing technology, such as AI, or applications and links that can help students' learning process in class. For example, in writing class, they use Grammarly. Then in speaking class, they use YouTube. Finally, they use AI to explore data regarding English learning. For this reason, students can operate the source of the material and become independent learners.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research objectives, namely to find out teachers' knowledge about the characteristics of learner agency and to find out classroom activities to promoting learner agency, the researcher drew conclusions from the analysis of research findings obtained from questionnaires and interviews as instruments of data collection.

The researcher found that teachers comprehend learner agency by doing some activities there are the characteristics of learner agency in the aspects supporting students' collaboration, students' awareness, students' motivation, students' belief and attitude, and students' culture. Some teachers do not comprehend about learner agency, but they comprehend on independent learner. In fact, learner agency is the root of all independentlearners (Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao, & Mercer, 2021). There are many ways that can be done to support student learner agency. For example, building reading habits, introducing AI and other links to access international databases.



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