

Activating Learner's Autonomy with Supportive Instructional Practice in Distance Learning during Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract

The development of distance learning in Indonesia started during the Covid-19 era and continues to the post-pandemic era. Schools and Universities in Indonesia began to develop distance learning programs to cover the need for students to study from their region as an effect of distance learning in the pandemic era to the regular offline classes. Distance learning requires students and teachers to cope autonomously with all learning materials. The role of teachers in helping students deal with the lesson is crucial. Thus, this study explores how teachers' experience applying the supportive instructional practice in distance learning supports learners' autonomy in the EFL context. Two English lecturers who teach English in a distance learning program were selected to share their experiences through the narrative inquiry method. This study shares how lecturers use supportive instructional practice in distance learning activities to support and activate students' autonomy. Besides, lecturers' past, current, and future experience in teaching English is essential to activate learners' autonomy with supportive instructional practice. Educational practitioners must be aware that learning materials in distance learning might differ from in-class materials.

Keywords: autonomous learning; distance learning; supportive instructional practice

INTRODUCTION

The school and university closure that occurred in March 2020 made learning and teaching change. The transformation of learning from face-to-face to online learning by distance is an unprepared condition for teachers, students, and several related parties. This unprepared condition is also experienced in English teaching and learning. This online learning model requires students to control their learning due to the need for teacher supervision and interaction with others (Chik & Benson, 2020).

School closures have ended since the end of 2022, and schools have turned back to in-class learning. However, online learning conducted during the pandemic provides the impact of learning loss experienced by students. Hasan & Bao (2020) shows that the perception of "e-Learning crack-up" has a considerable favorable impact on students' psychological

distress, and fear of academic year loss is the main factor responsible for psychological distress during the COVID-19 lockdown. Therefore, whether learning is conducted in or outside the classroom, the capacity to control one's learning is needed. Benson (2013) calls the capacity to control one's learning called autonomy. Several studies regarding autonomy, both during the pandemic and post-pandemic era, have been conducted.

Autonomy is a fundamental goal in education. As Little (1996) has said, the claim that "all genuinely successful learning is, in the end, autonomous, is further explained by Benson (2013), that developing autonomy for learners make learners responsible and critical members of the community, not only better language learners. Therefore, research on activating autonomy is essential to do considering that education does not only aim to make students good at learning but also to become part of a responsible and critical community with the control capacity they have.

Numerous studies have been conducted on EFL learner autonomy during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak era. Susanti et al. (2023) and Basri (2023), using a case study research design in the university context, tried to determine factors that influence promoting learner autonomy, and the researcher found that the capacity of EFL student teachers during online learning was moderate. Teachers' instructions are crucial factors and learner autonomy still requires thought to foster learner autonomy. In contrast, the mismatch of teachers' and students' background, their expectations, and the size of the classroom hinders the promotion of learner autonomy. Using qualitative research design, Mustofa & Wirza (2023) and Shih & Chia (2020) tried to investigate using EFL textbooks and learning logs to develop learner autonomy. They found that the use of collaborative learning logs has a positive influence on the development of autonomy, while the use of textbooks does not optimally facilitate the development of autonomy. Most of the research on autonomy was focused on the factors and the tools that possibly develop learner autonomy. The essential aspect of promoting learner autonomy is the teacher.

In promoting learner autonomy, the role of the teacher is crucial. As stated by Ozer & Yukselir (2021), teachers in the twenty-first century are expected to be 'lifelong learners' to guide their students' engagement in self-directed learning and autonomous thinking. The teacher does not teach autonomy, but teacher learning practices that reflect the characteristics of autonomy can promote learner autonomy. Therefore, teachers' teaching practices promoting autonomy are essential in developing learner autonomy. Therefore, this research focuses on exploring teachers' experiences in teaching and learning autonomy reflected in teachers' teaching strategies in the EFL classroom context. Since this research focuses on the teacher's teaching and learning experiences, this research employed narrative inquiry as the research design. As Barkhuizen et al. (2014) stated, Narrative inquiry assists the researcher in understanding how teachers use their experiences and identities to represent themselves and others, and narrative inquiry assists the researcher in acquiring another perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of autonomy has evolved. Holec (1980) emphasizes the behavioral aspect in defining autonomy. Little (1991) emphasizes the psychological aspect of the

autonomy concept. Therefore, Benson (2013) proposes a definition of autonomy that covers all aspects. Benson (2013) defines autonomy as controlling one's learning. The definition of autonomy may take too long to cover all essential aspects of learning for practical use. Nevertheless, Benson (2013) argues that the definition of autonomy at least covers the three dimensions. The three dimensions of control represent the essential key to defined autonomy and are interdependent.

Control Over a Learning Management

This dimension of control is related to learning behaviors. Benson (2013) explained that control over learning management is the behavior related to planning, organizing, and evaluating learning. Learning management itself is observable behavior. However, the description could be more problematic since it describes what autonomous learners need to be able to do. Whereas the dimension of control over learning management should be described as the mental capacities that underlie the abilities in learning management, for instance, planning their language learning, selecting resources, and allocating time. Although learning management is briefly about behaviors (planning language learning, selecting resources, and allocating time), it emphasizes the 'control' itself. Thus, control over learning management can be described as the capabilities that allow the learner to complete those behaviors successfully (Benson, 2013). Since control over learning management is described as the behavior in learning, it must be associated with the strategies used in learning. Benson (2013) argues that autonomy can be described as the capacity to apply strategies precisely associated with the control of learning.

Control Over the Cognitive Process

This control dimension differs from the other dimensions since it does not correspond directly to observable behaviors. Control over learning management is the mental capacity that underlies behaviors, while control over cognitive processing is purely cognitive. Control over cognitive process-controlled learning management and content (Benson, 2013). Although control over cognitive processing is not underlain in learning management and content, there is still a connection between them.

Control Over Content

This dimension of control is not less important than the two other dimensions since they are interdependent. Benson (2013) argued that when learners self-manage their learning but do not learn what they want, it cannot be called authentic self-directed. The content that learners should learn has been set in the syllabus and curriculum. Thus, this realm is the constraint in control over the content. Littlewood (1999) proposes proactive and reactive autonomy to distinguish the complete and incomplete dimensions of control over learning. In contrast, Ribé's theory (2003) of convergence and divergence explains whether learners learn the same content or learn the content based on their uniqueness.

Reeve & Cheon (2021) stated that the concept of autonomy-supportive teaching is underlined by the SDT (self-determination theory) proposed by Ryan and Deci in 2017. SDT emphasizes the psychological need for personal ownership over one's behavior. When the

learners have control over their behavior and endorsement from the environment, they experience the need for 'satisfaction' in the pleasurable subjective feelings (Lee & Reeve, 2017). This feeling is essential to engage students in their classroom and gain psychological well-being.

The importance of need satisfaction encourages SDT researchers to seek contextual settings that establish the psychological experience of having one's autonomy supported. There is a definition of autonomy support. However, the definitions emphasize the behavioral aspect and need to explain the aspect that influences that behavior. Therefore, Reeve & Cheon (2021) try to figure out a more comprehensive definition. They define autonomy-supportive teaching as 'the adoption of a student-focused attitude and understanding interpersonal tone that enables the skillful enactment of seven autonomy-satisfying instructional behaviors to serve two purposes-support intrinsic motivation and internalization. Therefore, in the autonomy-supportive teaching concept, student focus and understanding tone are more critical. As Reeve & Cheon (2021) explained that a student focus and an understanding tone, when combined, allow the teacher to take the students' perspective during instruction, which is the beginning point for autonomy-supportive teaching.

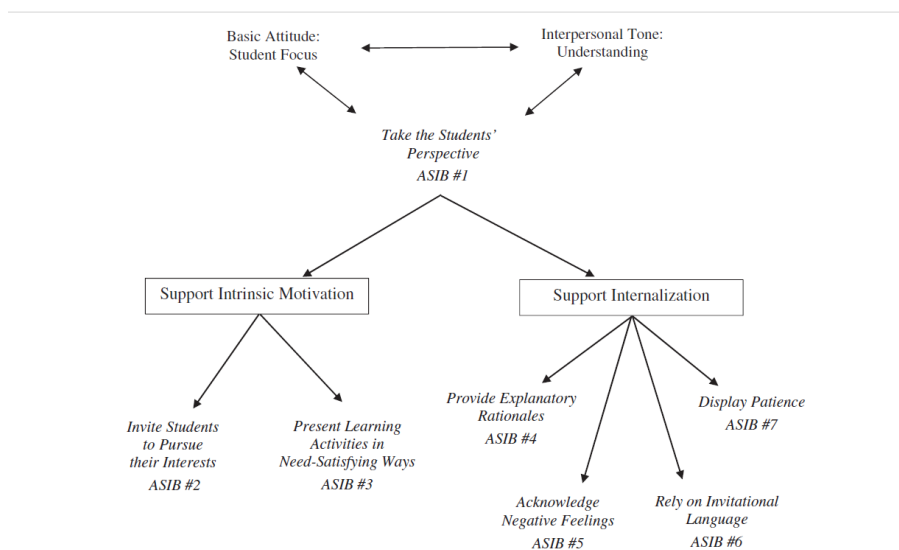


Figure 1: Seven autonomy-supportive instructional behavior (ASIB) (Reeve & Cheon, 2021)

As illustrated in Figure 1, the first Autonomy-supportive instructional behavior is to take the students' perspective that originated from the student's focus attitude and understanding of interpersonal tone. In this theory, the student's perspective means the teachers must be able to imagine if they were a student and neglect the teacher's wants and goals. It is aligned with the student's focus theory. When the teachers can take students' perspectives, they will be able to support intrinsic motivation and support internalization. Ryan & Deci (2000) defined intrinsic motivation as doing an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence. Therefore, in the classroom context, students' intrinsic motivation is their interest and excitement in doing learning activities. Ryan & Deci (2017) state that intrinsic motivation is the urge to seek novelty and

challenges, explore unfamiliar environments, participate in activities and new experiences, and stretch and extend one's abilities. For students to conduct activities based on intrinsic motivation, they need learner autonomy.

There are two ways to support intrinsic motivation (Reeve & Cheon, 2021), i.e., to invite students to pursue their personal interests and present learning activities in need-satisfying ways. The first way to support students' intrinsic motivation is by inviting them to pursue their interests, which is considered the second ASIB. Pursuing students' interests means the teacher needs to provide exciting learning and teaching activities and encourage students to find interesting things and explore them. While presenting learning activities in need-satisfying ways, the teachers allow the student to choose the activities they will participate in.

The second behavior when the teachers can take the student's perspective that enables the teacher to support the student's autonomy is internalization. The internalization process transfers the values that the teacher believes to the students. As Ryan & Deci (2000) said, internalization is the process of absorbing values, beliefs, and behavioral norms from societal sources (for example, instructors) and transforming them into one's own. Internalizing one's values and beliefs to others is challenging. As has been said by Vasconcellos et al. (2020) that the process of internalizing the values and beliefs that teachers have for students is considered difficult because all this time, teachers ask students to do activities that students consider uninteresting and not worth the effort they spend and these triggers negative feelings in students. Therefore, the internalization process is challenging to carry out. Reeve & Cheon (2021) proposed four ways for teachers to help students go through the internalization process, also included in ASIB.

The first way that teachers can help students through the internalization process is to provide an explanatory rationale. This method is the fourth of ASIB in which, in this process, the teacher provides knowledge about the importance and benefits of learning, especially language learning. The following way that teachers can do this is to acknowledge negative feelings, which is also ASIB five. In this way, teachers must be able to recognize students' negative feelings. Thereby teachers and students can collaborate in selecting activities that are appropriate for teachers and interesting for students. Therefore, teachers can adjust the activities that they will conduct. The following way that teachers can do to help students go through the internalization process is to rely on invitational language, which is also the sixth ASIB. Relying on invitational language means that teachers must be more able to use persuasive language. When teachers feel overwhelmed in dealing with situations that are out of control, teachers usually use teacher-prescribed language, e.g., Instead of using language that seems to dominate, teachers should use inviting language. The last way is showing patience, which is ASIB 7. Knowing the diversity in both ability and speed in learning encourages teachers not to homogenize the abilities of each student. Many things make teachers unable to be patient. However, Reeves and Cheon (2021) stated that the motivation to be patient stems from a deep respect for the student's autonomy and an understanding that meaningful gains in cognitive engagement (e.g., elaborating, paraphrasing, elaborating, paraphrasing, critical thinking), conceptual learning (e.g., conceptual change, cognitive

accommodation, deep information processing), and behavior change all take time and need multiple iterations and revisions.

METHOD

Research Design

This study investigates teachers' experiences as learners and teachers toward autonomy, reflecting on teachers' autonomy-supportive practices. Due to the research focus on teachers' experiences, this research employed narrative inquiry as the research design. Barkhuizen et al. (2014) stated that in an area where it is crucial to understand phenomena from the perspective of individuals who experience them, narrative inquiry focuses on how people use stories to make meaning from their experiences. Narrative inquiry makes meaning to the stories the teachers tell to understand the phenomenon in the teaching and learning language. Therefore, Narrative inquiry is the appropriate research design for this study.

Research Context and Participants

This research was conducted in the university context in Indonesia. Two lecturers participated in this research. The lecturers teach general English lessons in a distance learning program at the university. The participants were selected purposively based on the predetermined criteria to be research participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Narrative inquiry is about uniqueness (Barkhuizen et al., 2014); therefore, the participants were selected based on their unique experiences and practices in learning and teaching English. Through this criterion in selecting participants, they are expected to provide detailed information regarding their experiences with autonomy in learning and teaching the English language. The participant was purposely selected due to their numerous experiences in teaching and learning English. The participants have taught in formal and informal institutions, from EFL young learners to university students. The teachers also have numerous attractive strategies in teaching practices and create a good teaching atmosphere where all the students are engaged in the activities.

Data Collection Techniques

This research employed a multimodal narrative. A narrative can be constructed through various modes (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Since this research is multimodal, the data were in photograph, transcript, and video form, called artifacts. In this research, the multimodal text was considered a tool to describe the data. As in the previous narrative inquiry study, photographs (Nikula & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2008) and drawings (Kalaja & Ferreira, 2008) were used to stimulate the interview. In comparison, the participants can use the artifact to represent the learning and teaching process and experiences.

The researcher employed three data collection techniques. A semi-structured interview was conducted to elicit teachers' experiences in the story form since this research uses narrative as the data. The semi-structured interview was conducted to stimulate the teacher's exploration in answering the question. The questions of the interview are based on

Reeve & Cheon's (2021) theory about autonomy-supportive instructional behavior. The other data collection method was document analysis since this multimodal narrative research elicited the data in verbal, written, photograph, and video form.

Data Analysis

The researcher employed the data analysis technique Miles, Miles et al. (2014) proposed. After the researcher collected the data, the researcher condensed the data, which means the researcher summarized, specified, and eliminate unimportant data. This step was called data condensation. The next step was data display, in which the researcher used the matrix to display the condensed data. After the data were displayed, the researcher concluded and verified the data.

FINDINGS

Teaching Strategies in Distance Learning Context

In activating learners' autonomy, teachers must determine their teaching strategies to support their students. In this study, two English lecturers shared their teaching strategies that reflected the supportive instructional behavior in the distance learning context of the EFL classroom. The first participant (P1) has been teaching general English lessons in a distance learning program for a year, but she has taught English for 14 years in eight different institutions. P1 used the university's online learning management system to manage her teaching and learning activities. The LMS allows her to upload learning materials, quizzes, comments, and grades. P1 also used WhatsApp groups to deliver information regarding the meeting to students. In designing learning materials, P1 collected learning sources like videos, audio, pdf files, and power points as supporting materials for her students.

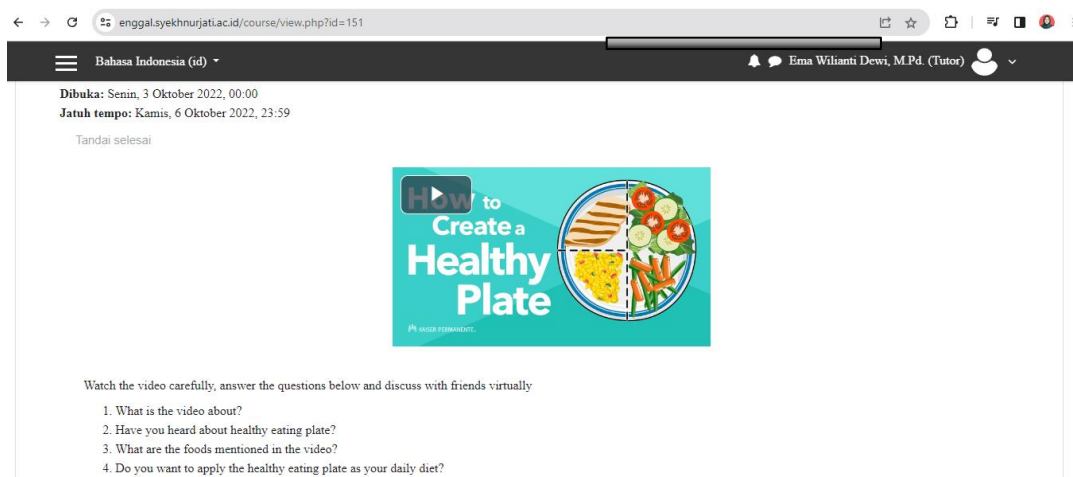


Figure 2. Learning Management System of P1

In Figure 2, the LMS of P1 showed multimodal learning material; there is a video and upcoming questions for students to deliberate. P1 said that she employs student-centered learning strategies where the goal is to make students communicate in English. One of the characteristics of this strategy is students' engagement. P1 got students' engagement term from her first teaching experience beginning her teaching carrier. Besides, she began engaging her students in learning activities inspired by her English teacher when she was in high school. She called her teacher as her role model. P1's teacher introduced various teaching strategies, such as lecturing, team presentation, and peer tutoring.

P1 modified her student-centered teaching strategies in her distance learning class since two-way communication differs from face-to-face communication in offline classes. The first participant utilized several websites and apps to support her online teachings, such as Quizizz, word search maker, bamboozle, jeopardy labs, and isl collective. P1 stated that these websites and apps could stimulate her students to engage actively in online learning. Although P1 provided some learning materials, those materials acted as supportive instruction for her teacher.

The second participant (P2) shares different experiences in her online teaching activity. P2 has taught online classes for almost three years after COVID-19 attacked Indonesia. She sifted her traditional offline classes into online classes because of her institution's regulation and government regulation that does not allow in-class activity. P2 has experienced three different LMS in her online teaching in three years. The learning strategy that P2 employed in her class is the same as P1: student-centered learning strategies. P2 used this strategy from the beginning of her teaching carrier in 2016. P2 felt that involving students in learning activities is vital due to their willingness to study. She learned about this strategy in college through Teaching Method lessons since she was an ELT department student at a university. With a student-centered learning strategy, P2 believed that learners could achieve autonomy, supportive instruction, and materials from the teacher/lecturer.

P2 started her online learning management with a learning management system provided by Google, Google Classroom. She formulated her online classes from scratch in Google Classroom. P2 felt difficulty in conditioning the students since shifting from offline classes to online classes is also new for the students.

P2 brings the students-centered learning strategy into her online classes by conveying activities that require students to involve actively. After spending two semesters using Google Classroom, the institution where she teaches is developing an online learning management system with a similar system. P2 used many resources of materials to support her learning strategy; for example, she used a video that needed to watch by the students, and she provided reflective questions about the video. Students may actively engage in this session.

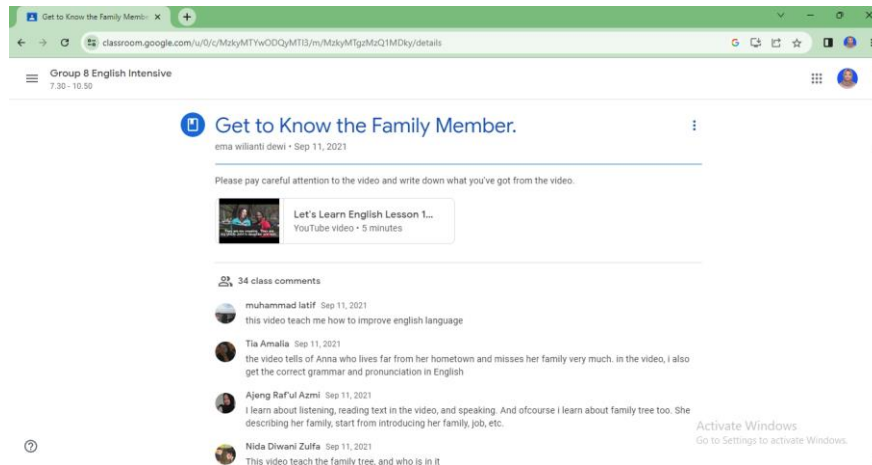


Figure 3. Learning Management System of P2

It can be seen from Figure 3 that 34 students were responding to the lecturer's instruction. P2 stated that it is possible to implement a student-centered learning strategy in distance learning with the help of technology. P2 also integrated the LMS with other learning websites or applications such as Mindmester, quizizz, Kahoot!, google meet and WhatsApp; P2 encourages students to have autonomy during the class. All materials and tools that P2 use is the way she provides supportive instructional practice. P2 believed that her students could engage and follow the learning activity, although it is in the form of distance learning. Figure 4 shows the work of P2's student, who tells a story of her visiting a museum.

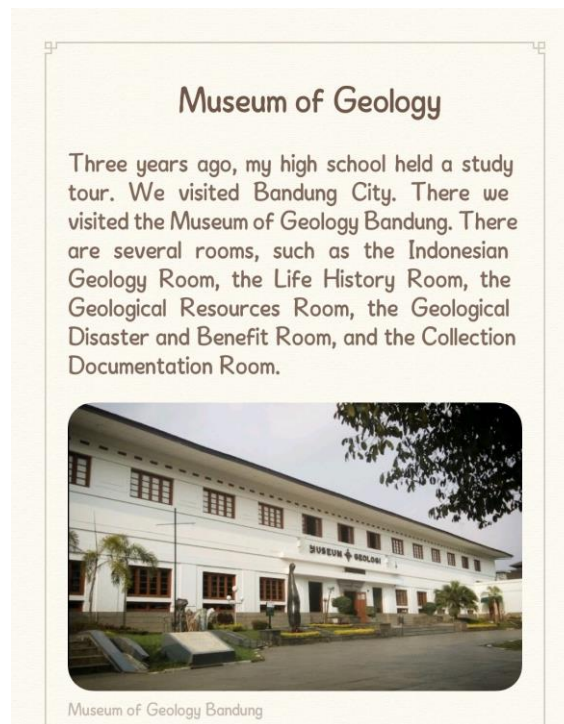


Figure 4. Student's work in distance learning

Lecturers' Past, Present, and Future Teaching Experience

In this section, the researchers briefly explain the participants' past, present, and future experiences in teaching English that shape the learning strategy they use. In the past, P1 taught high school students and applied the task-based approach in her teaching. P1 said this approach is a practice form from the previous topics. P1 lets her students work in groups to role-play as sellers in a task-based approach. The students practiced bargaining and selling their products in English. P1 saw that students with the same level of English competency tended to be in the same group. The obstacles were raised in beginner-level students with a different confidence level than advanced-level students. Students' activities were recorded in video format, which became the reflection materials at the end of the meeting.

A different experience was faced by P1 in the past when she taught English in private institutions where students of various ages. She faced students from fresh graduate students to 60 years old students. P1 did a need analysis before determining the learning strategy in class. After doing a need analysis, P1 decided to divide her students into several groups based on their expertise so the students could communicate with the relevant topics. P1 also got receptive skills in the past, such as grammar, listening, and reading. This past experience was her turning point in using English as daily communication.

At present, P1's working place is giving her valuable experience. She got broader insights about teaching quality theories from colleagues her and mentors. One of the theories is student engagement, where P1 needs to be fair with all students. P1 adjusts her teaching strategies based on her students' level or age. She uses gamification for children and teenagers to come up with their energy and open discussions with adult students. P1 prepared the teaching and learning activities, learning materials, and teaching methods in detail when planning lessons. P1 used teaching media such as activity cards to begin a simple conversation. The first participant (P1) reflected on her teaching strategies from past to present for designing her future teaching activity. P1 imagined that in the future, she could give her students choices to choose the topic or material they want to discuss in the class.

The second participant (P2) revealed a different experience from P1, which has its uniqueness. P2 faced various students of different ages, from elementary to senior high school. She revealed that her teaching strategies for different levels of students are different but still in the same framework, which is a student-centered teaching strategy. P2 differentiate teaching media for each level, for example, simple game for elementary students with multimodal, which can attract elementary students to study English. P1 prepared all media, such as pictures, videos, audio, and games, before she attended the class and prepared a backup in case the students wanted other games or media.

In her present experience, she consistently teaches undergraduate students for three years, both in online and offline classes. She felt that a student-centered teaching strategy is also suitable for this level of education. In online classes, P1 could transform from offline classes into online classes, conveying the same teaching strategies. However, P1 needs to prepare more supportive instructional materials to support her teaching and learning activities. P1 agreed that she wants to seek various teaching media to support her teaching strategy in the future.

DISCUSSION

Data from the interviews with the participants and their teaching artifacts showed that they employ teaching and learning strategies that they developed from their teaching experience in the past, present, and future. This study links the teaching strategies of the participants as supportive instructional practices and three dimensions of control that represent autonomy. Teaching strategies and media that the participant in the study used in their class are the representatives of supportive instructional practice that they bring to their classes. In the distance learning context, EFL teaching is related to technology-supported learning environments that the lecturer creates. As P1 and P2 employ the strategy in their online classes, they use several supportive educational websites and applications to complete their teaching strategy. This student-centered learning strategy strongly relates to learners' autonomy.

Learners' autonomy is crucial in EFL learning and has been discussed by educators, researchers, and policymakers worldwide (Huang & Benson, 2013). The findings show that the participants support three dimensions of learners' autonomy: control over learning management, control over a cognitive process, and control over the content. P2 provided learning materials in her online learning management system and let the students freely manage their time and sequences of material they want to study. This means that both lecturer and students can apply the strategies in the learning to complete the management of learning successfully. Ding & Shen (2019) in their study revealed that the students in MOOC programs manage their time studying the materials provided in LMS. This is seen from the current research from a lecturer's perspective, which lets the students manage their study time and strategies.

In another dimension, that is, control over the cognitive process, P1 and P2 ways of providing supportive learning materials is the courage in activating students' cognitive process. A study by Ding & Yu (2021) revealed that many students need more preparation for independent learning, either cognitively or in terms of academic skills, and therefore need more help and support from teachers. Therefore, the findings of this study represent the capability of lecturers P1 and P2 to understand the circumstances that assist language learning and arrange for the presence of those conditions. As well as the two dimensions above, learners need to deal with the dimension of control over the content in achieving learners' autonomy. P1 employed a need analysis before she started to teach in her class. This attempt helped her students achieve control over the content dimension in learners' autonomy. P1 argued that her students responded positively to her teaching strategy, letting them share their learning needs. A need analysis that P1 utilizes is closely related to autonomous learning since it contributes to developing learners' capacity to determine the content and manage their learning process (Tuan, 2021).

The findings show that P1 and P2 teaching strategies support activating the dimensions of autonomy. The participants' teaching strategies align with the autonomy-supportive instructional behavior (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). However, the participants must be conscious that they have been practicing the ASIB while teaching EFL in a distance learning context.

The supportive instructional practice employed by P1 and P2 is the way to communicate validation and support for students' experiences to make them feel they are in control of their learning (Baker & Goodboy, 2019). The researchers seek seven autonomy-supported instructional behavior (Reeve & Cheon, 2021) from the experience of P1 and P2 while teaching EFL in a distance learning context. The first ASIB is that the lecturers must take the students' perspective. In this case, P2 analyzes her teaching materials and strategy by acting as a student along with the curriculum given by the institutions. Taking students' perspectives is a fundamental activity that supports learners' autonomy.

P1 and P2 employ exciting topics and activities during online learning, which fulfill the ASIB #2 and ASIB #3. Involving interactive websites and quizzes could be a way to invite learners to pursue their interest and their learning satisfaction. This activity is revealed from P1 and P2's experience in teaching online classes shown in the findings. As also written in the findings, P1 and P2 always provide rationale in instructing the topics, materials, acts, and exercises displayed in LMS, which are reflected in ASIB #4 as the explanatory rationale. Vansteenkiste et al. (2018) stated that teachers could provide explanatory rationale by revealing the learning materials' hidden value and personal relevance.

Teaching EFL in a distance learning context does not prevent P1 and P2 from communicating with their students since the LMS has a comment box and direct message features that can communicate between students and lecturers. Moreover, P1 and P2 also employed WhatsApp groups as supplementary communication media. The communication between students and lecturers as participants in this study concluded that P1 and P2 were applying ASIB #5, #6, and #7, which acknowledge learners' negative feelings, rely on invitational language and display patience.

CONCLUSION

The present study reveals how supportive instructional practice and participants' experience as lecturers are in achieving the successful strategy in activating learners' autonomy in a distance learning context. Participants' past, present, and future teaching experiences influenced the teaching strategy they employed in the current situation. Teaching English as a foreign language in a distance learning context needs to correspond with technology. The familiarity of the lecturer with technology is crucial to complete the element of autonomy-supportive instructional behavior. The role of the lecturer in this study is seen as an important aspect of online learning. Moreover, learners' autonomy can be effectively achieved by the students with the help of strong supportive instructional practices that the lecturer carries out.

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