

## TEACHERS' ROLE IN PROMOTING AUTONOMOUS LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CASE OF ADDIS ABABA SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY

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Article Info	Abstract
<b>Article History</b> Received: November 2024 Revised: December 2024 Published: January 2025	<i>Nowadays promoting autonomous learning has become an important aspect of education. This study aimed to investigate the roles of the teachers in promoting autonomous English language learning at Addis Ababa Science and Technology University. Its emphasis was on the roles of facilitator, guide/mentor, and inspirator/supporter and to what extent supporting environment helping to promote autonomous language learning are available and are used effectively. A survey questionnaire was distributed to 313 freshmen engineering students at Addis Ababa Science and Technology University where 24 students participated in FGD. Furthermore, an interview was conducted with four teachers to obtain supplementary data and for triangulation. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS and the qualitative data obtained from FGD and interview was analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that teachers were involved in very limited practices that promote autonomous language learning and used available supporting facilities ineffectively. As facilitators, teachers did not offer necessary assistance on learning plans and objectives and in evaluating their own learning and progress. As a guide/mentor, teachers' assistance in providing alternative learning strategies and references was bound to the module and course outline. As an inspirator/supporter of autonomous learning teachers were weak on being positive and supportive when giving feedback, encouraging students to keep a written record of their learning, and acknowledging different ways students follow to attain their goal and their own learning styles. Hence offering teachers professional development programs on how to promote autonomous language learning will help develop learner autonomy.</i>
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### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays teaching students how to acquire knowledge and how to maintain enthusiasm about learning is an important aspect of education. In traditional language teaching, teachers play more important roles than students (Satrio & Setyaningsih, 2024). According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), the teacher acts as the model of language, the lesson planner, the controller of learner practice and the assessor of learners' performance, the organizer in the teaching program in terms of knowledge of grammar, the planners of the course, preparing the materials and deciding what and how learners ought to learn. However, in modern language teaching, the mode of teaching changed from teacher-centered to learner-centered in which the learner is the center of the program.

Learner-centeredness is an approach that views students as having more active and participatory roles in the learning and teaching process than in traditional approaches

(Matmuratova, 2020; Nduwimana, & Ndoricimpa, 2023). This means there are changes in roles both for learners and teachers. The change in the roles of both students and teachers has led to the emergence of autonomous learning as a key component in acquiring knowledge. Autonomous learning is about learners taking more control over their learning in classrooms and outside; autonomy in language learning is about taking more control over the purposes and the ways to learn the language (Benson, 2006; Akıcı, 2015). Sometimes learner autonomy is misunderstood in a way that it can be realized without a teacher. Little (1996) states that learners usually do not automatically take responsibility for their learning but they need teachers to help them to do that. Thus teachers are responsible for developing autonomous learners through their roles and practices in the classroom other than just being the source of knowledge to students. By changing their traditional role to the role of an organizer or facilitator, teachers help their students to be more responsible for their own learning (Alonazi, 2017).

Littlewood (1999) proposes a distinction between two levels of self-regulation proactive and reactive autonomy. Proactive autonomy regulates the direction of activity and the activity itself while reactive autonomy regulates the activity once the direction has been set. Proactive autonomy will be achieved when learners are able to take charge of their learning, determine their objectives, select methods and techniques, and evaluate what they have acquired (Holec, 1981; Little, 1994). However, in reactive autonomy learners don't need to create their own direction, but it enables learners to organize their resources autonomously to achieve their goal under the direction that has been initiated once. Therefore this study focused on reactive autonomy where the teachers were expected to follow up under the given direction.

Little (2007) suggests the three basic pedagogical principles governing the development of autonomy in language learning as learner involvement, learner reflection and appropriate target language use. Depending on these principles he also suggests some roles expected from the teachers. They are expected to use the target language as a medium of classroom communication and require the same of learners; involve learners in a non-stop quest for good learning activities; help learners to set their own learning targets and choose their own learning activities, subjecting them to discussion, analysis and evaluation; require learners to identify individual goals but pursue them through collaborative work in small groups; require learners to keep a written record of their learning plans of lessons and projects, lists of useful vocabulary, whatever texts they produce and engage them in regular evaluation of their progress as individual learners and as a class. As Little tries to describe the importance of autonomous learning and the role of the teacher, he states that all truly effective learning entails the growth of autonomy in the learner as regards both the process and the content of learning and for most learners, the growth of autonomy requires the stimulus, insight and guidance of a good teacher (as cited in Bajrami, 2015).

As Shu and Zhuang (2008) proposed autonomous learning has three important characteristics: willingness, capacity and supporting environment. Firstly, a language learner is willing to take an active attitude towards his or her language study and take the initiative to be responsible for the study. Secondly, through learner training and teacher support, language learners can develop the capacity to learn independently. Lastly, the development of LA cannot be accomplished without a supportive environment or context which includes the teacher's guidance, teaching and learning facilities, and learning materials. Based on the above discussion, autonomous learning can be considered as the constructive process of how language learners develop their autonomy within a supportive environment where language teachers play a crucial role in classroom teaching in fostering autonomous learning.

To encourage learners to become autonomous inside the language classroom, Yu (2006) suggests teachers' to-do lists developed from what Holec (1985) and Nunan (1997) stated about teachers' role as awareness of pedagogical goals, contents and strategies; active involvement in the learning; intervention while modifying and adapting personal goals, learning style and strategies; setting up personal goals and plans; awareness of responsibility and motivation; independent learning task; monitor and evaluate learning; acquire needed skills and knowledge. This list is enriched by Little's (2007) suggestion of the teacher's role in promoting language learner autonomy being related to three general pedagogical principles as learner involvement (planning, monitoring and evaluating of learning); learner reflection (process and content of learning and self-assessment); and target language use (the medium as well as the goal of learning).

For the effective development of autonomous learning, before contributing one's share, everyone in the process has to know his/her role. Autonomy requires the understanding of new roles between teachers and learners. Teachers must change their roles to adapt themselves to the new requirement of autonomy. The promotion of autonomy is dependent greatly on how teachers are aware of their new roles. As Zhuang tries to compare the role of teachers in autonomous learning with traditional teaching methods, autonomy does not remove teachers from their responsibility but redistributes the decision-making rights between teachers and students in the learning process. In autonomous learning, learners have more rights in making learning strategies. Accordingly, teachers do not control the whole learning procedure like a commander but take many other roles like directors or advisors (Zhuang, 2010). When the students are taught by autonomy-supportive teachers, positive academic outcomes are achieved including higher resourcefulness, more satisfaction, determination, positive reactions, and enthusiasm all necessary for their engagement in the process of learning and enhance their resilience because when teachers detect learners' desires, inclinations, and interests, bring them about by boosting and cultivating satisfactory classroom settings (Ma, 2021).

Several scholars suggest the teacher's roles in different ways. As Nunan (1993) states, in promoting autonomous learning teachers' role is to guide. Voller (1997) classifies the teacher roles into three categories: teacher as facilitator, teacher as counselor and teacher as resource. Xu & Xu (2004) state the roles of the teacher as Guide (counselor, instructor); Facilitator (helper); Organizer and designer; Cooperator (peer partner, friend, and participant); Inspirator and supporter; Monitor and evaluator; Resource supplier; and Atmosphere creator. Scholars choose the word that they think can represent the role of the teacher. In this case, the same practices can be represented in different terms. Therefore based on the given terms, in this study the researcher selects three terms that can represent the context of the study to show the roles of the teacher as facilitator; guide/mentor and Inspirator/supporter.

In an autonomous classroom, teachers as facilitators: are expected to manage the activities in the classroom and help learners plan their learning both for the long and short term. Teachers have to be able to establish a close collaboration with the learners and make sure that all learners know what is expected of them at all times (Lowes & Target, cited in Bajrami, 2015). Teachers as a guide: are expected to work closely with their students' language learning and help students develop better techniques for learning (Nunan cited in Xu & Xu, 2004). Teachers as inspirators/supporters: are expected to inspire their students by stimulating their interest; encouraging them to use English and motivating them to participate in communicative activities. Teachers are also responsible for making effective use of self-directed centers to facilitate autonomous learning and to encourage more communication between teachers and students via

various channels to monitor the learning process (Reinders & White, 2016). This indicates that supporting environment administration is the role of the teacher.

The promotion of autonomous learning needs the readiness and commitment of both students and teachers. In other words, it needs the teachers' awareness and effort to guide students properly. Both teacher and students should work together for the achievement of their goal which is producing independent learners. However, if the teachers' practices in language learning do not promote autonomous learning, it would be very difficult to achieve autonomy in learning language. Most of the research done on autonomous learning focused on students and research on teachers' role in autonomous learning is limited. In spite of this few local studies have been conducted. Chernet (2019) researched assessing EFL students 'and teachers' perceptions and practice of learner autonomy at Wolyta Sodo University. As the study by Xu and Xu (2004) which was based on the teachers' roles from students' perspectives only shows, teachers are expected to play the roles of guide, facilitator, assessor, psychological coordinator, peer cooperater, source of information, learner and researcher. The study did not include teachers' perspectives about the roles they actually play in fostering autonomous learning in classroom teaching. However, this study was intended to investigate teachers' roles in the promotion of autonomous language learning and to what extent a supporting environment is available at Addis Ababa Science and Technology University (AASTU) from both students' and teachers' perspectives. In Ethiopia, English is thought of as a foreign language and English is a medium of communication at higher education institutions. AASTU is one of the two science and technology universities in Ethiopia where students scoring higher score join voluntarily by taking an entrance exam. Before joining their field of specialization, all freshmen students take pre-engineering courses where 'communicative English skills' is one of the common courses.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The research approach of this study was a mixed approach. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were employed to collect the data from the students and teachers under the study. The rationale for using both quantitative and qualitative approaches was for triangulation. Quantitative data helps to get information from a wider population and qualitative data helps to understand the phenomenon in depth (Creswell, 2012). The data were collected through questionnaires, FGD and semi-structured interviews. The researcher developed the questionnaire from the literature that shows the practices of teachers to promote autonomous learning in the classroom. Semi-structured questions were also developed to collect in-depth information both from students and teachers. First, by using a questionnaire, quantitative data was collected from students and followed by FGD. Then teachers were interviewed. The quantitative data were analyzed statistically using SPSS and the qualitative data from FGD and interviews were analyzed thematically. During the discussion, the qualitative and quantitative data were mixed for corroboration and triangulation purposes. Finally, the conclusion and recommendation are made respectively.

### **Population and Sample**

In this study, the population consists of both students and teachers in AASTU. There were 1620 freshmen students and 16 EFL teachers in AASTU. Students were chosen to fill out a questionnaire to give information about to what extent their teachers are applying autonomous learning-promoting practices in the classroom. The sample size was determined depending on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination calculation. Accordingly, for the 1600

population size, 310 samples are appropriate and since the number of the population (freshmen students in AASTU) was 1620, the researcher decided to take the sample size of 1700 population size which is 313 in number. There were 36 sections of pre-engineering students having 45 students in each section. From each section 9 students were selected using systematic random sampling to fill survey questionnaire. The researcher selected students at every 5 (1,5,10,15,20,25,30,35,40) from the attendance generated from students information management system (SIMS). 324 students filled out the survey questionnaire. From these 324 students, 24 volunteer students again participated in the FGD in a group of six to give detailed information on their teachers' practices to promote autonomous learning. In addition, teachers were asked to give a detailed explanation of their autonomous learning-promoting practices in the classroom. Four teachers who have more than ten years of teaching experience in the institution were selected randomly and involved in interviews. This helps to triangulate the responses of the students and the teachers

### **Research Instruments**

In this study, three instruments: questionnaire, FGD and interview were used to gather data from the population. To elicit the data from students, a questionnaire and FGD were used. A questionnaire was designed to get information to what extent English teachers of AASTU play their role in promoting autonomous learning in the classroom. The questionnaire is divided into two sections. The first section consists of 18 items that are related to the roles teachers play in encouraging autonomous language learning in their classrooms. This section needs the students to rate the frequency of their teachers' implementation of the items in their classrooms. Students are required to answer each item on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = usually, 5 = always). The second section includes eight items of agreement to identify the availability of facilities that can support autonomous language learning.

FGD is a structured discussion used to obtain in-depth information from students on how their teachers help them to become autonomous language learners. Semi-structured questions developed by the researcher were used to conduct the discussion with four groups. The questions are related to how their teachers share responsibility and how they help their students to let them become autonomous language learners. The discussion was audio recorded. The result was used as a counter-check of the data obtained from the students' questionnaire. To elicit data from teachers the researcher interviewed them. The purpose of the key informant interview was to gather in-depth information from teachers about their roles in promoting students' autonomous language learning. Participants in the key informant interview were EFL teachers who have given 'communicative English skills' course at AASTU. They were expected to best help the study by providing firsthand information. The data was collected through face-to-face interviews using semi-structured and generally open-ended questions to elicit views on their practices to foster autonomous language learning and to what extent the facilities provided in the university help them to promote autonomous language learning. The interview was also audio recorded.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from the questionnaire underwent a thorough cleansing process to ensure its accuracy and reliability for analysis. During this step, eleven papers were excluded due to incomplete information, leaving a total of 313 papers for quantitative analysis. These data were entered into SPSS, where frequency calculations were performed to identify patterns and trends. Meanwhile, audio recordings from interviews or focus groups were transcribed to facilitate qualitative analysis. The transcription process ensured that the qualitative data was

well-organized and prepared for integration with the quantitative findings, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the teachers' practices.

To streamline the analysis, the items related to teachers' practices were categorized under three key roles: facilitator, guide/mentor, and inspirator/supporter. This classification provided a structured framework for examining the data, allowing for a detailed exploration of how teachers fulfill these roles in their teaching practices. The qualitative data was analyzed thematically, with insights drawn from the transcripts to complement and enrich the quantitative findings. By integrating both types of data, the study offered a holistic view of teachers' practices, highlighting the interplay between their roles and the broader patterns identified through frequency analysis. This mixed-methods approach ensured a robust and nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Research Findings

The quantitative data obtained from the survey questionnaire are presented in a tabular form with descriptive statistics followed by qualitative data. The result was discussed categorizing teachers' roles into three categories which were (a) facilitator; (b) guide/mentor and (c) inspirator/supporter. The result of the supporting environment available in AASTU was also analyzed separately. Results from the students' FGDs and teachers' interview was also presented integrated with the survey questionnaire result.

### Teachers' teaching practices for the role 'facilitator'

As can be seen in Table 1, students were asked to identify the extent their teachers involved them in a way that promotes autonomous learning. The four items are related to the practices of English teachers as being a learning facilitator. The responses of participants regarding 'always/usually' and 'rarely/never' categories have been combined to indicate a valid percentage of their answers. The role that teachers practiced 'always' or 'usually' was only sharing responsibilities in the learning process with students (56.5%)

Table 1  
Teachers' teaching practices for the role 'facilitator'

S/N	Teachers' roles as facilitator	Always/Usually		Sometimes		Rarely/Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Directing students to set their own goals to achieve the course objective	124	39.7	113	36.1	76	24.3
2.	Sharing responsibilities in the learning process with students	177	<b>56.5</b>	94	30	42	13.4
3.	Engaging students to evaluate their learning progress regularly	131	41.9	98	31.3	84	26.8
4.	Directing students to reflect on the tasks they did inside and outside class	103	32.9	108	34.5	102	32.6

Students mentioned that there was no different goal they were expected to set. At the beginning of the semester, teachers gave them a course outline where the objectives of the course and the contents of the course are stated. Students considered that goal setting related activities are the responsibility of the teachers. As one student stated,

*...everyone can have different goal, but the teacher has to set a goal that is general for all of us because everyone has different goal that the teacher cannot help every students to achieve their*

*goal. I plan or set a goal for what I am bad at. And some students may not know what they know and what they don't; so the teacher should give different assignments to test students' skills and discover what they are good at and what they are bad at.*

From the above extract, one can understand that the students do not know that they have a responsibility to set their own goals. Teachers also approve of this as they don't facilitate to let the students set their own goals directly. All teachers mentioned that they have advised their students to let them have a goal not specifically for the subject they teach but a goal they need to achieve at the time of their stay at university. In addition, the issue of goals will be raised at the beginning of the semester and slightly at the beginning of a new chapter. As one teacher (T1) stated,

*It is done at the beginning of the semester or at the beginning of the session, during the introductory session of the course, I share the responsibility; I have my own responsibility and the students have their own responsibility. There are course objective that the students are expected to achieve at the end of the semester. At that time when I tell them these are mine those are yours, indirectly I am forcing them to have their own plan but I may not remember as their objective that they have designed in each session of the semester once I tell them.*

As we can understand from the above extract the teacher facilitates to let the students share responsibilities. Most of the teachers mentioned that goal-setting was done implicitly not explicitly. Both teachers and students stated that teachers shared responsibilities implicitly and slightly created awareness. However as we can understand from the above text, since there was no way to check its accomplishment, it means the teacher did not mentor students on how to achieve their goal.

Regarding evaluation, the response of the teachers and students is opposed to some extent. The result from the survey shows that teachers did not work on the facilitation for evaluation. Students also stated the same idea in the discussion that evaluation is a task of teachers. They expect teachers to assess the level of the students' knowledge, identify their gaps, and help them to work on how to fill the gap. However, teachers stated that they encourage students to evaluate each other's work. After doing some activities students were expected to exchange their work with their friends and they gave feedback for their work. Even though it was the responsibility of the teacher to facilitate to make students involved in evaluating their own learning, teachers have mentioned that there was a lack of interest in evaluation. Teachers stated that there was room for self-evaluation on the students' module. At the end of each chapter, there is a reflection section where students are expected to reflect by answering the given questions and indirectly evaluating the progress of their learning. However, students were not willing to do it on their own unless the teacher ordered and gave them time in class to do it. Students also stated the same idea in the discussion that evaluation is a task of teachers. Even they expect teachers to assess the level of the students' knowledge, identify their gaps, and help them to work on how to fill the gap.

### **Teachers' teaching practices for the role 'guide/mentor'**

Students were asked to identify the extent their teachers get involved in the practices that promote autonomous learning. As can be seen in Table 2, eight items are related to the practices of English teachers as learning guide/mentor. The responses of participants regarding 'always/usually' and 'rarely/never' categories have been combined together to indicate a valid percentage of their answers. The two roles that teachers practiced 'always' or 'usually' were encouraging students to pursue their individual goals by working with others in (pairs and

groups)(57.5%) and supporting students as they can develop the capacity to learn independently (51.1%).

Table 2  
Teachers' teaching practices for the role 'guide/mentor'

S/ N	Teachers' role as guide/mentor	Always/Usually		Sometimes		Rarely/Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Helping students to become aware of alternative strategies and learning styles	149	47.6	110	35.1	54	17.3
2.	Encouraging students to pursue their individual goals by working with others in (pair and group)	180	<b>57.5</b>	96	30.7	37	11.8
3.	Involving students in a non-stop search for good learning activities	129	41.2	112	35.8	72	23
4.	Informing students the necessary strategies about the different paths they may choose to follow in order to identify and use the right kind of information.	145	46.3	104	33.2	64	20.4
5.	Providing students guidance on recommended online tools and services (links and resources)	142	45.4	96	30.7	75	24
6.	Supporting students as they can develop the capacity to learn independently	160	<b>51.1</b>	88	28.1	65	20.8
7.	Providing students alternative learning strategies which they could have used	149	47.6	105	33.5	59	18.8
8.	Mentoring students on how to achieve their goals	125	40	103	32.9	85	27.2

As data from qualitative sources indicated working with others in pairs and groups was common practice in the course. As one of the teachers stated (T3), "Most of the time it becomes a place to raise an issue of argument. They try to convince each other and at the end, they need the teacher to judge their case. In this kind of situation, students who were not active participants also become motivated and forget their fear of participation." This shows that teachers guide students to let them learn cooperatively. As students mentioned in the discussion the time given for a course is limited so that students are expected to work independently on their own. They also stated that teachers gave them homework to do in advance before coming to the class or by showing a sample of activity in the class and letting the students finish on their own.

Regarding informing students of different learning strategies, teachers mentioned that most of the time the strategies to be used were already given in the module so they were not expected to use different strategies. However, there may be a time to change the learning strategies given in the module. As one teacher mentioned (T2):

*It is already stated in the course plan, the learning style, and process should be like these, lecture, group, pair, individual work is needed which is mentioned at the beginning of the session. As a teacher, I have to be flexible b/c I don't know what happen at the classroom. I may give them time for presentation and if they are not interested to that, I may change it to pair work or group work. Simply by considering the context, I try to use varieties of strategies.*

From the above extract, one can understand that the learning strategy may be changed depending on the will of the teacher. In addition, students also mentioned that they can use their own strategies but following the order of the teacher is better for them because they believe the teacher knows the better strategy to use. Related to guiding recommended online tools and services like links and resources, teachers mentioned that basic resources were stated on their course outline and when they get better resources that can help students more; they share for students using different mediums of communication like telegram and email. Students also



mentioned that there is no problem with learning resources these days and everything they need is found easily but the main thing is the motivation and commitment to do it.

### Teachers' teaching practices for the role 'Inspirator & Supporter '

Items from 13 to 19, as shown in Table 3, are intended to investigate to what extent the teachers play the role of inspirator/supporter in promoting autonomous language learning. The two roles that teachers practiced 'always' or 'usually' to inspire students were using the English language as the medium of classroom communication and requiring the same of students (76.1%) and raising awareness about autonomous learning and promoting it to students (52.7%).

Table 3  
Teachers' teaching practices for the role 'Inspirator & Supporter '

S.N	Teachers' roles as Inspirator & Supporter	Always/Usually		Sometimes		Rarely/Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Using English language as the medium of classroom communication and require the same of students	238	76.1	57	18.2	18	5.8
2.	Acknowledging different ways students follow to attain their goal and their own learning styles	125	39.9	102	32.6	86	27.5
3.	Motivating students to learn English by minimizing external pressure	155	49.5	94	30	64	20.4
4.	Encouraging students to keep a written record of their plans of lessons and assignments	128	40.9	81	25.9	104	33.2
5.	Encouraging students to keep a written record of their learning such as lists of useful vocabulary and texts they produce by themselves	127	40.6	92	29.4	94	30
6.	Being positive and supportive especially when giving feedback	129	41.2	112	35.8	72	23
7.	Raising awareness about autonomous learning and promoting it to students	165	52.7	82	26.2	66	21.1

Both teachers and students testified that the medium of classroom communication is English. Students mentioned that when students had problems while explaining their ideas, the teacher encouraged them by reminding them of a word that could help them express their ideas. This can be considered as motivating students to learn English by minimizing external pressure where 49.5% of the students mentioned their teachers practiced it. However, teachers had stated that even though they were ready to help their students by giving feedback for what they did, students did not want to go further to improve their learning and students do not have a culture to ask for help for their problem. Students contacted their teachers in case there was a problem with their results. Otherwise, no one comes to discuss with teachers and to get support from them.

Regarding encouraging students to keep a written record of their learning such as lists of useful vocabulary and texts they produced by themselves most of the teachers stated that they advise their students to have vocabulary notebooks or to use the back of their notebook to record new vocabulary daily but the students were not willing to use this strategy to add vocabulary. One of the reasons not to apply this strategy was related to motivation. As one of the teachers mentioned students need incentives. When they are told to do something, if they know there will be a mark, they will be interested in completing the task unless otherwise, they don't think it is useful for them. Regarding raising awareness about autonomous learning and promoting it to the students, both students and teachers mentioned that teachers reminded the students not to expect a lot from the teacher so that they have to work widely independently.

### Supporting facilities for autonomous language learning

As Addis Ababa Science and Technology University (AASTU) is a science and Technology University, it is expected that infrastructures helping to foster autonomous learning are available in the university. Students were asked about the availability of those supporting environments.

Table 4  
Supporting facilities in AASTU to Support Autonomous Language Learning

Item	Facilities	Available		Not available	
		F	%	F	%
1	Internet access	270	86.3	43	13.7
2	Computer access	291	93	22	7.0
3	Online sources	217	69.3	96	30.7
4	e-library	191	61	122	39
5	English TV program	35	11.2	278	88.8
6	e-learning platform	95	30.4	218	69.6
7	Language learning lab	82	26.2	231	73.8
8	Materials that guide/initiate students to independent learning	175	55.9	138	41.1

As indicated in Table 4, students were asked to identify the availability of some supporting facilities that help students' autonomous language learning found in AASTU. The percentage of the students who agreed to the availability of computer access, internet access, online sources, e-library, and materials that guide/initiate students to independent learning were 93%, 86.3%, 69.3%, 61%, and 55.9% respectively. As both students and teachers stated, nowadays if internet access is available a lot of tasks can be done using smartphones. Most of the students have smartphones so that they can support their learning and for those who do not have smartphones, computers are available in the library with full internet access so that they can use online sources and e-library. Regarding those facilities, students stated their unavailability was related to the language lab. Some of the students knew that there was a language lab and the others didn't know it. Those who know its availability mentioned that they got a chance to enter the lab when their teacher took them there to teach them the listening part of the module. They were made to listen to audio texts and they were expected to do activities related to the listening text.

In addition, teachers also testify that the students were taken to the lab only for the sake of listening to audio texts. They all agreed that the purpose of the language lab is not only that it should be functional as a library as the students can work and practice the language using different learning methods. Teachers also believed that they should guide students to use the lab by assisting them on how to use it to improve their language skills by putting different materials and software on the computers to let the students use them to improve different skills of their language at the time comfortable for them. Teachers complained that computers and equipment in the laboratory were not functioning properly and there was no lab assistant who could operate the equipment and assist students on how to use that equipment properly at a time convenient for them.

### Discussion

For language teachers facilitating and promoting language learners' autonomy in learning is as important as fostering and developing learners' language communicative competence (Han, 2020). Autonomous language learning is a process of how language learners develop their autonomy within the supporting environment where the teacher's role in fostering autonomous

learning in classroom teaching is essential. As Shu and Zhuang (2008) state, one of the important characteristics of autonomous language learning is the learner's capacity developed by teacher support and supporting environment or context which includes the teacher's guidance, teaching and learning facilities, and learning materials. It is the responsibility of the teacher to foster autonomous learning in the process of making students lifelong learners (Yan, 2012). As Han (2014) stated, the role of the teacher in autonomous learning is to help learners assume the responsibility for making decisions about their learning in determining the objectives; defining the contents and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used, and evaluating what has been acquired. Having adequate knowledge about the concept of learner autonomy and the best strategies that students need to be autonomous learners helps teachers offer their students sufficient training to learn independently (Alonazi, 2017). Learners, therefore, will be able to manage their language learning in different ways like reflecting on their own learning process, evaluating their performance, and making important decisions regarding their learning. Accordingly, this study tries to discuss to what extent teachers are playing their role in promoting autonomous language learning. The practices teachers get involved in were categorized under three categories: teachers' practices as facilitators; teachers' practices as a guide/mentor; and teachers' practices as inspirators/supporters of autonomous learning.

The results indicated how frequently teachers implement different teaching practices that promote autonomous language learning in their classrooms. The result shows that the roles of the teacher under every category were very limited. It was found that English teachers play the role of facilitator only through sharing responsibilities in the learning process with students. This is far from what Yan (2012) and Xu & Xu (2004) explain the role of facilitator/helper as offering necessary enlightenment and assistance and helping students to make English learning plans and objectives. This result is the same to some extent with the findings of Cherinet (2019) that the teacher did not seem to share their responsibility in evaluating students' learning, and involving learners in decision making which traditionally are considered to be the teachers' responsibility. As the result indicates teachers did not involve students in evaluation because of the students' unwillingness to be involved in evaluating their work. This implies that teachers fail to play the role of facilitator since they cannot involve students in evaluating their own learning and progress. Students have to reflect on their learning process (Alonazi, 2017).

Teachers play the role of guide by supporting students so they can develop the capacity to learn independently and encouraging them to work with others in pairs and groups. As a Guide teachers show the effective ways of learning English independently and cooperatively (Xu & Xu, 2004; Zhao, 2018). Providing alternative learning strategies is one of the roles the teacher needs to play. As the result from qualitative data indicates even though strategies to be used are already indicated in the module, teachers mentioned that there are situations that force them to change the given strategy. This implies that teachers are playing the role that Yan (2012) stated as manager and organizer where teachers are expected to create opportunities for learners to learn spontaneously and creatively and to take their own initiatives to construct their knowledge and also when students meet any difficulties, teachers are expected to actively participate in finding solutions. The role of teachers as resource providers also sticks to the course outline by providing some references and materials for English learning and introducing some internet resources. However, students also indicated that they know resources are available everywhere and they need teachers to follow them and motivate them to use those resources. This implies that students can access different resources even more than teachers but the ability to get access cannot be guaranteed for students to learn autonomously. Therefore teachers need to follow up with the

students on how they are using resources. This is the same as what Yan (2012) indicates teacher as a facilitator: a guide to resources. Teachers should be capable of selecting the materials that can be used to arouse learners' interest and cater to their learning level to motivate and ensure their satisfaction and confidence.

As a way to inspire and show the teacher is a supporter of autonomous learning, using the English language as the medium of classroom communication and requiring the same of students is the practice teachers frequently use in promoting autonomous learning. This shows that teachers inspire their students by encouraging them to use English and motivating them to participate in communicative activities. In the process of becoming autonomous learners, teachers need to make all the efforts to make the learning easier and motivate students to use the best of their potential. Motivation can include: motivating students to learn actively and autonomously, helping them to plan and carry out their independent language learning, helping them to acquire the knowledge and skills, and helping them to get rid of the uncertainty and anxiety and overcome the obstacles (Yan, 2012). Learners get more personal feedback and guidance from the teacher through the logbooks which serve as a medium of communication as well as a tool for organization and reflection Bajrami (2015); Liu & Chen (2018) and as a counselor, a teacher can give advice and feedback when it is needed to help effective learning. However, the practice of being positive and supportive when giving feedback, and encouraging students to keep a written record of their learning were not practiced. Acknowledging different ways students follow to attain their goal and their own learning styles is the characteristic of autonomy-supportive teachers and when teachers detect learners' desires, inclinations, and interests, bring them about by boosting and cultivating satisfactory classroom settings (Ma, 2021).

The supporting environment in this study context is the facilities that can help to support students' autonomous learning. Both students and teachers stated that most of the facilities were available in AASTU. Teachers are responsible for making effective use of self-directed centers to facilitate autonomous learning and to encourage more communication between teachers and students via various channels to monitor the learning process (Xu & Xu, 2004). Teachers have to suggest tools and techniques for self-assessment, use computer-based learning materials, select and evaluate resources according to students' needs and levels, suggest websites, videos, or online dictionaries that motivate students to use the target language outside the classroom, encourage students to read English books, magazines and newspapers outside the classroom (Alonazi, 2017). Therefore using those facilities cannot be effective without the assistance of the teacher. This implies availability of these facilities may help to foster autonomous learning if the assistance and guidance of the teacher is added to it.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the crucial role teachers play in fostering autonomous language learning among students. However, the results reveal significant gaps in how these roles are executed in practice. Teachers, as facilitators, are expected to empower students by involving them in decision-making processes such as setting learning objectives, planning lessons, and evaluating their progress. Unfortunately, the study indicates that teachers fall short in this role, often failing to actively involve students in self-assessment and reflective practices. This may stem from students' reluctance or lack of confidence to participate in such activities. Consequently, students miss the opportunity to take ownership of their learning journey, which is a cornerstone of autonomy. To address this, teachers need to cultivate an environment where

students feel supported and motivated to evaluate their learning processes and outcomes critically.

In their role as guides, teachers demonstrated some level of engagement by encouraging collaborative learning and providing alternative strategies when necessary. However, their efforts were often limited to adhering to pre-designed modules without exploring the full spectrum of personalized and innovative methods. While students acknowledged the availability of resources, they expressed a need for more structured guidance from teachers to utilize these effectively. The study also underscores the importance of teachers as inspirators who motivate students to use the target language actively. While some efforts were noted in this regard, such as encouraging classroom communication in English, other vital practices like providing constructive feedback and recognizing diverse learning styles were underutilized. To fully support autonomous learning, teachers must create a nurturing environment, leveraging available facilities and tools while offering personalized feedback and encouragement. This approach not only addresses the challenges identified but also empowers students to become independent and lifelong learners, in line with the principles of learner autonomy.

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