Teachers' Beliefs and Teaching Strategies to Enhance Learner Autonomy in English Language Teaching in China

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Abstract

This study aimed to (1) explore college English teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy and (2) identify the teaching strategies that college English teachers adopt to promote their students' learner autonomy. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research selected 92 teachers from a total of 120 English teachers at College A in Henan Province after a random sampling technique was used based on the formula of Krejcie and Morgan. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from the questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, while semi-structured interviews were analyzed with Litchman's 3Cs Cycle. The findings revealed significant insights into the pivotal role of teachers' beliefs in fostering learner autonomy. College English teachers widely recognized the importance of learner autonomy in enhancing language learning efficiency, with the belief that it effectively promotes language learning (Mean = 4.41, SD = 0.87). These teachers recognized that teaching strategies encouraged self-regulated learning (Mean = 4.23, SD = 0.866) and fostered critical thinking skills (Mean = 4.37, SD = 0.75). Quantitative findings revealed a significant correlation between teachers' beliefs and their adoption of specific teaching strategies. Educators with stronger learner autonomy (LA) beliefs demonstrated a clear preference for learner-centered methods, such as inquiry-based learning and collaborative approaches. Qualitative interviews further illuminated the diverse strategies employed to foster LA, including technology integration in the classroom, the design of personalized learning paths, and the creation of collaborative tasks. However, the study also identified challenges, namely accurately assessing students' autonomy levels and striking a balance between providing guidance and encouraging independence. The study emphasized the importance of continuous innovation in curriculum design, technological application, and cultural sensitivity to support the dynamic development of learner autonomy. It offered valuable theoretical and practical insights for reforming college English teaching and suggested that future studies should focus on expanding sample diversity and deepening the application of mixed methods research.

Keywords: Learner autonomy, Teachers' beliefs, Teaching strategies

1. Introduction

The concept of Learner Autonomy (LA) was first proposed by Holec (1981) and defined as "learner's ability to be responsible for their own learning". This concept emphasizes that the ultimate goal of education should be to cultivate learners' ability to manage their own learning processes, determine their own learning objectives, choose their own learning content and methods, and thus achieve effective learning (Hu, 2002). Since then, the academic community has carried out continuous research around the concept of LA. Western scholars such as Dickinson (1987), Little (1991), Schunk and Zimmerman (1998), Benson and Voller (1997), Benson (2012) have continuously enriched and improved the Theory of Learner Autonomy.

China has introduced the concept of learner autonomy since the 1980s (Du & Sun, 1986), initiating gradual explorations in the early 21st century (Hua, 2002; Pang, 2001; Wei, 2002).

Although LA originated from Western educational ideas, its connotation has long been contained in Chinese traditional Confucian and neo-Confucian educational ideas. In 2007, the Ministry of Education issued "the Teaching Requirements for College English Courses", which clearly stated that one of the goals of college English teaching is to "cultivate students' autonomous learning ability", and paid special attention to it in the reform of college English courses (Shen, Bai & Xue, 2020). The policy promotes the cultivation of students' independent learning ability and highlights the application and research of LA concept in college English teaching. In the meantime, International, Hong Kong and Macao have also established such as HASALD (Hong Kong Association for Self-Access Learning & Development) and IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) and other professional institutions have further promoted the development of LA theory on a global scale.

In terms of international research, Asmari (2013) and Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) explored the beliefs of English teachers in Oman language centers about independent learning through questionnaires and interviews. Balcikanli (2010) and Yunus and Arshad (2015) also conducted a similar study among middle school English teachers in Turkey and Malaysia. Despite different social and cultural backgrounds, the research results were consistent: teachers generally recognized the concept of independent learning, but its application in classroom practice was low. It is mainly influenced by students, teachers, schools and social and cultural factors.

In reviewing the 60-year development of Chinese language education, domestic scholars Shu and Hua (2019) pointed out that although LA research has become a hot topic, the research from the perspective of teachers' beliefs is still relatively weak. In fact, as an important external factor in the cultivation of learner autonomy, teachers' beliefs have a direct impact on the development of students' autonomous learning ability (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Liu & Xu, 2018). Borg (2011) defined teachers' beliefs as teachers' understanding and views on teaching, learners, subjects and their own roles, and believed that teachers' beliefs are the core of teaching behavior and play an important guiding role in teaching activities and classroom decision-making (Little, 2022).

With the continuous advancement of China's new curriculum reform, college English teaching pays more and more attention to the cultivation of students' independent learning ability and learning habits, advocates the student-centered teaching concept, and actively applies new teaching methods such as observation, experience and inquiry to improve students' learning initiative and learning efficiency. Wang and Mei (2017) showed that teachers generally recognized the effectiveness of teacher-student interaction, independent learning, task-based teaching and cooperative inquiry teaching methods, among which independent learning ranked second in teaching efficiency, highlighting its positive role in promoting English learning.

To sum up, based on a number of studies in the field, the beliefs of college English teachers play a crucial role in the development of learner autonomy. Therefore, this study intended to investigate the current status of college English teachers' cognition of the concept of learner autonomy and the application of teaching strategies through a combination of the questionnaire and the interview, so as to provide theoretical basis and practical reference for the subsequent college English teaching reform and academic research.

2. Research Objectives

The study aimed to do the following:
1) To explore college English teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy
2) To identify the classroom teaching strategies that college English teachers adopt to promote learner autonomy among their students in learning English
The questions for the study were as follows:
1) What are teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in learning English?
2) What are the classroom teaching strategies that college English teachers have adopted to promote learner autonomy among their students in learning English?

3. Research Methodology

This section presents how the study was conducted.

3.1 Research method and design

This study employed a mixed methods research design, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to answer both research questions. Its main purpose was to explore teachers' views on learner autonomy and their classroom strategy practice. In order to supplement the limitations of questionnaire survey, the researcher also collected in-depth data through semi-structured interviews with nine teachers. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods for this research design can greatly improve the quality of research results, and most importantly, qualitative and quantitative data can help the researcher understand unexpected results (Mander, 2017).

3.2 Research Population and Sample

This study was conducted at A university in Henan Province, China. The population for the study included 120 English teachers of College A following random sampling using Krejcie and Morgan's formula (1970), it was found that essentially 92 teachers would serve as the study sample. In short, the number of the questionnaire respondents was 92, while the number of the teachers interviewed was nine. These nine teachers were willing to participate in the study. Based on Creswell (2009), nine interviewees in a range of 8 to 12 is acceptable.

3.3 Research Instruments

The questionnaire of this study was based on the questionnaire designed by Borg and Busaidi (2012) to explore the perceptions of learner autonomy among teachers at a university in Xinyang City. The questionnaire used Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3= Unsure; 4 = Agree; 5= Strongly Agree). Likert scales can help avoid placing a huge workload on participants and ensure a holistic view of the focus of the study (Hinkin, 1995). See the table below for interpretation of the scores.

Table 1 Interpretation of Score Range

Mean Score	Interpretation
4.21-5.00	Strongly agree
3.41-4.20	Agree
2.61-3.40	Unsure
1.81-2.60	Disagree
1.00-1.80	Strongly disagree

Source: Hinkin, 1995

This questionnaire, which was divided into two parts, consisted of 31 questions. Questions 1-5 were designed to investigate learners' autonomy beliefs, while Questions 6-31were designed to study the teaching strategies of college English teachers have adopted in their teaching.

During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher prepared some prompt questions, as shown in Table 2 below, for use. To avoid any misunderstanding, the interviews were conducted in Chinese.

Table 2 Semi-Structured Interview Questions

NO.	Interview Questions
1	In your opinion, what is the value of learner autonomy for the students?
2	Do you plan your lessons by considering how to improve students' learner autonomy? Why? Or why not?
3	What teaching strategies do you use to promote learner autonomy in the classroom and why do you use them?
4	What challenges do English teachers face in helping learners improve

their autonomy?

5	Are there any other things you would like to talk about learner autonomy?

3.4 Data Analysis

This section explained how the two kinds of data were analyzed. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the quantitative data collected through the questionnaires sent to the respondents. Descriptive statistics such as average and standard deviation were used to analyze the questionnaire responses. For qualitative data derived from the semi-structured interviews, Litchman's Three Cs (Coding-Category-Concept) Process was adopted. See Figure 1 below.
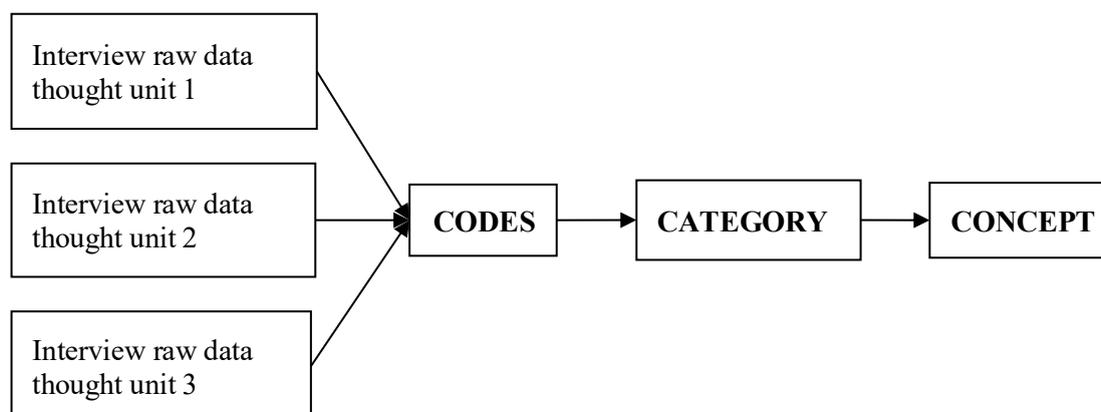
Figure 1 Structure of Qualitative Data Analysis of Litchman's 3 Cc Model (2013)

4. Results

4.1 Responses to Research Question 1: What are college English teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in learning English?

The following tables show the data collected from 92 college English teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in learning English.

Table 3 College English Teachers' Beliefs about Learner Autonomy in Learning English

Items	Mean	S.D.
1. Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would.	4.41	0.87
2. Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy.	4.37	0.75
3. Learner autonomy means a capacity that teachers could help learners to develop in the learning process.	4.14	0.85
4.To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate and monitor their own learning.	4.23	0.80
5.Confident and motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy.	4.33	0.83
Total	4.28	0.83

According to the collected quantitative data, college English teachers demonstrated their awareness of the significance of learner autonomy and a good attitude towards it. The total means score of Items 1-5 is Mean =4.28 /S.D.=0.83 which can be interpreted as "Strongly Agree".

As for the following section which consists of Items 6-31, the items can be divided into three groups that show the score ranges which indicate "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" but three items of three items in the "Agree" group scored the lowest as shown below.

Table 4 Seven Items Obtaining the Highest Scores in the "Strongly Agree" Group

Items	Mean	S.D.

8.The teacher should train students to develop their skills and strategies to become autonomous.	4.33	0.76
14.Activities in which learners can learn from each other enhance learner autonomy.	4.28	0.76
18.Learners can choose the type of classroom activities, which helps to improve their autonomy.	4.24	0.82
20.Cultivating learners' self-evaluation of learning can promote students' learning autonomy.	4.33	0.67
22.Mastering learning methods is the key to learner autonomy	4.21	0.85
25.Learners with strong independent learning ability can identify their own needs.	4.26	0.72
30.Students with higher motivation are more likely to improve learner autonomy than those with relatively lower motivation.	4.29	0.78

As can be seen from Table 4, based on the average scores shown, most teachers or observers who participated in the survey had a positive view of these strategies and believed that they helped promote learner autonomy. Among them, the average value of Item 8 (Teachers should train students to develop skills and strategies for autonomous learning) is the highest (Mean 4.33/S.D. 0.76), which indicates that teachers generally believe that providing training in skills and strategies for autonomous learning is very important and thus, there is still room for teachers to improve their grasp of students' autonomy in actual teaching. Besides, it is beneficial to learn from one another, choosing the activities themselves, assessing their own abilities and being fully motivated in learning enabled a learner to be an autonomous learner. In analyzing the survey results, it is evident that teachers exhibit varying levels of agreement regarding different teaching strategies to support learner autonomy. The seven highest-scoring items were: Item 8 (M = 4.33, SD = 0.76), Item 20 (M = 4.33, SD = 0.67), Item 30 (M = 4.29, SD = 0.78), Item 14 (M = 4.28, SD = 0.76), Item 25 (M = 4.26, SD = 0.72), Item 18 (M = 4.24, SD = 0.82), and Item 22 (M = 4.21, SD = 0.85). The highest rated item was Item 8, "The teacher should train students to develop their skills and strategies to become autonomous" (M = 4.33, SD = 0.76), and Item 20, "Cultivating learners' self-evaluation of learning can promote students' learning autonomy" (M = 4.33, SD = 0.67), both of which reflect strong support for instructional practices that directly empower learners. This was closely followed by Item 30, "Students with higher motivation are more likely to improve learner autonomy than those with relatively lower motivation" (M = 4.29, SD = 0.78), suggesting strong agreement that learner motivation plays a crucial role in developing autonomy. Item 14, "Activities in which learners can learn from each other enhance learner autonomy" (M = 4.28, SD = 0.76), highlights the role of peer interaction in fostering autonomy. Item 25, "Learners with strong independent learning ability can identify their own needs" (M = 4.26, SD = 0.72), and Item 18, "Learners can choose the type of classroom activities, which helps to improve their autonomy" (M = 4.24, SD = 0.88), also received high ratings, emphasizing teachers' recognition of learner choice and self-awareness as essential components of autonomy. Item 22, "Mastering learning methods is the key to learner autonomy" (M = 4.21, SD = 0.85), underscores the importance of equipping students with effective learning strategies.

Table 5 Fifteen Items within the Score Ranges that Show "Agree"

Items	Mean	S.D.
7.The teacher should evaluate students' autonomy periodically.	4.11	0.94
10.Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.	4.18	0.81
11.Learner autonomy is promoted when learners had some choice in the kinds of activities they do.	4.14	0.88
12.Learner-centered classrooms and library provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy.	4.09	0.90

13.Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the Internet to promote learner autonomy.	4.09	0.97
15.Group cooperation activities help to improve learners' autonomy.	4.18	0.85
16.The participation of learners in classroom management improves their autonomy.	4.09	1.00
17.Learners choose learning materials independently, which can enhance learners' autonomy.	4.10	0.92
19.The determination of learners' participation in the course objectives will foster their learning autonomy.	4.16	0.91
21.Independent learning is the core of learner autonomy.	4.10	0.79
23.Self-monitoring is the core of learner autonomy.	4.04	0.94
24.Self-directed students are able to identify their strengths and weaknesses in learning.	4.13	0.79
27.Learner autonomy can be fostered among the learner of any age	4.03	1.00
28.Learner autonomy can be enhanced in both children and adult learners.	4.16	0.84
29.Learner autonomy can be promoted in the learner of any cultural background.	4.13	0.85

Based on the data shown in the above table, the teachers agreed that there were various strategies to use and learner autonomy can be developed in people of different ages, cultural backgrounds if they choose what to do and how to do it. In addition to the strongly endorsed strategies, several other items received mean scores within the "agree" range (Mean between 4.00 and 4.18), reflecting a generally positive but slightly less intense level of agreement among teachers. These include Item 10 (Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy, M = 4.18, SD = 0.81) and Item 15 (Group cooperation activities help to improve learners' autonomy, M = 4.18, SD = 0.85), both of which highlight the value of learner participation and collaboration in fostering autonomy. Similarly, Item 19 (The determination of learners' participation in the course objectives will foster their learning autonomy, M = 4.16, SD = 0.91) and Item 28 (Learner autonomy can be enhanced in both children and adult learners, M = 4.16, SD = 0.84) suggest that autonomy is both contextually adaptable and developmentally achievable.

Table 6 Four Items in the 'Agree" Group that Got the Lowest Scores

6.The teacher knows the students' degree of autonomy.	3.70	1.10
9.The teacher is responsible for conducting co-operative group work activities.	3.87	0.98
26.Learner autonomy means independent learning.	3.78	1.14
31.Students who have learner autonomy need little attention from the teacher.	3.58	1.27

The information from the above table presents some food for thought shows that the teachers may know the students' degree of autonomy but may not be fully sure. This may be the reason why they cannot support students to be fully autonomous learners. They could have done better if they did. Besides, it is probably one area that the teachers must explore in-depth to find out how autonomous their students are. The teachers may not be fully confident to say that they are responsible for cooperative group work activities and that learner autonomy and independent learning are related. Finally, by being autonomous learners, it does not mean that they cannot seek help and support from the teachers. The true meaning of learner autonomy is "control over one's own learning or ways of learning but it does not mean that they do not need advice or some guide from the teachers. The four lowest-scoring items were: Item 31 (M = 3.58, SD = 1.27), Item 26 (M = 3.78, SD = 1.14), Item 6 (M = 3.70, SD = 1.10), Item 9 (M = 3.87, SD = 0.98). While most items scored within the "Agree" to "Strongly Agree" range, Item 31, "Students who have learner autonomy need little attention from the teacher" (M = 3.58, SD = 1.27), received the lowest score. This suggests that although learners may develop independence, teachers still perceive their ongoing guidance as necessary. Similarly, Item 26, "Learner autonomy means independent learning" (M = 3.78, SD = 1.14), received a relatively lower rating, indicating that

teachers may view autonomy as more than just self-directed learning and acknowledge its multifaceted nature. In addition, Item 6 "The teacher knows the students' degree of autonomy" (M = 3.70, SD = 1.10) received a relatively low score, suggesting that teachers may face difficulties in assessing individual student differences. This could be due to factors such as large class sizes, a lack of assessment tools, or time constraints in teaching. This issue warrants attention, especially in the context of advancing personalized and precision-based education, where teachers' ability to identify students' autonomy levels is crucial. Item 9 "The teacher is responsible for conducting co-operative group work activities" (M = 3.87, SD = 0.98), though still falling within the "Agree" range, scored lower than most other items, indicating that some teachers remain skeptical about the effectiveness or manageability of cooperative learning. This suggests that teachers may still lack systematic tools or mechanisms for evaluating learner autonomy and feel uncertain about how to assess it effectively.

In summary, the findings indicate that college English teachers widely adopt and endorse diverse teaching strategies to support learner autonomy. They place particular emphasis on encouraging learner motivation, promoting self-assessment, offering choices in learning tasks, and developing students' independent learning skills. These strategies reflect a learner-centered approach that aligns closely with contemporary autonomy-supportive pedagogy.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

Responses to Research Question 2: What are the teaching strategies the teacher adopt to promote learner autonomy in learning English?

The opinions of teachers were analyzed by Lichtman's 3Cs Steps of Analysis. In this section, the teacher interview data went through coding and categorization. The concepts that emerged from the interviews with 9 teachers were shown in Table 4: There was diversity in coding and categorization among the teachers, indicating that they had a variety of viewpoints and methods in their teaching approaches. Nine categories emerged: 1) Learning Strategies; 2) Teaching Techniques; 3) Technological Integration; 4) Role of the Educator; 5) Curriculum Design; 6) Assessment and Feedback; 7) Cultural and Social Aspects; 8) Personal Development; 9) Learning Environment.

Table 7 The Number of Codes, Categories and Concepts

Teacher 1-9	Number of Codes	Number of Categories	Number of Concepts
Teacher Chen	12	4	2
Teacher Jin	8	3	2
Teacher Li	7	4	2
Teacher Liu	6	2	2
Teacher Sun	5	1	2
Teacher Yang	12	8	2
Teacher Yang	8	4	2
Teacher Yi	7	5	2
Teacher Zhang	8	6	2
Total	71	37	18

Promoting learner autonomy in the classroom can be achieved through a variety of learning/teaching strategies.

"*I would choose the following common approaches: inquiry learning, collaborative learning, personalized learning, designing interdisciplinary projects, and feedback and mentoring. This can develop students' interest and ability level, encourage students to cooperate, find solutions on their own, and optimize learning paths and resource selection.*" (Teacher Yi, personal communication, January 2, 2024)

"*Specifically, I encourage active thinking and questioning among students during the teaching process. It's not about the traditional one-way communication where the teacher imparts knowledge and that's it. Instead, I allow for full discussions and the expression of their opinions because we live in an open world where knowledge and perspectives are constantly*

evolving."(Teacher Liu, personal communication, December 30, 2023)

"In the context of today's emphasis on lifelong learning and the emergence of a learning society, I believe that the cultivation of independent learning ability is not only related to students' academic performance and learning quality, but also has a profound impact on their future personal development."

"These teaching strategies should not be one-dimensional or boring. Therefore, in different courses, we need to adapt and adjust our teaching strategies according to the specific course content or objectives." (Teacher Chen, personal communication, January 2, 2024)

"These teaching strategies should not be one-dimensional or boring. Therefore, in different courses, we need to adapt and adjust our teaching strategies according to the specific course content or objectives." (Teacher Sun personal communication, December 30, 2023)

"Personally, I prefer to use more targeted strategies, which mainly include lecture-based teaching methods, task-based teaching methods, the occasional flipped classroom approach, and communicative pedagogy." (Teacher Chen, personal communication, January 2, 2024)

"First of all, in the teaching process, we should fully stimulate students' learning interest and initiative. This requires teachers to conduct in-depth and thorough preparation and research before teaching, so that we can design engaging learning tasks and activities that transform students from passive recipients into active participants. Secondly, in class, we will use multimedia animation and wonderful music to stimulate students' imagination, so that they can easily imagine vivid and rich scenes, which greatly improves their interest in learning. Third, teachers should learn to appreciate students' unique innovative thinking, we should allow students to have different opinions, express different views, and provide them with the freedom to explore and express themselves."(Teacher Yang, personal communication, January 3, 2024)

"First, we should learn how to involve students in our teaching programs. Secondly, it is crucial to pay attention to students' mental health. " (Teacher Zhang, personal communication, December 30, 2023)

Technological Integration is an important factor for learning that is related to learning autonomy.

"With the development of technology, our teaching methods have gone beyond the traditional chalk and blackboard and are now using more advanced teaching resources. So, in terms of student autonomy, we can use various platforms and websites to assign tasks or follow the guidance provided by the websites to facilitate their learning process." (Teacher Yang, personal communication, December 29, 2023)

"Indeed, learner autonomy emphasizes that students are the drivers of their own learning process. This method is very different from the traditional way of learning, and different from the teacher leading the learning, the purpose and direction of students' learning become clearer, making them more self-aware in learning."(Teacher Liu, personal communication, December 30, 2023)

Autonomous learners develop various roles.

"I think learner autonomy is a new way of teaching, which can cultivate students' ability to take the initiative to develop. In traditional teaching methods, students are the recipients of education, and student development is a passive goal without a clear purpose and direction. In this new role, students can explore and acquire scientific knowledge through self-directed learning. Students take control of the entire learning process and immerse themselves in their learning with enthusiasm and self-awareness. This increased autonomy in their learning responsibilities greatly enhances their initiative." (Teacher Yang, personal communication, December 29, 2023)

Teachers should design curriculum that encourages learner autonomy.

"I believe that as a college English teacher, it's important to incorporate elements into course design that enhance and help students recognize the importance of learner autonomy. Including tasks that promote and cultivate self-directed learning skills is essential. "(Teacher Chen, personal communication, January 2, 2024)

"In my course design, considering the enhancement of student autonomy is certainly a key point." (Teacher Yang, personal communication, December 29, 2023)

"When planning a course, it's crucial to consider how to enhance student autonomy. Doing so helps stimulate students' interest in learning, increases their engagement, and promotes deeper learning."(Teacher Yi, personal communication, January 2, 2024)

Autonomous learners assess their own learning.

"I think students cannot rely entirely on the teacher's assessment; they can evaluate themselves." Based on the learning process and feedback results, students can assess for themselves what they did not do well or what they need to improve." (Teacher Yang, personal communication, January 3, 2024)

"Secondly, as discussed in the previous question, students can engage in self-directed learning online and access their own learning analytics. Once they have this information, it's important for teachers to guide them on what to do next. This leads us to the second point, which is emphasizing the need for teachers to develop strategies that encourage students to engage in self-assessment. Teachers can instruct students on how to assess their own work and, after assessment, how to make improvements for significant progress. One strategy here is to provide detailed guidelines and standards for assessment."(Teacher Yang, personal communication, January 3, 2024)

Cultural and Social Aspects

"Taking two humanities classes and two science classes as an example, I might be more inclined to focus on the ideological and political education part when assigning tasks to the humanities class, because we are university teachers."(Teacher Chen, personal communication, January 2, 2024)

"Their inner feelings and students' needs or interests are aspects that may lack resonance among our older teachers. In the process of setting up classes, the advantage of our age can help build closer relationships with students."(Teacher Zhang, personal communication, December 30, 2023)

Personal Development

"Learner autonomy is a skill that benefits people of all ages. Specifically, it allows learners to choose their own study content, plan their own study time, and use the method that works best for them. Throughout the learning process, they follow their own choices and execute their own learning plan. I think this is a responsible way to learn. And, in the process, they also need to manage themselves effectively both academically and in their personal lives. I believe these are essential skills for personal growth." (Teacher Chen, personal communication, January 2, 2024)

Learning Environment

"First, educators need to provide support and guidance: provide the resources, advice, and feedback necessary to help students overcome challenges and uncertainties. Secondly, create flexible learning environments, such as libraries, multimedia devices, collaborative learning websites or apps, so that students have space and options to explore."(Teacher Yi, personal communication, January 2, 2024)

"All of these positive, fun learning environments with challenges and feedback mechanisms can help learners better focus on learning and improve learning efficiency." (Teacher Jin, personal communication, December 27, 2023)

"The reason why our learning environment is better is not only because of the teacher's guidance, but also because the students accept and digest the information independently, and then self-regulate the learning. Therefore, the value of students' self-directed learning is enormous, and this is what I have considered in the course planning." (Teacher Yang, personal communication, January 3, 2024).

In brief, through the analysis of semi-structured interview data of teachers, it is confirmed that their views on teaching methods and methods of teaching strategies are diverse.

The following table shows how the qualitative data and the interviewed data were similar or different. In fact, The qualitative data from the interviews and the quantitative data from the questionnaire both reflect a shared recognition among teachers regarding the significance of learner autonomy in language learning.

Table 8 Similarities and differences between quantitative and qualitative methods

Similarities	Differences
1.Both quantitative and qualitative results indicate that teachers hold a positive attitude towards learner autonomy. The mean scores from the questionnaire are above 4.0 for most items, and the qualitative interviews reflect a variety of teaching methods and philosophies that support the development of learner autonomy.	1.The quantitative results provide numerical data that show the extent of teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards learner autonomy and specific teaching strategies, offering a measurable understanding of the teachers' perspectives.
2.There is a consensus among teachers that learner autonomy is important for language learning efficiency, as seen in the high mean scores for items 1 and 2 in the questionnaire and the emphasis on self-regulated learning and critical thinking in the interviews.	2.The qualitative results offer a deeper insight into the teachers' approaches and philosophies, including the diversity in coding and categorization among teachers, which indicates a range of complex and detailed to more focused or simplified teaching methods.
3.Both sets of results suggest that teachers believe in the importance of adapting teaching methods to student needs, with the questionnaire showing agreement on the need for personalized learning paths and the interviews highlighting the use of diverse teaching techniques.	3.While the questionnaire quantifies teachers' beliefs and attitudes, the interviews provide context and explanations for these beliefs, allowing for a richer understanding of how teachers conceptualize learner autonomy and implement it in their teaching practices.

5. Conclusion

Based on the collected data, a total of 92 Chinese English teachers participated in the questionnaire and 9 teachers participated in the semi-structured interview in this study. By analyzing the questionnaire data and the semi-structured interviews, the following conclusions can be drawn.

In brief, our goals as teachers should be to support our students as best as we can to promote learner autonomy. The teaching methods that were earlier used to make every student learn the same thing at the same pace and in the same way are no longer suitable. The teachers' roles as facilitators and the need for personalized learning content and realistic learning goals should be highlighted. Asa result, students should be allowed to their own ways and strategies to master their own learning. All the questionnaire answers and interview answers were determined by descriptive statements.

6. Discussion

Through quantitative and qualitative analysis, the author can explore and prospect teachers' views on learner autonomy in English learning. The research results of this paper are consistent with the research views of Willenet al. (2009, p. 208), and both support the play of learners' autonomous learning ability.

To be specific:

First, teachers clearly recognize their important role in promoting learner autonomy. Smith, J (2020) believes that teachers are not only the transmitters of knowledge, but also the facilitators who guide, support and motivate students to become autonomous learners. This role includes creating learning environments that encourage exploration, providing personalized learning pathways, and providing regular feedback. Second, teachers recognize the need to strike a balance between providing guidance and allowing independence. While autonomy is the goal,

the process of becoming autonomous requires guided learning experiences. This balance is essential to ensure that students are not overwhelmed by total freedom, which can backfire for those who are still developing self-regulation skills. (Jones,2019). Third, some teachers express uncertainty when assessing students' level of autonomy. Furthermore, this challenge points to the need for more effective tools and strategies to assess learner autonomy and adjust teaching practices accordingly (Miller & Peterson, 2021). Finally, the integration of technology in teaching is seen as an important tool to promote learner autonomy. Technology not only provides diverse learning resources, but also enables personalized learning experiences to meet the individual needs and preferences of students (Lee & Bonk, 2020).

Future research should integrate diverse content and theories. While culturally responsive teaching (CRT) promotes equity, critics contend it may become symbolic – resembling liberal multiculturalism – thereby hindering critical thinking and anti-racism efforts (Kyle, 2024). To understand the complexity of CRT, a multi-case study design that included structured observations and interviews with five secondary school teachers in Germany explored the interplay between CRT practices, teacher beliefs, and microaggressions. Multi-dimensional understanding of learner autonomy: Teachers' comprehensive understanding of learner autonomy goes beyond mere autonomous learning. It includes developing critical thinking, fostering reflective learning practices, and enhancing self-regulation. This broader view reflects a recognition of the complexities involved in developing autonomous learners who can adapt to different learning situations and challenges.

The results of qualitative analysis show that teachers adopt a series of strategies to cultivate learners' autonomy. These include collaborative learning, student-centered approaches, and teaching methods adapted to the needs of individual students (McCombs & whistler, 1997). This diversity suggests an understanding that autonomy can be developed through a variety of pedagogical pathways, each catering to different aspects of the learning process (Johnson & Johnson,2017). The use of technology in teaching has always been an important strategy. By integrating digital tools and resources, teachers can create more engaging, interactive, and personalized learning experiences that encourage self-directed learning behaviors (Belland & Walker,2017; Kim & Lefler, 2017). In addition, teachers recognize their role as facilitators in the process of learning autonomy. Hattie and Timperley (2007) This includes guiding students to self-regulate their learning, encouraging reflective practice, and providing regular feedback. The shift from the traditional role of authority to a more supportive, facilitating role marks a major change in teaching practice. While teachers acknowledge the importance of promoting autonomy, there are challenges in implementation (Palfreyman, 2003). These difficulties include assessing levels of autonomy, ensuring student participation in autonomous tasks, and balancing instructional guidance with learner independence. Moreover, the design of curriculum and assessment methods plays a crucial role in fostering learner autonomy (Boud & Falchikov,2006). Teachers are exploring how to integrate elements that enhance autonomy into their curriculum design and seeking more effective ways to evaluate autonomous learning. Finally, the strategies adopted by teachers also take into account the cultural and social context of learning. This includes creating learning environments that are sensitive and inclusive to different cultural backgrounds and social contexts (Gay,2010).

In summary, strategies and their practical applications that influence college English teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy are moving toward a more dynamic, learner-centered and technology-integrated direction. The prospects for this field indicate a continued emphasis on innovative teaching practices, professional development, technological advancement, and curriculum innovation, all aimed at developing autonomous and adaptable learners in a rapidly changing global environment.

7. Suggestions

7.1 Suggestions for the use of the research findings

The research findings could bring benefits to the professional work of other researchers who are interested in the same topic areas, but they must be aware that the findings from this study can only be applied to other similar contexts. In others, the findings may not emerge in the same way.

7.2 Suggestions for Future Research

1) The sample can further cover more than one school or a larger population and sample size.

2) The data processing methods could be richer, and the analysis results could be more comprehensive. This study mainly used SPSS data analysis software for descriptive analysis of the data. However, we can also add or explore other technologies. For example, observation of students in the classroom or collection of teachers' teaching logs in the study.

3) Finally, this study explored English teachers' views on learner autonomy and what strategies teachers should use in the classroom to promote learner autonomy.

Wang and Jonathon (2020) pointed out that it is recommended that future research will continue to focus on mixed methods research. Therefore, there is an ongoing trend towards more indirect research using different research methods, with the help of various scientific analysis software to comprehensively explore this topic from different angles. At the same time, it is suggested that LA in English learning differs from different standpoints, so it is recommended to develop more research tools based on domestic theories, such as teacher logs and classroom observation sheets. Finally, a case study could be conducted on more experienced teachers and novice teachers to demonstrate their beliefs and the reasons behind their practice (Wu & Xiang, 2016) to promote the development of LA.

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