

ความเป็นครูผู้กำหนดตนเอง : การรับรู้อิสระและความสามารถของครูสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษา ต่างชาติในโรงเรียนมัธยมรัฐบาลไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาความเป็นครูผู้กำหนดตนเองในด้านการรับรู้อิสระและความสามารถของครูสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างชาติในโรงเรียนมัธยมรัฐบาลไทย รูปแบบงานวิจัยคือแบบขั้นตอนเชิงอธิบาย เก็บข้อมูลด้วยแบบสอบถามจากครูชาวไทยและต่างชาติรวม 29 คน ที่สอนในโรงเรียนขนาดกลาง ใหญ่และใหญ่พิเศษ 6 โรงเรียน ตามด้วยการสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้างกับครู 6 คน ผลวิจัยแสดงว่าการรับรู้อิสระและความสามารถของครูอยู่ในระดับสูง (ค่าเฉลี่ย 4.18 ค่าเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน 0.55) และพบแก่นสาระ 5 ประการจากการวิเคราะห์สาระคือ 1) มีอิสระสูงในการจัดการชั้นเรียนและการสนับสนุนการสอน 2) มีความสามารถสูงในการจัดการสอนของตนเอง 3) เป็นครูที่มีความสามารถรับผิดชอบการสอนด้วยตนเองในระดับปานกลางถึงสูง 4) เป็นครูที่เรียนรู้เพื่อพัฒนาตนเอง และ 5) อุปสรรคของความเป็นครูผู้กำหนดตนเอง สามารถอภิปรายผลการวิจัยได้ว่าเกิดจากการสร้างสมดุลระหว่างอิสระและความสามารถของความเป็นครูผู้กำหนดตนเองผ่านชุมชนการเรียนรู้ทางวิชาชีพและความต้องการอย่างแรงกล้าที่จะพัฒนาวิชาชีพซึ่งก่อให้เกิดการรับรู้อิสระและความสามารถของครูในระดับสูงนั่นเอง งานวิจัยนี้ให้ข้อเสนอแนะด้านการสอน การบริหารและงานวิจัยในอนาคต

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Teacher Autonomy : Freedom and Capacity Perceived by EFL Teachers in Thai Public High Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated teacher autonomy in terms of the freedom and capacity perceived by EFL teachers in Thai public high schools. Based on a sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design, quantitative data were collected from 29 Thai and non-Thai EFL teachers in six medium-, large-, and extra large schools. Semi-structured interviews were subsequently conducted with 6 participants. The findings revealed a high degree of teacher autonomy (mean = 4.18, SD = 0.55). The content analysis of the qualitative data generated five themes: 1) full freedom for learning management and teaching support; 2) high ability to manage one's own teaching; 3) moderate to very high autonomous teachers; 4) professional learning; and 5) teacher autonomy constraints. Balanced freedom and the capacity of teacher autonomy through professional learning communities and a strong sense of professional development contributed to the high degree of perceived teacher autonomy. Pedagogical, administrative, and further research recommendations are discussed.

Keywords : Teacher autonomy, Freedom, capacity, EFL teachers, Thai public high schools

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although there is no agreed definition, teacher autonomy in the teacher education field tends to be equated with “professional freedom or the degree to which curricula and institutions allow scope for teacher discretion” (Benson & Huang, 2008, p. 422). Besides freedom, teacher autonomy also means willingness and capacity to take control of teachers’ own teaching and learning (Huang, 2005). Teachers are also learners, both teaching and learning of teachers are then part of teacher autonomy definition. Teacher autonomy is, thus, categorized into professional work or teaching and learning (Lai, 2023).

Teacher autonomy has received its attention and interest from researchers, policy makers, school administrators and practitioners in many content areas (Usma Wilches, 2007) due to several reasons. First, teacher autonomy is advantageous for teachers themselves. Autonomy helps reduce work stress if teachers feel increased job satisfaction, more empowerment and professionalism. Teacher autonomy also prevents school teachers’ burnout (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Dincer, 2019). Second, in foreign language education there is a positive correlation between teacher and learner autonomy development. According to Breen and Mann (1997), a desire for learner autonomy development is one of the attributes of the teachers. It is not only changing teaching methods but also personality. To put simply, teachers must be autonomous which is a rudimentary prerequisite to foster learner autonomy. Strongly argued by Jimenez Raya (2017), learner and teacher autonomy cannot be separated from one another. This leads to the third reason. Teacher autonomy is beneficial to students’ learning success. Teacher autonomy correlates significantly with learning achievement of students (Ayril, et al., 2014 cited in Yazici, 2016). As Jimenez Raya (2017 : 7) argued, “quality teaching does make a difference in student achievement”. Fourth, teacher success can be predicted positively and significantly by teacher autonomy and professional identity (Derakhsan & Taghizadeh, 2020). In brief, teacher autonomy should be acknowledged as the ultimate goal of education worldwide (Cirocki & Anam, 2021).

Regarding the basic education system of Thailand (primary 1 to 6, and secondary 1 to 6), one of the national education policies is to invest in raising the quality of the entire educational system. The policy highlights the teacher development, curricula, instructional media, and information technology; improvement of the quality and knowledge of students as per educational plans, available resources, and surrounding factors; creation of a life-long learning system for Thai people; and establishment of Thailand as a regional educational hub (Bureau of International Cooperation, 2008). To achieve the goals of improving learning quality and developing life-long Thai learners and society, teachers play a vital role. Necessarily, teachers need to be autonomous in order to develop autonomous learners. Thus, teachers need the freedom to select, plan, implement and evaluate their own teaching to create engaging, innovative, and successful learning which meets the students’ needs and wants (Cirocki & Anam, 2021). Not only freedom, but teachers also need to be capable for decision making regarding their own teaching. In short, teachers need autonomy which consists of both freedom and capacity to direct their own instruction, which promotes teacher development and quality education.

Specifically, an education reform in Thailand started in 1996 and emphasized a learner-centeredness and the communicative language teaching approach (CLT) in English language teaching. As students normally learn English only in their classrooms, the CLT is a challenge for language teachers to help develop their students’ English proficiency. The training of the language teachers is considered the vital issue in terms of teachers’ own English proficiency and their teaching methodology. Therefore, the development of English teachers in Thailand is the ultimate goal of the Ministry of Education of Thailand. Qualified English language teachers are necessarily required for a development of English language teaching especially for the application of the CLT approach (Darasawang, 2007). At this point, relationships among teacher development, teacher autonomy and quality language learning of the students are clearly seen.

In terms of research in a Thai context, research on teacher autonomy in English language teaching (ELT) is still limited. A few research has recently been conducted to explore teacher autonomy of pre-service teachers (Jeh-Awae & Wiriyakarun, 2021) and English language teachers in a university (Chinpakdee, 2022; Khemavamsa, 2022). There is only one research carried out with Thai teachers in public schools in one location during the pandemic to explore their autonomy and constraints (Swatevacharkul, 2022). It is therefore an attempt of this present study to explore further teacher autonomy of Thai and non-Thai teachers in different school locations in Thailand after the pandemic to expand existing findings on teacher autonomy.

The perceptions toward teacher autonomy of the school teacher participants will provide information on their instructional practice, commitment and work satisfaction (Paulsrud & Wermke, 2020). Help and support needed by the teachers may be disclosed. The findings are also expected to provide more contribution to and pave the way for further research in this area in particular in the Thai school context due to the scarcity of teacher autonomy research. Besides, the results will be beneficial for those who are involved in school administration for teaching and learning development. Pedagogical and administrative policies of the schools may be established for the benefits of teachers' teaching and students' learning.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To explore teacher autonomy in terms of freedom and capacity perceived by EFL teachers in Thai public schools.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Conceptualizations of Teacher Autonomy

Little (1995, cited in Benson & Huang, 2008) was the first one who introduced the concept of teacher autonomy in foreign language education. Since then, there is still no consensus on the definition. However, scholars have attempted to conceptualize the term. According to Lai (2023), teacher autonomy is “teachers’ will and capacity to make key decisions concerning the content and conditions of work and the will and capacity to justify and develop practices (p. 145). To him, teacher autonomy can be conceptualized into professional work and professional learning.

As a professional work, teacher autonomy is normally discussed in relation to other people in the schooling context. Teachers’ work practice is compromised with school constraints. Being independent from external influence is thus emphasized as an early concept of teacher autonomy (Lai, 2023). Little (1995) strongly argued that successful teachers are always autonomous “in the sense of having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploring the freedom that this confers” (Little, 1995, p.79). Usma Wilches (2007) conceptualized teacher autonomy as a personal sense of freedom to exercise control over school matters. Teachers exercise autonomy in the areas of teaching and assessment, curriculum development, school functioning, and professional development.

Subsequently, teacher autonomy is viewed in terms of interdependence between teachers and colleagues. This conception underscores informed choice making and teacher agency in managing that interdependence (Lai, 2023). The emphasis on the interdependence of teacher autonomy is clearly articulated by Vieira (2003). Teaching is conceived as a moral and political activity requiring both willingness and ability of teachers to exercise some control over educational settings by mediating between constraints and ideals, and this requires a collaborative culture of schooling. For Benson (2010), most teachers work under some constraints; thus, teacher autonomy

concerns a working condition granting opportunities for teachers' teaching discretion and a teacher's capacity to create such working condition within the institution constraints. This conception highlights a view of teacher autonomy that involves professional freedom and internal capacity.

In regard to teacher autonomy as professional learning, Smith and Erdogan (2008) conceptualized teacher autonomy in relation to both professional action (teaching domain) and professional development (teacher-learning domain). To elaborate, professional action refers to self-directed teaching which includes capacity and freedom to self-direct one's teaching. Professional development means self-directed teacher-learning which includes capacity and freedom to self-direct one's learning as a teacher, and this highlights teacher autonomy as a teacher-learner. Teacher autonomy thus incorporates both capacity and freedom to control over teaching and learning of the teachers. The concept of interdependence of teacher autonomy is also advocated by Smith and Erdogan. Teacher autonomy is also "the ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes for oneself as a teacher, in cooperation with others" (Smith & Erdogan, 2008 : 83).

Cirocki and Anam (2021) synthesized the concepts of teacher autonomy and proposed that teacher autonomy "is the teacher's capacity to willingly and freely engage in: (1) self-directed teaching, where teachers plan, deliver and evaluate their pedagogical practice in seven areas: instructional materials, course content, teaching methodology, assessment, classroom management, lesson planning and school curriculum with a view to making the teaching-learning process attractive, effective and sustainable; .." (p. 4). Besides, teacher autonomy refers to self-directed lifelong professional learning. Teachers select and take part in activities that develop their teaching skills and content knowledge related to the seven areas which have effects on student's learning and learning success.

In brief, teacher autonomy appears to refer to both freedom and capacity to self-direct the teachers' own teaching in several aspects of instruction and learning as a teacher which relates to teaching professional development.

3.2 Teacher Autonomy and Teacher Professionalism

As noted by Farrell (2022), autonomy is one, besides self-determination, aspect of teacher professionalism which refers to a professional's knowledge, skills, and conduct. Knowledge should be ground practice. To become successful teaching professionals, teachers are suggested to do the following. First, they should develop a critical view of language education, manage local constraints to create spaces for maneuver, focus teaching on learning, and interact with others in the professional community. These four professional competences will facilitate the implementation of pedagogy for autonomy which assists in developing both teacher and learner autonomy (Jimenez Raya, 2017). Next, teachers need to be actively involved in professional development events because this will fulfil teachers' needs, arouse their interests, and maintain their attitudes, beliefs, and expectations. These promote the establishment of a school culture emphasizing professional development and individual forms of autonomy (Jimenez Raya, 2017). Then, Cirocki and Anam (2021) maintained that teachers with greater autonomy are likely to be innovative in testing new teaching approaches, using technology, adapting curriculum to meet students' needs, and planning for their professional development to develop their knowledge and skills. Additionally, MacKenzie (2002 cited in Benson & Huang, 2008), argued that teachers are not only responsible for their own class and students, but also engage in curriculum development. Strongly argued by Farrell (2022), a reflective approach should essentially involve in any approach that aims to promote teacher professional development. Teachers should perform critical reflection on their own teaching practices both inside and outside the classroom. Reflections will enable language teachers to try their best for every aspect of their teaching profession. Reflection constantly helps expand the knowledge base of language teaching. As McGrath (2000) pointed out, teachers should engage in classroom-based inquiry and reflective practice which promotes self-directed professional development.

Based on the teacher autonomy literature reviewed, for this study, teacher autonomy refers to freedom and capacity to willingly self-direct one’s own teaching as a teacher (Smith & Erdogan, 2008; Benson & Huang, 2008) in terms of instructional materials, teaching methodology, course content, lesson planning, assessment, curriculum, and classroom management (Cirocki & Anam, 2021). For Girocki and Anam, creative and innovative teaching materials should be produced by teachers to meet the desired language teaching and learning objectives. Teachers should employ appropriate teaching methods and educational technology that facilitate teaching and learning. Regarding course contents, it is the teachers’ responsibility for teaching content and implementation. All of these formulated the conceptual framework of this study which focuses mainly on educational domain (Figure 1).

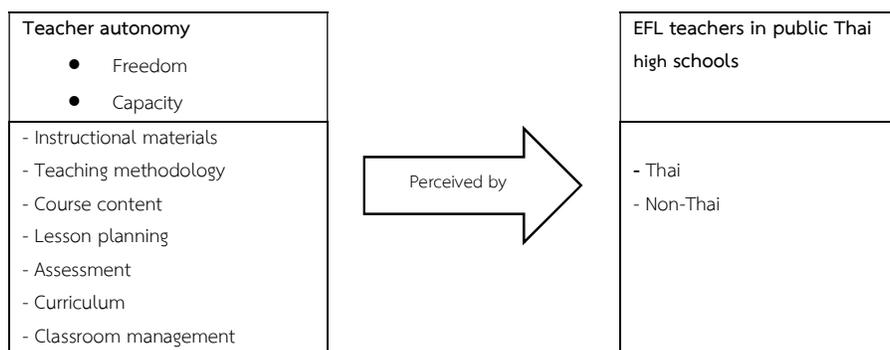


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

3.3 Research Studies in Teacher Autonomy

In terms of research, it was found that teacher autonomy increases school effectiveness as it positively impacts both teachers and students. Teachers with more autonomy support will have higher work satisfaction (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021) and stronger teaching motivation, which will further enhance their work engagement (Zhang et al., 2021). Quantitative research in the U.K. also revealed that teacher autonomy was different between several aspects of school teachers’ work. High teacher autonomy was reported in classroom management and practice areas, teaching methods, lesson planning, use of classroom time and rules for students’ behaviors. However, teacher autonomy was lower in areas of assessment and feedback. Also, primary school teachers perceived lower teacher autonomy than those in secondary schools (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). In the Indonesian context, secondary school teachers had a high sense of autonomy especially in the aspect of teaching methodology, instructional materials, course content, assessment, and lesson planning. However, they desired more autonomy in the decision-making process of school curriculum. They also needed more school support for teaching facilities and professional development (Cirocki & Anam, 2021).

In Thailand, EFL Thai teachers in public schools in Nothaburi perceived high autonomy of curriculum and general teaching. Treating students as a center of learning and basing teaching on learning standards were found to create a high level of teacher autonomy. The conception of student-centeredness drove the perceived high autonomy. The teachers took full responsibility to ensure their teaching met students’ needs and wants or facilitated students’ learning (Swatevacharkul, 2022). At a tertiary level, it was found that international EFL teachers in an international university perceived a moderate level (Khemavamsa, 2022), while pre-service EFL teachers reported a low degree of teacher autonomy mainly due to their limited online teaching experiences (Jeh-Awae & Wiriyakarun, 2021).

In short, research suggested that teacher autonomy is desired by teachers of all education levels as it connects with teachers' wellbeing, educational quality, professional development and school effectiveness. However, needs and support from schools are required for teacher autonomy development.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study took a form of a sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design (Creswell et al., 2003). For this study, quantitative data were first collected by a questionnaire, followed by a semi-structured interview to gather qualitative data at a subsequent stage to triangulate or elaborate on the quantitative results. The quantitative data (QUAN) gained more weight than the qualitative data (Qual).

Exploiting personal contact with school teachers, a convenience sampling technique was applied to gather data. There were 29 teachers from 6 public high schools (2 medium-size schools with 500-1499 students, 2 large-size schools with 1,500-2,499 students, and 2 extra large-size schools with at least 2,500 students) who completed the online teacher autonomy questionnaire. Three schools were in Bangkok and another three outside Bangkok (Nonthaburi, Samutprakarn, and Chantaburi). The majority was Thai, followed by American and Filipino. The teacher demographics were shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Teachers' demographics

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Gender	29	100	Nationality	29	100
- Male	- 14	- 48.30	- Thai	- 19	- 65.50
- Female	- 14	- 48.30	- American	- 7	- 24.10
- Unidentified	- 1	- 3.40	- Filipino	- 3	- 10.30
Age	29	100	Education	29	100
- 21-30	- 8	- 27.60	- Bachelor's	- 18	- 62.10
- 31-40	- 7	- 24.10	- Master's	- 10	- 34.50
- 41-50	- 11	- 37.90	- Doctoral	- 1	- 3.40
- 51-60	- 3	- 10.30			
Teaching experience	29	100			
- > 30 years	- 2	- 6.90			
- 20-30 years	- 6	- 20.70			
- 11-19 years	- 9	- 31.00			
- 5-10 years	- 7	- 24.10			
- < 5 years	- 5	- 17.20			

4.1 Research Instruments

4.1.1 Teacher Autonomy Questionnaire

The teacher autonomy questionnaire was mainly taken and adapted from Cirocki and Anam (2021) and Pearson and Moomaw (2005) for some items. The questionnaire including freedom and capacity items contained English and Thai to facilitate understanding of the Thai teacher subjects. Translation accuracy was verified by a back translation.

To ensure a content validity, three experts in the English language teaching field judged an item-objective congruence (IOC). Out of original 42 items of the teacher autonomy questionnaire, one item was deleted due to its repetition of another item, and this made the total items of 41: 6 items for instructional materials, teaching methodology, course content, and curriculum domains, 5 items for lesson planning and classroom management,

and 7 items for assessment. The content validity was 0.97. Subsequently, the questionnaire was tried out with 25 teachers in three different private schools to discover its reliability. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients revealed 0.93. This proved that the teacher autonomy questionnaire (Appendix) was of quality for the Thai educational context.

The five-point Likert scale questionnaire required the subjects to state their agreement with each item from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The degree of teacher autonomy was reflected by their agreement. An interpretation of the rating scores is as follows. The range of 4.21-5.00 signifies very high teacher and learner autonomy, 3.41-4.20 means high, 2.61-3.40 means moderate, 1.81-2.60 means low, and 1.00-1.80 means very low. The range of 0.80 for each scale is based on this formula: the highest value of the Likert-scale (5) – the lowest value (1) ÷ the highest value (5).

4.1.2 Semi-Structured Interview

Owing to the small number of participants who returned the questionnaire despite of twice reminders, semi-structured interview was considered, and these five questions were subsequently formulated as the guiding questions to verify the quantitative findings and gain insights. The questions were discussed with a colleague and minor modifications were made to facilitate clearer understanding of each question.

1. Do you think you have enough freedom to self-direct your own teaching? (in terms of instructional materials, teaching methodology, course content, lesson planning, assessment, curriculum, and classroom management) Why? Why not? (To verify the quantitative data on the ‘freedom’ construct of teacher autonomy)

2. Do you think you are capable of self-direct your own teaching? Why? Why not? (To verify the quantitative data on the ‘capacity’ construct of teacher autonomy)

3. Do you think you are an autonomous teacher of English? If yes, how autonomous are you? Why do you think so? (To verify the degree of autonomy as revealed from questions 1 and 2)

4. How do you professionally develop yourself? (To explore how they self-direct their learning)

5. What do you want to tell the school administrators regarding teacher autonomy? (To explore factors enhancing or hindering teacher autonomy or any improvements on teacher autonomy)

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

An online questionnaire was sent to teachers whom the researcher had personal contact with. They then distributed the questionnaires to their English teacher colleagues. Two months were spent on data collection as the response rate was rather low. Despite a resending of the questionnaire twice, only 29 teachers participated in this study. For data analysis, an overall mean and standard deviation (SD) of teacher autonomy were calculated. Further analysis of each construct was also performed for means and SDs.

A semi-structured interview was conducted over the phone with 6 teachers, which accounted for 21% of the total participants, from 5 schools who were willing to take part in the interview which took approximately 30 minutes. The interview was in Thai with the Thai informants and English with the non-Thai teacher. Their demographics are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2 Semi-Structured Interviewees’ Demographics

Participants	Gender	Nationality	Teaching Experiences (Years)	Position
Teacher #1	Female	Thai	1	Teacher
Teacher #2	Female	Thai	5	Teacher
Teacher #3	Female	Thai	12	Teacher
Teacher #4	Male	Thai	23	Teacher/School Director
Teacher #5	Male	Thai	30	Teacher
Teacher #6	Female	Filipino	32	Teacher

For the qualitative data, a thematic content analysis was carried out. Themes were in fact pre-determined based on the interview questions to support the quantitative data. Coding units were identified, and coding categories were defined after repeated reading of the responses by the researcher. Then, another coder helped verify the emerging themes. For any discrepancy, the two coders discussed until reaching an agreement. Relevant excerpts were presented under each emerging theme with underlined key phases or sentences.

5. RESULTS

It was found that, on average, teacher autonomy perceived by the teachers was at a high level ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.55$). Further analysis of the ‘freedom’ construct showed a high level ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.56$) and ‘capacity’ a very high level ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.57$). Mean and SD of each sub-dimension of teacher autonomy were reported in Table 3, while the appendix displayed mean and SD of each statement.

According to Table 3, it is clearly seen that all dimensions of ‘capacity’ were rated very highly, except Curriculum which was highly perceived. For ‘freedom’, Teaching methodology, Assessment, and Classroom management were perceived very highly. The rest was at a high level.

Table 3 Findings of Teacher Autonomy and Its Sub-Dimensions

Teacher autonomy ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.55$)	Freedom ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.56$)			Capacity ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.57$)		
	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Instructional materials	4.10	0.72	High	4.37	0.66	Very high
2. Teaching methodology	4.47	0.71	Very high	4.38	0.84	Very high
3. Course content	3.74	0.82	High	4.50	0.66	Very high
4. Lesson planning	3.83	0.73	High	4.36	0.55	Very high
5. Assessment	4.36	0.75	Very high	4.38	0.62	Very high
6. Curriculum	3.59	1.13	High	3.61	1.09	High
7. Classroom management	4.38	0.66	Very high	4.49	0.53	Very high

The content analysis generated five themes as follows.

5.1 Theme 1 Full Freedom for Learning Management and Teaching Support

Teachers reported having full freedom for their learning management. They had freedom to select materials and teaching methods that were deemed effective for their classes. Schools provided course books, but it was not necessary to strictly follow the course books. In regard to content, the national core curriculum specifies learning objectives for each educational level. The teachers made sure that learning objectives of core English courses were achieved as per the national core curriculum. For other courses, the teachers had full freedom to design the courses including course objectives. Some excerpts with emphasis in italics are :

I have *full freedom to design my course and select materials*. I can create things for my teaching. No one forces me to do this or that. I just have to achieve course objectives. For content, *all teachers teaching the same course discuss and agree on the content to be covered*. But for materials, *each teacher creates materials and shares them among the teaching team*. Each teacher has his or her own style of teaching, so *it's good that we design or create our own teaching materials for our students*. It's the teacher who knows his or her students well. (Teacher # 2)

At my school, *administrators provide us with freedom for every aspect of learning management*. For course books, based on the budget, the English content group head will select and provide us with the course

books. The course books are used as guidelines for content only. *Activities are designed by the teachers.* Modification of texts in the course books are possible to do, just follow the core curriculum's objectives. (Teacher # 3)

Every teacher reported that the schools had a teaching supervision policy to monitor quality of teaching.

My mentor always gives me suggestions for further improvements. There is one class observation each semester. Deputy director also gives distant observations by walking past every classroom. (Teacher # 2)

5.2 Theme 2 High Ability to Manage Own Teaching

The teachers humbly said they had the ability to self-direct their own teaching. All of them were not concerned about content as the core curriculum provided learning objectives as the guidelines. They were quite confident in their teaching management ability especially based on the student-centered approach. They also displayed their willingness to direct their own teaching. For example (with emphasis in italics) :

I can do well at a certain level. I know what I have to teach. I can plan my lessons. I can create new things for my classes. I use games to teach vocabulary. I am a person who likes to create new things like teaching methods or techniques and materials. Normally, I get new teaching techniques from Tik Tok. I adjust them for my students of course. I feel that I fail if I see my students don't enjoy learning. ... Yes, *there is a balance between freedom the school gives and my ability to direct my own teaching. This is good. I like that. I'm happy.* (Teacher # 2)

5.3 Theme 3 Moderate to Very High Autonomous Teachers

This theme confirmed the quantitative findings and the first two interview questions. Teachers were certain that they applied the active learning approach as required by the ministry of education. However, the new teacher with one year teaching experience perceived she was a moderate autonomous teacher with many things to learn. The teacher with 5-year experience humbly said she was a high autonomous teacher as her mentor always provided feedback for improvement. Teacher autonomy appeared to correlate with teaching experiences.

I rated myself moderate to high autonomy as I'm usually confident in my teaching, but I still need to improve. According to *my mentor's* comments, my teaching is good and it's active learning. (Teacher # 2)

The Filipino teacher indicated her autonomy which was exercised to promote learner autonomy in class. She was also willing to be autonomous.

Yes. I think so as I am open to change and follow the trends in methodology as well as being creative. I am also energetic ... *I like to reflect on what goes right or wrong about my teaching.* I offer optimal challenges for my students and thus *I am more like a counsellor* in the classroom rather than being a spoon-feeder. I use different teaching methods and utilize technology into my subject, instead of sticking to the course book, and *I adapt the curriculum when needed.* I try to *encourage my students to be more engaged in the class discussion.* (Teacher # 6)

The school director was a very high autonomous teacher and believed in teacher autonomy. Thus, as a school director, he provided full autonomy to every teacher in the school.

I was trained to manage my own teaching when I started working for this school. But *I could get help if I need it from senior teachers...* Yes, *I am able to direct my own teaching.* So, as a school director, I want every teacher to be able to manage their own teaching. *They all have full freedom for their teaching.* They just have to follow the core curriculum in terms of the contents, that's it". (Teacher # 4)

5.4 Theme 4 Professional Learning

Professional learning in terms of self-study and school requirements was founded. The teachers willingly performed self-study to professionally develop themselves. Social media such as YouTube, Facebook and Tik Tok and webinars were the major self-study sources of knowledge for innovative teaching techniques.

I learn from social media. I follow educational pages that share games, online and offline materials. I would like to learn more about instructional materials. ... After the online learning, students enjoy more if I use online materials. (Teacher # 2)

Besides, the schools provided training and seminars. Reflection and classroom action were also referred to as other ways for professional learning.

I reflect on learning problems by taking notes. Then I plan for further teaching based on the problems. But right now, *the school asks teachers to reflect too*. We receive questions asking about lesson plans and students' behaviors. This is for competency assessment. It's a whole semester data collection. We need to reflect on every lesson plan. Besides, *the school will ask us to do classroom research soon*. (teacher # 1)

5.5 Theme 5 Teacher Autonomy Constraints

There were two issues that were pointed out by every teacher which were considered as constraints to teacher autonomy development: budget for materials and facilities and non-teaching works. Some of the excerpts with emphasis in italics are :

I would like to have *a budget for materials development and training* on materials construction. I sometimes used my own budget to attend training or learn about new teaching techniques and materials development from social media. And there is *no projector in some classrooms*. (teacher # 1)

For learning management, the school administrators should *support materials, facilities and budget for instruction* such as modern instructional media, technology in a classroom and equipment ready for use. (teacher # 5)

Performing non-teaching works such as quality assurance documentation, financial and office supply documents. This takes a lot of time, and it takes away teaching time. (teacher # 3)

It should be noted that themes 1, 2 and 3 converged with the quantitative findings of the high level of teacher autonomy. Theme 4 augmented providing information on professional development while theme 5 diverged with the constraints to teacher autonomy. Table 4 illustrates data mixing.

6. DISCUSSION

The finding of high teacher autonomy corroborated with the previous findings of Swatevacharkul (2022) conducted in the Thai basic educational context and Cirocki and Anam (2021) in the Indonesian school context. The followings offer some explanations of the perceived high autonomy of the English teachers in public Thai schools.

6.1 Balanced Freedom and Capacity for Teacher Autonomy Development through PLC

There was a balance between freedom and capacity of teacher autonomy which may contribute to high autonomy perceived by the teachers. High or too high freedom given to teachers may turn to be harmful to students' learning if those teachers do not possess the ability to self-direct their own teaching. For EFL teachers to healthily exercise autonomy for the benefits of students and teachers themselves, there should be a balance between these two constructs to create a feeling of control in the school environment, work commitment and satisfaction. The findings revealed that professional learning communities (PLC) play a crucial role in promoting the perceived high degree of teacher autonomy through a mentoring system, reflective practice, and collaboration among teachers.

First, the mentoring system develops the teachers' capacity to self-direct their own teaching. Provision of freedom should come with a support system implemented by a school. The mentoring system creates opportunities for individual teachers to learn from people with more experiences. It promotes collaborative learning among teachers and interactions with others in the professional community (Farrell, 2022). The mentoring system encourages a collaborative culture of schooling as Viera (2003) suggested. Teacher autonomy is thus seen as the interdependence between teachers and colleagues, which assists in promoting teacher autonomy in the

Thai school contexts. Besides being the support system, the mentoring system monitors the teaching quality of each teacher. The mentoring system gives rise to a development of teacher professionalism and a higher degree of teacher autonomy.

Second, reflective practice contributes to the balance of freedom and capacity. In general, reflection is “conscious thinking about what we are doing and why we are doing it” (Farrell, 2015, p. 8). Reflective practice encourages teachers to think critically about their teaching and better plan for their next teaching. As Little (1995) argued, autonomous teachers always have a strong sense of responsibility for their teaching exercising through reflection. More importantly, reflections lead to opportunities for classroom inquiry (McGrath, 2000) and action research that normally attempts to solve learning problems. Classroom action research fosters teacher autonomy in terms of both teaching and teacher-learning domains. Therefore, reflective practice should be implemented as the policy of the English departments and the schools.

Third, collaboration among teachers enhances the interdependence of teacher autonomy (Smith & Erdogan, 2008). Sharing materials, teaching techniques and classroom research findings are worthwhile performing in a school context as this promotes teacher-learning domain and prevents a reluctance to try new things which is considered as a constraint of teacher autonomy. In contrast, this encourages the teachers to be advantageous and even creative. Thus, teacher collaboration provides chances for teachers to embrace new pedagogies and knowledge. It empowers teachers and cultivates their autonomy.

In short, PLC increases the ability to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes for teachers in a cooperative manner with other teachers. It fosters collaborative teacher autonomy. As Stoll et al. (2006) argued, developing professional learning communities is highly likely to establish capacity for sustainable improvement.

The implication lies in the attempt of the schools to balance freedom and capacity of teacher autonomy. Freedom is needed by the teachers, but promoting their abilities to self-direct their own teaching is equally important. This can be achieved by PLC which should be promoted and implemented in every school. Mentoring system, peer observation, knowledge sharing, self-study, training, and seminar are examples to encourage PLC which will lead to classroom action research with a major goal of solving students’ learning problems and improve their language learning. The school’s implementation of the transformative leadership policy thus deems appropriate and effective. Transformative leaders empower followers and pay attention to their personal development and develop their leadership capacity via coaching, mentoring and provision of both challenges and support (Bass & Riggio, 2008). The transformative leadership model is a good drive to develop teacher autonomy of the English teachers in Thai schools.

6.2 A Strong Sense of Self Development

The high level of autonomy might be resulted from a strong sense of self development. The qualitative findings displayed an attempt, willingness and responsibility of the teachers to professionally develop themselves. The teacher participants clearly exercised their autonomy in the area of professional learning for the benefits of students’ learning. They perceived the value of a student-centered learning approach, especially active learning which is the pedagogy required by the ministry of education to be implemented in every school. The active learning approach encourages teachers to be active in their teaching. As the evidence showed, every teacher tried to find activities that give knowledge and at the same time create positive emotion and learning motivation for their students. This clearly reflects their view of the importance of cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning. To create positive learning experiences, the teachers employ new teaching techniques and effective online and offline materials for the utmost learning outcomes of their students. Social media is the crucial source of the teachers’ learning.

Therefore, the key role of social media is clearly seen in fostering teacher autonomy in terms of professional action and professional development (Smith & Erdogan, 2008). Social media, especially Tik Tok and Facebook, are useful sources of teachers' learning as they provide free instructional materials. This clearly assists the teachers to self-direct their teaching and learning as a learner. It provides individualized learning for individual teachers. As argued by Benson and Lamb (2021, p. 83), "autonomy may be less about controlling learning processes and more about being aware of learning resources in the environment and being able to use those resources productively". Social media such as Facebook and Tik Tok and webinars contribute a great deal to teacher professional development and teacher autonomy promotion.

Autonomous teachers are always the learners who are creative and never stop learning and developing themselves. This calls for the schools to provide training that the teachers need to support their teaching, i.e., English teaching techniques and materials development. In English language teaching, teaching methods and materials cannot be seen in isolation. Such training will enable the teachers to become materials producers. Constructing own materials should promote more creativity in English pedagogy and develop increased teacher autonomy. Regular upskilling and reskilling are also considered beneficial to create and maintain the teachers' awareness of language teaching professional development, which will help encourage the teachers' role in promoting and enriching their own autonomy.

6.3 Diminishment of Constraints to Promote More Teacher Autonomy

Although the teachers perceived high autonomy, they pointed out two constraints of autonomy which are budget for materials and training and non-teaching works. The findings on a lack of budget were in line with the previous research (Swatevacharkul, 2022; Murray et al., 2020; Cirocki & Anam, 2021). The teachers need school support for procurement of materials, in particular digital materials. The students' preference for digital materials is due to their experiences of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. To support the EFL teachers for their innovative teaching, which is one characteristic of autonomous teachers, the school should seriously consider this financial issue and find ways to provide adequate materials and classroom facilities. A requirement to perform non-teaching works especially quality assurance, which supported Benson's (2010) work in Hong Kong, should also receive serious attention by the school administrators. There has been an attempt to return the teachers to their classrooms, but this seems not to be successful yet. This constraint imposed by the educational institutions affects both teachers and students and the educational quality in general. Consequently, the schools should try harder to diminish these two constraints of teacher autonomy for the better quality of English language teaching and learning.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The EFL teachers in public high schools in Thailand perceived that they had high freedom to self-direct their teaching and they strongly believed in their capacity to make decisions about every aspect of English learning management. Having freedom does not guarantee effective teaching if teachers are not capable of self-directing their teaching. Too much freedom can be frightening for some teachers and may even hinder teacher autonomy. The balanced freedom and capacity for teacher autonomy development is thus vital. This can be achieved by applying the mentoring system which supports the teachers and meanwhile monitors the teaching quality. Reflective practice and professional learning communities also contribute to the balance of freedom and capacity of teacher autonomy. The strong sense of professional development or a teacher learning is another factor that fosters high teacher autonomy. The attempt of the schools to diminish teacher autonomy constraints, i.e., a lack of budget for materials and innovative teaching and a demand for non-teaching works will increase a

greater degree of teacher autonomy, which will result in better quality teaching and learning of the students as well as a well-being of the teachers. In other words, when students learn with autonomy supportive teachers, positive academic outcomes are achieved including more satisfaction, higher determination, and more learning enthusiasm leading to higher autonomous learners.

Due to the small sample size of this study, the findings should be treated with caution and a larger scale study should be conducted to verify the findings. Further research can explore teacher autonomy and teacher professionalism to obtain information on how EFL teachers develop themselves as learners and how this impacts learner autonomy development. Empirical study to investigate the relationship between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy will contribute to pedagogical knowledge on how teacher autonomy impacts learner autonomy development. The relationship between teacher autonomy and other variables such as English proficiency of learners, work satisfaction, work stress and burnout of English teachers in the Thai educational system will provide useful administrative information to school administrators. Besides, a comparative study of teacher autonomy perceived by Thai and non-Thai EFL teachers will definitely contribute to general and cultural factors affecting their perceived teacher autonomy. Exploring teaching autonomy of EFL teachers in Thailand and psychological factors such as self-efficacy, motivation, and identity are also suggested.

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9. APPENDIX

Teacher autonomy questionnaire and findings of each statement

Teacher Autonomy Questionnaire		Findings	
Instructional materials		M	SD
1	I am allowed to use diverse materials to maximize student learning. โรงเรียนอนุญาตให้ฉันใช้สื่อการสอนที่หลากหลายเพื่อให้นักเรียนเรียนรู้ได้มากขึ้น	4.59	0.87
2	I am able to use diverse materials to accelerate student learning. ฉันมีความสามารถในการใช้สื่อการสอนที่หลากหลายเพื่อให้นักเรียนเรียนรู้ได้เร็วขึ้น	4.28	0.80
3	I am not expected to routinely use a specific coursebook. โรงเรียนไม่ต้องการให้ฉันใช้แต่หนังสือเรียนเล่มใดเล่มหนึ่งตลอดเวลา	3.24	1.21
4	I am able to make decisions on choosing instructional materials that I use to support struggling learners. ฉันมีความสามารถที่จะตัดสินใจได้เองในการเลือกสื่อการสอนเพื่อช่วยนักเรียนที่มีปัญหาการเรียน	4.59	0.57
5	I am allowed to select instructional materials for my teaching. โรงเรียนอนุญาตให้ฉันเลือกสื่อการสอนสำหรับการสอนของตัวเองได้	4.48	0.87
6	I am able to take part in evaluating the appropriateness of materials that are relevant to my subject. ฉันมีความสามารถที่จะร่วมประเมินความเหมาะสมของสื่อการสอนในรายวิชาที่ฉันสอนได้	4.24	0.95
Teaching methodology			
7	I am allowed to employ teaching methods that I find useful. โรงเรียนอนุญาตให้ฉันใช้วิธีและรูปแบบการสอนที่ฉันคิดว่ามีประโยชน์ได้เอง	4.52	0.69
8	I am able to employ teaching methods and approaches that I find useful. ฉันมีความสามารถที่จะเลือกใช้วิธีและรูปแบบการสอนที่ฉันคิดว่ามีประโยชน์ได้เอง	4.41	0.87
9	I am allowed to deliver student-centered lessons. โรงเรียนอนุญาตให้ฉันสอนแบบยึดผู้เรียนเป็นศูนย์กลางได้	4.55	0.74
10	I am able to decide on the development of skills and practices that promote lifelong learning and independent problem-solving. ฉันมีความสามารถที่จะตัดสินใจเองได้ว่าจะพัฒนาทักษะใดและใช้วิธีฝึกปฏิบัติแบบใดเพื่อส่งเสริมการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตและการแก้ปัญหาด้วยตนเองของนักเรียน	4.34	0.94
11	I have freedom to use methodologies and environments that engage students in active learning. ฉันมีอิสระในการใช้ระเบียบวิธีการสอนและสร้างบรรยากาศชั้นเรียนที่ให้นักเรียนมีส่วนร่วมในการเรียนแบบลงมือปฏิบัติ	4.28	1.03
12	I am free to be creative in my teaching approach. โรงเรียนให้อิสระแก่ฉันในการคิดสร้างสรรค์รูปแบบการสอนเอง	4.55	0.78
Course content			
13	I have freedom to decide on the language skills I teach in my class. ฉันมีอิสระที่จะตัดสินใจเองได้ว่าจะสอนทักษะภาษาอังกฤษใดให้แก่ นักเรียนของฉัน	4.00	1.00
14	I am able to determine how content is sequenced/delivered in my class. ฉันมีความสามารถที่จะตัดสินใจเองได้ว่าจะเรียงลำดับเนื้อหาและสอนเนื้อหาอย่างไรให้นักเรียนของฉัน	4.28	1.00
15	I am able to choose the content for the lessons I teach. ฉันมีความสามารถในการเลือกเนื้อหาของบทเรียนที่ฉันต้องสอนได้เอง	4.28	0.94
16	I don't have to follow the content in the coursebook strictly. ฉันไม่จำเป็นต้องสอนตามเนื้อหาในหนังสือเรียนอย่างเคร่งครัด	3.83	1.17
17	I am able to select activities/tasks for my lessons. ฉันมีความสามารถในการเลือกกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้/งานปฏิบัติต่าง ๆ ได้เอง	4.41	0.78
18	I am able to determine for the most part of what I teach in my class. ฉันเป็นคนกำหนดสิ่งที่สอนส่วนใหญ่ในชั้นเรียนของฉันเอง	4.17	0.80
19	I have the freedom to include whatever information I want in my lesson plan. ฉันมีอิสระที่จะบรรจุเนื้อหาใด ๆ ก็ได้ในแผนการสอนของฉัน	4.21	0.82

Teacher Autonomy Questionnaire		Findings	
Lesson planning			
20	I am able to prepare my own lesson plans. ฉันมีความสามารถในการจัดเตรียมแผนการสอนได้เอง	4.52	0.63
21	I don't have to follow strict guidelines while completing my lesson plans. ฉันไม่ต้องเขียนแผนการสอนตามแนวทางที่กำหนดไว้อย่างเคร่งครัด	3.34	1.34
22	I have freedom to identify the learning objectives for my lessons. ฉันมีอิสระที่จะกำหนดวัตถุประสงค์การเรียนรู้ของบทเรียนที่ฉันสอนได้	3.93	0.92
23	I am able to identify the learning objectives for my lessons. ฉันมีความสามารถในการกำหนดวัตถุประสงค์การเรียนรู้ของบทเรียนที่ฉันต้องสอนเองได้	4.21	0.68
Assessment			
24	I have freedom in promoting self-assessment among my students. ฉันมีอิสระที่จะส่งเสริมให้นักเรียนประเมินตัวเอง	4.28	1.00
25	I am able to design self-assessment activities. ฉันมีความสามารถในการออกแบบกิจกรรมเพื่อให้นักเรียนประเมินตนเอง	4.28	0.84
26	I have freedom in designing formative tasks to prepare my students for summative assessment. ฉันมีอิสระที่จะออกแบบกิจกรรมระหว่างการเรียนรู้เพื่อเตรียมความพร้อมนักเรียนสำหรับการประเมินปลายภาค	4.31	0.85
27	I am able to design formative tasks to prepare my students for summative assessment. ฉันมีความสามารถในการออกแบบกิจกรรมระหว่างการเรียนรู้เพื่อเตรียมความพร้อมนักเรียนสำหรับการประเมินปลายภาค	4.38	0.73
28	I am able to design my own tests to check my students' knowledge. ฉันมีความสามารถที่จะออกแบบข้อทดสอบเองได้เพื่อทดสอบความรู้ของนักเรียน	4.48	0.69
29	I am free to select evaluation and assessment activities used in my class. ฉันมีอิสระในการเลือกกิจกรรมการวัดและประเมินผลนักเรียนของตนเองได้	4.48	0.63
30	I am able to design evaluation and assessment activities used in my class. ฉันมีความสามารถในการออกแบบกิจกรรมการวัดและประเมินผลนักเรียนของตนเองได้	4.38	0.68
Curriculum			
31	My school encourages me to suggest changes/modifications to the curriculum to improve the functioning of the school. โรงเรียนสนับสนุนให้ฉันเสนอแนะว่าควรที่จะเปลี่ยนแปลงหรือปรับหลักสูตรอย่างไรเพื่อพัฒนาการดำเนินงานของโรงเรียน	3.93	1.07
32	I am involved in contributing to discussions regarding the implementation of the school curriculum. ฉันมีส่วนร่วมในการอภิปรายเรื่องการนำหลักสูตรของโรงเรียนไปสู่การปฏิบัติ	3.86	1.22
33	I have freedom to propose changes to my school teaching policies. ฉันมีอิสระที่จะเสนอให้มีการเปลี่ยนแปลงนโยบายด้านการสอนของโรงเรียนได้	3.24	1.41
34	I am able to contribute to a development of institution curriculum. ฉันมีความสามารถที่จะเข้าร่วมในการพัฒนาหลักสูตรสถานศึกษาได้	3.66	1.23
35	I am involved in checking whether the school curriculum meets the needs of my students. ฉันมีส่วนร่วมในการตรวจสอบว่าหลักสูตรของโรงเรียนตรงกับความต้องการของนักเรียนหรือไม่	3.48	1.18
36	I am involved in the process of evaluating the school curriculum; the process is not limited to the management team. ฉันมีส่วนร่วมในกระบวนการประเมินหลักสูตรของโรงเรียน ซึ่งไม่ได้จำกัดเฉพาะทีมผู้บริหารเท่านั้น	3.45	1.21
Classroom Management			
37	I have the freedom to promote healthy competition among my students. ฉันมีอิสระที่จะส่งเสริมการแข่งขันเพื่อพัฒนาตนเองของนักเรียน	4.21	0.82
38	If I do not want students to sit in rows, I am able to use other types of seating arrangement during my lessons. ถ้าฉันไม่ต้องการให้นักเรียนนั่งเป็นแถว ๆ ฉันสามารถใช้วิธีการจัดที่นั่งแบบอื่น ๆ ได้ในคาบเรียนของฉัน	4.31	1.11
39	I am allowed to establish classroom work procedures for all my lessons. โรงเรียนอนุญาตให้ฉันกำหนดกระบวนการเรียนการสอนในทุก ๆ คาบสอนของฉันได้เอง	4.55	0.69
40	I am able to establish classroom work procedures for all my lessons. ฉันมีความสามารถที่จะกำหนดกระบวนการเรียนการสอนในทุก ๆ คาบสอนของฉันได้เอง	4.59	0.68
41	I am able to set standards of behavior that my students must follow in the classroom. ฉันมีความสามารถที่จะกำหนดมาตรฐานความประพฤติในห้องเรียนที่นักเรียนต้องปฏิบัติตามเองได้	4.59	0.57