

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of the Research

Learner autonomy is the capacity of the learner to make a decision and take charge of their own learning (Little, 1991). The essence of learner autonomy is the learner's capacity to direct one's own learning (Little, 2007). It does not mean letting students learn on their own or allowing them to do so without the guidance of a teacher. Thus, teachers and students must work together regularly to help learners develop their own sense of learner autonomy. In this sense, it enables learners to set realistic goals in the context of formal education. It helps them develop self-awareness and learn more effectively. In other words, learner autonomy is the student's ability to manage his or her own abilities and skills to achieve learning goals.

In the realm of English, learner autonomy has long been emphasized in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. It is one of the aspects that contribute to the success of EFL students (Tran & Duong, 2018). There are some explanations for this agreement. According to Yoshinta & Yuniarti (2021), the reasons are: First, learner autonomy lifts motivation, particularly intrinsic drive, to meet their own learning needs. Intrinsically motivated learners would engage in learning activities for the sake of learning rather than for the sake of receiving extrinsic benefits. Learners would be in charge of their own education and make judgments about it. Second, learners will recognize that

their learning outcomes, whether success or failure, are the consequence of their own hard work and learning strategies rather than external forces. Third, students' learning processes become more effective and efficient when learners are motivated and capable of recognizing their own strengths and weaknesses. As a result, their level of autonomy will determine the degree of success in their learning outcomes. Fourth, the development of procedural abilities influences the attainment of communication competencies.

In the classroom, learner autonomy is not easy to develop to their maximum potential (Little, 2003). The emergence of autonomy in both the process and content of learning needs a good teacher's stimulus, insight, and guidance (Little, 2000). Since students do not understand how to develop learner autonomy, the teacher should help learners become learner autonomy.

In Indonesia, the concept of learner autonomy was formerly introduced by Ki Hajar Dewantara with the motto "Tut Wuri Handayani." This concept highlights the student center learning and teacher's role as facilitators, guides, and collaborators (Claramita, 2016). In 2013, the government introduced Curriculum 2013. This curriculum's characteristics are similar to Tut Wuri Handayani's idea. It emphasizes the learner's freedom and opportunity to choose how to achieve a learning goal by integrating ICT into the teaching-learning process. Nadiem Makarim, Indonesia's Minister of Education, launched Merdeka Belajar as an educational policy in 2019. The essence is to give students more freedom to direct their own learning. Students are no longer

taught to memorize information; instead, they are trained to select and comprehend relevant information critically (Arlita, 2021).

Studies on learner autonomy in Indonesian EFL settings have been conducted in school contexts. Learner autonomy implementation in offline classes (Yuliani, Y., & Lengkanawati, N. S, 2017; Darsih, 2018; Yulianto, 2019; Wiraningsih & Santosa, 2020; Yuzulia, 2020) and online classes (Yoshinta & Yuniarti, 2021; Dalilan, 2021; Muhammad, 2020; and Rinekso, 2020). These studies revealed that students positively view the importance of learner autonomy (Yoshinta & Yuniarti, 2021; Dalilan, 2021; Yulianto, 2019; and Muhammad, 2020). Their positive perception is followed by their positive attitude, such as active participation during online learning (Yoshinta & Yuniarti, 2021), active commenting on others' ideas, control on deciding learning modes, setting, materials, and finishing the challenges (Muhammad, 2020). In addition, motivation to be self-reliant is also found in the Yoshinta & Yuniarti (2021) study. However, Yoshinta & Yuniarti (2021) mentioned that a positive attitude does not always imply a satisfactory learning outcome. Yulianto (2019) stated that it is not easy to develop learner autonomy without adequate support from the teacher. Moreover, Yuliani & Lengkanawati (2017) mentioned that lack of learner autonomy experience, poor English proficiency, and a heavy concentration on the national exam are identified as barriers among Indonesian EFL students. Although some Indonesian teachers have applied strategies to promote learner autonomy, such as writing through self-directed feedback (Akmilia 2017), Problem-Based Learning by Darsih (2018), most

students are not autonomous yet. The use of IT such as Schoology (Muhammad, 2020), e-learning and Kahoot applications (Rinekso, 2020), blogs, self-journals, videoconferences, and collaboration media (Yuzulia, 2020) had promoted English learner autonomy.

Since teachers lack knowledge in promoting learner autonomy (Wiraningsih & Santosa, 2020), they need learner autonomy training to improve their perception of learner autonomy (Yuliani, 2017). Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati (2019) mentioned that teachers had less confidence in allowing students to take control of their learning. The teacher had conflicting beliefs about following the entire curriculum and a misconception that learner autonomy would reduce her work in achieving curriculum goals. According to Wiraningsih & Santosa (2020), teachers face challenges in promoting learner autonomy due to school zoning, unplanned events schedules, a lack of teaching knowledge, and student characteristics. Thus, some strategies were used to transform challenges into opportunities, such as initiating activities, collaborating, and planning.

However, in Indonesia, the teaching and learning process in the pandemic has shifted from offline to online learning, from online to limited face-to-face learning. The COVID-19 area's level determined it. In these unprecedented situations, teachers and students had to accept that the classes were conducted online. They needed an internet connection and an ICT device to conduct the teaching and learning process. Students had to study independently when the internet connection was not working properly. This was

a challenging situation. Online learning in Indonesia needs more user-friendly platforms, especially for students who reside in remote rural areas with restricted internet connections Agung et al. (2020). It was similar to the conditions in the Kesugihan district, a rural area located about 18 km from Cilacap regency, Central Java, Indonesia.

Consequently, teachers must promote learner autonomy, as they were physically separated from their students and could not always provide all of the information in their life. Moreover, students would always face many new challenges and confront many unprecedented situations in their life. Thus, promoting learner autonomy in learning is essential for their mental growth. However, EFL teachers may face some challenges in promoting learner autonomy.

Considering the phenomena above, it needs to explore the teachers' challenges and identify the factors in promoting learner autonomy in this pandemic era where some schools have been conducting remote learning and *Pertemuan Tatap Muka Terbatas* (PTMT) or limited face-to-face learning. Moreover, it is also crucial to explore teachers' strategies to face those challenges. In addition, the research on EFL teacher challenges and strategies in promoting learner autonomy in Cilacap, Central Java, Indonesia, has not yet been conducted moreover in the pandemic era. Hopefully, it can provide insight for teachers in improving their classes and help students in promoting learner autonomy.

## **B. Research Questions**

1. What are EFL teachers' challenges in promoting learner autonomy in the pandemic era?
2. What are EFL teachers' strategies to overcome the challenges in promoting learner autonomy in the pandemic era?

## **C. Objectives of the Research**

Particularly, the purposes of this research are as follows:

1. to investigate EFL teachers' challenges in promoting learner autonomy in the pandemic era.
2. to explore EFL teachers' strategies to overcome the challenges in promoting learner autonomy in the pandemic era.

## **D. Contributions of the Research**

This research provides educational practitioners with considerable information regarding the challenges and strategies in promoting learner autonomy during the pandemic. This result is expected to give a reference for EFL teachers in improving English classes and helping students become autonomous learners. For the education decision-maker, it can be a reference in evaluating regulations and as feedback in making new regulations.