



Readiness For Learner Autonomy: Bangladeshi EFL Learners' Motivation, Attitude and Practices

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This qualitative study underscores the potential variability in learners' autonomous learning due to the differences in psychological factors, and endeavors to explore Bangladeshi English language learners' motivation, attitude, and practices for conceptualizing their readiness for learner autonomy.

Methodology: To reach its aim, a qualitative research design was employed to investigate the participants' motivation, attitudes, and practices. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 students enrolled in an EFL program in different Bangladeshi universities. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data, relating to the key themes related to learner autonomy.

Main Findings: The findings substantiate the participants' readiness as evidenced by their clear learning goals, active engagement in a wide range of autonomous practices, and positive attitudes towards autonomous learning. However, a significant degree of teacher dependency traced among the participants, leading the study to classify their readiness as 'reactive autonomy'.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study is unique in a sense that it explores learners' readiness for autonomy by gauging their motivation, attitude, and practices from a holistic perspective. It bridges gaps in the existing literature by addressing both motivational and attitudinal aspects of the learners, offering nuanced insights into fostering learner autonomy, particularly in contexts like Bangladesh, where traditional, teacher-centered approaches have long dominated the educational landscape.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The shift from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered approach in language education has brought the concept of learner autonomy to the forefront. Defined as learners' ability to take charge of their own learning [1], [2], this approach is widely regarded as beneficial in language learning as it empowers learners to make independent choices and take responsibility for their learning [3], [4]. As a result, the implementation of learner autonomy helps dismantle traditional power dynamics in classrooms by ensuring a gradual shift in responsibility from teachers to learners [5]. Furthermore, autonomous learners tend to achieve greater success as they develop autonomous learning skills and apply these in real life, going beyond the classroom [4]. Give all these the benefits, there is global emphasis on promoting learner autonomy in formal language classrooms. However, the implementation of learner autonomy can be a bit intricate since it involves learners' psychological aspects [6]. Literature suggests that learners become autonomous when they willingly accept their learning responsibilities

and engage in autonomous learning practices [1], [3], [7], [8]. This view indicates that a key prerequisite for autonomous learning is learners' readiness, which includes motivation, autonomy in learning, and a positive attitude towards autonomous learning [9]-[12]. However, readiness for autonomous learning is likely to differ from learner to learner depending on their levels of motivation and attitude [13]-[15]. Therefore, literature emphasizes to examine learners' readiness for autonomous learning prior to implementing autonomous practices in classroom [9].

In the Bangladeshi EFL context, the discourse of learner autonomy has already gained much attention. However, the number of empirical studies on this topic is still limited, leaving the actual state of learner autonomy in Bangladesh remained largely unexplored. Moreover, conflicting findings of these studies paint a perplexing picture—while some studies claim a glimpse of learner autonomy and readiness among Bangladeshi language learners [16], [17], others highlight their teacher dependency and a lack of a positive attitude towards autonomous learning [18], [19]. As a result, these contrasting findings create ambiguity in actualizing the true state of learner autonomy in the Bangladeshi EFL context. In addition, previous studies have primarily focused on learners' attitudes while putting less attention on motivation, a crucial factor in gauging readiness for autonomy [16]-[18]. Since attitude and motivation are interconnected [20], addressing both factors is essential, otherwise it may lead to an incomplete understanding of learner autonomy. Thus, these gaps in the literature make it challenging to make informed decision regarding the design and implementation of effective strategies to promote learner autonomy in formal language classrooms. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge the gap in existing literature by examining both attitude and motivation to provide a more comprehensive conceptualization of readiness for learner autonomy in Bangladesh.

Besides that, this study is significant both in terms of academic research and language education practices. Given the prevalent teacher dependency among Bangladeshi EFL learners, exploring their readiness for learner autonomy from both attitudinal and motivational perspectives offers a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in the Bangladeshi context. Moreover, the study's findings have the potential to contribute to the development of more effective pedagogical approaches for fostering learner autonomy in a language classroom. It is also hoped that, the results will provide policy-makers in Bangladesh and beyond with empirical insights in making informed decisions regarding the implementation of learner autonomy. Additionally, the findings can serve as a foundation for future research, addressing gaps in current literature and guiding further investigations into autonomous language learning. Given the critical need to explore the extent of learner autonomy among Bangladeshi English language learners, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1. To what extent Bangladeshi English language learners are motivated for autonomous learning?

RQ 2. Are their attitudes positive enough to demonstrate readiness for autonomous learning?

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Readiness for learner autonomy can be referred to as learners' motivation for language learning; willingness and positive attitude towards autonomous learning; acceptance of learning responsibilities; and regulating autonomous learning behavior [13], [14]. This view sheds light on factors like motivation and attitude. Among these, motivation pertains to learners' desires or intended goals that drive them towards engaging in effortful conduct [21]-[23]. Learners' motivation is a pivotal factor that influences learners' readiness for autonomous learning [24]. Learners with high levels of motivation are more likely to regulate autonomous learning behaviors compared to those with lower motivation levels [25]-[27]. In addition, attitude encompasses a set of beliefs which helps learners to possess negative or positive psychological tendency towards autonomous learning [28]-[30]. Such beliefs may establish a spectrum of mindsets varying from teacher-dependency to autonomous learning [9]. Thus, learners are likely to demonstrate readiness for learner autonomy when they hold a positive perception and preference for autonomous learning activities [31].

To conceptualize learners' readiness for learner autonomy, Cotterall [32] investigated the beliefs of 131 English language learners. The results of the study revealed that learners' beliefs have profoundly influenced their autonomous learning and their prior experiences played a prominent role in shaping their beliefs towards autonomous learning. Similarly, Yıldırım [5] explored 103 Turkish learners' readiness by examining their perceptions. The study revealed that learners demonstrated autonomy and a positive attitude towards sharing responsibilities with their teachers. In the Hong Kong context, Chan, Humphreys and Spratt [24] investigated 508 students' readiness by examining motivation and perceptions towards their learning responsibilities and abilities. The findings indicate that motivated students are more autonomous compared to less motivated ones. Cirocki, Anam and Retnaningdyah [14] studied 391 Indonesian EFL students and teachers for conceptualizing readiness. The study found that the participants were not ready to regulate their learning objectives and materials, rather they are passive and excessively teacher-dependent and possess low levels of motivation. The study presumed motivation is preventing participants from becoming autonomous. Khalymon and Shevchenko [33] explored Ukrainian prospective teachers' perceptions and beliefs for gauging readiness, encompassing their willingness to take responsibility, motivation for learning, and capacity to act autonomously. The study found a

moderate level of readiness for autonomy among the learners despite them having high levels of motivation and willingness.

In the Bangladeshi context, Mehrin [19] studied 80 learners' attitudes and perceptions for estimating their readiness. The study found the learners to possess a teacher-dependent attitude and perceive autonomous learning as a beneficiary only under teachers' authority. Similarly, Islam [18] found her participants to be holding teacher-dependency and unwillingness towards autonomous learning. On the contrary, a few other studies have come up with such findings that indicate the presence of autonomous characteristics among Bangladeshi learners' learning practices. For instance, Bashir [34] studied 69 undergraduate students' perceptions and found the participants to be ready for autonomous learning as they prefer autonomy instead teacher-centered learning. Jahan [17] found the participants ready for autonomous learning as they hold the capability for managing their learning, and engaged in a wide range of autonomous activities. Akter [16] also found her participants holding the characteristics of autonomous learners. Thus, these contrasting findings in the literature make it challenging to design and develop appropriate strategies regarding the promotion of learner autonomy in Bangladeshi EFL classrooms. Therefore, this study sets fourth to address this gap.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Types of Research

This study explores learners' readiness for autonomy by examining their motivation, attitude, and language learning practices. Studies of this kind usually requires a rich, detailed data extracted from the participants' own interpretation of experiences and viewpoints. Therefore, a qualitative research design was employed for data collection, incorporating semi-structured interviews. This approach allows participants to reflect on their learning experiences and articulate their perspectives on autonomous language learning in a more natural and open-ended manner [35]. Moreover, Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to gain deeper insights into participants' perceptions of autonomous learning, enabling them to freely express their viewpoints and experiences. As a result, this method enhances the study's understanding of learners' motivation, attitude, and actual learning practices.

3.2. Population and Research Sample

The study collected data from twenty participants across seven universities in Bangladesh using a purposive sampling method. The participants for the interview sessions were required to be at least second-year students who are pursuing EFL. Participants were primarily selected from the Department of English and the Institute of Education and Research at each university, as these institutions offer specialized EFL programs. The recruitment process began with two participants from the University of Rajshahi, who were then asked to refer similar participants from other universities. This chain-referral method ensured a diverse yet focused participant pool. The primary aim of this study was to explore learners' readiness and the influence of contextual factors on their motivation, attitude, and learning practices, rather than to generalize findings across all EFL learners in Bangladesh. Given this objective, a sample size of twenty participants was appeared sufficient to extract meaningful insights into the participants motivation and perception and their autonomous learning practices.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

As a qualitative study, semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method. The key themes of the study were identified and categorized into three broad areas: motivation, attitude, and autonomous learning practices. The category of attitude was further divided into two subcategories: learners' attitude toward learning content and strategy selection, and learners' attitude toward autonomous practices. These subcategories helped in structuring the interview questions to ensure a focused and meaningful discussion with the participants. Then, the instruments were designed to capture participants' experiences and reflections rather than focusing on theoretical or technical aspects. The sequence of questions encouraged detailed responses, allowing participants to freely elaborate on their perspectives. Where responses were unclear, prompts were used to clarify and encourage further discussion, ensuring rich and meaningful data collection.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Given the qualitative nature of this study, an interpretive data analysis approach was adopted. The analysis process followed the framework suggested by Dörnyei [36], which includes data transcription, pre-coding and coding, thematic analysis, and interpretation. Thematic analysis, introduced by Braun and Clarke [37], was applied to analyze participants' views, preferences, and learning practices. The process involved classifying raw data based on existing theories and concepts, identifying new themes, and developing a thematic map, as recommended by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison [38]. During the pre-coding phase, key themes such as motivation, attitude, and learning practices were identified. In the coding phase, these themes were refined by extracting relevant statements from the transcripts. For instance, references to autonomous learning practices that emerged during pre-coding were further analyzed in the coding phase, where specific statements from

participants were highlighted as supporting evidence. The interpretation phase aligned the analyzed data with the research questions, and the findings were later compared with theoretical perspectives from the literature.

3.5. Research Procedures

The research was structured around theoretical underpinnings on learner autonomy, focusing on motivation, attitude, and learning practices. The study followed a systematic procedure, beginning with a detailed literature review that helped establish the research objectives and methodology. After developing the interview instruments, a pilot study was conducted to ensure the reliability and appropriateness. The results of the pilot study led to significant refinements in the instruments as well as the data collection procedure. Once finalized, data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews with selected participants. During the data analysis procedure, participants were assigned anonymous identifiers (e.g., S1, S2, S3), and de-identified quotes were used throughout the study to maintain confidentiality. To ensure the reliability of the findings, a small portion of the data was analyzed by another researcher, and similar findings emerged, reinforcing the credibility of the study. Finally, the findings were compared with existing literature to answer the research questions and to provide a comprehensive understanding of learners' readiness for autonomy in the Bangladeshi EFL context. The flowchart below demonstrates the research procedure of this study.

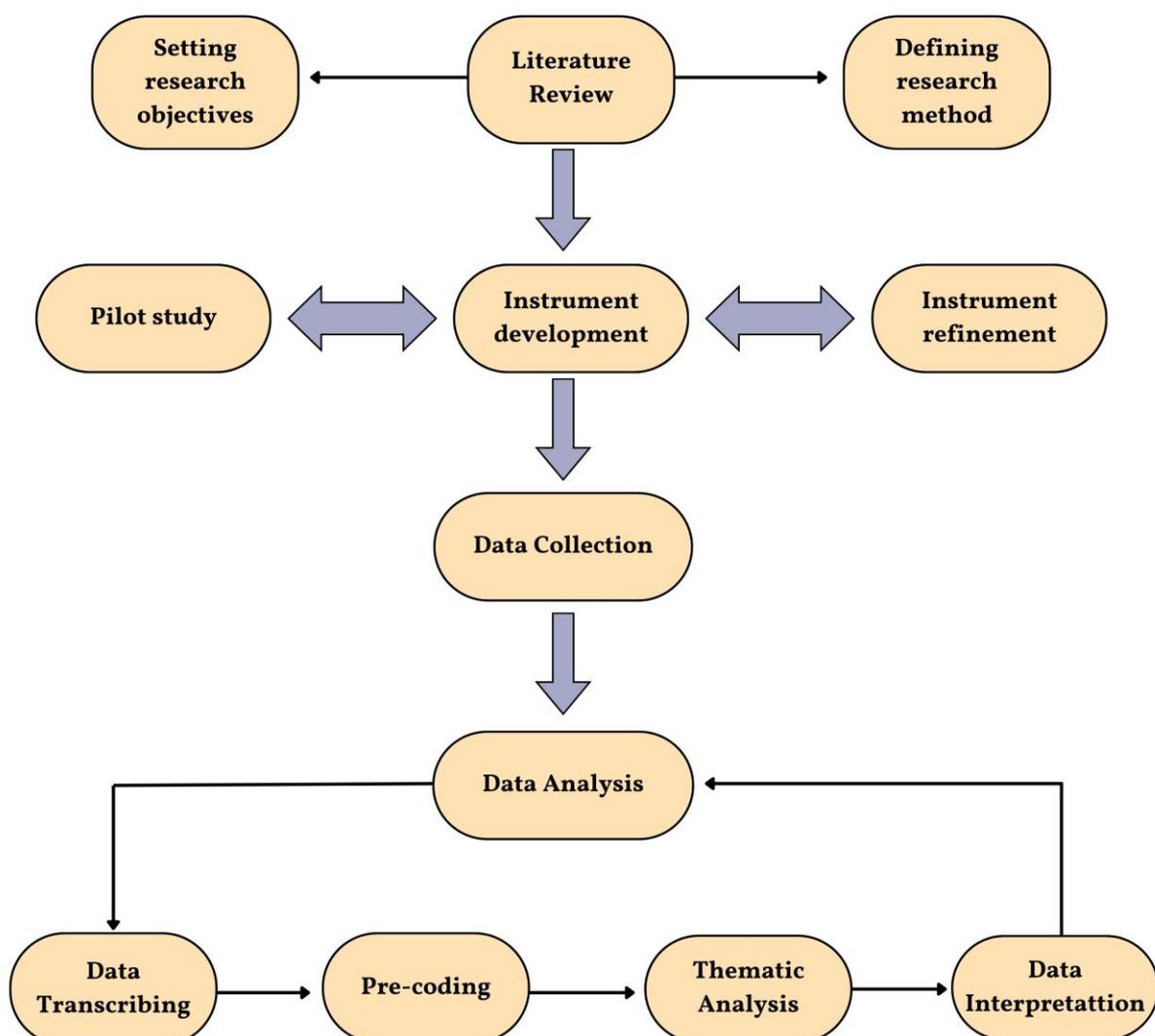


Figure 1. Research Procedure

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

The research questions of this study have addressed learners' motivation and attitude separately for conceptualizing readiness, as suggested by the literature [13]-[15]. The first research question investigates learners' motivation, while the second explores their attitudes towards autonomous practices. Key findings are presented below in relation to the existing literature.

4.1.1. References to Motivation

Learners are supposed to be motivated when they have particular goals, and these goals can be understood from their desired future selves as language learners [21], [22], [23], [39]. The data set also indicates that the participants of this study possess particular goals for their learning. For instance, in response to why do you learn the English language, participants replied as follows: *"I need it (learning English) for social use, learning, etc. Besides these, it will help me to get jobs. Basically, I learn English to use it as a communication tool"*, [S6]. Some of the participants mentioned their fascination towards literature as a reason for learning the English language. For instance, S14 stated, *"I am interested in language and literature since my childhood so I am learning English."* These statements are typical for all the participants in which they reported their desired goal of learning English language is to be successful users of the language [14] which implies their motivation. Besides that, motivation encompasses learners' effortful conduct which can be understood from their investment of time and efforts to achieving their intended goals [21]-[23]. To note that, their efforts towards achieving goals are supposed to be autonomous [40]. Similarly, the participants of this study have reported a wide range of autonomous practices in pursuit of their goals. For instance, S6 reported his autonomous practices, *"Except for attending classes, I basically learn by watching TV shows and movies, listening to songs, and reading newspapers"* and *"I use to discuss with my friends to decide what to learn or do next. Besides these, I use to learn by watching movies, and videos, posting English texts on Facebook or talking in English to each other"*. These statements seem to be almost typical for all the participants in which they reported to pursue their goals by going beyond teacher-directed learning activities. Such pursuance appears to be reflected by Holec's [1] characterization of autonomous learners. Therefore, this juxtaposition of goals and autonomous efforts appears to denote the participants' motivation and autonomy, leading towards assuming that the participants of this study are ready for autonomous learning.

4.1.2. References to Attitude

When motivated learners carry out their learning autonomously, they are supposed to hold a positive attitude towards autonomous learning activities [41], [42]. Likewise, the participants of this study also hold a positive attitude towards autonomous learning since they reported their preferences of autonomous practices instead of teacher-dependent ones in pursuing their learning goals. For instance, *"I prefer group study because it is very convenient for me. It gives me the comfort to express myself better than classroom lectures. I do not hesitate or feel shy. Moreover, discussing with friends gives us the opportunity to exchange our learning and understanding."* [S18], and *"Because I need to gather information from different sources for doing an assignment. Then, how much I will take from which source or the arrangement of the assignment, deciding these things teach me a lot. It helps me learn a lot of new information and I feel like I learn better when I find out on my own."* [S10]. Since learning activities like assignments and presentations help learners learn autonomously going beyond teacher-dependence [43], participants' preference for such activities appears to indicate their positive attitude towards autonomous learning. S10's statement also indicates a belief that he can learn better through autonomous activities rather than teacher-dependent learning. A similar kind of belief is identified to be crucial in shaping their learning behavior autonomously by Cotterall [32] which may eventually influence their attitude positively, and result in learner autonomy [22], [44]. All in all, Bashir [34] also found a similar attitude among Bangladeshi English language learners. In addition, learners are likely to exhibit a sort of willingness towards autonomous learning when they perceive and accept autonomous learning responsibilities [2], [13]. Similarly, the participants have reported a kind of willingness and acceptance. For instance, in response to who should be responsible for selecting your learning content and strategy, S9 replied that *"It should be mine. Because I have come to study at the university after a certain age when are not supposed to spoon-feed me everything"*. Learners' acceptance of their learning responsibility is likely to being autonomous in learning [1], [4] which seems to be mirrored by this statement. Yildirim's [5] study also found a similar kind of willingness and acceptance among the participants which is regarded as learners' readiness for learner autonomy [33].

However, positive attitude towards autonomous learning is not typical for all the participants of this study. Despite being motivated and autonomous, the participants also reported some sort of teacher dependency. For instance, S14 stated, *"Since we study literature, I think it is better if these are decided by the department"*. This statement is typical for almost all the participants which implicates that the participant learners are not likely to be ready for accepting their own responsibility of learning content and strategy selection. Instead, they are more likely to depend on teachers in this regard which appears to be reflected by the findings of Islam [18] and Mehrin [19]. The participants also reported their preference towards rote learning instead of autonomous

practices. For instance, *“I learn better from lectures. It helps me memorize better. I can memorize by listening to the teacher’s lecture better than by reading materials myself”* [S19]. Similarly, S2 stated, *“I prefer final exams. Because, assignments can be done using Chat GPT. That’s why I don’t prefer assignments.”* These statements are evidence that indicate the belief and perception of the participants’ towards their role and capability in the learning process [45] which reflects a belief that he learns better under teacher-directed lectures whereas the lecture-based teaching approaches have been widely criticized for being teacher-controlled that diminishing learners’ autonomous problem-solving attitude [46]-[48]. In sum, the participants’ inclination towards such activities appears to indicate their teacher-dependent attitudes [9], aligning with the findings reported other research studies, e.g., [14], [18], [19].

4.2. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the complex nature of learner autonomy, highlighting the significant role of motivation and attitude in shaping learners’ readiness for autonomous learning. Participants’ specific learning goals and autonomous learning activities emerged in this study highlight the disposition that motivated learners are autonomous or vice-versa [26], [41], [49], [27]. Moreover, these motivated learners hold a positive attitude towards autonomous practices, aligning with the ideas of Chorrojprasert [13], Ryan & Deci [41] and Schunk & Pajares [42]. Furthermore, the participants have exhibited a sort of willingness towards autonomous learning and acceptance of learning responsibilities as part of their attitudes, which appears to align with the perspectives of Chorrojprasert [13], Cirocki, Anam and Retnaningdyah [14], and Littlewood [31]. In sum, the participants’ motivation, positive attitude, and willingness to accept autonomous learning indicate their readiness for autonomous learning [12]. Such results indicate that the Bangladeshi learners possess the potential of full-scale autonomous learning. However, the results of this study also reveal the participants’ teacher dependency despite being autonomous in learning. Therefore, their readiness can be characterized as ‘reactive autonomy’ which refers to a state where learners depend on teachers to some extent despite exhibiting autonomous behavior [2].

The results of this study also highlights that it is quite common in Asian cultures like Bangladesh that learners can enjoy some level of autonomy despite being teacher-dependent to some extent [12], [50], [51]. Such dependency could possibly stem from external factors such as excessive teachers’ control, a rigid curriculum, and insufficient resources and support for autonomous learning [40], [41]. Since learners’ attitude is shaped within the context of learning, these external factors likely to create a belief that learning is most successful when directed by teachers, resulting in a reluctance towards learner autonomy [52], [53]. Therefore, to promote learner autonomy in such scenario, policy-makers should create opportunities within the curriculum for learners to take responsibility for their learning. In addition, a gradual shift from a heavy reliance on teacher-directed instruction towards more student centric teaching-learning is necessarily required. This may involve creating a more supportive environment for autonomous practices, such as providing resources for self-directed learning, encouraging collaborative learning activities, and offering guidance on how to select appropriate learning strategies. These steps can help learners gradually build the skills necessary for learner autonomy.

Despite the valuable insights, this study has several limitations that need to be considered First, the research was conducted in a specific geographical context and may not fully capture the diversity of learners’ experiences in different cultural or educational. The small sample size also restricts the generalizability of the findings. Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data from participants presents potential biases, such as social desirability or inaccuracies in self-assessment. Future studies could address this limitation by triangulating data with more objective measures, such as classroom observations, to provide a more balanced view of learner autonomy. Lastly, the study primarily addresses learners at the tertiary level, leaving a gap in understanding how autonomy manifests at other educational stages, such as in secondary or primary school. Exploring learner autonomy in these contexts would be beneficial for developing a more comprehensive view of how autonomy can be fostered throughout a learner’s educational trajectory.

Future research also could focus on the integration of technology to enhance learner autonomy, particularly in under-resourced settings. Exploring how digital tools and online platforms foster autonomous learning could provide insights into bridging educational gaps. Additionally, examining learner autonomy across different levels—such as secondary and primary schools—would help understand how autonomy develops at various stages of learning. Most importantly, given the teacher dependency among the participants of this study, a thorough investigate should put light on the external factors, e.g., curriculum, teaching-learning practices, previous study experience with a view to achieveing more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon.

5. CONCLUSION

This research aimed to assess the readiness of Bangladeshi English language learners for autonomy by exploring their attitudes, motivations, and learning behaviors. The findings reveal that while learners demonstrate strong motivation, positive attitudes, and engage in various autonomous learning practices, they still exhibit a degree of dependency on teachers. As a result, their readiness can be characterized as “reactive

autonomy,” where learners are somewhat autonomous but still rely on teacher guidance to fulfill their learning responsibilities. These results highlight the complexity of promoting learner autonomy in contexts like Bangladesh, where traditional, teacher-centered pedagogies dominate. Therefore, to truly and effectively promote autonomy, it is important to create classroom environments that gradually transition from teacher-centered to more student-centered approaches. This could involve providing resources for learner autonomy, integrating technology to support independent study, and offering opportunities for collaborative learning that empower students to take responsibility for their own learning. In conclusion, while the participants in this study show readiness for autonomous learning, they still exhibit teacher-dependency, possibly due to external factors such as rigid curricula and cultural expectations. Therefore, educators and policymakers should consider these factors and adopt strategies that strike a balance between teacher guidance and learner autonomy, ensuring that learners are better equipped to navigate their educational paths autonomously.

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