

MALAYSIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' BELIEFS, ROLES AND PRACTICES ON LEARNER AUTONOMY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

SITI NUR BINTI YUSOF

UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

2024

**MALAYSIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' BELIEFS, ROLES AND
PRACTICES ON LEARNER AUTONOMY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

SITI NUR BINTI YUSOF

THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATIONS
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS**

2024



Please tick (✓)

Project Paper

Masters by Research

Master by Mixed Mode

PhD

✓

INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK**

This declaration is made on the 14th May 2024

i. Student's Declaration:

I, SITI NUR BINTI YUSOF, P2017100973, FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATIONS hereby declare that the work entitled MALAYSIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' BELIEFS, ROLES AND PRACTICES ON LEARNER AUTONOMY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS is my original work.

I have not copied from any other students' work or from any other sources except where due reference or acknowledgement is made explicitly in the text, nor has any part been written for me by another person.



Signature of the student

ii. Supervisor's Declaration:

I ASSOC. PROF DR. CHARANJIT KAUR A/P SWARAN SINGH hereby certifies that the work MALAYSIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' BELIEFS, ROLES AND PRACTICES ON LEARNER AUTONOMY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS was prepared by the above named student, and was submitted to the Institute of Graduate Studies as a * ~~partial~~/full fulfillment for the DEGREE OF DOCTOR PHILOSOPHY, and the aforementioned work, to the best of my knowledge, is the said student's work.

14 May 2024

Date



Signature of the Supervisor





UNIVERSITI
PENDIDIKAN
SULTAN IDRIS
اوپي سي

INSTITUT PENGAJIAN SISWAZAH /
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UPS/IPS-3/BO 31
Pind.: 00 m/s: 1/1

BORANG PENGESAHAN PENYERAHAN TESIS/DISERTASI/LAPORAN KERTAS PROJEK
DECLARATION OF THESIS/DISSERTATION/PROJECT PAPER FORM

Tajuk / Title: MALAYSIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' BELIEFS,
ROLES AND PRACTICES ON LEARNER AUTONOMY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

No. Matrik / Matric's No.: P20171000973

Saya / I: SITI NUR BINTI YUSOF

(Nama pelajar / Student's Name)

mengaku membenarkan Tesis/Disertasi/Laporan Kertas Projek (Doktor Falsafah/Sarjana)* ini disimpan di Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun) dengan syarat-syarat kegunaan seperti berikut:-

acknowledged that Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (Tuanku Bainun Library) reserves the right as follows:-

1. Tesis/Disertasi/Laporan Kertas Projek ini adalah hak milik UPSI.
The thesis is the property of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
2. Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun dibenarkan membuat salinan untuk tujuan rujukan sahaja.
Tuanku Bainun Library has the right to make copies for the purpose of research only.
3. Perpustakaan dibenarkan membuat salinan Tesis/Disertasi ini sebagai bahan pertukaran antara Institusi Pengajian Tinggi.
The Library has the right to make copies of the thesis for academic exchange.
4. Perpustakaan tidak dibenarkan membuat penjualan salinan Tesis/Disertasi ini bagi kategori **TIDAK TERHAD**.
The Library are not allowed to make any profit for 'Open Access' Thesis/Dissertation.
5. Sila tandakan (✓) bagi pilihan kategori di bawah / *Please tick (✓) for category below:-*



SULIT/CONFIDENTIAL

Mengandungi maklumat yang berdarjah keselamatan atau kepentingan Malaysia seperti yang termaktub dalam Akta Rahsia Rasmi 1972. / *Contains confidential information under the Official Secret Act 1972*



TERHAD/RESTRICTED

Mengandungi maklumat terhad yang telah ditentukan oleh organisasi/badan di mana penyelidikan ini dijalankan. / *Contains restricted information as specified by the organization where research was done.*



TIDAK TERHAD / OPEN ACCESS

[Signature]

(Tandatangan Pelajar/ Signature)

Tarikh: 14/05/2024

[Signature]

(Tandatangan Penyelia / Signature of Supervisor)
& (Nama & Cop Rasmi / Name & Official Stamp)

Prof. Madya Dr. Charanjit Kaur s/p Swaran Singh
Timbalan Dekan (Akademik dan Antarabangsa)
Fakulti Bahasa dan Komunikasi
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

Catatan: Jika Tesis/Disertasi ini **SULIT @ TERHAD**, sila lampirkan surat daripada pihak berkuasa/organisasi berkenaan dengan menyatakan sekali sebab dan tempoh laporan ini perlu dikelaskan sebagai **SULIT** dan **TERHAD**.

Notes: If the thesis is CONFIDENTIAL or RESTRICTED, please attach with the letter from the organization with period and reasons for confidentiality or restriction.



APPRECIATION

Alhamdulillah, praise to Allah for giving me the chance to embark on this long and winding journey. Without Him, I would not have reached at this final process of doctoral program. This is dedicated to my late mother, Hajjah Halijah Wahab, who I miss dearly and think of all the time. You have certainly motivated me to become what I am today. I would like to also dedicate this to my father, Haji Yusof Md Dom, who kept asking me when I would finish. Dad, I have finally finished it! Honestly, I never thought this day would come.

My dear husband, Wazi Abdul Hamid, who told me never to give up. I love you so much and hope that all the sacrifices were worth it. My lovely children, Asyraf, Nur Maryam, Nur Rahmah and Elyas; thank you all so much for being patient and understanding with me during my journey. I hope I will inspire all of you to keep learning and never give up no matter what challenges arise. I did it all for you!

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance and help of several individuals. Thank you to my dear supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Charanjit Kaur Swaran Singh, who has taken her time to support and encourage me towards the end of my journey. I am indebted to you for the rest of my life. Dr Wan Mazlini who has taught me many things throughout my PHD journey; my lecturers, my teachers and colleagues for supporting me.

Thank you to my family, my colleagues, my friends, my research participants and everyone who has helped me along the way. The kindness, tolerance, understanding, and support of everyone has greatly encouraged me when I was struggling during one of the toughest times of my life. May Allah bless you all!



ABSTRACT

This study explores the beliefs, roles and practices of Malaysian English language teachers concerning learner autonomy and how they develop autonomous learning in secondary school classrooms. The objectives of the research are to gain insights into teachers' beliefs on learner autonomy and understand the practices they employ to develop autonomous learning among their learners. The study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. A total of 172 English language teachers participated in the first phase of the research, responding to a questionnaire to provide quantitative data on their beliefs, roles and practices on learner autonomy. For the second phase, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were conducted with a selected group of teachers to gain in-depth insights into their practices in developing learner autonomy. The findings from the survey revealed that teachers have positive beliefs about learner autonomy and its development. These teachers believe that motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy. The teachers also view that learner autonomy is a concept that is suitable for Malaysian learners. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that the majority of teachers held positive beliefs about learner autonomy and recognised its importance in enhancing students' language learning experiences. Teachers acknowledged the benefits of promoting self-directed learning and developing students' abilities to set goals, select appropriate learning strategies, and monitor their own progress. Regarding the implementation of autonomous learning, the findings indicated that most teachers preferred group work as a key strategy. They incorporated group work into various activities to optimize their collaborative learning experiences. The implications of this research offer valuable insights for teacher training programs and curriculum development in English language education. By understanding teachers' beliefs and practices, educational institutions can design targeted interventions to support teachers in effectively fostering learner autonomy, ultimately enhancing students' language learning outcomes.



KEPERCAYAAN, PERANAN DAN AMALAN GURU BAHASA INGGERIS TENTANG AUTONOMI PEMBELAJARAN DI SEKOLAH MENENGAH

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyelidiki kepercayaan, peranan, dan amalan guru Bahasa Inggeris Malaysia mengenai autonomi pelajar dan bagaimana mereka mengembangkan pembelajaran autonomi dalam bilik darjah sekolah menengah. Objektif penyelidikan adalah untuk memperoleh pandangan mengenai kepercayaan guru terhadap autonomi pelajar dan memahami amalan yang mereka gunakan untuk mengembangkan pembelajaran autonomi di kalangan pelajar mereka. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan campuran, menggabungkan kaedah pengumpulan data kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Sejumlah 172 guru Bahasa Inggeris mengambil bahagian dalam fasa pertama penyelidikan ini, menjawab soal selidik untuk memberikan data kuantitatif mengenai kepercayaan, peranan, dan amalan mereka dalam autonomi pelajar. Bagi fasa kedua, temu bual separa berstruktur dan pemerhatian bilik darjah dijalankan dengan kumpulan guru terpilih untuk mendapatkan pandangan mendalam mengenai amalan mereka dalam mengembangkan autonomi pelajar. Penemuan dari kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa guru-guru mempunyai kepercayaan positif terhadap autonomi pelajar dan pembangunannya. Guru-guru ini percaya bahawa pelajar yang bermotivasi lebih cenderung untuk mengembangkan autonomi pelajar. Mereka juga melihat autonomi pelajar sebagai konsep yang sesuai untuk pelajar Malaysia. Analisis tematik data menunjukkan bahawa majoriti guru mempunyai kepercayaan positif terhadap autonomi pelajar dan mengakui kepentingannya dalam meningkatkan pengalaman pembelajaran bahasa pelajar. Guru-guru mengakui manfaat mempromosikan pembelajaran berdikari dan mengembangkan keupayaan pelajar untuk menetapkan matlamat, memilih strategi pembelajaran yang sesuai, dan memantau kemajuan mereka sendiri. Mengenai pelaksanaan pembelajaran autonomi, penemuan menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan guru lebih suka kerja berkumpulan sebagai strategi utama. Mereka menggabungkan kerja berkumpulan ke dalam pelbagai aktiviti untuk mengoptimalkan pengalaman pembelajaran kolaboratif mereka. Implikasi dari kajian ini memberikan pandangan berharga untuk program latihan guru dan pembangunan kurikulum dalam pendidikan Bahasa Inggeris. Dengan memahami kepercayaan dan amalan guru, institusi pendidikan dapat merancang intervensi bergerak untuk menyokong guru dalam membangunkan autonomi pelajar secara berkesan, dengan harapan meningkatkan hasil pembelajaran bahasa pelajar.



CONTENTS

	Page
DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK	ii
DECLARATION PAGE	iii
APPRECIATION	iv
ABSTRACT	v
ABSTRAK	vii
CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES	xvi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xviii
 CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of the study	2
1.3 English Language Teaching (ELT) in Malaysia	5
1.3.1 School-based assessments (SBA)	8
1.3.1.1 School-based Assessment in Malaysia	8
1.3.2 The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)	10
1.3.3 The Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM)	13



1.3.4	Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC)	15
1.4	Statement of the problem	18
1.5	Research aims	21
1.6	Research objectives	24
1.7	Research questions	25
1.8	Conceptual Framework	26
1.9	Significance of the Study	27
1.10	Operational Definitions	28
1.11	Summary	29

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1	Theoretical framework	30
2.1.1	Constructivist Theory	31
2.1.2	Humanistic psychology	33
2.1.3	Cognitive Psychology	34
2.2	Learner autonomy	37
2.3	Learner autonomy and language education	40
2.3.1	Learner Autonomy in ESL Teaching and Learning	44
2.4	Factors affecting learner autonomy	49
2.4.1	Language Learning Motivation	50
2.4.2	Language Learning Strategy	55
2.4.3	Language Learning Belief	59

2.4.4	Language Learning Anxiety	61
2.4.5	Teachers' Role	65
2.5	Misconceptions of learner autonomy	70
2.5.1	Misconception 1: Learner autonomy is essentially self - instruction and therefore can be achieved without an instructor	71
2.5.2	Misconception 2: Intervention by the teacher is detrimental to learner autonomy	71
2.5.3	Misconception 3: Learner autonomy is a new teaching method that can be applied by teachers	72
2.5.4	Misconception 4: Learner autonomy is a single, easily described behavior	72
2.5.5	Misconception 5: Learner autonomy is a steady state achievable by only certain learners	73
2.6	Benefits of developing learner autonomy	75
2.7	Learner autonomy and motivation	77
2.8	Teachers' roles in developing learner autonomy	81
2.9	Model for developing autonomy in ELT by Pichugova et al	87
2.9.1	Choice	88
2.9.2	Goals and needs	89
2.9.3	Support	90
2.9.4	Emotional climate	92
2.9.5	Learning strategies	93
2.9.6	Learner attitude and motivation	93
2.9.7	Self-esteem	95

2.10 Beliefs	96
2.11 Teachers' beliefs	98
2.12 Teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy	101
2.13 Link between teachers' beliefs and actions	102
2.14 Previous studies on teachers' beliefs and practices in developing learner autonomy	104
2.15 Research gap	109
2.16 Summary	111

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY 112

3.1 Introduction	112
3.2 Research paradigm	112
3.3 Research design	114
3.4 Research procedure	118
3.5 Research aims and objectives	119
3.6 Data collection	120
3.6.1 Phase one – Survey	121
3.6.2 Quantitative data analysis	122
3.6.3 Phase Two – Qualitative Research Design	126
3.6.4 Qualitative data analysis	127
3.6.4.1 Qualitative Research Approach	127
3.6.4.2 Pre-observation stage (preliminary interviews)	131
3.6.4.3 Classroom observation stage	132

3.6.4.4	Post observation stage (Reflective Interview)	132
3.6.4.5	Data analysis stage	133
3.7	Data triangulation	133
3.8	Research validity and reliability	134
3.8.1	Validity of questionnaire	135
3.8.2	Validity of research instruments	138
3.9	Ethical considerations	141
3.10	Summary	143
CHAPTER 4	FINDINGS	144
4.1	Introduction	144
4.2	Profile of Study Respondents	144
4.3	Teachers' Beliefs of Learner Autonomy in Language Teaching	149
4.3.1	Inferential Statistics	158
4.3.1.1	Teachers' Beliefs Based on Gender	158
4.3.2	Reliability Test	160
4.4	Teachers' Practices to Developing Autonomy in Malaysian Secondary Schools	163
4.4.1	Descriptive Statistics	163
4.4.2	Inferential Statistics	170
4.4.2.1	Teachers practices based on teaching experience to develop learner autonomy in Malaysian schools	173

4.4.2.2	Teachers' practices based on location to develop learner autonomy in Malaysian schools	175
4.5	Qualitative Findings	178
4.5.1	The participants	179
4.5.2	Teachers' beliefs on learner autonomy	179
4.5.3	Teachers' Roles and Practices	180
4.5.4	Teachers' Practices to Develop Learner Autonomy	196
4.6	Teachers' views on the issues associated with developing learner autonomy	200
4.6.1	Teachers' understanding of learner autonomy	202
4.6.2	Teachers' perceived constraints and possibilities of learner autonomy in language teaching	203
4.7	Mismatch between beliefs and practices	211
4.8	Summary	213

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

5.1	Introduction	214
5.2	Summary Of the Study	215
5.3	Discussion Of Findings	218
5.3.1	Teachers' Beliefs of Learner Autonomy In Language Teaching	218
5.3.2	Teachers' Practices in Developing Autonomy in Malaysian Secondary Schools	219
5.3.3	Teachers' Views On The Issues Associated With Learner Autonomy In Language Teaching	233

5.3.4	Mismatch between Teachers' Beliefs and Practices	238
5.4	Implication Of the Study	240
5.4.1	Ministry of Education	240
5.4.2	Schools	241
5.4.3	English language teachers	242
5.4.4	Students	244
5.4.5	Body of knowledge	245
5.5	Limitations of Study	245
5.6	Recommendation For Future Research	246
5.7	Summary	246

REFERENCES

248

APPENDICES

262



LIST OF TABLES

Table No.		Page
3.1	The phases of data collection	120
3.2	Description of questionnaire	125
3.3	Case study participants	127
3.4	Interview and Classroom Observation Schedule	133
4.1	Demographic profile of study respondents	145
4.2	The distribution of teacher based on age	146
4.3	Teachers' Beliefs Of Learner Autonomy In Language Teaching	150
4.4	Normality test	157
4.5	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	159
4.6	Independent-samples t-test	159
4.7	Mean scores and standard deviations	159
4.8	The comparison of alpha coefficient in original study and in this study	160
4.9	Items with Psychological Orientation	162
4.10	Teachers' Practices To Developing Autonomy In Malaysian Secondary Schools	181
4.11	Teachers' Practices Regarding Student Involvement in Goals and Needs	168



4.12	Teachers' Practices Regarding Learning Strategies	169
4.13	Normality Test Results	173
4.14	Levene Test	173
4.15	One -Way ANOVA Analysis	174
4.16	Mean Score and Standard Deviation	174
4.17	Post Hoc Scheffe Differences Teachers' Practices Based On Experiences	191
4.18	Levene test	176
4.19	One -Way ANOVA Analysis	176
4.20	Mean Score and Standard Deviation	177
4.21	Post Hoc Scheffe Differences Teachers' Practices Based on School Location	193
4.22	Profile Demography	179
4.23	Themes and Sub-Themes	181
4.24	Themes and Sub-Themes	201



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure No.		Page
1.1	The KSSM Framework	22
2.1	The theoretical foundation of learner autonomy	56
2.2	Cyclical process of motivation, autonomy and achievement in language learning	95
2.3	Interaction between authentic resources, student autonomy and motivation (Vaicuniene & Uzpalienė, 2012, p. 193)	96
2.4	A model for developing learner autonomy in the foreign language teaching context (Pichugova et al., 2016)	105
2.5	Teacher cognition, schooling, professional education and classroom practice (Borg, 2003, p. 82)	118
3.1	Concept map of quantitative and qualitative data to be collected and analysis	134
3.2	The case study	130
4.1	Teaching Experience of Respondents	165
4.2	Teachers who have attended CEFR Course	166
4.3	Frequency distribution of item 1	174
4.4	Frequency distribution of item 4	174
4.5	Boxplot for data distribution for teachers' beliefs	175



4.6	Mean comparison of the four constructs in this study and Borg and Al-Busaidi's study.	179
4.7	Frequency distribution on teachers' practices	189
4.8	Boxplot of teachers' practices	189

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CERF	Common European Framework of Reference
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
HOTS	Higher-order thinking skills
KBSM	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah
KSSM	Standards-Based Curriculum for Secondary Schools
MoE	Ministry of Education
PBD	Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah
PPSR	Pelaporan Pentaksiran Sekolah Rendah
PT3	Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga
SBELC	Standards-Based English Language Curriculum
SPM	Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia



LIST OF APPENDICES

- A Questionnaire
- B Interview Protocol 1
- C Observation Checklist
- D Interview Protocol 2



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The initial topic chosen for this study stemmed from the researcher's own experience as an English teacher in secondary school, where she worked for more than a decade.

Over the years, while interacting with both English teachers and secondary school students, the researcher became increasingly curious and concerned about the declining English proficiency and lack of learner autonomy among the students. Despite English being introduced to Malaysian students as early as preschool until secondary school the reported situation persisted.

Noticing this recurring issue sparked the researcher's interest in delving deeper and investigating the actual state of autonomy development in Malaysian English language classrooms. The researcher's personal experience and observations served as a catalyst for this study, prompting her to seek answers to understand the root causes and challenges hindering the promotion of learner autonomy in the context of Malaysian education.

By undertaking this research, the aim is to gain valuable insights into teachers' beliefs and their current practices in fostering learner autonomy. The findings can potentially shed light on the factors contributing to the reported decline in English proficiency and guide future efforts to improve the quality of English language education at all levels. The researcher's interest for addressing this issue and her firsthand experience in the field make them well-equipped to investigate and contribute meaningfully to the understanding of autonomy development in Malaysian English language classrooms.

1.2 Background of the study

The English language is mandated to be part of Malaysia's national education curriculum and is governed by the language in education policy. Although there were earlier intentions to make it a compulsory subject to pass at the primary or secondary levels in 2016, currently it is not obligatory for students to pass it to complete their education. The significance of the English language as a crucial second language in education has been recognised and solidified since 1957 through the Education Ordinance, and this recognition has been reaffirmed in subsequent documents like the Education Act and the National Education Policy released in 1970 (Azman, 2016).

The role of the teacher has gradually changed and become more complex in today's world as it has been redefined due to advancement of research and technologies. The traditional role of the teacher as the sole provider of knowledge has been under dispute and some might consider irrelevant in today's classroom. Learner –centred



approaches that promote learner autonomy has been seen as the right move to prepare learners for the 21st century challenges. In the past decade, the Malaysian education system has been aggressively promoting 21st century teaching and learning strategies. Education policies highlight the importance of acquiring 21st century skills which can be blatantly seen in the National Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

Learner autonomy was officially recognised in Malaysia in 1990, with the introduction of 'Self Access Learning' in primary schools, and later in 1995, for the English language subject in secondary schools (Yunus & Arshad, 2015). However, the implementation of learner autonomy faced challenges as many teachers continued to adopt a traditional 'spoon-feeding' approach, resulting in teacher-centred language classrooms (Azman, 2016; Thang & Azarina, 2007). Despite the positive outcomes demonstrated by autonomous learning activities, there was limited evidence of widespread adoption of such an approach in Malaysian schools (Seng, 2003). Unfortunately, there exists a prevailing assumption that learner-centred pedagogy is less effective than teacher-centred methods in enhancing students' cognitive performance.

Learner autonomy is strived upon across the national curriculum in all subjects at all levels. However, learners seem to still have a low level of autonomy in language learning. This has made the researcher wonder what teachers do in the language classroom to promote learner autonomy. Are Malaysian teachers truly able to embrace and promote learner autonomy in their English language classrooms? Despite all preaching of learner-centredness in teaching and learning, do teachers let go of the reins and allow their learners to take responsibility of their own learning?





For a long time, learner autonomy has been recognised as a crucial aspect of language learning. Holec (1981) eloquently described learner autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's own learning and assume responsibility for all decisions related to the learning process. Despite the concept being coined three decades ago, limited research has been conducted on English language teachers' beliefs regarding their learners' level of autonomy, especially in the specific context of Malaysia (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012).

This study aims to bridge this research gap by investigating Malaysian English language teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy and how they facilitate the development of autonomy in their classrooms through their roles and practices. The focus is on gaining an in-depth understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices in fostering learner autonomy. To achieve this objective, a pragmatic approach will be employed, as it allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research topic. The study will utilise various data collection methods, including a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations.

The questionnaire will provide quantitative data, allowing for the identification of patterns and trends in teachers' beliefs, roles and practices related to learner autonomy. Semi-structured interviews will offer an opportunity for teachers to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words, providing rich and insightful qualitative data. Classroom observations will complement the data by capturing the actual classroom dynamics and practices related to autonomy development.





By using a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to offer a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Malaysian English language teachers' beliefs, roles and practices regarding learner autonomy. By uncovering the beliefs and practices of English language teachers related to learner autonomy, the research findings can offer valuable insights into how this important aspect of education is currently being approached. Furthermore, the findings from this research can contribute to the enhancement of language education practices and inform future strategies to promote learner autonomy effectively in the Malaysian context. The study's findings can be used to inform future strategies and initiatives aimed at effectively promoting learner autonomy among Malaysian students. Armed with a better understanding of the teachers' perspectives, policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers can tailor their approaches to align with the needs and preferences of the teachers and students.

This alignment is crucial for creating more effective educational policies and practices that support and encourage learner autonomy, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of language education in Malaysia.

1.3 English Language Teaching (ELT) in Malaysia

In the Malaysian education system, English language holds a compulsory status in both primary and secondary schools. Students undertake the learning of English throughout their eleven years of schooling, spanning six years in primary school (ages 7 to 12) and five years in secondary school (ages 13 to 17). Throughout this period, students are required to prepare for one major examination known as the Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia (SPM) which is taken at the end of secondary schooling.





Previously, students also underwent the Pelaporan Pentaksiran Sekolah Rendah (PPSR) and Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3) examinations, but these assessments were abolished in 2022. As a result, the SPM has become the sole significant examination that students face during their compulsory schooling years. By making English language compulsory from primary to secondary school, the Malaysian education system aims to provide students with a strong foundation in the language, enabling them to communicate effectively in English and enhancing their overall language proficiency. The SPM examination serves as a crucial assessment to gauge students' language skills and their ability to apply English in various contexts. Overall, the compulsory nature of English language education in Malaysia reflects the importance placed on language proficiency as an essential skill for personal and professional development, and it underscores the country's commitment to equipping students with valuable language abilities for their future endeavours.



Indeed, teaching and learning approaches in the field of education have evolved to adapt to the demands of the modern world. In response to the ever-changing global landscape, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has taken significant steps to revamp the English language syllabus and policies, demonstrating their commitment to aligning the education system with current trends and global standards. One of the key changes introduced is the incorporation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in the new Standards-Based Curriculum for Secondary Schools or Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM). The integration of CEFR provides a standardised framework for assessing language proficiency and aligning language learning objectives with international standards. This framework allows for a clearer



understanding of students' language abilities, fostering a more effective and standardised approach to language education.

Additionally, the implementation of classroom assessment or Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah (PBD) is another notable initiative by the MoE in 2016. Shifting away from traditional teacher-centred classrooms, PBD emphasises a learner-centred approach to education. By incorporating assessments that are designed to cater to individual student needs and learning styles, PBD enables a more personalised and adaptive learning experience for students. This shift towards learner-centred classrooms empowers students to take greater ownership of their learning journey, promoting active engagement and fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter (MoE, 2019).

The ministry's commitment to adopting progressive teaching and learning approaches reflects their dedication to preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the globalised world. By embracing learner-centred practices and aligning language education with international standards, the education system aims to equip students with the necessary skills and competencies to thrive in today's interconnected and dynamic society. These strategic initiatives signal a positive direction towards a more inclusive, adaptable, and effective education system in Malaysia.

1.3.1 School-based assessments (SBA)

Classroom Assessment plays a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness of the curriculum implemented within classrooms. It involves both formative and summative assessments, employing diverse approaches and methods. This type of assessment serves as a part of a broader approach to gather information about a child's progress, whether through formal or non-formal means, enabling teachers to determine the child's level of mastery. Principles such as inclusivity, authenticity, and localisation are integral to the holistic nature of classroom assessment. The information obtained from these assessments is utilized by administrators, teachers, parents, and students themselves to formulate further actions aimed at enhancing or developing the child's learning stage (Wiliam & Leahy, 2015).

1.3.1.1 School-based Assessment in Malaysia

The earliest document related to classroom assessment was discovered in 1983 and was initiated by the Curriculum Development Division (CDD), previously known as the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) at that time. This document, titled "Classroom Assessment Guide in KBSR Classroom" was specifically designed for the primary level and was associated with the implementation of the New Primary School Curriculum (Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah or KBSR). Prior to this curriculum, different types of schools in Malaysia had been using curricula from their respective countries of origin, such as British, Chinese, and Tamil curricula, while Malay schools used localized curriculum. The assessment document for KBSR provided detailed



information on its objectives, assessment activities, steps involved in both formal and non-formal assessments, as well as methods to gauge a child's progress and level of achievement. The document also included samples of assessment instruments.

A second review of classroom assessment was conducted in 1996, resulting in the rebranded "PKSR Guidelines: Primary School Operational Evaluation" (Buku Panduan PKSR). This revised document demonstrated improvements in conceptualization, objectives, assessment features, methods of assessment, reporting, and instrument creation. A similar guideline was also developed for the secondary level. In 2001, as part of the review of the school curriculum, another assessment guideline called "Penilaian Kendalian Sekolah" (School Operational Evaluation) was introduced, serving as a single guideline for both primary and secondary school teachers. However, during this period, classroom assessment was not accorded significant importance and did not receive much attention from educators across the country. The focus was on the necessity of implementing new pedagogical strategies to foster novel learning experiences.

It wasn't until 2011 that the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate officially introduced "School-based Assessment" (Pentaksiran Berasaskan Sekolah) based on Surat Siaran Lembaga Peperiksaan Bil. 3 tahun 2011 dated 29 July 2011. This new assessment system comprised four components: Central Assessment, Classroom Assessment, Physical Activity Assessment, and Sports and Co-Curriculum Assessment, as well as Psychometric Assessment. School-based assessment is considered holistic as it evaluates a child's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in line with the National Philosophy of Education. The implementation of



school-based assessment took place in stages, starting with primary Standard One in 2011 and secondary Form One in 2012. Towards the end of 2016, school-based assessment was referred to as classroom assessment or Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah (PBD).

Teachers are required to follow the assessment procedures outlined by the Ministry of Education and continuously assess students during the teaching and learning process in the classroom. The school-based assessment initiative was introduced in primary and secondary government funded schools as an effort to reform the education system, which was previously criticised for being excessively focused on exams (Rashid, Abdul Rahman & Yunus, 2017). With the introduction of school-based assessment, students were no longer solely evaluated through summative examinations, but instead, they underwent continuous assessment integrated into the teaching and learning process. Under school-based assessment, teachers assess student achievements based on a Performance Standard set by the Ministry of Education, which outlines the expected learning outcomes for students. The MoE emphasised that school-based assessment allows teachers the autonomy and recognition to carry out both formative and summative assessments at their discretion (MoE, 2019, p. 32). This shift in assessment approach aims to provide a more comprehensive and balanced evaluation of students' progress and abilities.

1.3.2 The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

The CEFR, established in 2001, serves as a global standard for foreign language education, encompassing assessment, teaching, and language learning needs



(Mohamad Uri & Abd Aziz, 2018). Its primary objective is to define the language proficiency levels required for effective communication. By offering a universally recognized framework, the CEFR facilitates the mutual recognition of language qualifications and aids learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies, and educational administrators in aligning and coordinating their efforts. This framework consists of six levels of descriptors that classify language learners' abilities, dividing them into three main groups: proficient users (levels C1 & C2), independent users (levels B1 & B2), and basic users (levels A1 & A2). Additionally, it comprises detailed descriptors, known as "can-do" statements, which outline learners' capabilities in listening, writing, reading, and speaking skills.

The implementation of the CEFR in Malaysia commenced in 2013 when the English Language Standards and Quality Council was established. Through the English Language Teaching Centre, this Council extended support to the ministry in enhancing and advancing the English language proficiency of Malaysian students. Its main responsibilities included incorporating the CEFR framework into the education system and formulating a comprehensive plan for systematic improvements in English language education (Mohamad Uri & Abd Aziz, 2018). The alignment of the education system with the CEFR holds significant importance within the Malaysia Education Blueprint, as it aims to elevate the standard of education to meet international benchmarks (Azman, 2016). By embracing the CEFR guidelines, Malaysia endeavours to enhance the language proficiency of its students and ensure they are well-equipped to communicate effectively on an international level.





The MoE introduced the Roadmap for English Language Education in Malaysia, covering the period from 2015 to 2025, to align the standard of English education in schools with the CEFR. This roadmap is a comprehensive long-term plan consisting of three phases, aiming to provide high-quality language education from preschool to tertiary levels. Phase 1 (2013-2015) focused on enhancing the English proficiency of school teachers. During this two-year period, teachers underwent various training programs, including Professional Up-Skilling of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT), the Native Speaker program, the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant program, and the Expanded Specialist Coach role for English (Sani, 2016). To make further preparations, the council utilised the findings of the Cambridge baseline study conducted in 2013. This has helped in developing CEFR descriptors, setting targets for each educational level, and facilitating capacity building efforts.



During Phase 2 (2016-2020), the Standards-Based English Language Curriculum was aligned with CEFR descriptors, and international CEFR-aligned textbooks and support materials were selected for use. The implementation of the new curricula, along with the validation of CEFR levels for each educational stage, is scheduled to take place from 2017 to 2020 (National Education Blueprint, 2013). English language teachers will also participate in a series of trainings and workshops related to CEFR during this period to ensure their proficiency with the framework and new curricula. Phase 3 (2021-2025) is dedicated to the council's evaluation, review, and revision of the CEFR implementation from the previous phases. This will encompass assessing and refining the descriptors set in Phase 2, as well as reviewing the selected textbooks and teaching materials.



The CEFR is designed to unite language learning objectives, content, tasks, and assessments, aiming to facilitate teaching and learning and support the selection of learning techniques. It emphasises learner autonomy, which is fostered through the use of the European Language Portfolio, a learner-centred tool that encourages goal setting, self-assessment, and self-reporting (Little, 2005). For instance, self-assessment promotes learner autonomy by empowering learners to have more control over their language learning, enhancing their self-awareness and awareness of the language learning process, and providing them with a realistic understanding of their own abilities (Alderson, 2005).

1.3.3 The Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM)

 05-4506832
  pustaka.upsi.edu.my
  Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun
Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah
  PustakaTBainun
  ptbupsi

Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM) or the secondary school standard curriculum was introduced in 2017 for form one to replace the Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (KBSM) or the secondary school integrated curriculum implemented since 1989. English in KBSM employed the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, emphasising on learning language for communicative purposes and not for grammatical knowledge. The fundamental principles in CLT were learner-centredness and contextualised language use (Nunan 2003).

The KSSM is a continuation for the Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah or primary school integrated curriculum, which was introduced in standard one in the year 2011. The KSSR and KSSM were introduced as a curriculum transformation initiative on the following aspects: content, pedagogy and assessment (MoE, 2016) and a part of

the Malaysian Education Blueprint. In the process of transforming school curriculum, the MoE had conducted benchmarking with school curriculum of several developed countries such as Singapore, New Zealand, United Kingdom and Australia to ensure that the new school curriculum does not only cater local needs but also meets international benchmarks so it will be on par with global education (Tajularipin, Mohd Ayub & Suriati, 2015).

Following the introduction of KSSM, the Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) was created and launched for Form 1 students in 2017. As of now, the new English language curriculum is implemented in Malaysian secondary schools for Form 1 to Form 5 students, aiming to enhance their English language proficiency. This substantial alteration in the national curriculum will carry substantial implications for English language teaching and learning, necessitating significant adjustments in teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and instructional approaches.

The KSSM (Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah) in Malaysia incorporates higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) into student learning and prioritizes the achievement of expected competencies based on established curriculum standards. This curriculum adopts a modular approach, making it genuinely learner-centred and accommodating diverse learning needs, rather than solely emphasizing academic and cognitive achievement outcomes. The primary goal of the KSSM is to ensure that every child progresses successfully, and by the completion of Form Five in secondary education, they will have acquired essential literacy, numeracy, and life skills (MoE, 2015). The focus is on enabling every student to reach their potential and preventing any child from being left behind in their educational journey.

The SBELC highlights that pupils should develop 21st Century Skills through nine specific characteristics: resilient, thinker, communicator, team player, inquisitive, principled, informed, caring and patriotic (MoE, 2016). The document states that HOTS is to be “incorporated through activities that promote critical thinking and creativity, and utilise thinking strategies and reasoning skills” (MoE, 2016, p. 11). Thus, HOTS is given emphasis in all aspects of teaching, learning and assessments.

1.3.4 Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC)

The SBELC is structured in a modular format, focusing on thematic units that encourage students to develop problem-solving abilities, decision-making skills, and creative expression (MoE, 2016). This curriculum framework is built on six key strands: communication, spirituality, attitude, and values, humanities, personal competence, physical development and aesthetics, and science and technology. It operates on five core guiding principles, designed to address the challenges and requirements of the 21st century. These principles include preparing students for the real world, promoting sustained language use, fostering global competencies, recognizing and catering to individual differences among pupils, and nurturing the development of confident and competent communicators (MoE, 2018). The new curriculum places great importance on nurturing 21st-century skills to equip students with essential abilities and competencies for success in an ever-changing world, as exemplified in the SBELC:

In preparing pupils to meet the challenges of the 21st century, due emphasis is given to developing perseverance, critical, creative and innovative thinking, and current Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills. As future leaders, pupils need to improve their proficiency in English, as well as leadership qualities and ethical decision-making skills in order to be globally competitive.

(MoE, 2016, p 2).

The SBELC gives equal emphasis on English literacy skills and communication skills as core elements in the language curriculum. The SBELC aims to enable pupils to communicate confidently, proficiently and competently; be knowledgeable, respectful of other cultures and well-versed in emergent literacies; make calculated decisions through critical and analytical thinking, and collaborate with others to solve problems creatively and innovatively (MoE, 2018). By the end of secondary school, pupils are able to achieve the following objectives:

1. Understand meaning in a variety of familiar contexts.
2. Recognise features of spoken genres on familiar topics.
3. Communicate information, ideas, opinions and feelings intelligibly on familiar topics.
4. Understand a variety of texts by using a range of appropriate strategies to construct meaning.
5. Explore and expand ideas for personal development by reading independently and widely.
6. Communicate intelligibly through print and digital media on familiar topics.

7. Communicate with appropriate language, form and style in a variety of contexts.
8. Respond to, analyse and evaluate a variety of literary text types.
9. Appreciate and inculcate values, positive attitude, patriotism and citizenship through language activities.

(MoE, 2018, p.3)

The SBELC emphasises pupil-centred teaching and learning strategies, where the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator rather than a traditional instructor (MoE, 2016). The document specifically recommends the use of inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, pupil-centred learning, and cooperative learning. Additionally, the curriculum incorporates cross-curricular elements that align with the Content and Learning Standards in SBELC (MoE, 2016). By implementing these strategies, learners stand to benefit greatly as they navigate today's intricate and multi-faceted world, necessitating the ability to connect knowledge from various sources (MoE, 2016, p.14). To achieve the objectives of developing students' accurate, confident, and effective communication skills in the English language and preparing them to face the challenges of the 21st century, the curriculum provides teachers with a selection of key elements across different subjects.

The current SBELC indirectly incorporates several principles of learner autonomy. By the time students complete their secondary schooling, they are expected to have developed a certain level of autonomy in language learning. The curriculum places an emphasis on teachers fostering learner autonomy in language classrooms. The traditional role of the teacher as the sole provider of knowledge is shifting towards that

of a facilitator (MoE, 2016, p.12). The new English language curriculum requires teachers to design activities and assessments that encourage learners to comprehend language input and respond to questions using higher-order cognitive skills, emphasizing conceptual understanding and integration of various language skills and language focus. This moves away from traditional rote learning skills highlights the importance of promoting learner autonomy in the language learning process (Tajularipin, Mohd Ayub & Suriati, 2015). In essence, the SBELC indirectly promotes learner autonomy by empowering students to take charge of their language learning and encouraging teachers to create a supportive and facilitative learning environment in the language classrooms.

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi **1.4 Statement of the problem**

English is considered a second language in Malaysia. Students in secondary schools are required to undergo at least 120 hours of English language classes yearly. The emphasis of mastery of English is one of the nations' educational agenda due to its global status and importance in commerce, science and technology. However, the English proficiency of secondary school students has been steadily deteriorating in the past few years (Azman, 2016; Renganathan, 2023). Students are also unable to apply the knowledge of the English language to communicate in a genuine way (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021; Paul, 2003).

The Malaysian education system is very much examination oriented that students are taught by rote-learning and memorising in order to get good scores and the



best grades (Aspalila, 2011). Malaysian teachers in general are heavily bounded by the traditional teaching method (Azman, 2016). As a result, students' creativity and critical thinking has been greatly reduced (Darshan & Ong, 2003). Even though SBA was introduced in 2011, teachers and parents still consider the exam grades for national examinations as important (Mansor, Leng & Rasul, 2013).

The upgrade of the national education curriculum for both primary and secondary schools aim to improve the quality of English language teaching and learning. The KSSM is a continuation of the KSSR and is “developed on the basis of accessibility, quality, equity, flexibility and do-ability” (Ministry of Education, p.1 2016). However, lack of preparation and haphazard implementations have left teachers struggling to cope with new teaching policies and strategies (Azman, 2016). Teachers revert to old teaching methods in order to achieve good examination results (Azman, 2016). Factors of institutional pressure, societal expectations together with conflicts of teachers' agendas and priorities are obstacle to implement learner autonomy in the language classrooms (Huang, 2006).

It is also not clear whether Malaysian secondary school teachers are equipped with knowledge or training on how to develop learner autonomy in the language classroom. The new SBELC states that “teaching and learning in the 21st century is pupil-centred and the teacher acts as a facilitator” (MoE, 2018, p.13). The SBELC also suggests teaching and learning strategies that involve cognitive processes in learning and understanding information, metacognitive processes and resource management which includes time, effort, skills and support. It also recommends inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, pupil-centeredness and cooperative learning. All these



are common strategies that develop learner autonomy. However, studies still suggest that Malaysian students are still lacking in English proficiency (Azman, 2016; Yen Dwee & Anthony, 2017) and lack autonomy in language learning (Rashid, Abd. Rahman & Yunus, 2017; Yen Dwee & Anthony, 2017), therefore the researcher wants to investigate what is happening in the English language classrooms with regards to the development of learner autonomy.

Little is known of what our English language teachers know or understand of learner autonomy as most research focuses on learner autonomy at tertiary level with little focus being done in both primary and secondary school level. Alonazi (2017) states that although teachers may seem to be passionate in cultivating learners' autonomy, they may not be fully aware of what their roles of the teacher actually involves in or how it affects their teaching. Are our English language teachers ready to take upon the task of developing 21st century skills such as learner autonomy? Therefore, this study aims to investigate teachers' beliefs of learner autonomy in language teaching. This study also aims to examine the relationship between teachers' beliefs of learner autonomy to their actual teaching practices in the language classroom.

This research will examine ELT practices in an ESL context where teachers are required by the new curriculum to indirectly develop learner autonomy. This research will reveal how English language teachers view learner autonomy and how they develop learner autonomy in their language classroom.



1.5 Research aims

In Malaysia, creating holistic individuals is the goal of the national education philosophy, it states:

“Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals, who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large”.

(MoE, 2018)

This educational goal is supported by KSSM which advocates the development of students' 21st century skills. The SBELC for English Form 1 states that:

“In the SBELC, knowledge, skills and good values are elements integrated into each strand. These elements are woven into every lesson to inculcate awareness, understanding and respect for the diversity amongst individuals and various communities leading to unity and harmony in our multicultural society”.

(MoE, 2016, p 2).



Within the 2016 English language curriculum, the framework promotes learning which emphasise on six strands which are; communication, spirituality, attitude and values, humanities, personal competence, physical development and aesthetics, and science and technology (Figure 1.1).

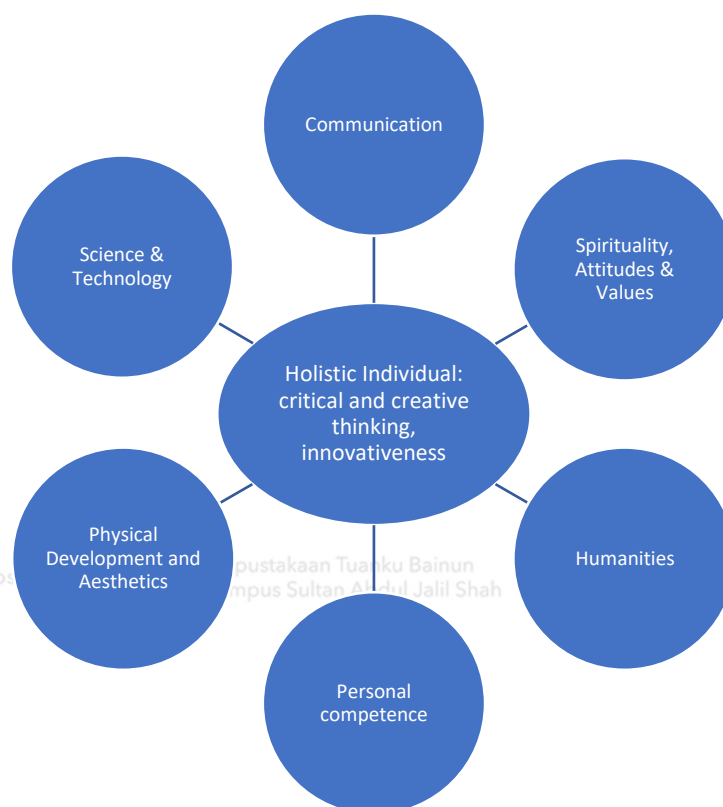


Figure 1.1. The KSSM Framework

Teaching and learning should ensure that students no longer act as knowledge recipients but they must also have an active role as knowledge constructors. Currently, teachers are no longer regarded as the only resource of learning as learning can take place not only at school but also at home and in the wider society where a range of resources can be accessed. Learning activities are expected to move from the textual

interpretation to the scientific in order to cultivate students into life-long learners. ICT should also be used in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching.

Since KSSM was implemented, it requires English language teachers to alter their ways of teaching in order to cater to the demands of the 21st century. SBA has been introduced since 2011 where both summative and formative assessment will be implemented to complement the new curriculum. The English curriculum has promoted the use of the communicative approach and authentic materials, however, the national examinations often create a barrier between curriculum policy and implementation. Although SBA aims to move away the focus on examinations, the national examinations are still considered the requirement to further studies or in applying work. National examinations are high stakes, therefore, influence both how the teachers and students learn (Aspalila, 2011). Teachers teaching practices have traditionally revolved around national examinations.

Without a doubt, teachers play an important role in the success of curriculum implementation as they are the “agents of change” in changing classroom practices (Prawat, 1992). However, teachers may not accept and implement changes unless they view changes beneficial to both themselves and their students (Schmidt & Datnow, 1995). Researching teachers’ beliefs of learner autonomy has the potential to uncover existing levels of understanding and whether or not the teachers feel positive of the need to develop learner autonomy. It is imperative for this study to reveal and seek to understand any reluctance to develop learner autonomy, for example in relation to teachers’ view of their roles or obstacles in their particular context. Therefore, the main aims of this study are to investigate English language teachers’ beliefs of learner autonomy and how they develop learner autonomy in the secondary school classrooms.

1.6 Research objectives

The main aims of this study are to investigate English language teachers' beliefs of learner autonomy and how they develop learner autonomy in the secondary school classrooms. The main aims will be expressed by three research objectives below:

Research objective 1: To investigate Malaysian English language teachers' beliefs of learner autonomy in language teaching in secondary schools.

Research objective 2: To investigate Malaysian English language teachers' actual teaching practices with regards to developing autonomy in the secondary school classrooms.

- a) To describe the roles that teachers play.
- b) To describe what the teachers do to promote autonomous learning.

Research objective 3: To investigate the teachers' views on the issues associated with learner autonomy in language teaching.

- a) To investigate the teachers' understanding of learner autonomy.
- b) To investigate the teachers' views on the possibilities and constraints to develop learner autonomy.



1.7 Research questions

The research questions to facilitate the study are as follows:

1. What are teachers' beliefs of learner autonomy in language teaching?
2. What are the practices of English language teachers with regards to developing autonomy in Malaysian secondary schools?
 - a) What roles do they play?
 - b) What do they do to promote autonomous learning?
3. What are the teachers' views on the issues associated with learner autonomy in language teaching?
 - a) What do teachers understand of learner autonomy?
 - b) What do teachers perceive as constraints and possibilities associated with learner autonomy in language teaching?



1.8 Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework is constructed as the basis of this study. Key terms related to teachers' beliefs, the roles they play and their practices in developing learner autonomy are outlined as illustrated in Figure 1.2.

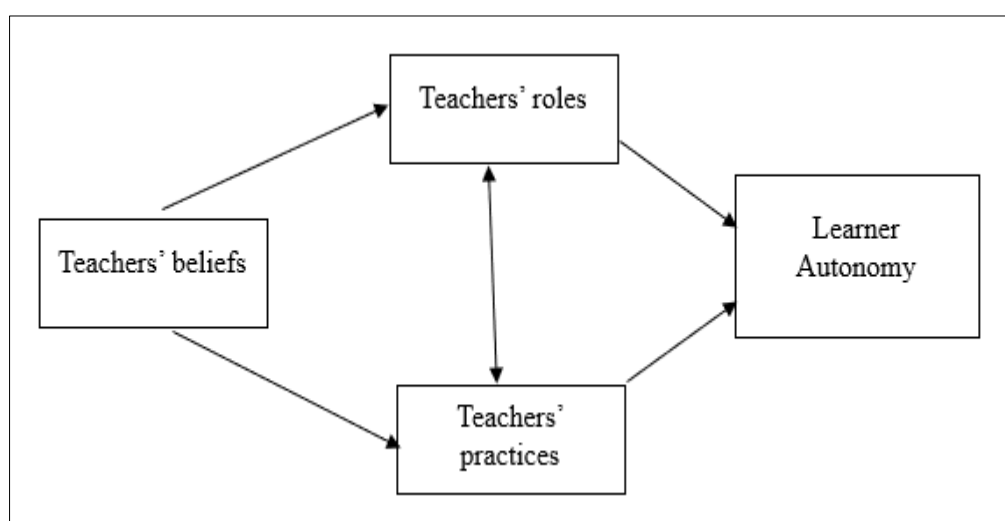


Figure 1.2. Conceptual Framework of the study

The term "learner autonomy" was originally introduced by Henri Holec, a French educational researcher, during the early 1980s. Holec's definition of learner autonomy referred to "the capacity of learners to assume responsibility for their own learning" (Holec, 1981). The concept of learner autonomy initially took shape among teacher-researchers at the Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues (CRAPEL) at the University of Nancy, France, back in the early 1970s (Holec, 1981). It emerged from the necessity to have a term that encompassed individuals' ability to take control of their learning process. Consequently, learner autonomy has been widely acknowledged by proponents as a fundamental principle, advocating that

learners possess the empowerment and entitlement to be in charge of their own learning journey (Smith, 2015).

The conceptual framework shows the interconnection between ESL teachers' beliefs, the roles they play and their practices in developing learner autonomy in the ESL classroom. The teaching practices which have direct influence from the teachers' beliefs in developing learner autonomy. The teachers' practices and roles may support or discourage the development of learner autonomy. Based on the conceptual factor, problems may arise and become the relevant factors in explaining the congruence as well as incongruence between the teachers' beliefs, practices and roles in developing learner autonomy. The beliefs, practices and roles may appear to influence each other in terms of changing or altering certain beliefs. Where it is a common and logical assumption that beliefs may influence teachers' decision in the actual practices and roles, the practices and roles may have the similar effect to the beliefs.

1.9 Significance of the Study

This study aims to address the gap and make a contribution on how English secondary school teachers' beliefs of learner autonomy are reflected into their teaching practices. This study also attempts to investigate how learner autonomy is understood by teachers and whether they have the necessary pedagogical knowledge to implement it in their language classrooms. The findings will contribute to studies of ELT in ESL contexts by depicting the relationship between what teachers think and what they do when attempting to develop learner autonomy.

The study is conducted with the intention of adding to the knowledge in the area of second language learning, and the teaching and learning of English in ESL contexts. More specifically it addresses the development of learner autonomy by English language teachers in Malaysian secondary schools. The findings will also give insight on English language teachers' preparedness to implement learner autonomous classrooms. Any misbeliefs and challenges on implementing learner autonomy in the language classroom can be addressed and steps could be taken to overcome them. This is also to ensure that every government policy is implemented effectively at grass-root level.

1.10 Operational Definitions

The terms that are frequently used in this thesis are mostly defined based on the frameworks used in this study. The terms used in this study include teachers' beliefs, classroom practices, pronunciation skills and integration of skills.

1. Teachers' beliefs is what teachers think, know, and believe and the relationships of these mental constructs to what teachers do in the language teaching classrooms (Borg, 1997). Since beliefs are intangible; they are evident only through one's actions and words. Teachers' beliefs are intangible constructs as they are made up of rational ideas developed over a period of time, through experiences gained while trying to understand a students' mind and monitoring classroom behaviours. In this study, teachers' belief is viewed as being formed from the teachers' personal experiences and then interpreted based on the teachers' values. The beliefs of the teachers are also determined by other

interacting factors that surround a particular situation. The teachers' schooling experience and professional experiences may also have impact over the way they behave as teachers.

2. Learner autonomy refers to the ability to Holec's (1981) definition "to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3) and this covers taking responsibility for "determining the [learning] objectives, defining the content and progressions, selecting methods and techniques to be used...evaluating what has been acquired" (p. 4).

3. Classroom practices is what teachers do in the classrooms with regards to the development of learner autonomy. This includes the approaches that they employed to teach the English language.

1.11 Summary

As the first chapter, this chapter presents the research of the thesis generally. It begins with an explanation on how the topic was selected and moves on to English Language Teaching in Malaysia. This is then followed by discussing the research background of the study, discussing on the rationale, stating the research aim and objectives and explaining the significance of this study. Finally, this chapter ends with a discussion on the ethical considerations.