

Empowering EFL Teachers to Achieve Professional Autonomy

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Abstract

EFL teachers' professional development is a necessity in the context of education reform in Indonesia. Under the school-based management in which the school-level curriculum is implemented, all educational efforts are geared toward the achievement of the national education goal. Since the educational environments keep changing, teachers are required to make informed decisions and take actions accordingly to respond to their students' learning needs which also keep changing and vary from student to student. This will be fulfilled when teachers are professionally autonomous. The writer's limited observation shows that the existing EFL teachers still need to develop themselves to be more autonomous. This paper is aimed at exploring ideas of facilitating EFL teachers in their efforts to become more autonomous.

Key words: autonomy, autonomous, decision making, eclecticism, learning needs

A. Introduction

Education has been redefined in the 2003 Indonesian Education Law as quoted below:

Education means conscious and well-planned effort in creating a learning environment and learning process so that learners will be able to develop their full potential for acquiring spiritual and religious strengths, develop self-control, personality, intelligence, morals and noble character and skills that one needs for him/herself, for the community, for the nation, and for the state (Education Act No. 20/2003, Article 1: 1)

The above definition implies that: (1) students are subjects of their own learning; (2) students' whole potentials (spiritual, ethical, esthetical, intellectual, kinesthetic) of learners; and (3) an assumption of students as individual creatures, community members, and citizens. When students are treated as subjects of their own learning, they should be facilitated in developing their autonomy in learning. When all of the students' potentials are to be developed, differences in their learning needs should be recognized and fulfilled accordingly. When the results of education are to fulfill different levels of needs in different contexts, principled flexibility and autonomy are indispensable. All of this requires that teachers in general and EFL teachers in particular should be able to make informed decisions and take actions accordingly. And this is possible only if they are empowered to reach full principled autonomy, i.e. autonomy in relation to learning autonomy in students..

Such a notion of teacher autonomy will ensure the accomplishment of the national education goal which emphasizes the development of the total persons as God's creatures, as individuals and as citizens, as can be seen in the quotation below.

The National Education functions to develop the capability, character, and civilization of the nation for enhancing its intellectual capacity, and is aimed at developing learners' potentials so that they become persons imbued with human values who are faithful and pious to one and only God; who possess morals and noble character; who are healthy, knowledgeable, competent, creative, independent; and as citizens, are democratic and responsible. (Artl. 3, the 2003 Education Law).

The desired education with its national goal is conducted in the decentralized system with schools having autonomy in looking after its own affairs through the implementation of school-based management and school-level curriculum, which is to be developed based on the national educational standards for the pursuit of the national educational goal (the 2003 Education Law, Artl. 36). This is related to the motto "Diversity in Unity." Guiding the implementation of such an education system are the following six principles:

- Education is organized democratically, equally and non-discriminatorily based on human rights, religious values, cultural values, and national pluralism.
- Education is conducted as systemic unit with an open system and multi-meanings.
- Education is conducted as a lifelong process of inculcating cultural values and for the empowerment of learners.
- Education is conducted based on the principles of modeling, motivation and creativity in the process of learning.
- Education is conducted by developing culture for reading, writing, and arithmetic for all members of the community.
- Education is conducted by empowering all components of the community through their participation in the implementation and quality control of the education services. (Artl. 4, the 2003 Education Act)

Since the strategic environments keep changing due to the societal developments and advancements of science and technology, the students' needs also change as schooling/teaching is always contextually situated. To be able to fulfill the changing learning needs of students, teachers need to constantly learn, relearn, and unlearn as occasion demands so that they become professional teachers with great principled autonomy. That is, autonomy which is exercised for purposes of developing students' learning autonomy.

This paper is aimed at exploring concepts of teacher autonomy and ideas of facilitating EFL teachers in their efforts to become more autonomous. To achieve this aim, the discussion in this paper will cover concepts of teacher autonomy, characteristics of autonomous EFL teachers, and strategies of empowering EFL teachers to achieve professional autonomy, concluded with some implications for EFL teacher education institutions and offices of education.

B. Concepts of Autonomy and (EFL) Teacher Autonomy

1. Autonomy and Teacher Autonomy

Before discussing teacher autonomy, the concept of autonomy should be made clear. According to Pennycook (1997), autonomy means “both mastery over oneself (an internal, psychological mastery) and freedom from mastery exercised over oneself by others (an external, social and political freedom). Thus it is based on a belief in a developed self — a self-conscious, rational being able to make independent decisions — and an emphasis on freedom from external constraints—a sense of liberty bestowed by social and political structures” (as quoted by Bailey, 2006: 57).

Concepts of teacher autonomy have been discussed in the literature. Barfield *et al.* (2001) cites a number of authors as quoted below:

- ... teacher autonomy may hinge on "ideas of professional freedom and self-directed professional development" (Benson, 2000, citing McGrath, 2000);
- ... teacher autonomy may highlight "critical reflection" (Smyth, 1989) and "transformation through dialogue" (Shor & Freire, 1987).

The above concepts of autonomy and teacher autonomy quoted/cited above imply that autonomous teachers critically reflect on their teaching practice and independently make professional decisions for their own development as professionals and along the process of transforming themselves into better professionals they are involved in dialogue with other parties. Explaining teacher autonomy, Little (1995: 179) he states that "...successful teachers have always been autonomous in the sense of having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest possible degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploiting the freedom that this confers" (Little, 1995, p.179).

Recognizing that teaching is always contextually situated, through a post conference e-mail discussion, Barfield *et al.* (2001) have developed a comprehensive definition of teacher autonomy. To them teacher autonomy constitutes:

- a continual process of dialogue and critical reflective inquiry into how teaching can best promote autonomous learning for learners
- understanding of possible various constraints and collaborative work to confront and transform them into opportunities for change
- institutional knowledge and flexibility in dealing with external constraints
- ability to work collaboratively & establish networking both within the institution and beyond; hence, the importance of negotiation

- a need for continuous personal and professional improvement
- a recognition of teacher-learner pools of diverse knowledge, experience, equal power and autonomous learning.
- an understanding of the interrelationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy in the light of values of co-learning, self-direction, collaboration and democratic co-participation as related to critical reflective inquiry, empowerment, dialogue.
- willingness to collaborate with learners and colleagues in questioning and flexibly re-interpreting the exercise of authority within the classroom.

Talking about teacher autonomy, Little stated that "...successful teachers have always been autonomous in the sense of having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest possible degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploiting the freedom that this confers" (Little, 1995, as quoted by Barfield *et al.*, 2001).

2. EFL Teacher Indonesia and Their Empowerment Needs

Adapting from Bailey (2006: 76) and considering ideas of autonomy and teacher autonomy cited above, the writer would like to state that autonomous EFL teachers are reflective EFL practitioners, capable of (1) recognizing own strengths and weaknesses, (2) independently making informed decisions and taking action accordingly to satisfy their Ss' learning needs, developing their own classroom teaching skills (a wide repertoire of routines to fit widely varying concrete EFL learning circumstances), and (3) willingly taking a large degree of responsibility for their own professional development (cf. Bailey, 2006: 76).

In the present post-method era, with the rising demand for greater autonomy on the part of learners, EFL teachers who wish to be progressively successful in facilitating their students' learning should apply the principled eclecticism proposed by Brown (2001) with his nine principles of L2 learning and (2) be reflective to keep self-developing or e lifelong learners to fulfill their students' learning needs which keep changing. In other words, they should consider students' learning needs above all else; thus applying the learning-centred approach.

Do EFL teachers in Indonesia need empowering to be more autonomous? To the writer's limited observation, they do. It should be noted that their levels of competencies, which are necessary for their autonomy, vary from place to place and from teacher to teacher. Their professional development needs might vary in relation to their education and the situations and conditions of their schools.

EFL teachers in Indonesia can fall into the following categories: (1) highly advantaged; (2) fairly advantaged, (3) disadvantaged, (4) very disadvantaged, and (5) severely disadvantaged. The first category refers to those who (a) have a relevant qualification and (b) have an appropriate educational qualification, (c) possess a high level of capability, (d) work in good (well-funded, well-facilitated, well-staffed) schools with good input, which (e) are located in areas with easy access to development means. The first category refers to schools with all the five aspects being advantaged, the second category to those with four aspects being advantaged and one being disadvantaged, the third to those with three aspects being advantaged and two being disadvantaged, the fourth to those with two aspects being advantaged and three being disadvantaged, and the fifth to those with one aspect being advantaged and four being disadvantaged.

Since 2001, the education system in Indonesia has shifted from highly centralized to highly decentralized. The decentralized system has been implemented through the implementation of school-based management and school-level curriculum. On paper, the system has been relatively easily changed. In practice, however, educational administrators and teachers still have to work very hard to change their working culture from pure implementer of the policies centrally formulated to autonomous decision-makers and action takers. Their levels of autonomy therefore vary from place to place and from person to person. Variations of teacher autonomy may be illustrated in Figure 1 below.

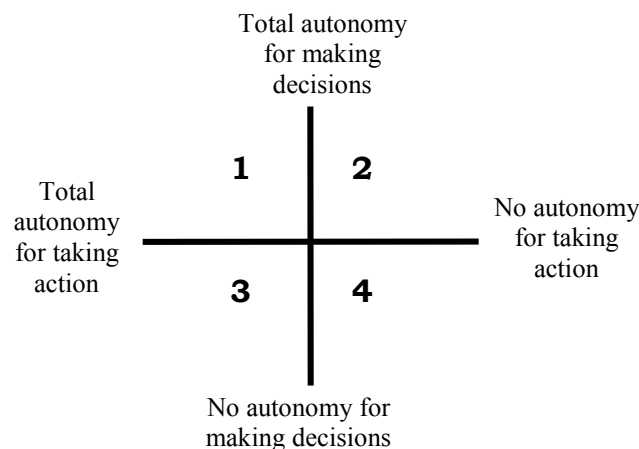


Fig. 1: Teachers' autonomy in decision making and action taking
(from Bailey, 2006: 71)

To reach the objective of this paper, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by empowerment. To empower EFL teachers is to provide EFL teachers with knowledge and skills (competencies) that give them more power necessary to exercise more control over their own professional life so that they can independently make decisions and take action for nothing but improving their students' learning. Some experts have proposed lists of EFL teacher competencies. Integrating the competencies proposed by Brown

(2001) and Richards (2001) who quoted Murdoch (1997) as well as those proposed in Law No. 14/2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, the writer has come to the following list of competencies EFL teachers should have:

A. Pedagogical Competencies

1. Prepare classes adequately and have clear aims and objectives.
2. Consider Ss' cultural background to be important when preparing a course.
3. Give clear and sufficient instructions, examples or demonstrations before Ss begin activities.
4. Present language points in clear and interesting ways.
5. Employ a range of techniques to teach language items (voc., grammar, pron.)
6. Employ a range of techniques of practicing grammatical forms.
7. Try to relate language forms, functions and vocabulary to contexts relevant to Ss' interests.
8. Set up interactive pair/group activities.
9. Employ a variety of activities for developing Ss' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.
10. Employ a variety of techniques to achieve a good balance between accuracy-focused, and integrative, content-focused activities (to help Ss to develop both accuracy (correctness in grammar, pronunciation, punctuations) and fluency
11. Employ a variety of techniques to help Ss to develop their ability to understand the content of texts (oral and written).
12. Use games and puzzles effectively and appropriately.
13. Give Ss sufficient time to respond to learning tasks.
14. Encourage Ss to be active (e.g. ask questions, suggest sth., ask for clarification, be a volunteer in doing things).
15. Elicit background knowledge of Ss appropriately.
16. Avoid impeding student learning via over-use of the mother tongue, or attempt to learn Ss' mother tongue.
17. Act as a good language model for Ss.
18. Use the language appropriate for the level of the class.
19. Use, and get Ss to use, correct classroom English.
20. Deal with Ss' errors systematically and effectively.
21. Get Ss to self-correct minor mistakes.
22. Get Ss to correct/comment on each other's written work and oral performance.
23. Make Ss aware of the strategies they can use to learn English more effectively.
24. Use/develop interactive, intrinsically motivating techniques to create effective tests to evaluate Ss' progress and increase motivation.
25. Involve Ss in selecting classroom activities.
26. Maintain a dialogue with Ss to gauge their reaction to the materials and teaching methods.
27. Make Ss aware of the pedagogic purpose of classroom activities.
28. Consider Ss' different language learning styles in designing the lesson.
29. Attend to the learning needs of the various ability levels in the class.
30. Give appropriate feedback to Ss about their progress.
31. Adapt the teaching plan to respond to Ss' immediate needs and reactions to planned activities.
32. Provide sufficient variety and change of pace to sustain Ss' interest.
33. Use a variety of techniques to ask questions and elicit responses from Ss.

34. Organize Ss and classroom activities well.
35. Make good use of the whiteboard/chalkboard, visuals and other media (OHP, Multimedia).
36. Constantly check to find out if Ss have understood teaching points or benefited from activities.
37. Take a good position at different stages of classroom learning.
38. Believe that education has a vital role to determine the future of societies.

B. Social Competencies

39. Establish a good rapport with Ss.
40. Recognize Ss' achievements and develop Ss' interest in learning.
41. Communicate an enthusiasm for the subject.
42. Be patient, polite and enjoy helping Ss acquire new skills/knowledge.
43. Be patient in working with Ss of lesser ability.
44. Offer challenge to Ss of exceptionally high ability.
45. Value the opinions and abilities of Ss.
46. Be aware of cross-cultural differences and am sensitive to Ss' cultural traditions.
47. Have good strategies for dealing with inappropriate student behaviour.
48. Avoid intimidating shy Ss during classroom learning.
49. Be enthusiastic about working harmoniously and candidly with colleagues to raise the quality of ELT programmes.
50. Seek opportunities to share thoughts, ideas, and techniques with colleagues.
51. Enjoy people; show enthusiasm, warmth, rapport, and appropriate humour.

C. Personal Competencies

52. Indicate a good classroom presence and personality.
53. Dress in the style that can be an asset in the classroom.
54. Be flexible when things go awry. (adaptive to what is going on).
55. Organize activities well.
56. Willingly and conscientiously make efforts to meet commitments/ promises.
57. Set goals of life.
58. Set short-term and long-term goals for continued professional growth.
59. Maintain an inquisitive mind in trying out new ways of teaching.
60. Be prepared to experiment and carry out classroom research in order to further improve teaching competence.
61. Consistently practise own religious teachings.
62. Maintain and exemplify high ethical and moral standards.
63. Possess a talent, interest, dedicating will, and idealism.
64. Possess a commitment to improving education quality, belief, piety, and noble character.
65. Obey all legal provisions, laws, codes of teacher conducts, and religious and ethical values maintain and improve the national unity

D. Subject Matter Competencies

66. Believe that learning English is vitally important for students' future success.
67. See English language learning as part of a larger process of promoting international contacts and interest in other cultures.
68. Be knowledgeable concerning the use of different varieties and styles of English in different societies/cultures.
69. Believe in the importance of empowering Ss to become increasingly more responsible for their own progress in learning (more autonomous learners).
70. Be aware of the value of professional development activities and make full use of available professional support and development opportunities (e.g. seminars/conferences/seminars/workshops).
71. Understand the linguistic systems of English phonology, grammar, and discourse.
72. Possess adequate English vocabulary to teach Ss.
73. Possess adequate English vocabulary to read ELT books.
74. Possess competence in the four English language skills.
75. Make constant efforts to maintain/develop own English skills.
76. Comprehensively grasp basic principles of language learning and teaching.
77. Know through experience what it is like to learn a foreign language.
78. Understand the close connection between language and culture.
79. Possess a relevant academic qualification and educational background.

A solid mastery of these competencies will certainly empower EFL teachers. Since “mastery of competencies” is a matter of degree, the better their mastery, the more empowered, thus the readier, they will be to stand on their own feet professionally.

To be effective in improving their teaching practice towards a better mastery of competencies, EFL teachers are advised to apply the nine principles proposed by Brown (2001). The principles consists of (a) cognitive principles (automaticity, meaningful learning, the anticipation of reward, intrinsic motivation, strategic investment), (b) affective principles (language ego, self-confidence, risk-taking, the language-culture connection), and (c) linguistic principles (the native language effect, interlanguage, communicative competence). (See Brown, 2001, Chapter 4, for full information on these principles).

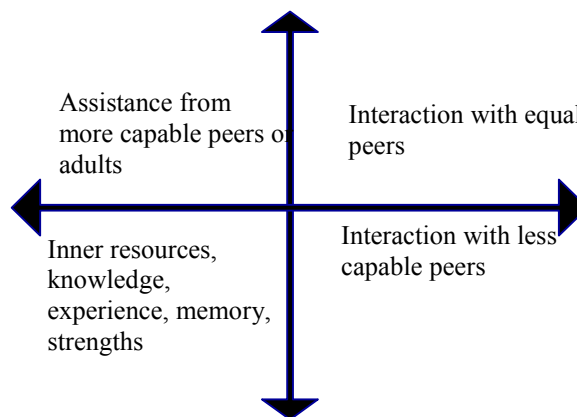
For purposes of empowerment EFL teachers, it is important to make them aware of their competencies and the level of improvement they want to achieve. This can be done by asking them to self-assess the levels of their competencies and determine the level they want to achieve. For this matter, an instrument of self-assessment is available in the following website: teflinforum.jardiknas.org and complete the questionnaire. After completing it, they should return to the following email address: suwarsihm@yahoo.com

C. The Development of Teacher Autonomy

1. The Nature of Autonomy

After defining ‘autonomy’ as quoted in Section B of this paper, Pennycook further stated that “ ... autonomy is not achieved by handing over power or by rational reflection... rather it is the struggle to become the author of one’s own world, to be able to create one’s own meanings, to pursue cultural alternatives amid cultural politics of everyday life”(ibid.). So teachers who want to achieve professional autonomy have to make serious efforts through various means to build the route to their destiny.

However, we have to remember that every person has his/her own levels of capability. In sociocultural theory, “what a person can do confidently comprises an area of self-regulated action.” (Bailey, 2006: 64). “Beyond that there is a range of knowledge and skills which the person can only access with someone’s assistance” said van Lier (1996, as quoted by Bailey, 2001: 64). Further van Lier said that the material that is within reach, whether it involves skills or knowledge, constitutes ZPD (ibid.). However, “anything outside the circle of proximal development is simply beyond reach and not (yet) available for learning” (ibid.). Learners, including teachers who learn to improve themselves, can accomplish productive work in the ZPD by using varied resources, including assistance from interaction with peers, as well as their own inner resources (ibid.) Figure 2 depicts these ideas.



Self-regulation and multiple zones of proximal development (van Lier, 1996, as quoted by Bailey, 2006: 64).

Efforts of professional developments are likely to be more successful if they are made based on principles. Rueda (1998), as cited by Bailey (2006: 45-46) proposed the five principles for professional development as follows:

1. **Principle 1:** Promote learning through joint productive activity among leaders and participants. This means that professional development necessarily involves assisted performance by a more competent other.
2. **Principle 2:** Promote learners' expertise in professionally relevant discourse. According to sociocultural theory, language is an important tool for mediating interaction. Learning the discourse of teaching is part of learning teaching, especially if it helps novices to articulate a problem or reconceptualize the problems somehow.
3. **Principle 3:** Conceptualize teaching, learning, and joint productive activity in the experiences and skills of participants. Teaching and learning must be based on meaningful everyday activities. This means that activities and problem-solving tasks should focus on authentic issues relevant to the participants.
4. **Principles 4:** Challenge participants towards more complex solutions in addressing problems. It is better to view professional development activities as long-term problem-solving opportunities rather than short-term exercises. In sum, teacher need "meaningful feedback on efforts that are critical to success.
5. **Principle 5:** Engage participants through dialogue, especially the instructional conversation. These interactions encourage participants to make connections between formal schooled knowledge derived through education and practical knowledge gained by experience.

These principles, to the writer's opinion, will apply well in making efforts to empower EFL teachers.

2. The Routes to Teacher autonomy

Ideas of ways to teacher autonomy have been explored by experts such as Brown (2001) Edge & Richards (1993) and Harmer (2001). The suggested routes to teacher autonomy can be classified to individual efforts and collaborative efforts.

a. Individual Efforts

Individual teachers can make efforts to develop themselves professionally to reach full professional autonomy with their students' autonomy in learning the main success criterion. Their efforts may include the following: self-assessment/appraisal, regular reading of professional literature, and make use of available resources (electronic, print, audio, audio-visual).

Self-assessment. Teachers can self-assess the following points in relation to their teaching (Brown, 2001): (1) learning environment (relationship with students, the classroom, presentation, culture and adjustment); (2) the individuals (physical health, self-concepts, aptitude and perception, reinforcement, development); and (3) the activity (interaction, language). (see Brown, 2001: 435-437, for the full form).

Regular reading of professional literature. Individually, teachers can regularly read books, journals, magazines and any other materials available in the school library or other libraries. The problem is that in general schools in Indonesia usually have limited materials for teachers to read.

Make use of available resources. If books are not available, they can turn to electronic materials which are accessible through internet. This, however, requires ICT skills and equipment. If the school does not yet have any ICT equipment, they can go to the internet shops. Or they can go to the ICT centres in the schools joining the *Jardiknas*. The problem may, however, be faced by those who live in an area with no internet line.

Nowadays, teachers can learn more from mass media, which often present a useful talk on education in English. In addition, English radio and TV broadcasts are available in certain stations. Those who have access to cable TV can learn a great deal to improve their English skills from various English programs, presented in different varieties of English, i.e. British English, American English, Australian English, Singaporian, and other varieties.

b. Developing with colleagues

Teachers can develop with colleagues through the following means: peer-assessment/appraisal, student assessment/appraisal, peer coaching, team teaching, teacher support group, collaborative curriculum development and revision, teacher association, virtual community, action research.

Peer-assessment. Teachers can assess their peers' teaching, for example, on the following aspects (see Brown, 2001 for the full form): (1) preparation, (2) presentation, (3) execution/method, (4) personal characteristics, and (5) teacher/student interaction. They can also conduct an appraisal of their peers, for example, on the following aspects (see Richards, 2001: 246-248, for the full form): (1) aims and objectives, (2) appropriacy of materials, (3) organization of the lesson, (4) stimulating learner interest, (5) opportunities for learner participation, (6) use of teaching aids, (7) explaining difficult concepts, (8) effectiveness, and (9) any other general observations.

Student-assessment. Teachers can also ask their students to assess their teaching, for example, on the following aspects (modified from Richards, 2001): (1) the teaching (a. class preparation, b. warming up, c. communicating material, d. arousing and maintaining student motivation, e. stimulating students' interest, f. class time management, g. students' opportunity to learn the EL items, h. students' opportunity to learn to use the EL items communicatively, i. responding to student problems, j. overall performance, k. the most useful aspect of teaching, l. the least useful aspect of teaching, m. the teacher's personality and presence, n. teacher-student rapport), and (2) the course (a. course content, b. course materials, c. the most useful aspect of the course, d. the

useful aspect of the course, e. suggestion of ways to improve the course) (See Richards, 2001, for the example of the full form).

Peer coaching. Brown (2001: 441) says that “Peer coaching is a systematic process of collaboration in which one teacher observes and gives feedback to another teacher, usually with some form of reciprocity.” Brown (ibid.) quotes Kinsella (1994) who defines and elaborates as follows:

Peer coaching is a structures process by which trained faculty members voluntarily assist each other in enhancing their teaching within an atmosphere of collegial trust and candor, through: (1) development of individual instructional improvement goals and clear observation criteria; (2) reciprocal, focused, nonevaluative classroom observations; and (3) prompt constructive feedback on those observations.

Peer coaching has at least two major advantages. Peer coaching can be of special help if the observation is focused on certain aspects such as distribution of student participation across the classroom; teacher speech mannerism, patterns, eye contact, and nonverbal distracters; group and pair work management; and transitions from one activity to the next. It is also able to offer a personalized opportunity for growth for both sides because the observer sharpens her/his metacognitive ability to reflect on the teaching process, while the observed may raise his/her awareness of his/her areas of strengths and weaknesses.

Team teaching. As far as there is no financial constraints, team teaching can offer an extraordinary rewarding experience (Brown, 2001). EFL teacher can choose among the following models: (1) two teachers are overtly present throughout a class period, but divide responsibility between them; (2) two teachers take different halves of a class period, with one teacher stepping aside while the other performs; and (3) two or more teachers teach different consecutive periods of one group of learners, and must collaborate closely in carrying out and modifying curriculum plans.

Cooperative/collaborative development. In cooperative development, a teacher talks (as a speaker) with an empathetic colleague (understander), who “makes every effort to understand the speaker but crucially ... does not interpret, explain, or judge what he or she is hearing. All that necessary is for the understander to say ‘this is what I’m hearing. This is what I’ve understood. Have I got it right?’ (Edge, 1992: 65, as quoted by Brown, 2001: 348.) This is similar to “co-counselling” where two people meet and each speaks and listens for the same amount of time (Head & Taylor, 1996, as cited by Brown, 2001: 348).

Teacher support group. EFL teachers can join gatherings of teachers at the school, district, and provincial levels. Teachers working in the same school can get together to discuss any issues and problems which may arise in the course of their teaching. Or teachers from different schools can get together to do the same. MGMP is one form of support group.

Collaborative curriculum development and revision. The process of curriculum development and revision involves teachers in a collaborative effort with curriculum supervisors and among teachers themselves. As consultation is going on many curriculum aspect, new curriculum is born everyday. This kind of collaboration results in solicited teacher contributions to course syllabuses. Sch a process takes place in the development of the present KTSP. Curriculum decision making through collaborative work among teachers and between teacher and other parties will support the development of teacher autonomy.

Teachers' associations. EFL teachers can join teachers' associations existing in Indonesia (e.g. TEFLIN, JETA) and abroad (e.g. IATEFL - Briatin; TESOL- the USA; and Asia TEFL-South Korea. From these associations, they can get at least two benefits: (1) attending conferences, meetings, and workshops where they can hear about the latest developments in the field, and (2) presenting, which provides them with opportunity to reflect on their practice and sharpen their perceptions through the feedback from the audience.

The virtual community. EFL teachers can join virtual communities through which they can talk to each other, exchange ideas and opinions as well as experiences, and ask for help. The chance to reach people from different countries will help them in enriching their knowledge of, improve their understanding of and insights into EFL teaching and learning.

Action research. Action research is a means a teacher can use to improve his/her teaching. Through a cyclical process of planning, acting and observing, reflecting, replanning, acting and observing, and reflecting and so on in which a critical reflective inquiry is conducted through the processes of observing, inquiring, negotiating, evaluating and developing in collaboration with one's learners and colleagues characterized by democracy and dialogue, the teacher as a researcher will be empowered, thus becoming more autonomous. He/she is then readier to help their students to grow to be more autonomous in their learning. (See Madya, 2006 for more information on action research).

All of the routes to teacher autonomy will work effectively if implemented in combination and facilitated and supported adequately. This has some implications for educational institutions of all levels.

D. Conclusions and Suggestions

The present national education system requires that EFL teachers respond to and fulfill their students' learning needs which keep changing with the changing environments. In this context, they need to have the power to control over their professional life. In other words, they need to have professional autonomy, which enables them to make timely informed decisions and take action accordingly as occasion demands. . The present EFL

teachers have not reached full autonomy for many reasons. In other words, they should learn to be more autonomous.

Since EFL teachers have a vital role in the whole EFL teaching and learning, yet very often face technical, bureaucratic and financial constraints, they should not be left alone in their effort to improve themselves professionally. They should be provided with institutional support, for example, in the form of: (1) opportunity and adequate support (further study, joining associations, attending gatherings/meetings/seminars/conferences/workshops); (2) facilities, equipment and resources for professional development (e.g. professional books, ICT equipment); and (3) merit-based rewards. Only if support is provided will these EFL teachers be motivated to self-develop, striving for professional autonomy.

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