# Teachers' Beliefs on Autonomous English Learning in Chinese Universities

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*Abstract*—**Autonomous English learning has gained increasing attention from English teachers in Chinese universities. However, few empirical studies were conducted to explore this notion from teachers' perspective. In this study, by means of a mixed approach, the belief of English teachers in Chinese universities was explored, mainly based on the data from 481 quantitative questionnaires and supplemented by the online in-depth interviews. The study explored the teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy including their belief about its definition, the methods of developing learner autonomy and teachers' roles in its cultivation. Beside, their beliefs about the impact of age, culture and motivation on learner autonomy were investigated. The study revealed that consistency existed among teachers in the belief about the definition of learner autonomy while inconsistencies existed in how to improve students' learner autonomy. Also this research revealed that culture, motivation and traditional teaching mode affected the effective implementation of this concept. In the future, we might deepen the understanding of this educational concept and provide favorable conditions for the teachers to effectively put this approach into practice in the classroom settings.**

*Index Terms*—**autonomous English learning, University English teachers, teachers' beliefs**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Autonomous learning, also known as self-directed learning, is a modern learning concept based on humanistic psychology and cognitive psychology (Alharbi, 2022). Holec (1981) introduced this concept into foreign language teaching and it has been widely and maturely applied in Europe and America since then. In the 1990s, autonomous learning came to the fore in foreign language education in China. In 2007 the Chinese Ministry of Education issued the College English curriculum teaching requirements, which pinpointed fostering English learner autonomy of university students as one of the goals in developing comprehensive competence in English (Shen et al., 2020). The guidance document has aroused a growing concern on developing students' self directed learning competence in colleges and universities across China. But the key to educational reform is teachers in that the implement of the former hinges on classroom teaching (Gamble et al., 2018). So it is necessary to gain insight into teachers' belief for clear understanding of their classroom instruction. Teachers' belief refers to their views on education which covers their notions on teaching, learning, learners, their disciplines and roles (Borg, 2011). The core of teaching is teachers' belief as what they think underpins their instructional behaviors. That is, their beliefs are embodied by a series of teaching activities and decisions in the classroom setting (Little, 2022). The purpose of this study is to understand the beliefs of English teachers in colleges and universities about learner autonomy, investigate the implementation of this notion in EFL classroom in China, and hopefully promote the effective fulfillment of this concept. The research questions are as follows: 1, what are the teachers; beliefs about the definition of learner autonomy; 2, what are their views about how to improve the students' autonomy in the classroom settings?; 3, what are their beliefs about their own roles in the students' autonomous learning?; 4, what are the teachers' beliefs about the relations between learner's age, psychological and cultural factors and autonomous learning?

## II. RELEVANT LITERATURE

In foreign language teaching, concerns over autonomous language learning began in the 1980s, and then there were examinations about its definition and connotations (McCombs & Whisler, 1989) and the role of different social-cultural contexts on the implementation of this concept (Crome et al., 2009). In their findings, it was confirmed that theoretically research on teacher's belief on autonomous language learning exerted a guidance role in course design, material selection, classroom teaching and teacher training. Also some empirical studies based on diverse social-cultural contexts have emerged in the past few years. Asmari (2013) and Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) conducted a series of studies on the beliefs of English teachers on autonomous learning in one language center in Oman by means of

questionnaires and interviews. Balcikanli (2010) adopted a similar mixed method to explore 112 English teachers' beliefs of autonomous learning in Türkiye. Yunus and Arshad (2015) investigated the beliefs and teaching practices of English teachers in public middle schools in Malaysia through questionnaires. In spite of diverse socio-cultural background, the results were similar—teachers took high degree of recognition on autonomous learning from the perspective of concept but were less contented with the implementation in classroom, which was affected by the factors such as students, teachers, schools, society and culture. Yunus and Arshad (2015) suggested studies on foreign language teachers' belief on autonomous learning conducted across the world. Since China is one of the countries which have the most English learners, it is of significance to do the corresponding research.

By taking "foreign language" and "autonomous learning" as the key words, we conducted a key word search of Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and found that there was a sharp increase of articles from less than 100 in the 1980s to over ten thousand in total in 2022. According to the literature review by Chuying (2017), 77% of the articles were non-empirical with the emphasis on theoretical speculative research. The main research contents covered how to cultivate autonomous language learning, the role of teachers in it, teacher autonomy, internal and external factors affecting learner autonomy and research review about it. Chuying (2017) held that autonomous learning in teaching practice left much to be desired. In particular, teachers should change from teachers merely responsible for English teaching to teaching researchers. Lin and Reinders (2019), Wang (2019) and Gong et al. (2020) attributed the problem of autonomous learning in College English teaching to teachers' inaccurate knowledge of its required conditions, which negatively affected the design and implementation of its training programs.

Liu et al. (2021) pointed out that in China many English teachers simply equated autonomous learning to the rigid application of online multimedia coursewares. Yang (2019) also raised the concern that the consensus had not been achieved on the definition of autonomous language learning. More specifically, teachers' understandings of this concept were various. These researches concurred that many problems in autonomous learning in English teaching arose from teachers' related beliefs. Regrettably, most of the existing literatures were just theoretical discussions about teachers' roles (Cheng & Ding 2021) and there was a lack of empirical studies of their real inner beliefs. However, since teachers are direct participants and implementers, their beliefs are the key to the success of autonomous learning in English teaching.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, a mixed methods approach was adopted. That is, quantitative data were first collected and analyzed before the qualitative ones. Priority was given to the former. In the quantitative period, by means of snowball sampling on a professional platform named "Wen Juanxing" for the collection of questionnaires, a total of 481 English teachers in Chinese universities from 29 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions were surveyed. With response rate to the questionnaire at 100%, it took approximately one and a half months to collect, sort out and perform entry process. The basic information table about the subjects (Table 1) showed that they had certain representativeness for the gender, age, educational background were in line with the overall characteristics of English teachers in Chinese universities as a whole.

TABLE 1
BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

|  | Gender | | Date of birth | | | | | Highest level of education | | | Courses taught | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Male | Female | 1990s | 1980s | 1970s | 1960s | 1950s | Bachelor | Postgraduate | Doctor | Non English majors | English majors |
| Number of people | 100 | 381 | 14 | 194 | 206 | 61 | 6 | 50 | 340 | 91 | 332 | 149 |
| Percentage | 21 | 79 | 3 | 40 | 43 | 13 | 1 | 10 | 71 | 19 | 69 | 31 |

The questionnaire in this study was based on the one designed by Borg and Busaidi (2012) aiming at the exploration of the teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in a language center in Oman, which mainly described their views on the definition of learner autonomy and the relevant factors that affected teaching and learning. Our changes were mainly translating their questionnaire into Chinese, addition and deletion of some items in accordance with specific conditions in China. The revised questionnaire fell into two parts. The first was teachers' basic information and the second consisted of 41 items including four dimensions: definition of learner autonomy, methods of cultivating autonomous English learning in universities, age psychological and cultural factors and role of teachers. The questionnaire was in the form or Richter scale divided into 5 levels from 1=completely disagree to 5= completely agree. In the pre-test with 60 teachers, the whole reliability (Cronbach α) arrived at 0.71.As for the subsequent formal test, the figure reached 0.871.

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to gain the knowledge of the internal structure of dataset. The threshold value of the factor loading was set at 0.50 and KMO was 0.905 (approximate chi square=3672.562, df=190, p<0.05), which meant that the data was very suitable for factor analysis. Through the analysis, we obtained three factors: 1) teachers' beliefs about the definition of learner autonomy; 2) their beliefs about how to enhance learner autonomy in the classroom settings; 3) beliefs of their roles in the cultivation of learner autonomy. The cumulative variance was 56.05%

and the commonality of each item was over 0.322. Also, the reliabilities of all the three factors were over 0.65 with factor one and two at 0.842 and 0.855 respectively.

The qualitative analysis was based on the results of the four dimensions of the quantitative one. It was in the form of semi-structured interview aiming at both the highest and the lowest scoring items. Among the interviewed teachers, we selected ten participants (Table 2) according to their professional titles, age, gender, and the grade of university where they worked. Each of the ten teachers was interviewed online for about 1-1.5 hours. As the supplementary data of the quantitative research, the transcripts were labeled and classified with identifiable codes for easy reference.

TABLE 2
BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE ONLINE INTERVIEWEES

| Name | ZK | SY | GZY | WXL | WRS | BYG | LH | LYM | SGY | LX |
|------|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|----|
| Professional title | associate professor | lecturer | associate professor | associate professor | assistant | lecturer | associate professor | lecturer | professor | associate professor |
| Age | 50s | 30s | 40s | 40s | 20s | 30s | 40s | 30s | 50s | 50s |
| Gender | female | female | female | female | female | male | female | female | male | female |
| Grade of university | first batch | second batch | first batch | first batch | second batch | first batch | second batch | second batch | second batch | first batch |

## IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we will discuss the research issues related to the three factors and the age psychological and cultural aspects that are not included in factor analysis but still exert some roles on autonomous English learning.

### A. Teachers' Beliefs About the Definition of Learner Autonomy

Concerning the data in factor analysis (Table 3), the mean value of teachers' belief about the definition of learner autonomy was the highest, at 4.07, which was significantly higher than the figures for the other factors—belief about how to improve students' learner autonomy in the classroom settings and their roles in fostering learner autonomy (F [2960]=28.819, p<0.05). As for the latter two factors, there was no significant difference in terms of mean value. The results showed that teachers' views about the definition of learner autonomy were clearer than those of the two factors.

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE FACTORS (N=481)

| Factor | Mean | Standard deviation |
|--------|------|--------------------|
| Teachers' belief about the definition of learner autonomy | 4.0700 | .52667 |
| Teachers' belief about how to improve students learner autonomy | 3.8753 | .47001 |
| Teachers' belief about their roles in fostering learner autonomy | 3.8392 | .72618 |

Analysis of variance was performed to the items in the factor-teachers' beliefs about the definition of learner autonomy. It was found in Table 4 that there were significant differences among the items (F [52400]=29.919, p<0.05). Through comparison, it was clear that the mean values of item 14 (master learning methods), item 13 (learn independently), item 12 (self-assessment), item 16 (discern their own strength and weakness) and item 17 (specify learner needs) were higher than that of item 15 (self-monitoring), which indicated that these elements were highly accepted in the definition of learner autonomy. In the following online interview, some teachers expressed similar points.

"Learner autonomy refers to active learning, application of appropriate methods and budgeting and effective use of one's time to attain the best learning effects" (ZK).

"It is the ability to be responsible for their own learning, set goals, arrange study materials, synthesize course resources available and evaluate learning outcome" (SY).

"The student is able to independently manage their study, be well-organized and thoughtful, clearly analytical, and choose the suitable methods to achieve learning goals" (LX).

"First of all, learner autonomy is a student-centered mode. The students are expected to give full play to their initiative, enthusiasm and creativity. Students with autonomous learning awareness will take an active attitude and have the ability to use what they have learned and resources available to read, think, explore and analyze. As a result, learning objectives can be achieved by them through independent analysis, exploration and practice" (GZY).

Even though item 15 was also in the first factor, its score was significantly different from those of other items. In the interview, most teachers held that autonomous learning still needed teachers' monitoring. One of them explained that self-monitoring might be a contributing factor in autonomous learning in theory. But in reality, it could not be described as a crucially contributing part in learner autonomy. Last semester, her students were in lack of initiative as in most cases, the teacher told them which units or which parts of the book should be reviewed. "That is to say, essentially, I have to monitor their learning process" (WXL).

Although there has not been any widely accepted definition on learner autonomy since the notion was put forward in the field of foreign language teaching thirty years ago, the agreement was reached on some of its basic characteristics, which were defining learning objectives and needs, learning willingly, reviewing regularly, evaluating learning methods

on a regular basis and so forth (Thomas & Rose, 2019). When the teachers were at the mention of autonomous learning in the online interview, the descriptive words like "freedom", "autonomy", "independence", "voluntary", "responsibility", and "self-control" frequently appeared. This was similar to the findings of Al Asmari (2013) as well as Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) in their research on a language center in Oman. In their study, teachers were basically in agreement on the point that learner autonomy meant that the students took responsibilities and made decisions in their personalized study. Also in our research, teachers' understanding and beliefs about learner autonomy were basically consistent with its definitions in other related literatures.

TABLE 4
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF FACTOR 1—TEACHERS' BELIEF ABOUT THE DEFINITION OF LEARNER AUTONOMY (N=481)

| Item | Mean | Standard deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Students with strong learner autonomy can specify their own needs (17) | 4.18 | .678 |
| Fostering students' self-assessment of learning can facilitate their learner autonomy (12) | 4.14 | .634 |
| Mastering learning methods is the key to learner autonomy (14) | 4.13 | .714 |
| Students with learner autonomy can identify their strength and weakness in learning (16) | 4.10 | .676 |
| Independent learning is the core of learner autonomy (13) | 4.05 | .742 |
| Self-monitoring is the core of learner autonomy (15) | 3.82 | .775 |

*B. Teachers' Beliefs on How to Improve Students' Learner Autonomy in Classroom Setting*

Variance analysis of the dimension- teachers' beliefs on how to improve students' learner autonomy in classroom setting showed that significant differences existed among the items (F [104800]=57.663, p<0.05). By means of comparison (Table 5), it was found that the scores of item 6 (students are allowed to choose what they will study), item1 (activities where learners can learn from each other) and item 3 (group activities) significantly exceeded those of the rest items. This indicated that teachers were largely sympathetic to this view that it was an effective teaching method in the classroom to create free space for the students to choose what they would learn together with cooperative group learning and mutual learning. Results in this study were similar to those in other countries. For instance, Al-Asmari (2013) claimed that cooperative group learning was the most effective way to enhance learner autonomy in the classroom in his survey of some teachers in a language center in Saudi Arabia on the methods of teaching autonomous learning.

TABLE 5
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF FACTOR 2—TEACHERS' BELIEF ABOUT HOW TO ENHANCE LEARNER AUTONOMY IN CLASSROOM SETTINGS (N=481)

| Item | Mean | Standard deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Learner autonomy will be enhanced if the students are allowed to choose what they want to learn. (6) | 4.17 | .710 |
| Activities in which students can learn from each other can boost learner autonomy. (1) | 4.07 | .625 |
| Cooperative group activities help improve learner autonomy. (3) | 4.05 | .684 |
| Learner autonomy will be boosted due to students' involvement in classroom management. (5) | 3.95 | .92 |
| A student-centered classroom provides good conditions for the enhancement of learner autonomy. (2) | 3.93 | .690 |
| Students can choose the type of classroom activities, which helps to improve learner autonomy. (8) | 3.93 | .688 |
| Students' engagement in the determination of course goals will cultivate their learner autonomy. (9) | 3.92 | .743 |
| Study in self-access foreign language center will foster learner autonomy. (10) | 3.79 | .714 |
| Learner autonomy will be enhanced if students make their own choice in learning materials. (7) | 3.68 | .801 |
| Online extracurricular assignments will boost learner autonomy. (11) | 3.65 | .739 |
| If students have the right to decide the way of evaluating their points, learner autonomy will be enhanced. (4) | 3.48 | .876 |

In this dimension, the items which had comparatively lower scores were 10 (Study in self-access foreign language center will foster learner autonomy), 7 (Learner autonomy will be enhanced if students make their own choice in learning materials), 11 (Online extracurricular assignments will boost learner autonomy) and 4 (If students have the right to decide the way of evaluating their points, learner autonomy will be enhanced). By comparison, the average scores of these items were significantly less than the figures for the rest items in the same dimension. In particular, the mean value of item 4 was the lowest. This meant that there existed low degree of acceptance among the teachers in terms of students' choice of learning materials, self-evaluation, online assignment and learning in the self-access center. In the following interview, the teachers explained:

"The students couldn't make out quite a few evaluation methods. What they were familiar with were no more than examinations" (WXL).

"Definitely, students' performance must be reviewed by their teachers. Otherwise, what is our role? Many university students began to learn English in the kindergarten. After over a decade of study, they have higher expectation and demand of the teachers in universities. Never before have had my students determined the evaluation methods by

themselves. Besides, by convention, it is teachers who set questions in the final examination. I cannot imagine the students will take such job" (SY).

Similarly, according to the findings of Borg and Al Busaidi (2012) in the dimension of the feasibility of practicing learner autonomy in classroom settings, the figure for the item concerning evaluation was also the lowest. However, from the descriptive statistics of items in factor 1, the item about self-evaluation was not low. That means in teachers' beliefs, there existed difference between the definition and how to foster learner autonomy in the aspect of self-evaluation. Besides, due to advocate of learner autonomy, many universities built advanced cyber learning centers. For some university faculties and administrative personnel, autonomous learning was just e-learning (Wong, 2020). But the survey in this study indicated that e-learning was not always an effective way of self-regulated study. In the qualitative survey, some teachers pointed out:

"Our self-access English learning center is like a computer room. It seems not effective for them to study on computers. In the self-access center, a few teachers just let students learn by themselves" (GZY).

"Contents on the Internet are cluttered. Also it is difficult for the students to judge which contents are authoritative and reliable. E-learning is not the whole of autonomous learning in that cyberspaces do not have the guiding, supervising and counseling functions as the teachers do" (LH).

In the interview, teachers expressed their confusion about how to cultivate learner autonomy in the classroom settings. One of them pointed out "I do not think I can figure out the effective measures. The choice of teaching scheme is a little arbitrary. Sometimes, as I see it, learner autonomy equals students' sole responsibility of planning and executing their own learning" (ZK). Meanwhile, they were not very satisfied with the implementation of autonomous learning in the classroom. For instance, one teacher said "our classroom only provides space and time for learner autonomy" (WXL). On the whole, compared with students' self-evaluation, choice in learning materials and classroom activities and involvement in the determination of course goals, these measures were more widely accepted by the English teachers in Chinese universities, which were cooperative group activities and choice of what they wanted to learn.

*C. Teachers' Beliefs About Their Roles in Learner Autonomy*

Variance analysis of the third factor—teachers' beliefs about their roles in learner autonomy indicated that significant differences existed among the items, all of which were reverse (F [2960]=68.665, p<0.05). By means of adjusting order (Table 6), we could find that the adjusted average score of item 18 (learner autonomy can be conducted completely without teachers' assistance) was higher than those of the rest two items. It meant that actually from the perspective of teachers' roles in the cultivation of students' autonomous learning, we gained fewer acceptances in the statement in item 18. On the other hand, after the order was adjusted, the figures for item 19 (learner autonomy is a negation of the traditional view that teachers led the dominant role in education) and item 20 (learner autonomy means independent learning) were relatively lower. That meant that originally items of 19 and 20 won more recognition than item 18.

TABLE 6
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF FACTOR 3—TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT THEIR ROLES IN LEARNER AUTONOMY (N=481, R=REVERSE)

| Item | Mean | Standard deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Learner autonomy can be conducted completely without teachers' assistance (18r) | 4.16 | .837 |
| Learner autonomy is a negation of the traditional view that teachers led the dominant role in education (19r) | 3.71 | .982 |
| Learner autonomy means independent learning (20r) | 3.65 | 1.000 |

Teaching featured with learner autonomy was different from the one dominated by teachers. But it did not mean that autonomous learning could be totally without teachers' assistance (Lee, 2016). In fact, teachers could play the role of assistance, advisor and resource provider in the classroom settings (Akhter et al., 2020). When referring to their roles, the teachers pointed out:

"For the students who can take charge of their own time, they still need our help to tackle some problems. Furthermore, for those with insufficient self-study abilities we can act as a designer and organizer of a class besides problem solver" (WXL).

"Learner autonomy presents higher requirements for us. In the traditional teaching mode, students just paid close attention to our lectures. Now, learning is conducted by the students independently. In this process, if they find and put forward some questions, it is our turn to give the answers and provide more resources to help them have a thorough understanding of the learning content" (SY).

"We actively encourage and guide the students to learn independently. In addition, a platform is built for them to share learning achievements, information and references, and provide assistance to some students who are in need of in the problem-solving process" (BYG).

"The teacher is like a guide, providing guidance on learning content and methods. We, as it were, leaders in teaching and learning practice. First, on the occasion of a new semester, we use a variety of ways to get across the importance of English to the students. Second, in the classroom, we help them learn a lot of Western cultures through English textbooks, which enhances their interest. Once they have profound interest and clear study goals, we will arrange tasks to acquire appropriate learning approaches" (LYM).

"Teachers are facilitators. Namely, they guide and help the students in terms of learning themes, content, and strategies. Apart from that, they help the students out with queries, broaden their horizons and learn English effectively" (GZY).

The roles mentioned in the online interview were: organizing teaching in class, answering questions, providing resources, fixing learning objectives, evaluation, increasing interest, instructing how to use advanced learning devices. Notably, some teachers maintained that the optimal condition of exercising learner autonomy was that both students and teachers were self-regulated learners at the same time, and thus they would learn from each other and help each other forward. This view was echoed by Delos and Torio (2021) in his research on learner autonomy. That was teachers' self-study was the key to the facilitation of students' autonomous learning. The teacher who could not regulate his own study was unlikely to cultivate learner autonomy in his students.

*D. Teachers' Beliefs About the Relationship Between the Implementation of Learner Autonomy and Age, Culture and Psychological Factors*

Besides the three aspects discussed above, there were other dimensions which needed discussions though they were not attributed to any factor in the factor analysis. They were about age (item21：Learner autonomy could be fostered among the students of any age; item22: Learner autonomy could be enhanced in both children and adult learners), culture ( item23: Learner autonomy can be promoted in the student of any cultural background; item24: Compared with the students in the Western countries, it is more difficult to develop learner autonomy in Chinese students) and motivation (item25: Students with higher motivation are more likely to improve learner autonomy than those with relatively lower motivation). As similar studies on the three perspectives mentioned above had been conducted out of China ( Jones et al., 2020), we felt the need to conduct the empirical studies based on results of the quantitative data supplemented by the qualitative ones in the interview. Table 7 presented the descriptive statistics on the three perspectives, in which the highest mean was in motivation, at 4.2 while the figure for age was the lowest, at 3.9. Furthermore, variance analysis showed that there was significant difference among the three\
(F [2960]=197.945, p<0.05).

TABLE 7
TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LEARNER AUTONOMY AND AGE, CULTURE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS (N = 481)

| Individual factor | Mean | Standard deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Motivation | 4.2079 | .71474 |
| Culture | 4.0042 | .80622 |
| Age | 3.9210 | .89442 |

In the three learners' individual factors, the lowest average value was in age. In other words, teachers believed that there was some correlation between age and cultivation of learner autonomy. That is, there existed difference between adults and children in the cultivation of learner autonomy. In the interview, one teacher explained "Adult students have stronger autonomous learning ability. On the other hand, younger ones need more guidance from their teachers" (WRS).

As for motivation, one teacher maintained that "English is not very useful to my students. That is why they have little interest in it. Essentially I lead the class. Even when I keep them at hard work, they are unwilling to learn, not to mention autonomous learning" (WXL). Yunus and Arshad (2015) also claimed that weak motivation would reduce the effect of learner autonomy. In the light of their research, motivation was the key to language learning, the degree of which was of great importance to learner autonomy.

When it comes to culture, its mean value was not significantly different from that of age. This indicated that in the teachers' opinion, the impact of culture was not particularly evident. And to refine that slightly, students from any cultural background could develop their learner autonomy as long as in the appropriate environment. However, one teacher in a second batch university stated "Typically, cramming method is adopted in English teaching in high school. Since Chinese university students are accustomed to such approach, it is difficult to develop their learner autonomy" (LYM). This view was shared by Al Asmari (2013) who in a research in Saudi Arabia maintained that from the perspective of teachers, once the students were used to spoon fed teaching methods, it was comparatively hard to cultivate their learner autonomy. Besides, in a survey conducted by Littlewood (1999) on Asian students' learner autonomy, on the individual level, no significant difference was revealed between Asian students and their Western peers in the development of learner autonomy while on the population level, education model, personal experiences and learning environment all exerted certain impact on the cultivation of learner autonomy. Therefore, even though changes took place in the attitude towards the traditional spoon feeding mode, there were quite a few high schools and universities were negatively influenced. In response to this, focus on the individual differences and needs would play a vital role in the implementation of learner autonomy.

## V. CONCLUSION

By mixed methods approach, this study explored Chinese university English teachers' belief about learner autonomy. Through data analysis, we found that they had a clear understanding of the definition of learner autonomy. Also, their views in this respect were basically consistent with those in related documents. Apart from the consistency in their

views on the scope of content implied in the concept of learner autonomy, agreement was also reached on the role of themselves in autonomous learning in teaching English in universities. For instance, the majority of teachers affirmed the indispensible role in supervision and guidance. However, inconsistency emerged between their beliefs of the definition and belief of the methods to enhance learner autonomy. In this study, the participants just affirmed the positive role exerted by a limited number of methods such as cooperative study and group learning which were the most-used teaching ways in the communicative approach. Some of the teachers were not clear about how to integrate learner autonomy into evaluation and selection of goals, contents, activities and so forth. In brief, the gap between teachers understanding of learner autonomy and actual teaching practice, hindering the smooth implementation of the teaching concept discussed in this study. As for the rest dimensions, first with regard to culture, though most teachers believed that difference in cultural background should not be rated as the element affecting learner autonomy, in practice, the traditional "spoon feeding" mode in China impeded autonomous learning. Second, as for motivation, the teachers held that lack of motivation in learning English was a major hindrance to the improvement of learner autonomy.

On the whole, as an educational concept, learner autonomy found general acceptance among English teachers in Chinese universities. But there was a gap between their understanding of the definition of this notion and how to implement the concept in teaching practice. Factors such as culture and Chinese traditional teaching mode negatively affected the effective fulfillment of learner autonomy. Some of our suggestions were that at the theoretical level individual teachers deepen their understanding of learner autonomy and its implementation methods and in their daily teaching they improve the effectiveness of implementation by teaching observation and reflection after class. Besides the efforts by teachers alone, teachers and educational researchers could cooperate to seek out practical and effective ways of the realization of learner autonomy in specific classroom settings. Finally, as for out-class environment, policy makers in the domain of English teaching might take as many factors as possible in terms of the effective implementation of learner autonomy to create a favorable external environment for the smooth implementation of this notion.

## APPENDIX. QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT TEACHERS' BELIEF OF AUTONOMOUS LEARNING

This questionnaire consists of 25 items. There are five options below each item. Each option has a number. Please judge which option below each item is most suitable for your teaching practice. And tick the corresponding bracket.

1. Activities in which students can learn from each other can boost learner autonomy.
   totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
2. A student-centered classroom provides good conditions for the enhancement of learner autonomy.
   totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
3. Cooperative group activities help improve learner autonomy.
   totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
4. If students have the right to decide the way of evaluating their points, learner autonomy will be enhanced.
   totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
5. Learner autonomy will be boosted due to students' involvement in classroom management.
   totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
6. Learner autonomy will be enhanced if the students are allowed to choose what they want to learn.
   totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
7. Learner autonomy will be enhanced if students make their own choice in learning materials.
   totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
8. Students can choose the type of classroom activities, which helps to improve learner autonomy.
   totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
9. Students' engagement in the determination of course goals will cultivate their learner autonomy.
   totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
10. Study in self-access foreign language center will foster learner autonomy.
    totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
11. Online extracurricular assignments will boost learner autonomy.
    totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
12. Fostering students' self-assessment of learning can facilitate their learner autonomy.
    totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
13. Independent learning is the core of learner autonomy.
    totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
14. Mastering learning methods is the key to learner autonomy.
    totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
15. Self-monitoring is the core of learner autonomy.
    totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
16. Students with learner autonomy can identify their strength and weakness in learning.
    totally disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral  agree ( ) totally agree ( )
17. Students with strong learner autonomy can specify their own needs.

totally disagree ( )  disagree ( )  neutral  agree ( )  totally agree ( )

18. Learner autonomy can be conducted completely without teachers' assistance.

totally disagree ( )  disagree ( )  neutral  agree ( )  totally agree ( )

19. Leaner autonomy is a negation of the traditional view that teachers led the dominant role in education.

totally disagree ( )  disagree ( )  neutral  agree ( )  totally agree ( )

20. Learner autonomy means independent learning.

totally disagree ( )  disagree ( )  neutral  agree ( )  totally agree ( )

21. Learner autonomy could be fostered among the students of any age.

totally disagree ( )  disagree ( )  neutral  agree ( )  totally agree ( )

22. Learner autonomy could be enhanced in both children and adult learners.

totally disagree ( )  disagree ( )  neutral  agree ( )  totally agree ( )

23. Learner autonomy can be promoted in the student of any cultural background.

totally disagree ( )  disagree ( )  neutral  agree ( )  totally agree ( )

24. Compared with the students in the Western countries, it is more difficult to develop learner autonomy in Chinese students.

totally disagree ( )  disagree ( )  neutral  agree ( )  totally agree ( )

25. Students with higher motivation are more likely to improve learner autonomy than those with relatively lower motivation.

totally disagree ( )  disagree ( )  neutral  agree ( )  totally agree ( )

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