# Unveiling the Gender Influence on Autonomous Vocabulary Learning Strategies among Vietnamese EFL Teachers

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**Abstract:** This study sought to explore the influence of gender on the strategies adopted by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Vietnam to enhance Learner Autonomy (LA) in vocabulary acquisition. Studying the influence of gender is particularly crucial in the Vietnamese context, as societal and cultural attitudes toward gender roles may distinctly impact pedagogical choices and, consequently, the efficacy of vocabulary learning strategies. Given the imperative role of English in global linguistic landscapes and the pressing need for effective vocabulary learning strategies, this investigation addresses a significant gap in current research by examining the gender-based pedagogical choices of EFL teachers. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 99 high school EFL teachers from the Mekong Delta region through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicated a broad consensus across genders on the importance of strategies that foster autonomous vocabulary learning. However, male teachers held a stronger belief in the effectiveness of independent study for bolstering students' autonomous vocabulary learning compared to their female counterparts. The reasons for this divergence were explored and linked to cultural factors, pedagogical beliefs, and personal learning experiences. These findings underscore the need for teachers, policymakers, and administrators to consider the complexity of gender-based influences when devising pedagogical strategies for enhancing vocabulary learning autonomy.

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## 1. Introduction

Second language vocabulary acquisition efficacy continues to be a pivotal focus in the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy (Brooks et al., 2021). As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the need for effective and efficient language learning strategies is higher than ever. Autonomous Vocabulary Learning, a subset of Learner Autonomy (LA), is gaining prominence for its potential to empower learners, enabling them to take control of their vocabulary learning journey. This self-directed approach not only leads to better retention and understanding, but also contributes to long-term language acquisition, thus becoming a crucial aspect of modern EFL teaching.

Acknowledging the constraints associated with teacher-centric instructional methodologies, an increasing number of academicians and practitioners have championed the advancement of LA within the sphere of vocabulary education (Almusharraf, 2020; Teng, 2018). This paradigm shift implicates bestowing learners with the requisite strategies and tools to autonomously navigate their vocabulary acquisition process, thereby lessening the dependency on instructor facilitation.

In the context of global linguistic landscapes, English has emerged as a common language or lingua franca, particularly in nations such as in Vietnam, where the mastery of English is perceived as a conduit to a multitude of professional and personal opportunities (Tran & Tanemura, 2020). Consequently, the urgency to identify and adopt efficacious strategies for acquiring English vocabulary is both immediate and pressing (Bai, 2018). Examining the gender aspect in this context is urgent, because it can reveal whether there are systemic gender-based biases in pedagogical strategies that could inadvertently advantage one group over the other. This is crucial for creating more equitable educational environments and for enhancing the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies for all learners.

However, despite this exigency, there remains a conspicuous dearth of research exploring the methodologies employed by EFL teachers in contexts such as in Vietnam to cultivate LA, with a special emphasis on vocabulary learning. Even more noticeably, there is a near absence of empirical investigation into how gender influences EFL teachers' selection of strategies aimed at enhancing vocabulary learning autonomy. This lacuna in existing literature provided the impetus for this research. Thus, this study endeavours to explore the implications of gender on the strategies adopted by Vietnamese EFL teachers to bolster the autonomy of vocabulary learning among their students.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Conceptualization of Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy (LA) has persistently occupied a seminal position within language acquisition discourse over past decades. It is primarily construed as the learners' capacity and readiness to regulate their educational experiences and

outcomes. Holec (1981) formulated LA as the ability to assume responsibility for one's educational journey. This includes a learner's active participation in delineating educational objectives, selecting content, applying pertinent methodologies, and appraising learning outcomes. Building on this premise, Benson (2013) proposed that LA extends beyond possessing the ability, but necessitates the motivation to accept responsibility for one's educational progress.

The proactive involvement of learners in their language acquisition process has been the crux of numerous academic investigations. Little et al. (2017) highlighted that autonomous learners dynamically formulate their linguistic comprehension through personal engagement. Nunan and Richards (2015) contend that the promotion of LA requires equipping learners with competencies to interact efficiently with language input. In the realm of vocabulary learning, the concept of LA has demonstrated profound relevance and advantages. Rahmat et al. (2021) state that learners exhibiting higher degrees of autonomy often demonstrate superior effectiveness in vocabulary acquisition due to their utilization of strategies such as inferring meaning from context, exploiting dictionaries, and maintaining vocabulary notebooks. These techniques equip learners to augment their vocabulary comprehension beyond classroom confines, leading to sustainable vocabulary acquisition (Arguello, 2012).

## 2.2 Frameworks for Enhancing LA in Vocabulary Acquisition
Informed by previous studies (e.g., Dobao, 2014; Gibson, 2016; Lai et al., 2018; Mahmoud, 2011; Nation, 2022; Shadiev et al., 2020), this study repurposes the strategies for cultivating LA as its theoretical framework, particularly in vocabulary learning, examined through seven thematic clusters: learner-centric approaches, independent learning, self-evaluation and assessment, collaborative learning, skill cultivation, authentic resources, and integration of technology and out-of-classroom learning.

### 2.2.1 *Learner-Centred Approaches*
The learner-centric model advocates that optimal learning environments should prioritize the learner (Mahmoud, 2011). This model creates an enabling environment for fostering LA in vocabulary learning and involves engaging learners in decision-making processes regarding their education. The central notion is that by conferring learners with autonomy over their educational journey, their motivational and engagement levels may be enhanced, subsequently cultivating a greater sense of autonomy.

### 2.2.2 *Independent Learning*
A salient facet of LA is proficiency in independent study. Academics suggest that independent learning, whether it be individual study or library-based learning, constitutes a critical aspect in nurturing autonomy in vocabulary learning (Nation, 2022). This implies that educational institutions should strive to create environments conducive to independent study.

### 2.2.3 *Self-Evaluation and Assessment*
Promotion of LA can be achieved through self-evaluation and assessment strategies (Janulevičienė & Kavaliauskienė, 2011; Tyas, 2020). The ability to define

their own success metrics and critically analyse their learning promotes autonomous learning behaviour. By enhancing learners' abilities to assess their progress, they can identify areas of strength and areas in need of improvement, leading to more strategic and effective vocabulary learning.

### 2.2.4 Collaborative Learning

In contrast with independent learning, collaborative learning also holds significance in cultivating LA. Activities that stimulate learner cooperation can nurture a sense of responsibility and self-regulation (Dobao, 2014). These activities not only offer learners opportunities to learn from their peers but also motivate them to assume ownership of their learning process.

### 2.2.5 Skills Development

The cultivation of strategic skills for vocabulary learning is integral in fostering LA. These strategies (e.g., mnemonic devices, context clues, word parts, flashcards, word maps or semantic networks) encapsulate a myriad of techniques and tools aimed at aiding learners in comprehending, retaining, and applying new vocabulary more efficiently (Gibson, 2016). Instruction in these strategies enables learners to adopt a more proactive role in their vocabulary learning process, fostering self-directed learning and minimizing teacher dependency.

### 2.2.6 Authentic Resources

The employment of authentic resources in vocabulary learning can significantly augment LA. Through engagement with real-world language use in reading comprehension tasks and auditory materials, learners can develop skills and strategies that enable them to learn and apply vocabulary independently, thereby assuming more responsibility for their own learning (Shadiev et al., 2020). This active involvement and the sense of ownership of the learning process are integral to the ethos of LA.

### 2.2.7 Technology and Out-of-Class Learning

The integration of technology and the implementation of tasks beyond the traditional classroom confines can profoundly enhance LA in vocabulary learning. By offering learners opportunities to engage with a diverse array of resources and to learn according to their individual needs and interests, these strategies foster independent learning skills and augment vocabulary knowledge beyond the conventional classroom environment (Lai et al., 2018).

## 2.3 Interplay Between Teachers' Gender and Selection of Strategies to Foster Learner Autonomy

The influence of the teacher's gender on the choice of strategies aimed at fostering LA has emerged as a burgeoning area of academic investigation. Studies examining the relationship between teachers' gender and their teaching methodologies have reported varied results. Some empirical investigations, such as those conducted by Holmlund and Sund (2008) and Ekornes (2015), posit that female teachers are more likely to foster a collaborative and inclusive learning milieu, an environment that is highly conducive to the development of LA. Conversely, research by Dee (2007) suggests that male teachers demonstrate a

propensity towards traditional, teacher-centred methodologies, which might be less conducive to the promotion of LA.

The correlation between a teacher's gender and student learning outcomes has been thoroughly explored. Dee (2007) identified that students educated by same-gender teachers exhibited superior educational outcomes. It is plausible to connect this observation with LA, as a positive teacher-student rapport could amplify learners' motivation, confidence, and consequently, their autonomy.
While explicit studies focusing on the relationship between teachers' gender and their choice of strategies for LA enhancement are limited, ancillary literature provides valuable insights. For instance, Groenhout (2002) argues that the concept of autonomy itself is not gender-neutral, implying that gender dynamics can exert significant influence on the fostering of autonomy within the classroom context. Sociocultural perspectives, epitomized by researchers such as Ng and Confessore (2015), also yield crucial insights. These scholars underscore that the correlation between teachers' gender and their choice of strategies to promote autonomy is likely mediated by sociocultural norms and expectations.

## 3. Methods
### 3.1 Research Design
For this study, a mixed-methods design was employed, leveraging both quantitative and qualitative data to ascertain a comprehensive understanding of the gender-based influences on the strategies utilized by Vietnamese EFL teachers to cultivate vocabulary learning autonomy. The research design incorporated two principal data collection instruments: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

Regarding the design of the study, it was underpinned by several theoretical frameworks which guided the choice of methodologies and interpretation of findings. First, the central framework was the LA theory, which posits that learners take control and responsibility for their own learning process (Holec, 1981; Hu & Zhang, 2017). In this research context, this theory guided the exploration of how vocabulary learning autonomy could be enhanced, and the impact of teachers' pedagogical strategies in this aspect. Second, the research design also was grounded in the *pragmatist paradigm*, which fundamentally informs the mixed-methods approach. Pragmatism eschews the traditional divide between quantitative and qualitative research and allows for the use of multiple methods to gain a fuller understanding of a research problem (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). In this study, pragmatism provided the flexibility to employ both a questionnaire to uncover broad, quantifiable trends, and semi-structured interviews to delve into nuanced, context-specific insights. Lastly, the investigation utilized the Ecological Systems Theory as a theoretical lens to comprehend the multifaceted influences on the promotion of vocabulary learning autonomy (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). This framework was particularly useful in the context of Vietnamese EFL teaching, as it allowed for an examination of the myriad micro and macro factors that could potentially affect teaching strategies for fostering vocabulary learning autonomy. These could range from individual

characteristics of teachers, particularly their gender, to broader contextual factors, like societal norms and institutional policies.

## 3.2 Participants

The cohort for this research consisted of 99 high-school EFL teachers, hailing from various educational institutions within the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. For participant selection a convenience sampling methodology was utilized, predicated on the teachers' accessibility and expressed willingness to partake in the study. Prior to commencing data collection, ethical clearance was procured from the appropriate institutional review board.

Potential participants were thoroughly briefed regarding the aim, nature, and extent of the investigation. Emphasizing ethical considerations, they were informed that their participation was wholly voluntary, and they were afforded the right to recede from the study at any point, free from repercussions. All participants provided written informed consent, thereby affirming that they fully comprehended and accepted the conditions of their participation in the study. Within this consent document, the researchers guaranteed the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' identities and responses, assuring them that their personal information would not be disclosed. The researchers committed to utilizing the collected data strictly for research purposes, and assured participants that all findings would be reported in a consolidated manner, devoid of any personally identifiable information.

The selected sample exhibited diversity in terms of gender to ensure an encompassing spectrum of viewpoints. Of the 99 participants, 63 identified as female and 36 as male. The subset of interviewees was judiciously chosen to secure a balanced representation of genders. This group encompassed four female and four male participants. A summary of these demographics is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1. Participants**

| Participants for Survey | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Variables* | *Sub-variables* | *Number of Participants* |
| Gender | Males | 36 |
| | Females | 63 |
| **Participants for Interviews** | | |
| *Pseudonyms* | *Gender* | |
| Teacher 1 | Male | |
| Teacher 2 | Male | |
| Teacher 3 | Female | |
| Teacher 4 | Male | |
| Teacher 5 | Female | |
| Teacher 6 | Female | |
| Teacher 7 | Male | |
| Teacher 8 | Female | |

The heterogeneous participant profile enriched the study findings, bolstering both its comprehensiveness and validity.

### 3.3 Data Collection Instruments

*3.3.1 Questionnaire*

The questionnaire used in the study comprised 14 items, designed to delve into the participants' viewpoints on a range of strategies fostering learners' vocabulary learning autonomy. Each statement was evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale spanning from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These items were assembled into seven categories, each spotlighting a distinct facet pertinent to LA within vocabulary acquisition. The categories encapsulated: (1) Learner-Centred Approaches, (2) Independent Learning, (3) Self-Assessment and Evaluation, (4) Collaborative Learning, (5) Skills Development, (6) Authentic Resources, and (7) Technology and Out-of-Class Learning. To ensure the reliability of these categories, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each. The reliability coefficients were as follows: Learner-Centred Approaches ($\alpha = .89$), Independent Learning ($\alpha = .85$), Self-Assessment and Evaluation ($\alpha = .88$), Collaborative Learning ($\alpha = .90$), Skills Development ($\alpha = .86$), Authentic Resources ($\alpha = .91$), and Technology and Out-of-Class Learning ($\alpha = .87$). These coefficients suggest a high level of internal consistency for the items within each category, lending credibility to the instrument used for data collection.

In the design and pre-testing phases several measures were implemented to secure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Grounded in a thorough review of the scholarly discourse on LA and vocabulary learning methodologies, the questionnaire was formulated. Each item was contrived to quantify a specific concept connected to the cultivation of LA in vocabulary learning, thereby ensuring content validity. The categorization of the seven categories was determined by theoretical considerations and empirical LA studies, reinforcing the construct validity of the questionnaire. A pilot study conducted with a smaller group of EFL teachers who did not form part of the main participant cohort ascertained the reliability of the questionnaire. The internal consistency was quantified using Cronbach's alpha, demonstrating high consistency, and affirming the questionnaire reliability ($\alpha=.87$). To ensure face validity, the questionnaire was evaluated by a group of subject matter experts in EFL instruction and LA, and their feedback was utilized to refine the language and format of the questionnaire.

*3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews*

Eight participants were selected for semi-structured interviews to delve deeper into the strategies they employed to nurture vocabulary learning autonomy. These interviews facilitated a more profound exploration of participant experiences and opinions than the questionnaire alone. The interview guide was designed to parallel the seven categories outlined in the questionnaire, ensuring consistency between the two instruments. The interviewees' experiences with Learner-Centered Approaches, Independent Learning, Self-Assessment and Evaluation, Collaborative Learning, Skill Development, Use of Authentic Resources, and Incorporation of Technology and Out-of-Class Learning were explored.

Content validity of the interview guide was ensured by developing it in alignment with the research objectives and literature review. It aimed to delve into teachers' experiences with the diverse strategies recognized as significant in fostering LA. Construct validity was assured through the concordance between the interview guide and the categories in the questionnaire. Reliability was upheld by consistently utilizing the same interview guide with all participants. The interviews were conducted in a neutral, respectful manner, encouraging candid responses, especially in Vietnamese, the participants' mother tongue. The interview guide was reviewed by a panel of experts in EFL teaching and LA, ensuring its relevance and appropriateness. Their feedback was incorporated to refine the interview questions, ensuring they would elicit insightful and useful responses.

The implementation of mixed methods, incorporating both a questionnaire and interviews, served to triangulate the data, thus enhancing the study's validity and reliability. Consistencies across the findings derived from both the questionnaire and the interviews bolstered the credibility of the study. Discrepancies, conversely, unearthed areas for further exploration and nuanced comprehension.

### 3.4  Data Analysis

The researcher in this study adopted a mixed-methods approach for data analysis, allowing for an in-depth investigation of the strategies utilized by EFL teachers in promoting vocabulary learning autonomy as well as the gender-based effects on their perceptions of strategies for promoting vocabulary learning autonomy. This process entailed separate analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data, succeeded by the integration of the results to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Quantitative data derived from the questionnaire were analysed using the Independent Sample T-Test, conducted by using SPSS version 20. The analysis provided an overview of the gender-based influences on the strategies for promoting vocabulary learning autonomy. The resulting p-values were employed to determine the existence of any significant differences between the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding these strategies. As suggested by Cohen (2013), $p>.05$ indicated a lack of significant difference between the two testing variables, and vice versa.

To determine the practical significance of these differences, effect size analyses were carried out using Cohen's D. A predetermined statistical significance threshold was set at $p<.05$, in line with Cohen's (2013) guidelines. Effect sizes were then interpreted as per Cohen's (2013) benchmarks. This detailed statistical analysis, coupled with effect sizes, allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the collected data, bolstering the validity and reliability of the findings, and facilitating their extrapolation to similar educational contexts.

Qualitative data gleaned from the semi-structured interviews were interpreted using a thematic analysis approach. This systematic process followed the six key stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2014). Upon transcription, the interviews were read and re-read to familiarize the researchers with the data. The transcripts

were then coded, highlighting sections of data that represent the most basic segment that could be meaningfully assessed in relation to the phenomenon under study. Codes were assembled into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each prospective theme. Researchers refined each theme, generating clear definitions and names for each theme, ultimately producing a detailed analysis.

Subsequent to the individual analyses, the quantitative and qualitative findings were synthesized, comparing and contrasting the results from the two datasets to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and complementarity. This amalgamation facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the gender-based influences on the strategies employed by EFL teachers to nurture vocabulary-learning autonomy, and how these strategies were perceived and enacted in their pedagogical practices.

## 4. Results and Discussion
The outcomes of the Independent Sample T-Test yielded an expansive comprehension of the gender-related impacts on the perceptions of EFL teachers regarding the diverse strategies to foster vocabulary learning autonomy. Table 2 below encapsulates the gender-associated impacts on the pedagogical strategies employed by EFL teachers to facilitate students' LA in vocabulary acquisition.

**Table 2. Influence of Gender on EFL Teachers' Strategies for Augmenting Students' LA in Vocabulary Learning**

| Strategies | Gender | N | Mean | SD | SEM | p | Cohen's d |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The provision of ideal conditions in learner-centred classrooms for developing learner autonomy in vocabulary learning. | Male | 36 | 4.19 | .89 | .15 | .54 | X |
| | Female | 63 | 4.08 | .90 | .11 | | |
| 2. The promotion of learner autonomy through activities that encourage learners without their teacher. | Male | 36 | 4.11 | .89 | .15 | .93 | X |
| | Female | 63 | 4.10 | .86 | .11 | | |
| *Learner-centred Approaches* | *Male* | *36* | *4.15* | *.78* | *.13* | *.69* | *X* |
| | *Female* | *63* | *4.09* | *.79* | *.10* | | |
| 3. The centrality of learning to work alone in the development of learner autonomy in vocabulary learning. | Male | 36 | 4.03 | 1.06 | .18 | .05 | .42 |
| | Female | 63 | 3.57 | 1.13 | .14 | | |
| 4. The activity of independent study in the library that develops learner autonomy in vocabulary learning. | Male | 36 | 3.78 | .96 | .16 | 1.00 | X |
| | Female | 63 | 3.78 | 1.11 | .14 | | |
| *Independent Learning* | *Male* | *36* | *3.90* | *.86* | *.14* | *.24* | *X* |
| | *Female* | *63* | *3.68* | *.96* | *.12* | | |
| 5. The involvement of learners in analysing the suitability of the learning content, promoting learner autonomy. | Male | 36 | 4.17 | .97 | .16 | .60 | X |
| | Female | 63 | 4.06 | .93 | .12 | | |
| | Male | 36 | 4.28 | .85 | .14 | .12 | X |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. The freedom of learners to decide how their learning is assessed, promoting learner autonomy. | Female | 63 | 3.97 | .98 | .12 | | |
| *Self-assessment and evaluation* | *Male* | *36* | *4.22* | *.86* | *.14* | *.26* | *X* |
| | *Female* | *63* | *4.02* | *.88* | *.11* | | |
| 7. The promotion of learner autonomy through activities that encourage learners to work together. | Male | 36 | 3.78 | 1.07 | .18 | .95 | X |
| | Female | 63 | 3.76 | 1.13 | .14 | | |
| 8. The role of interactive activities in class in promoting learner autonomy in vocabulary learning. | Male | 36 | 4.06 | .79 | .13 | .56 | X |
| | Female | 63 | 3.94 | 1.05 | .13 | | |
| *Collaborative learning* | *Male* | *36* | *3.92* | *.75* | *.13* | *.72* | *X* |
| | *Female* | *63* | *3.85* | *.99* | *.12* | | |
| 9. The necessity of training students in strategies for learning vocabulary. | Male | 36 | 4.55 | .85 | .14 | .10 | X |
| | Female | 63 | 4.20 | 1.01 | .13 | | |
| 10. The provision of tools designed to help learners to understand, remember, and use new vocabulary more effectively. | Male | 36 | 4.51 | .85 | .14 | .10 | X |
| | Female | 63 | 4.18 | 1.01 | .13 | | |
| *Skills development* | *Male* | *36* | *4.53* | *.85* | *.14* | *.10* | *X* |
| | *Female* | *63* | *4.19* | *1.01* | *.13* | | |
| 11. The use of reading comprehension tasks to help promote learner autonomy in vocabulary learning. | Male | 36 | 4.11 | .98 | .16 | .94 | X |
| | Female | 63 | 4.13 | 1.01 | .13 | | |
| 12. The assistance of listening to authentic audio in promoting learner autonomy in vocabulary learning. | Male | 36 | 4.06 | .96 | .16 | .53 | X |
| | Female | 63 | 4.19 | 1.08 | .14 | | |
| *Authentic resources* | *Male* | *36* | *4.08* | *.84* | *.14* | *.69* | *X* |
| | *Female* | *63* | *4.16* | *.95* | *.12* | | |
| 13. The out-of-class tasks requiring Internet usage as a way of promoting learner autonomy. | Male | 36 | 4.01 | .83 | .14 | .95 | X |
| | Female | 63 | 4.08 | 1.00 | .13 | | |
| 14. Provision of tasks requiring students to use new words in real-world situations. | Male | 36 | 4.11 | .83 | .14 | .96 | X |
| | Female | 63 | 4.08 | 1.00 | .13 | | |
| *Integrating technology and out-of-class activities* | *Male* | *36* | *4.06* | *.83* | *.14* | *.97* | *X* |
| | *Female* | *63* | *4.06* | *1.00* | *.13* | | |
| **Strategies** | **Male** | **36** | **4.09** | **.69** | **.12** | **.50** | **X** |
| | **Female** | **63** | **3.99** | **.81** | **.10** | | |

The results show that both male and female teachers had comparable views on the methods employed to promote autonomous vocabulary learning (M[Male]= 4.09; M[Female]=3.99; p=.50), indicating a general alignment with previous studies that underscore the importance of strategies for enhancing vocabulary learning autonomy (Dobao, 2014; Gibson, 2016; Janulevičienė & Kavaliauskienė, 2011; Lai et al., 2018; Mahmoud, 2011; Nation, 2022; Shadiev et al., 2020). From the

perspective of LA theory, both genders seem to value learner-centered methods, consistent with LA's emphasis on learner agency and control over the learning process. Both male and female teachers largely perceived these strategies, similarly, demonstrating a consensus across genders that could be reflected in prior literature (Groenhout, 2002; Ng & Confessore, 2015). In summary, the attitudes of male and female teachers towards various teaching methods and strategies seem to align, which reinforces the idea that gender does not considerably sway perceptions of effective strategies for boosting students' LA in vocabulary acquisition.

There could be several reasons why the male and female teachers shared similar attitudes towards pedagogical approaches and strategies. First, according to the Ecological Systems Theory, Vietnamese male and female teachers undergo similar professional education and training, where they are exposed to the same theories and methodologies of teaching (Nguyen & Walkinshaw, 2018). This shared background is likely to influence their attitudes towards effective teaching and learning strategies. Second, irrespective of gender, Vietnamese teachers aim for similar outcomes: the intellectual and personal growth of their students (Mai & Hall, 2017). According to the Pragmatist Paradigm, which values empirical results, teachers prioritize strategies that they find most effective in practice, regardless of gender. Therefore, their teaching approaches, which are guided by this common goal, are likely to be similar. Third, over time, societal norms about gender roles have evolved in Vietnam. Education is an area where this is particularly true. As such, traditional gender-based differences in attitudes towards teaching and learning may have diminished (Nguyen & Simkin, 2017), leading to more alignment between Vietnamese male and female teachers. Lastly, modern teaching is becoming increasingly student-centred, focusing more on the learners' needs than the personal preferences or styles of the teachers (Abdigapbarova & Zhiyenbayeva, 2023). Since students' learning requirements are not gender-specific, the methods employed by teachers to enhance learning are likely to be uniform across genders.

The data were subsequently scrutinized statement-wise, which resulted in the unveiling of a considerable variance within the t-test findings. Specifically, male teachers exhibited a more profound conviction regarding the efficacy of independent study in fortifying students' autonomous vocabulary learning (Strategy No. 3) as opposed to their female counterparts within the confines of this specific study ($M_{Male}$=4.03; $M_{Female}$=3.57; p=.05). As per the Cohen's D value, this discrepancy is categorized as a small-effect size. During the interviews, the interviewees were required to elucidate the solitary significant deviation surfacing in the quantitative data analysis. This disparity between the perceptions of male and female teachers concerning the centrality of solitary learning to students' vocabulary learning autonomy was explored. Here, LA theory again becomes relevant. Teachers who view vocabulary learning through the lens of learner autonomy may be more likely to value strategies that promote independence, as independent study is closely aligned with LA principles.

Teacher 1, a male teacher, asserted, "I am of the opinion that students should be spurred towards greater independence, competitiveness, and self-reliance." Teacher 1 supported the concept of individual work from the standpoint of LA theory, advocating for student independence and autonomy. Conversely, Teacher 3, a female teacher, noted, "I usually delegate assignments that entail group work as opposed to solitary endeavours as I believe that peer interaction fosters a more profound learning experience". Teacher 3 expressed a preference for collaborative work, which could also be framed within LA theory as fostering interdependent forms of learner autonomy. Ecological Systems Theory could explain these differing viewpoints as potentially stemming from different microsystems or immediate environments in which these teachers interact. The male teacher promoted independent study as a way to foster autonomy, while the female teacher favoured group assignments to encourage peer-to-peer learning and cooperation. These preferences might not necessarily be consciously chosen but were, to a certain extent, a product of the cultural norms and societal expectations to which the teachers had been exposed (Truong et al., 2017). Vietnam, like many other societies, has a rich cultural tapestry that influences various aspects of its social structures, including educational practices. The Vietnamese society is historically known for valuing community harmony and interdependence, often espoused more by female figures, leading to teaching approaches that emphasize group work, cooperation, and mutual support (Khamkhien, 2010; Truong et al., 2017). On the other hand, societal expectations for males often encompass traits such as competitiveness, independence, and self-reliance, aligning with individualistic teaching methods (Nguyen et al., 2010; Knodel et al., 2005).

Additionally, Teacher 4, a male teacher, declared, "Autonomous vocabulary learning, that is, learning without direct teacher intervention, can engender greater independence and self-assuredness in students". In contrast, Teacher 6, a female teacher, posited, "We, as teachers, ought to emphasize guided or collaborative learning strategies". The differences in pedagogical beliefs among male and female teachers can be explained through LA theory and Pragmatist Paradigm. Male teachers, with a more directive style, may align with certain interpretations of LA theory that emphasize student self-direction. Female teachers, tending towards collaborative strategies, may focus on the pragmatist idea of "what works" to facilitate learning, which could involve more interaction and guidance. This variance possibly could be a reflection of the differing pedagogical beliefs or instructional styles between male and female teachers (Dee, 2007; Holmlund & Sund, 2008), pointing to the complexity of gender-based influences in pedagogical strategies. Particularly, Dee (2007) found that male teachers tend to adopt a more authoritative or directive teaching style, while Holmlund and Sund (2008) indicated that female teachers lean towards a more collaborative or nurturing approach.

Finally, Teacher 7, a male teacher, expressed, "Given my personal positive experiences with autonomous learning, I am unequivocally supportive of the notion that teachers should fortify students' vocabulary learning autonomy by offering increased opportunities for solitary work". In contrast, Teacher 5, a female teacher, contended, "Perhaps inexplicably, but independent study was not

particularly effective in my own experience with English language acquisition. I am more inclined towards collaborative learning strategies, which is why I often assign my students to work collaboratively." Teachers' own experiences as learners could be interpreted within the Ecological Systems Theory, in which personal history constitutes a chronosystem that evolves over time and affects current perceptions and behaviours. Teachers may carry these past learning experiences into their teaching practices, thereby influencing their pedagogical choices. These remarks demonstrate that teachers' convictions about teaching and learning are frequently a reflection of their personal experiences as learners (Hofer, 2017; Nikolaros, 2014; Soeprijanto et al., 2022). This understanding is pivotal when contemplating the impact of a teacher's approach on both the teaching process and the resultant learning outcomes, suggesting a need for teachers to maintain self-awareness and reflexivity in their teaching practice.

## 5. Conclusion
This research was instrumental in elucidating the nuanced impacts of gender on the strategies employed by Vietnamese EFL teachers to foster vocabulary learning autonomy among their students. A compelling insight gleaned from the investigation is that despite generally exhibiting consensus on the strategies employed, a notable divergence emerged in terms of the weight ascribed to independent study as a learning strategy. This difference, although identified as having a small effect, warrants further exploration and validation through future research, which could provide a more profound understanding of the role gender plays in the pedagogical decision-making process. The study also underscores the intricate interplay of personal experiences, cultural norms, and gender roles in shaping pedagogical preferences. Cultural norms and gender roles were found to significantly inform the choices that teachers make, highlighting the importance of acknowledging and accounting for cultural contexts in research related to education and pedagogy. Moreover, the study reinforces the significance of reflexivity in teaching practice, suggesting that teachers' personal experiences as learners frequently inform their pedagogical decisions and preferences.

## 6. Implications
The findings of this study underscore the value of introspection and reflexivity among EFL teachers. Teachers should consider how their personal beliefs, cultural norms, and past learning experiences might shape their teaching methods and preferences. Such heightened awareness may facilitate more informed and balanced pedagogical decisions that effectively accommodate the diverse learning needs of students. Additionally, the emphasis in this study on LA suggests that teachers should consider providing learners with the necessary tools and strategies required for independent vocabulary learning. This shift from teacher-centric instruction to a more student-focused approach will enhance learners' self-confidence and independence in their language-learning journey.

Policymakers may leverage the findings of this study to inform curriculum development and policy formulation in the EFL sector. Policies should encourage the incorporation of diverse teaching strategies in EFL classrooms to promote LA. Furthermore, policies should be crafted to provide professional development opportunities for teachers, allowing them to explore and understand the impact

of their personal beliefs and cultural norms on their pedagogical choices. Lastly, considering the gender-based divergence observed in the study, policymakers should strive to promote diversity and inclusivity in teaching strategies.

School administrators should note the importance of facilitating a learning environment that encourages LA. This can be achieved by encouraging and providing resources for teachers to implement a variety of teaching strategies in their classrooms, catering for different learning styles and preferences. Administrators also should foster a culture of continuous learning among teachers, offering workshops or seminars that encourage reflexivity and introspection on teaching practice. Moreover, acknowledging the role of gender in shaping teaching strategies, administrators should advocate for a balanced gender representation among teaching staff to promote a diverse range of pedagogical approaches.

## 7. Limitations, and Recommendations for Further Research

Despite the insightful findings generated by this research, the design and execution of the study show some inherent limitations. The use of convenience sampling might have introduced selection bias, as the sample comprised teachers who were readily accessible and willing to participate, which may not be truly representative of the broader population of EFL teachers in Vietnam. Furthermore, while the study sought to capture a broad range of perspectives through the inclusion of both male and female teachers, the generalizability of these findings to different contexts or regions within Vietnam might be limited. Moreover, the reliance on self-reported data through questionnaires and interviews could have been subjected to social desirability bias, potentially influencing participants to provide responses they perceived as socially acceptable or preferred.

Future research could benefit from addressing these limitations. A more diverse sampling strategy, such as stratified or random sampling, could be employed to ensure the representativeness of the sample. Future studies could also seek to explore this issue within different regional or cultural contexts, both within and outside Vietnam, to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, future research could explore the use of observational data or teacher reflections in addition to self-reported data to mitigate the potential effects of social desirability bias. Moreover, it would be interesting for future research to delve into the exploration of other factors that might influence EFL teaching strategies, such as teachers' educational background, personality traits, or cultural beliefs. Lastly, the small size of the gender-based divergence found in this study calls for more in-depth exploration of the influences of gender on EFL teaching strategies.

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