

LEARNER VOICE AND STUDENT EMPOWERMENT IN UNIVERSITY EFL CLASSROOMS: EXPLORING TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Learner voice and student empowerment are important aspects of student-centered learning, yet students' active participation does not necessarily mean that they can influence decisions about their learning. This study explores university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' perceptions of learner voice and student empowerment, focusing on their understandings of students' roles, reported strategies for encouraging participation, and perceived opportunities and limitations for student involvement. A qualitative research design was employed, involving 17 university EFL teachers from public and private universities in Bandung and Cimahi, Indonesia. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's approach. The findings indicate that teachers generally perceived students as active participants, learning partners, and contributors to classroom activities. They reported using sharing activities, group discussions, assignments, guidance, and motivational strategies to encourage student involvement. However, their accounts provided more explicit evidence of opportunities for participation than of students' influence over learning-related decisions. Their reported efforts were mainly associated with informing and consulting students, while opportunities for shared decision-making, including decisions about learning goals, classroom activities, and assessment, were less clearly described. These findings highlight the distinction between providing opportunities for students to express their views and enabling them to exercise meaningful influence over their learning. The study suggests that promoting learner voice in university EFL classrooms requires not only encouraging participation but also listening to students' perspectives and considering their contributions in educational decision-making.

Keywords: *Learner voice; student-centered learning; student empowerment; teacher perceptions; university EFL*

INTRODUCTION

Student-centered learning has become an important part of higher education. In this approach, students are expected to take an active role in learning rather than simply receive information from their teachers. They are encouraged to share ideas, join discussions, work with others, and take responsibility for their learning. These activities are also important in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, where students need opportunities to communicate and exchange ideas. However, students' participation in classroom activities does not always mean that they have a meaningful

voice in their learning. Students may join discussions and complete assignments, while teachers still make most of the decisions about what and how they learn. Therefore, it is important to understand the difference between asking students to participate and giving them opportunities to express their views and influence their learning.

Learner voice refers to students' opportunities to express their ideas, opinions, and experiences about their learning. However, it involves more than allowing students to speak. Lundy (2007) explains that meaningful participation requires four elements: space, voice, audience, and influence. Students need opportunities to express their views, support in communicating them, someone who listens to their views, and opportunities for their views to influence decisions.

This concept is closely related to student empowerment, which means giving students opportunities to contribute to their learning and influence decisions that affect them. Rather than simply following teachers' instructions, students are recognized as active contributors who can express their preferences, suggest learning activities, and contribute to decisions about assessment. Therefore, although learner voice and student empowerment are closely connected, they have different emphases: learner voice focuses on students expressing their views and having them heard, while student empowerment focuses on their opportunities to influence decisions and take a more active role in learning (Seale, 2010).

These issues are important in university EFL classrooms because learning English requires students to communicate, exchange ideas, and participate in different learning activities. Teachers have an important role in creating opportunities for such participation. Their beliefs about students, learning achievement, motivation, and effective teaching may influence how they understand student involvement. For example, teachers may consider students active when they complete assignments, participate in group discussions, or answer questions. These activities can support learning, but they do not necessarily mean that students have a voice in decisions about learning goals, classroom activities, or assessment. Exploring teachers' perceptions can help us understand what they consider meaningful participation and how they understand learner voice and student empowerment.

Previous studies have examined student voice and participation in higher education and foreign language learning. Seale (2010) discusses student voice initiatives in higher education and highlights the importance of participation and empowerment. In an EFL context, Oruç (2024) investigates a negotiated curriculum in a university-level language classroom, examining student choice, classroom management, assessment, collaborative discussion, and student-led activities as ways of supporting student voice. In Indonesia, Hornay et al. (2024) examine teachers' and students' perspectives on English language learning, including classroom participation, teaching materials, media, and assessment, highlighting the importance of aligning teachers' beliefs with students' learning preferences. Although these studies provide insights into student voice, participation, and teaching practices, less attention has been given to how university EFL teachers themselves understand learner voice and student empowerment, particularly how they distinguish students' active participation from their meaningful involvement in learning-related decisions. This gap is important because teachers' understandings may shape how they perceive students' roles and the significance of students' opinions in the learning process. Therefore, the present study explores university EFL teachers' perceptions of learner voice and student empowerment, focusing on how they understand these concepts and the opportunities and limitations for student involvement reflected in their accounts.

In response to these concerns, this study explores university EFL teachers' perceptions of learner voice and student empowerment in higher education. The data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and teacher interviews. The study examines how teachers understand learner voice, how they define student empowerment, and what opportunities and limitations for student involvement appear in their accounts. It does not aim to evaluate teachers' actual classroom practices. Instead, it focuses on teachers' expressed opinions and reported experiences. By exploring these perspectives, the study aims to contribute to a better understanding of learner voice and student empowerment in university EFL education. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do university EFL teachers perceive learner voice in teaching and learning?
2. How do university EFL teachers understand student empowerment in the classroom?
3. What opportunities and limitations for learner voice and student empowerment are reflected in teachers' accounts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learner Voice in Education

Learner voice refers to students' opportunities to express their ideas, opinions, experiences, and concerns about their learning. However, learner voice involves more than allowing students to speak or answer teachers' questions. Cook-Sather (2006) explains student voice in relation to students' presence and power in educational settings. This perspective suggests that students should not only be present in the classroom but should also be recognized as individuals whose experiences and perspectives have value. Similarly, Justiniano and Scherer (2001) emphasize the importance of respecting students' views, listening to their ideas, and developing partnerships between teachers and learners. From this perspective, learner voice involves communication, listening, respect, and opportunities for students to contribute to the learning process.

Lundy (2007) provides a useful framework for understanding meaningful learner voice through four elements: space, voice, audience, and influence. Space refers to opportunities for students to express their views, while voice concerns the support they receive in communicating those views. Audience means that someone listens to what students say, and influence concerns whether their views can affect decisions. Although Lundy's framework was originally developed in relation to children's participation rights, these elements can provide a useful perspective for examining student voice in education. They suggest that asking students to express their opinions is not enough if their contributions are ignored or have no influence on decisions.

Learner voice is also related to students' identities and their experiences of learning. Nasrollahi Shahri (2018) discusses the relationship between linguistic identity and investment in language learning, highlighting the importance of understanding learners' positions and experiences in language education. Norton (2013) similarly explores the relationship between identity and language learning. These perspectives suggest that students' contributions should be understood in relation to their experiences and positions as language learners. In university EFL classrooms, listening to learner voice can therefore help teachers understand students' perspectives on learning English, their needs, and their experiences of classroom participation.

Student Empowerment

Student empowerment is closely related to learner voice because both concepts concern students' roles and opportunities to contribute to education. However, empowerment places greater emphasis on students' ability to act, exercise responsibility, and influence decisions. Ashcroft (1987) connects empowerment with developing the capacity to act, while Kreisberg (1992) examines empowerment in relation to power and education. From these perspectives, empowering students involves more than encouraging them to participate. It also involves recognizing their ability to contribute to decisions and take responsibility within the learning community.

Freire (1970) criticizes educational approaches that position students as passive recipients of knowledge and emphasizes dialogue as an important part of education. This perspective supports the idea that students should have opportunities to express their views and participate in constructing meaning through interaction with teachers and peers. In a similar direction, Weimer (2002) discusses learner-centered teaching and the importance of reconsidering the roles of teachers and students in the learning process. These perspectives suggest that student empowerment requires teachers to consider students as active contributors rather than simply recipients of instruction.

In classroom settings, empowerment can involve different degrees of power sharing. Teachers may begin by informing students about learning activities and expectations. They may then invite students to express their opinions, consider their suggestions, and involve them in decisions about learning. At a higher level, teachers and students may work together as partners, sharing responsibility for particular aspects of learning. Therefore, student empowerment does not necessarily mean that teachers give up their authority completely. Rather, it involves creating opportunities for students to exercise meaningful influence within the teaching and learning process.

Levels of Student Participation and Empowerment

To understand the relationship between participation and empowerment, it is important to distinguish between different levels of student involvement. Arnstein (1969) introduced a ladder of citizen participation to explain differences in the distribution of power between authorities and participants. Hart (1992) adapted the idea of a participation ladder to children's participation, distinguishing meaningful involvement from forms of participation that provide little real influence. Although these frameworks were developed outside university EFL education, they offer a useful starting point for examining the relationship between participation and decision-making power.

Building on this tradition, Rudd et al. (2007) discuss different levels of learner engagement, ranging from informing and consulting students to involving them in decisions, collaborating with them, and empowering them. At the informing level, students receive information about learning activities and expectations. At the consultation level, teachers invite students to express their opinions, although their views may have limited influence on the final decisions. Involvement and collaboration provide greater opportunities for students to contribute to decision-making, while empowerment involves giving students greater responsibility and control over aspects of their learning.

Fielding (2004) also proposes different ways of understanding student involvement, including students as sources of information, active respondents, co-researchers, and independent researchers. These categories illustrate how students' roles

can move beyond providing information to working with teachers and taking greater responsibility for investigating issues. Fielding (2001) further considers students as potential agents of educational change. Together, these perspectives highlight the importance of examining not only whether students participate but also the roles they are given and the influence they can exercise.

These frameworks are relevant to the present study because they help distinguish participation from empowerment. For example, students may participate in group discussions or complete assignments without influencing decisions about learning goals or assessment. Similarly, teachers may invite students to express their opinions but make decisions without considering their suggestions. Such situations suggest that opportunities to participate and opportunities to influence decisions are not necessarily the same. In this study, the participation frameworks provide conceptual guidance for interpreting teachers' accounts of student involvement. They are not used to classify teachers' actual classroom practices, because the study relies on questionnaires and interviews rather than classroom observations.

Teachers' Perceptions of Learner Voice and Student Empowerment

Teachers play an important role in shaping how students are understood and involved in the learning process. Their beliefs about teaching, learning, and students can influence how they interpret classroom participation and the responsibilities they assign to learners. Borg (2006) explains that teacher cognition includes teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and thinking related to language teaching. This perspective is relevant because teachers may have different understandings of what it means to encourage student participation or create a student-centered classroom.

Phipps and Borg (2009) examine tensions between teachers' stated beliefs and their teaching practices, demonstrating the importance of investigating teachers' understandings of teaching rather than assuming that their beliefs and actions always correspond. For the present study, this perspective supports examining teachers' accounts carefully while recognizing that reported views do not necessarily provide direct evidence of classroom behavior. Since the current study uses questionnaires and interviews, its focus is on what teachers say about students' roles, participation, and empowerment.

Teachers may understand student involvement in different ways. Some may emphasize completing assignments, answering questions, and participating in group discussions. Others may place greater emphasis on listening to students' preferences, considering their suggestions, and involving them in decisions about learning. These differences are important because teachers may describe their classrooms as student-centered while understanding participation mainly as students' involvement in activities. Examining teachers' perceptions can help identify how they define meaningful participation and whether their accounts recognize students' opportunities to influence learning decisions.

Conceptual Focus of the Present Study

Drawing on the literature discussed above, the present study views learner voice and student empowerment as related but distinct concepts. Learner voice concerns students' opportunities to express their views and have them heard and considered. Student empowerment concerns their opportunities to influence decisions and take greater responsibility in learning. The participation frameworks proposed by Rudd et al. (2007) and Fielding (2004) provide additional perspectives for examining differences between

informing students, consulting them, involving them in decisions, and sharing responsibility with them.

These concepts guide the analysis of university EFL teachers' responses to open-ended questionnaires and interviews. By focusing on teachers' expressed perspectives, the study seeks to understand how student participation and influence are understood in university EFL education without assuming that teachers' accounts necessarily represent their actual classroom practices.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore university EFL teachers' perceptions of learner voice and student empowerment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The study focused on how teachers understood learner voice, how they conceptualized student empowerment, and what opportunities and limitations for student involvement were reflected in their accounts.

Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Using these two methods allowed the researcher to examine teachers' perspectives from different sources. The questionnaires provided written responses to questions about students' roles, classroom participation, learning achievement, and student empowerment, while the interviews offered opportunities to explore teachers' views in greater detail.

Participants

The participants were 17 university teachers who taught in public and private universities in Bandung and Cimahi, Indonesia. They consisted of five male and twelve female teachers. Regarding teaching experience, ten participants had taught for more than ten years, five had fewer than five years of teaching experience, and two were novice teachers.

The participants were invited to respond to open-ended questionnaires concerning learner voice and student involvement in teaching and learning. The study also involved interviews with teachers to obtain further information about their perspectives. The participants' varied teaching experience and institutional backgrounds provided different perspectives on learner voice and student empowerment in university EFL education.

Instruments

Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and teacher interviews. The questionnaire consisted of ten open-ended questions designed to explore teachers' perspectives on learner voice, students' roles, classroom participation, learning achievement, and student empowerment. The questions also addressed teachers' expectations for students and their reported ways of encouraging student involvement in learning.

In addition to the questionnaires, interviews were conducted to obtain further explanations of teachers' views and reported experiences. The interviews focused on teachers' understandings of student participation, their expectations for students, and their perceptions of the opportunities and limitations associated with student involvement in learning.

The use of questionnaires and interviews enabled the researcher to examine both the breadth of teachers' responses and the explanations they provided during the interviews.

Since the study relied on teachers' accounts, the findings were interpreted as evidence of their perceptions and reported experiences rather than direct evidence of classroom practices.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in teachers' perceptions of learner voice and student empowerment. The analysis followed the general phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

First, the researcher read the questionnaire responses and interview data several times to become familiar with the content. Second, relevant statements were coded according to their meaning and relationship to the research questions. Initial codes included students' roles, opportunities for participation, teachers' views of achievement, expectations for learning, and reported efforts to involve students.

Third, related codes were grouped into broader themes. The analysis was informed by the concepts of learner voice and student empowerment, particularly the distinction between opportunities to express views and opportunities to influence decisions. The participation framework discussed by Rudd et al. (2007) provided a conceptual reference for interpreting teachers' accounts of informing, consulting, involving, collaborating with, and empowering students. However, the analysis also remained open to ideas emerging from the data.

Finally, the themes were reviewed in relation to the research questions. Questionnaire responses and interview accounts were compared to identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns in teachers' understandings. The analysis focused on what teachers expressed in their accounts and did not assume that reported practices necessarily represented their actual classroom behavior.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from open-ended questionnaire responses and the teacher accounts included in the original research document. The findings are organized around four main themes: teachers' perceptions of students' roles, their reported strategies for facilitating active learning, their views of student achievement, and their efforts to involve and empower students. The discussion interprets these findings in relation to learner voice and student empowerment, particularly the participation continuum proposed by Rudd et al. (2007), Lundy's (2007) framework, and Fielding's (2004) typology of student engagement.

Findings

Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Roles in the Classroom

The findings indicate that the participating teachers generally viewed students as active participants in learning. Their responses described students in several ways, including as subjects of learning, partners, active learners, researchers, and the focus of classroom activities. However, the responses also included one description of students as passive learners.

Table 1. Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Roles

Category	Teacher participants identified in the original data	Number listed
Students as subjects of learning	T1, T7, T14, T15, T16	5
Students as partners	T2, T4, T5, T8, T11, T12, T13, T17	8
Students as active learners	T6, T18	2
Students as researchers	T3	1
Students as the focus of learning	T9	1
Students as passive learners	T10	1

As Table 1 shows, the most frequently represented category is *students as partners*, followed by *students as subjects of learning*. Teachers described students as partners, friends, participants, and learning partners. These descriptions suggest that the teachers recognized the importance of interaction and cooperation in the learning process. The identification of students as subjects of learning also indicates an understanding that students should take an active role rather than simply receive information from their teachers.

Teacher 3 described students as “the discovery doers,” reflecting a view of learners as individuals who explore and discover knowledge. This description is particularly relevant to student empowerment because it positions students as participants in the construction of knowledge. Nevertheless, the statement alone does not establish whether students have the authority to select learning goals or influence classroom decisions.

The data also contain a different perspective. Teacher 10 described students as passive learners. This response suggests that the teachers' understandings of students' roles were not entirely uniform. It is therefore more accurate to conclude that the responses predominantly presented students as active participants, rather than claiming that every teacher consistently understood students in this way.

The findings can be interpreted through Fielding's (2004) typology of student engagement. Viewing students as partners or discovery-oriented learners is consistent with an emphasis on active participation. However, students' roles as partners may involve different degrees of responsibility. Students can work with teachers and peers while still having limited influence over learning-related decisions.

The distinction is also important in relation to learner voice. Justinianno and Scherer (2001) associate learner voice with respecting students' perspectives, listening to their ideas, and developing partnerships between teachers and learners. From this perspective, describing students as partners provides an encouraging starting point. However, the extent to which such partnership is realized depends on whether students' views are listened to and considered in the learning process.

Teachers' Strategies for Facilitating Active Learning

To explore how teachers supported active learning, the original study asked them to explain their efforts to involve students in classroom activities. The responses included providing tasks and assignments, creating opportunities for sharing, giving information and guidance, and organizing group discussions.

Table 2. Teachers' Reported Strategies for Facilitating Active Learning

Strategy	Teacher participants identified in the original data	Illustrative response
Providing tasks and assignments	T3	"I must facilitate them to do the tasks, and assignments in line with their intellectual, capacity, motivation, and interest."
Creating opportunities for sharing	T2, T4, T5, T7, T9, T10, T11, T13, T14, T16	"I make classroom as a place for sharing where they can play their role actively."
Providing information and guidance	T1, T6, T16, T17	"I ask students to read the book, attend the class regularly, help arranging the project, make sure that the students understand the instruction and inform the rubric."
Organizing group discussions	T8, T12, T15	"I usually set the classroom into group discussion so each or everyone has the same opportunity to talk and deliver argument."

The findings show that teachers reported several ways of encouraging students to participate. Teacher 3 emphasized providing tasks and assignments that matched students' intellectual capacities, motivation, and interests. This response suggests awareness that learning activities need to consider differences among students. Teachers 8, 12, and 15 referred to group discussions as a way to give students opportunities to speak and present arguments.

The most common category in Table 2 is sharing. One teacher explained that the classroom should be "*a place for sharing where they can play their role actively.*" This response indicates that the teacher valued opportunities for students to contribute to classroom interaction. However, the explanation does not specify what kinds of ideas students can share, how the teacher responds to their contributions, or whether their views influence learning decisions.

This pattern is important because the opportunity to speak is only one part of learner voice. Lundy (2007) explains that meaningful participation involves space, voice, audience, and influence. Group discussions and sharing activities may provide space for students to express their views. Yet, to understand whether these activities support meaningful learner voice, it is also necessary to examine whether teachers listen to the views expressed and whether those views have any influence.

The responses also suggest that teachers differed in how specifically they explained their strategies. Some described particular activities, such as assignments and group discussions, while others referred more generally to sharing and active participation. The original analysis notes that many teachers did not explain in detail how they facilitated active learning. This makes it difficult to determine the extent to which their reported strategies involved students in making decisions.

The distinction between participation and empowerment is therefore central to interpreting these findings. Group discussions can encourage communication and allow

students to present different perspectives, but they do not automatically give students responsibility for choosing topics, establishing learning goals, or determining assessment criteria. Similarly, providing assignments can encourage students to complete learning tasks without necessarily involving them in deciding what or how they learn.

Rudd et al. (2007) provide a useful framework for understanding this distinction. Their continuum differentiates between informing students, consulting them, involving them in decisions, collaborating with them, and empowering them. The strategies reported by the teachers demonstrate opportunities for participation, but the descriptions provide less evidence of collaboration in decision-making or the transfer of responsibility to students.

Teachers’ Views of Student Achievement

The teachers’ responses about student achievement revealed two broad categories: achievement as an outcome and achievement as ongoing progress. Most of the teacher identifiers listed in the original table were associated with the outcome-oriented category, while two teachers emphasized continued effort and progress.

Table 3. Teachers’ Perceptions of Student Achievement

Category	Teacher participants identified in the original data	Description of achievement
Tenacity and ongoing progress	T1, T12	Continuous improvement, attention to the learning process, and progress over time
Outcome-oriented achievement	T2, T3, T4, T5, T7, T8, T9, T10, T11, T13, T14, T15, T16,T17	Scores, knowledge, skills, understanding, rewards for effort, and achievement of learning objectives

The findings suggest that the teachers generally associated achievement with demonstrable learning outcomes, including scores, knowledge, skills, understanding, and the completion of learning objectives. For example, Teacher 12 described achievement in terms of students’ English fluency and their ability to express ideas:

“It’s always been a good feeling when having high achiever students, listening to their fluency and how they deliver their ideas when speaking English, we as a teacher also learn a lot from them.” (Teacher 12)

This response shows that achievement was not understood only as a numerical score. The teacher also valued students’ ability to communicate in English and express their ideas. Such a perspective is relevant to EFL learning because it recognizes students’ communicative performance as an indicator of progress.

Teacher 8 also connected achievement with motivation and participation:

“For me, high achiever students are who show their highest motivation in joining the whole class activities, do the out of class assignment, and eager to learn and ask new knowledge even outside of the class.” (Teacher 8)

This response suggests that achievement can include behavioral indicators, such as participation, completing assignments, asking questions, and showing interest in

learning. It therefore provides evidence that at least some teachers considered students' engagement alongside academic outcomes.

The original data also include descriptions of students who experience learning difficulties. Teacher 14 explained that low-achieving students were those who could not achieve most of the learning targets and who participated less actively in learning activities. Teacher 15 described such students as those "*struggling academically or performing below proficiency*" who need academic support during classroom activities.

These responses suggest that teachers often interpreted achievement through students' progress toward established learning targets, together with their participation and motivation. However, these accounts do not establish that teachers used achievement scores as their only measure of learning.

The contrast between outcome-oriented achievement and ongoing progress is important for understanding learner voice. When achievement is defined through scores and the attainment of objectives, attention may focus on whether students meet expectations established by the teacher or curriculum. When progress is also valued, teachers may be more likely to recognize individual learning development and students' experiences during the learning process.

Weimer (2002) emphasizes students' active roles in learner-centered teaching. From this perspective, student involvement can extend beyond completing assignments or meeting predetermined targets. Students may also reflect on their progress, identify their learning needs, and contribute to discussions about how learning activities can be improved.

Nevertheless, the present findings do not demonstrate whether teachers who emphasized outcomes gave students fewer opportunities to express their views. Rather, the responses show which indicators of achievement teachers chose to emphasize. More direct evidence would be needed to establish how these views influenced their classroom decisions.

Teachers' Efforts to Empower Students

The original study also examined the activities teachers associated with student empowerment. The responses were classified as informing, consulting, or unspecified activities. The data therefore provide an opportunity to examine how teachers understood students' involvement beyond their participation in classroom tasks.

Table 4. Reported Activities Related to Student Involvement and Empowerment

Type of involvement	Reported activities	Teacher participants identified in the original data
Informing	Providing rewards and punishment; transmitting knowledge; modelling	T1, T8; T2, T6, T10; T3, respectively
Consulting	Providing time and space for sharing; allowing students to use English; organizing collaborative group discussions; persuading or motivating students to study	T4, T5, T12, T16; T13; T14, T15; T17, T11, respectively
Unspecified	Describing students as the center of learning or as participants rather than objects of learning	T9, T7

The responses classified as informing focused on teacher actions such as transmitting knowledge, modelling, and providing rewards or punishment. These

activities can communicate expectations and provide guidance. However, they do not necessarily give students an opportunity to influence decisions about their learning.

The responses classified as consulting included providing time for sharing, encouraging students to use English, organizing group discussions, and motivating students to learn. These activities may create opportunities for students to communicate their views and participate more actively. For example, collaborative discussions can allow students to express ideas and respond to their peers.

However, the descriptions do not consistently explain whether teachers used students' views to make decisions about learning objectives, activities, or assessment. Providing time for sharing, for example, does not by itself establish that students' suggestions influence the final decision. Likewise, encouraging students to use English can promote language practice without necessarily giving them a role in shaping the learning process.

Rudd et al.'s (2007) framework helps clarify this distinction. Informing and consulting are different from involving students in collaborative decision-making or empowering them to take responsibility for decisions. Consultation gives students an opportunity to express their views, but the influence of those views depends on how the teacher responds. Empowerment requires a greater degree of shared responsibility and influence.

The original analysis concluded that teachers' reported efforts were mainly associated with informing and consulting and that they did not clearly describe involving students in selecting goals or making decisions. This interpretation is broadly consistent with the categories presented in Table 4. However, the evidence supports a conclusion about what teachers described in their responses, rather than a definitive claim that they never share decision-making authority in practice.

The finding is significant because it highlights a possible difference between teachers' use of student-centered language and their descriptions of student involvement. Teachers may describe students as the center of learning while providing limited detail about the decisions students can influence. This does not necessarily indicate a contradiction in their beliefs. It may also reflect the general nature of their responses or the questions asked in the questionnaire.

The distinction between learner voice and empowerment is therefore useful in interpreting the findings. Learner voice involves opportunities for students to express their perspectives and have those perspectives heard. Student empowerment involves a further step: students' contributions can influence decisions and allow them to take greater responsibility for their learning. The responses show that teachers reported activities that could support learner voice, but the extent of student influence remains unclear in several accounts.

Teachers' Expectations for Student Learning

The data also reveal differences in what teachers expected students to gain from learning. The original analysis grouped their responses into four broad areas: content, instructional process, students' intellectual development, and the development of the whole person.

Table 5. Teachers' Expectations for Student Learning

Area of expectation	Examples from the original responses	Teacher participants
Content	Improving English ability and understanding learning content	T9, T11
Instructional process	Enjoying learning, showing enthusiasm, and participating actively	T4, T8, T14, T15, T16, T17
Intellectual development and application	Understanding concepts, solving problems, developing useful skills, and applying knowledge in daily life or future careers	T1, T3, T5, T6, T7, T10, T12
Whole-person development	Becoming a lifelong learner	T2

The responses show that teachers' expectations extended beyond memorizing information. Some emphasized students' enjoyment and participation in classroom activities, while others focused on understanding, problem-solving, and applying knowledge beyond the classroom.

Teacher 15, for example, stated that students were expected to participate actively in learning activities. Teacher 10 expressed the expectation that students should be able to apply theories in their future lives or careers. These responses suggest that teachers recognized both participation in the learning process and the practical value of learning.

One particularly relevant response came from Teacher 2, who stated:

"Sy berharap mahasiswa saya menjadi pembelajar yg mandiri sepanjang hayat."

This means, "I hope my students become independent lifelong learners." The response expresses a broader educational goal: students should develop the capacity to continue learning beyond the immediate course. This expectation is relevant to empowerment because lifelong learning involves the ability to recognize learning needs and take responsibility for continued development.

However, the original analysis indicates that only one teacher was classified under the whole-person category. This suggests that lifelong learning was less explicitly represented than expectations concerning instructional participation and intellectual development in the responses presented. It should not be interpreted as evidence that the other teachers did not value students' long-term development, since they may have expressed related ideas under other categories.

The findings suggest that teachers' expectations were diverse, but the ways students could contribute to shaping their own learning were less clearly described. Expectations that students should participate, understand, and apply knowledge do not automatically indicate that students are involved in deciding how learning takes place. The distinction again reinforces the importance of examining not only the outcomes teachers expect but also the role students are given in pursuing those outcomes.

Discussion

From Student Participation to Student Empowerment

Taken together, the findings indicate that teachers generally recognized the importance of students' active participation. They described students as partners, subjects of learning, and contributors to classroom activities. They also reported using sharing, group discussion, assignments, guidance, and motivation to support learning.

However, the data suggest that teachers' descriptions of participation were more explicit than their descriptions of shared decision-making. In several responses, teachers identified activities that encouraged students to participate but did not explain whether students could influence learning goals, select activities, negotiate assessment criteria, or take responsibility for decisions. This pattern is central to understanding the relationship between learner voice and student empowerment in the present study.

Lundy's (2007) framework helps explain why participation should not be treated as sufficient evidence of meaningful learner voice. Students need opportunities to express their views, but they also need an audience that listens and opportunities for their views to influence decisions. In the present data, group discussions and sharing activities provide examples of opportunities for expression. The extent to which students' views influenced decisions is less clearly established.

Rudd et al. (2007) provide a further distinction between informing, consulting, collaborating, and empowering students. The activities described by the teachers in this study appear mainly in the informing and consulting categories as interpreted in the original analysis. Although these activities can support participation, they do not necessarily involve students in shared decision-making. The findings therefore suggest that the teachers' accounts provide stronger evidence of participation opportunities than of student empowerment.

Fielding's (2004) typology also helps explain the different roles represented in the data. Students may participate as respondents or active contributors without necessarily becoming collaborators in decision-making. Describing students as partners is therefore meaningful, but the extent of the partnership needs to be examined through what students are allowed to do and how their contributions are used.

The findings concerning student achievement add another dimension to this discussion. Most teachers in the original categorization emphasized scores, knowledge, skills, understanding, or the achievement of learning objectives. Other responses highlighted participation, motivation, and continued progress. These different emphases show that teachers recognized several indicators of learning, although the responses more often described achievement through outcomes and participation than through students' involvement in defining or evaluating their learning goals.

The study does not establish that outcome-oriented teachers necessarily provide fewer opportunities for learner voice. Rather, it shows that their explanations of achievement and teaching strategies do not consistently describe students' influence over learning decisions. This is an important distinction because it keeps the interpretation grounded in the available data.

Overall, the findings suggest that the teachers' accounts reflect a recognition of student-centered learning, active participation, and interaction. At the same time, the accounts provide less explicit evidence of how students can influence decisions and share responsibility for their learning. This distinction contributes to the study's central argument: learner voice and student empowerment should not be understood simply as students being active in classroom activities. Meaningful learner voice also requires

that students' perspectives are heard and considered, while empowerment involves a greater opportunity to influence decisions.

The findings should be interpreted in light of the study's data sources. They represent teachers' stated perceptions and reported experiences from open-ended questionnaires and the teacher accounts included in the original document. They do not directly demonstrate the frequency or quality of classroom practices, nor do they establish how students themselves experience their opportunities to participate. Future research combining teacher accounts with student perspectives and classroom observations could provide a more complete understanding of how learner voice and student empowerment are enacted in university EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study explored university EFL teachers' perceptions of learner voice and student empowerment, focusing on how teachers understand students' roles, facilitate classroom participation, and support students' learning. The findings suggest that teachers generally recognize students as active participants and learning partners rather than merely recipients of knowledge. Teachers reported using sharing activities, group discussions, collaborative tasks, and opportunities for students to express their ideas to support classroom participation.

However, the findings also indicate that opportunities to participate do not necessarily mean that students have substantial influence over their learning. Although teachers described practices intended to encourage student involvement, their accounts provided less explicit evidence of students participating in decisions about learning goals, activities, or other aspects of classroom learning. From this perspective, learner voice appears to be valued, but the extent to which it leads to student influence remains an important question.

The teachers' accounts also revealed different emphases in their understanding of student achievement and learning. Many responses highlighted learning outcomes, such as improvements in knowledge, skills, understanding, and achievement of learning targets. Other responses emphasized students' participation, motivation, enjoyment, and progress during the learning process. These perspectives suggest that teachers' expectations encompass both academic achievement and the learning experiences that support it, although the relationship between these priorities and student empowerment requires further exploration.

The study contributes to discussions of learner voice by highlighting the importance of distinguishing between giving students opportunities to speak and enabling them to influence learning. Using Lundy's framework, learner voice can be understood not only in terms of opportunities for expression but also in terms of whether students are heard and whether their contributions have an influence on decisions. Similarly, the participation continuum helps illustrate why classroom activities such as discussion and collaboration should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of empowerment. The significance of these activities depends partly on the role students have in shaping their learning.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study relied on teachers' self-reported accounts and did not include classroom observations to examine how the reported practices were enacted. Therefore, the findings reflect teachers' perceptions and descriptions rather than direct evidence of classroom interaction or the extent of students' actual influence. In addition, the study involved 17 university EFL teachers

from public and private institutions in Bandung and Cimahi, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other contexts.

Future research could combine teacher interviews with classroom observations and students' perspectives to investigate how learner voice is expressed, received, and acted upon in university EFL classrooms. Further studies could also examine how teachers create opportunities for students to participate in decisions about learning objectives, classroom activities, and assessment. Such research would help clarify the conditions under which learner voice develops from classroom participation into meaningful student empowerment.

Overall, this study suggests that promoting learner voice requires more than creating opportunities for students to speak or participate in classroom activities. It also requires attention to how teachers listen to students, respond to their contributions, and make room for students to influence their learning experiences. Recognizing this distinction may help university EFL teachers reflect on their pedagogical practices and develop more participatory learning environments.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In the writing process, the authors used AI tools, specifically ChatGPT, to rephrase particularly dense sentences. All AI-generated text was subsequently reviewed, edited, and verified by the authors, who maintain complete responsibility for the manuscript's accuracy, integrity, and final content.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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