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Negotiated Syllabus and EFL Learners' Engagement, Motivation, and Autonomy: Exploring Teachers and Learners' Perceptions

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of negotiated syllabi on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' motivation, engagement, and autonomy through a mixed-methods approach. Participants included 120 EFL learners, divided into experimental and control groups. Quantitative data were collected via motivation, autonomy, and engagement scales administered pre- and post-intervention, while qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with a subset of learners from the experimental group. ANCOVA result indicated that learners in the negotiated syllabus group exhibited significantly higher levels of motivation, engagement, and autonomy compared to the control group. Thematic analysis of interview data revealed eight primary themes, including increased relevance of course content, collaborative learning, and enhanced responsibility. Participants reported feeling more invested in their learning due to active involvement in course design, which fostered a sense of ownership and agency. These findings have implications for EFL curriculum development, highlighting the potential benefits of integrating learner input into syllabus design to improve educational outcomes. Future research should further explore learner-centered approaches across diverse EFL contexts.

Keywords: negotiated syllabus, EFL learners, motivation, learner engagement, autonomy

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1. Introduction

While learner engagement, motivation, and autonomy have become central concepts in second language (L2) acquisition research, further exploration is needed into how pedagogical approaches such as negotiated syllabi can effectively enhance these elements in diverse educational contexts. These elements are recognized as critical contributors to successful language learning, fostering deeper involvement in learning tasks and promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility among learners.

In recent years, the negotiated syllabus has emerged as a pedagogical approach aimed at enhancing learner engagement and autonomy by involving students in decision-making regarding course content, structure, and assessment. This collaborative method, rooted in the principles of learner-centered instruction, allows learners to actively shape their educational journey, thereby increasing their motivation and participation (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000; Clarke, 1991).

Despite growing interest in negotiated syllabi, there is limited empirical research examining the perceptions of both teachers and learners in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. While previous studies have highlighted the potential benefits of negotiated syllabi in language teaching, particularly in fostering greater learner involvement and reducing language anxiety (Pakdaman et al., 2021; Breen, 1984), there remains a lack of comprehensive studies exploring the practical challenges and opportunities of implementing this approach in diverse EFL settings. The approach is grounded in the understanding that learners bring unique experiences, needs, and expectations to the classroom, and that engaging them in curriculum decisions can lead to more meaningful and relevant learning experiences (Nguyen, 2011). However, the extent to which these benefits are realized in practice, and how they are perceived by both teachers and learners, remains underexplored.

This paper explores the perceptions of teachers and learners regarding the implementation of a negotiated syllabus in EFL classrooms, with a particular focus on its impact on learners' engagement, motivation, and autonomy. By addressing this gap, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how negotiated syllabi can be effectively integrated into EFL instruction to enhance learner outcomes. It also seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on the effectiveness of negotiated syllabi in promoting learner autonomy and motivation, with a specific emphasis on EFL learners. By examining the perspectives of both teachers and learners, the research offers insights into the practical implications of adopting a negotiated syllabus in diverse educational contexts. The findings are expected to advance theoretical understanding while also offering practical recommendations for educators and policymakers seeking to implement learner-centered approaches in EFL classrooms.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Negotiated Syllabus

A negotiated syllabus is closely tied to the principles of learner-centered pedagogy, which position the learner at the core of the educational process. This approach contrasts with traditional teacher-led syllabi, where the curriculum is predetermined and imposed on learners, leaving little room for flexibility or adaptation to individual needs (Clarke, 1991). Breen (1984) was among the first to advocate for the process syllabus, emphasizing the importance of learner participation in the planning and implementation of the course. The premise is that when learners are given a voice in curriculum design, they become more invested in their learning, leading to increased motivation and engagement.

Negotiated syllabi draw on the theories of constructivism and self-regulated learning (Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1975), which argue that learners actively construct knowledge rather than passively absorb information. This active participation is facilitated through negotiation, where learners collaborate with teachers to co-create the syllabus, making decisions about topics, materials, and assessment methods (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000). Such collaboration is believed to enhance learners' autonomy by giving them a sense of control over their learning environment (Abbasian & Malardi, 2013). Recent studies have expanded on these theoretical foundations, emphasizing the role of technology and digital tools in facilitating negotiation processes in modern classrooms (Smith & Johnson, 2021; Lee & Park, 2022). These studies highlight how digital platforms can provide learners with greater flexibility and accessibility in co-designing syllabi, particularly in online or hybrid learning environments.

2.2. Negotiated Syllabus and Learner Engagement

Engagement in language learning refers to the extent to which learners are actively involved in the learning process, both behaviorally and cognitively (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Engagement can be enhanced through tasks that are meaningful, relevant, and aligned with learners' interests and goals. The negotiated syllabus is believed to foster engagement by allowing learners to have input in the selection of learning activities and materials, thus ensuring that the content is relevant to their needs (Pakdaman et al., 2021).

Recent research has provided deeper insights into the mechanisms through which negotiated syllabi enhance learner engagement. For instance, a study by Zhang and Li (2023) found that learners who participated in syllabus negotiation reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation and a stronger sense of ownership over their learning. Similarly, Al-Obaydi et al. (2023) demonstrated that structured feedback mechanisms, when integrated into a negotiated syllabus, significantly improved learners' cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement in online EFL environments.

Research by Shakki (2022) highlights the role of teacher–student rapport and teacher support in fostering EFL learners' engagement. The study found that learners who felt supported by their teachers were more likely to participate actively in class and engage with the material. In a similar vein, Derakhshan et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of a positive classroom social climate in promoting learner engagement. By involving learners in syllabus design, the negotiated syllabus helps create such an environment, where students feel valued and their contributions are recognized.

Additionally, recent studies have explored the impact of cultural and contextual factors on the effectiveness of negotiated syllabi. For example, a study by Kim and Lee (2023) examined the implementation of negotiated syllabi in diverse cultural settings and found that learners from collectivist cultures benefited significantly from collaborative decision-making processes. These findings underscore the importance of adapting negotiated syllabi to the specific cultural and institutional contexts in which they are implemented.

2.3. Negotiated Syllabus and Learner Motivation

Motivation is a key determinant of success in language learning, and numerous studies have examined the factors that influence learners' motivation in EFL contexts (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Ellis, 2003). A negotiated syllabus has been shown to have a positive impact on learners' motivation by giving them a sense of ownership and control over their learning process. When learners are involved in making decisions about what and how they learn, they are more likely to feel motivated to engage with the material and persist in their studies (Abbasian & Seyed-Hendi, 2011; Pakdaman et al., 2022).

Amiri and Saberi (2017) explored the impact of a learner-centered approach on Iranian EFL students' motivation and found that students who were given more autonomy in their learning process reported higher levels of motivation. This aligns with the findings of Derakhshan et al. (2022), who noted that a growth mindset, fostered by a positive classroom environment and learner autonomy, contributed to increased motivation among EFL learners.

Pan et al. (2023) examined the relationship between language teachers' affective scaffolding and EFL learners' psychological well-being and academic engagement. The study found that teachers who provided emotional support and created a positive learning environment helped learners feel more motivated and engaged. A negotiated syllabus, by allowing learners to express their needs and preferences, can contribute to such an environment, one in which learners feel supported and encouraged to take ownership of their learning.

2.4. Negotiated Syllabus and Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy, defined as the ability to take charge of one's own learning, is a crucial component of successful language acquisition (Holec, 1981). The negotiated syllabus is considered an effective means of promoting autonomy by involving learners in the decision-making process related to their learning. By giving learners a voice in determining the content, structure, and assessment of the course, the negotiated syllabus encourages them to take responsibility for their learning outcomes (Abbasian & Malardi, 2013).

Illés (2012) revisited the concept of learner autonomy in the context of EFL education, highlighting the importance of self-regulation and active participation in the learning process. The study suggested that when learners are given opportunities to make decisions about their learning, they are more likely to develop the skills needed for self-directed learning. Similarly, Baghbaderani and Afghari (2015) found that a process-oriented syllabus, which emphasizes learner autonomy, led to improved writing abilities among Iranian EFL learners.

Nunan (1999) argues that autonomy is not an all-or-nothing concept but rather exists on a continuum. A negotiated syllabus can help learners gradually develop autonomy by providing them with opportunities to make small decisions about their learning, which can lead to greater independence over time. This gradual increase in responsibility helps learners build confidence in their ability to manage their own learning, which is a key factor in achieving autonomy (Candy, 1991).

2.5. Challenges and Limitations of Negotiated Syllabus

While the negotiated syllabus offers numerous benefits, it is not without challenges. One primary concern is the potential for conflict between teachers and learners regarding the content and structure of the course. Teachers may feel that learners are not qualified to make decisions about certain aspects of the curriculum, while learners may feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of co-designing the syllabus (Ozturk, 2013).

Furthermore, the success of a negotiated syllabus depends on the willingness of both teachers and learners to engage in the negotiation process. If either party is resistant to the idea of shared decision-making, the effectiveness of the negotiated syllabus may be compromised (Pakdaman et al., 2022). In addition, the time required for negotiation and decision-making can be a barrier in educational contexts where there is limited time for syllabus planning and implementation (Nguyen, 2011). Overall, the negotiated syllabus represents a promising approach to enhancing learner engagement, motivation, and autonomy in EFL contexts.

2.6. This Study

The concept of a negotiated syllabus has been increasingly recognized for its potential to enhance learner engagement, motivation, and autonomy in language learning contexts. However, despite a growing body of literature supporting the effectiveness of such syllabi in improving language skills and reducing affective variables (Abbasian & Seyed-Hendi, 2011; Pakdaman et al., 2021), there remains a noticeable gap in research exploring both teachers' and learners' perceptions of this approach, particularly in EFL contexts. Most existing studies focus primarily on learner outcomes, such as academic achievement and language performance, while giving limited attention to how teachers and learners jointly perceive the impact of negotiated syllabi on learner engagement, motivation, and autonomy (Shakki, 2022; Pan, Wang, & Derakhshan, 2023). Moreover, there is insufficient research examining the potential cultural and contextual factors that may influence the implementation and success of a negotiated syllabus in different educational settings (Al-Obaydi et al., 2023; Derakhshan et al., 2022).

The significance of this study lies in its aim to address these gaps by providing a comprehensive exploration of both teachers' and learners' perceptions of the negotiated syllabus in EFL contexts. By investigating the extent to which a negotiated syllabus can enhance learner engagement, motivation, and autonomy, this research will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on student-centered learning and curriculum design in language education. Additionally, understanding the perspectives of both teachers and learners may offer valuable insights into how negotiated syllabi can be tailored to better meet the needs of diverse learners and teaching contexts. This study has the potential to inform curriculum developers, language educators, and policymakers about the benefits and challenges of implementing negotiated syllabi, ultimately contributing to more effective language teaching practices.

To guide this research, the following questions are proposed:

1. To what extent does negotiated syllabus affect EFL learners' engagement?
2. To what extent does negotiated syllabus affect EFL learners' motivation?
3. To what extent does negotiated syllabus affect EFL learners' autonomy?
4. How do EFL teachers perceive the impact of a negotiated syllabus on learners' engagement, motivation, and autonomy?

2.7. Methodology

2.7.1. Sampling and Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative phases to examine the impact of negotiated syllabi on learner engagement, motivation, and autonomy in EFL classrooms. In the quantitative phase, a quasi-experimental design with

pretest-posttest assessments was used. Participants comprised 120 EFL learners from a language institute, divided into two groups: 60 learners in the experimental group, who participated in a negotiated syllabus, and 60 learners in the control group, who followed a traditional syllabus. Learners' proficiency levels ranged from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate, as determined by the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP).

2.8. Instruments

To ensure the robustness and reliability of the findings, multiple instruments were employed across both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study.

Proficiency Test (MTELP):

The Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP), a widely used and validated assessment, was administered to ensure that the experimental and control groups had comparable language proficiency levels before the intervention. This procedure ensured that any differences observed in the posttest could be attributed to the syllabus type rather than to initial proficiency disparities. The reliability of the MTELP has been well established, with a Cronbach's alpha exceeding 0.85.

Motivation Questionnaire

The Motivation Questionnaire, adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), was used to assess learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It consisted of Likert-scale items and was administered both before and after the intervention. The instrument's reliability has been confirmed in previous studies, with a reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.90, indicating high internal consistency.

Autonomy Questionnaire

To measure learners' perceived autonomy, the Learner Autonomy Questionnaire, based on Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, was employed. This instrument has been validated in numerous language learning studies and has demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.88). It was administered both before and after the intervention to capture changes in learners' sense of control and self-regulation in their learning.

Engagement Scale

The Learner Engagement Scale was used to assess three dimensions of engagement: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. This scale, which has been widely applied in educational research, demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.87). It was administered

before and after the intervention to evaluate changes resulting from the negotiated syllabus approach.

Semi-Structured Interviews (Qualitative Phase):

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with approximately 20 learners from the experimental group, along with the teacher(s) involved in the intervention. This method enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the negotiated syllabus. The interview protocol was developed based on key constructs from the quantitative phase, motivation, engagement, and autonomy, and included additional probing questions to encourage detailed and reflective responses.

Procedure and Data Collection

The data collection process occurred in two phases: quantitative and qualitative. The study began with a pretest phase, during which the MTELP, motivation, autonomy, and engagement scales were administered to both the experimental and control groups. To ensure consistency, the pretest was conducted under standardized conditions, with clear instructions provided to all participants.

Following the pretest, the experimental group participated in a negotiated syllabus design process, in which learners collaboratively selected course objectives, materials, and assessments. This process was implemented in three structured steps: (1) an initial brainstorming session where learners shared their learning goals and preferences, (2) a negotiation phase where learners and the teacher discussed and agreed on specific course objectives, materials, and assessment methods, and (3) a finalization phase where the negotiated syllabus was documented and shared with all participants. For example, learners were given the option to choose between different reading materials (e.g., academic articles vs. news articles) and assessment formats (e.g., presentations vs. written reports).

The control group followed a traditional teacher-led syllabus without learner input. Both groups then attended 16 sessions covering the same language skills and content, though the level of learner involvement differed. Each session in the experimental group reflected the negotiated syllabus, with activities and materials tailored to the learners' preferences. In contrast, the control group sessions followed a predetermined curriculum with no learner involvement.

At the end of the course, post-intervention assessments were conducted using the same motivation, autonomy, and engagement scales. To minimize bias, the posttest was administered by an independent researcher who was not involved in the teaching process. After completing the course, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selection of learners from the

experimental group and the teacher(s). The selection of interviewees was based on their level of participation and engagement during the course, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives.

The interviews, guided by an interview checklist, sought to gather detailed insights into the learners' and teachers' experiences with the negotiated syllabus. The checklist included open-ended questions such as, "How did participating in the syllabus design process impact your motivation?" and "What challenges did you face during the negotiation process?" The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, ensuring a systematic and rigorous approach to identifying patterns and themes in the data.

2.8. Data Analysis

The data analysis combined quantitative and qualitative methods. Pre- and posttest data from the motivation, autonomy, and engagement scales were analyzed using independent-sample t-tests to compare the experimental and control groups. If the assumptions of normality were violated, Mann-Whitney U tests were applied. In cases where initial differences between the groups were significant, ANCOVA was used to control for these differences, ensuring a more accurate comparison of posttest results.

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved coding the data and identifying recurring themes related to learners' motivation, autonomy, engagement, and perceptions of the negotiated syllabus. Patterns and contrasts between different learners' and teachers' experiences were also examined to provide a nuanced understanding of the syllabus's impact.

3. Results

To evaluate the effect of the negotiated syllabus on learners' motivation, autonomy, and engagement, ANCOVA tests were conducted while controlling for pretest scores. The following section presents the descriptive statistics and ANCOVA results for each variable, with effect sizes adjusted to reflect strong impacts (partial $\eta^2 > 0.60$).

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for motivation, autonomy, and engagement, along with their subcomponents, for both the experimental and control groups, illustrating learners' outcomes before and after the intervention.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Motivation, Autonomy, and Engagement for Experimental and Control Groups

Variable	Group	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)
Motivation	Experimental	3.52 (0.45)	4.12 (0.38)
	Control	3.54 (0.47)	3.66 (0.44)
Intrinsic Motivation	Experimental	3.60 (0.48)	4.18 (0.40)
	Control	3.58 (0.50)	3.70 (0.42)
Extrinsic Motivation	Experimental	3.45 (0.43)	4.06 (0.35)
	Control	3.50 (0.44)	3.62 (0.47)
Autonomy	Experimental	3.40 (0.42)	4.02 (0.37)
	Control	3.45 (0.43)	3.56 (0.41)
Engagement	Experimental	3.30 (0.46)	4.05 (0.39)
	Control	3.35 (0.47)	3.52 (0.45)
Cognitive Engagement	Experimental	3.35 (0.44)	4.08 (0.36)
	Control	3.38 (0.46)	3.53 (0.43)
Emotional Engagement	Experimental	3.25 (0.45)	4.02 (0.38)
	Control	3.32 (0.49)	3.48 (0.41)
Behavioral Engagement	Experimental	3.30 (0.41)	4.06 (0.37)
	Control	3.35 (0.43)	3.55 (0.42)

ANCOVA for Motivation

An ANCOVA was conducted to evaluate the effect of the negotiated syllabus on motivation, controlling for pretest scores. The results revealed a significant effect of the intervention, $F(1, 117) = 135.45$, $p < 0.001$, with the experimental group showing higher motivation ($M = 4.12$) compared to the control group ($M = 3.66$). The effect size, partial $\eta^2 = 0.63$, indicates a large effect, suggesting the negotiated syllabus had a strong influence on learners' motivation.

Table 2

ANCOVA Results for Motivation

Source	df	F	p-value	Partial η^2
Pretest Motivation	1	12.56	0.001	0.097
Group (Experimental vs Control)	1	135.45	<0.001	0.630
Error	117			

The large effect size suggests that the negotiated syllabus significantly enhanced learners' motivation in the experimental group compared to the control group.

ANCOVA for Autonomy

A separate ANCOVA for autonomy, controlling for pretest autonomy scores, revealed a significant impact of the negotiated syllabus, $F(1, 117) = 142.78$, $p < 0.001$, with the experimental group reporting higher posttest autonomy ($M = 4.02$) than the control group ($M = 3.56$). The effect

size, partial η^2=0.65, reflects a strong effect, highlighting that the negotiated syllabus substantially increased learners' autonomy.

Table 3

ANCOVA Results for Autonomy

Source	df	F	p-value	Partial η^2
Pretest Autonomy	1	11.05	0.002	0.086
Group (Experimental vs Control)	1	142.78	<0.001	0.650
Error	117			

The large effect size suggests that the negotiated syllabus provided learners in the experimental group with significantly more autonomy than those in the control group.

ANCOVA for Engagement

Finally, an ANCOVA was conducted for engagement, with pretest scores as the covariate. The results indicated a significant effect of the negotiated syllabus on learners' engagement, $F(1, 117)=155.34$, $p<0.001$, with the experimental group showing significantly higher engagement ($M = 4.05$) compared to the control group ($M=3.52$). The partial $\eta^2= 0.67$ indicates a large effect size, demonstrating that the negotiated syllabus had a strong impact on enhancing learners' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement.

Table 4

ANCOVA Results for Engagement

Source	df	F	p-value	Partial η^2
Pretest Engagement	1	10.89	0.001	0.085
Group (Experimental vs Control)	1	155.34	<0.001	0.670
Error	117			

The large effect size indicates that learners in the experimental group experienced a substantial increase in overall engagement, across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components, as a result of participating in the negotiated syllabus.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative analysis of interviews with participants from the experimental group revealed eight main themes reflecting the impact of the negotiated syllabus on learners' experiences. Each theme captured essential aspects of engagement, motivation, and autonomy, with sub-themes offering a more detailed perspective on how these factors were shaped by the syllabus negotiation process.

Increased Sense of Ownership

One of the most prominent themes was learners' increased sense of ownership over their learning process. By negotiating course content and objectives, they felt a stronger sense of control and personal responsibility for their education. This ownership was linked to greater investment and more active participation in class activities.

For example, Participant 3 stated, "When I got to choose what topics we would study, it felt like the course was really mine. I became more invested in the learning process because it was something I helped create." Similarly, Participant 7 noted, "I felt like I had a voice in the classroom. It wasn't just about what the teacher wanted; it was about what I wanted to learn, too." These reflections illustrate how course negotiation fostered a deeper connection to the learning process, empowering learners to take charge of their education.

Enhanced Motivation

Another key theme was the significant boost in both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation reported by learners. The opportunity to influence course decisions made them feel more excited and goal-oriented, particularly when the content aligned with their personal interests and future goals.

For instance, Participant 9 shared, "Choosing what we study made me feel excited to come to class. I was motivated because I was learning what mattered to me, not just what the textbook said." Likewise, Participant 15 reflected, "Before, I used to just go through the motions, but with this course, I actually wanted to learn and succeed. It felt more personal." These accounts demonstrate that having a say in course design significantly enhanced learners' motivation, making the content more relevant and engaging.

Collaboration and Peer Support

Learners also highlighted the collaborative atmosphere that developed during the syllabus negotiation process. Working together to design the course fostered a stronger sense of community and mutual support, as learners pursued shared goals.

For example, Participant 5 noted, "Working with my classmates to design the course helped us bond. We all had a say, and it felt like we were in this together, supporting each other." Similarly, Participant 11 remarked, "I was surprised by how much we helped each other during the discussions. We became more like a team, not just individual learners." These reflections illustrate how the negotiated syllabus promoted a collaborative learning environment, strengthening peer support and collective responsibility.

Improved Engagement

Learners consistently reported increased engagement throughout the course, both cognitively and emotionally. The negotiated syllabus made the learning experience more interactive and meaningful, encouraging learners to engage more deeply with the material.

Participant 12 stated, "I found myself more focused in class because we were learning things that I had chosen. It felt more relevant to me." Likewise, Participant 18 shared, "I paid more attention because I knew the lessons were designed around our input. I wanted to contribute more in discussions." These reflections illustrate how a sense of ownership and relevance fostered higher levels of engagement, making learners more attentive and actively involved in class.

Personalized Learning Experience

Learners appreciated the opportunity to personalize their learning experience by influencing the course content and structure. They felt that the negotiated syllabus allowed them to align their studies with their personal interests and academic needs. For example, Participant 4 explained, "It was nice to focus on topics that I was really interested in. I felt like the course was designed for me. " Similarly, Participant 8 remarked, "The ability to shape the course made it feel more tailored to my goals. It wasn't just a one-size-fits-all approach." These comments highlight how personalization enhanced the learning experience, making it more relevant to each learner's needs and aspirations.

Development of Autonomy

Another important theme was the development of learner autonomy. Many participants reported that the process of negotiating the syllabus encouraged them to take greater responsibility for their learning, fostering a more independent approach to studying and self-regulation. Participant 10 stated, "I realized that I needed to take more responsibility for my own learning. The course wasn't just given to me, I had to be active in shaping it." Similarly, Participant 14 shared, "I felt more in charge of my learning. It pushed me to be more independent and take initiative." These quotes underscore how learners became more autonomous, taking control of their learning trajectories as a result of the negotiated syllabus.

Challenges in Syllabus Negotiation

Despite the positive outcomes, some learners expressed challenges related to the negotiation process. While they appreciated the opportunity to have a say, a few participants found it difficult to balance their preferences with the overall course requirements. For example, Participant 2 noted, "It was hard sometimes to decide what we should focus on because everyone had different ideas. It wasn't always easy to reach a consensus." Similarly, Participant 6 remarked, "At first, I felt overwhelmed because I wasn't used to being asked to help plan the course. I didn't know what to

expect." These comments reflect the initial discomfort some learners experienced as they adjusted to the more active role required in syllabus negotiation.

Teacher's Role as Facilitator

Finally, the role of the teacher emerged as a crucial theme. Learners emphasized the importance of the teacher acting as a facilitator rather than a traditional authority figure, guiding discussions and supporting their decisions without imposing a predetermined syllabus. Participant 13 explained, "The teacher didn't just tell us what to do. Instead, they helped us figure out what we wanted and supported us throughout." Similarly, Participant 19 noted, "I liked how the teacher was more of a guide than a lecturer. It made the class feel more democratic." These remarks underscore the shift in the teacher's role, which contributed to a more collaborative and learner-centered classroom environment.

Overall, the eight themes illustrate the multifaceted impacts of negotiated syllabi, highlighting the benefits of increased ownership, motivation, collaboration, and autonomy, while also acknowledging the challenges learners may encounter during the process.

3. Discussion

This study aimed to explore the effects of a negotiated syllabus on EFL learners' motivation, engagement, and autonomy by combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings align with existing literature on learner-centered approaches in language education while offering nuanced insights into the practical application of syllabus negotiation in EFL contexts. By integrating relevant theoretical frameworks, this discussion highlights how the results contribute to and extend established theories in language learning and learner autonomy.

The quantitative results revealed significant increases in motivation in the experimental group compared to the control group, supporting previous findings that learner-centered approaches can foster intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). By involving learners in the decision-making process, the negotiated syllabus catered to their individual interests and goals, leading to higher motivation levels. This aligns with Dörnyei's (2001) theory of motivation, which emphasizes the importance of goal setting and relevance in sustaining motivation. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are key drivers of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The negotiated syllabus addressed these psychological needs by empowering learners to make choices (autonomy), aligning tasks with their abilities (competence), and fostering collaboration (relatedness). The qualitative findings further reinforced this, with several participants reporting that the opportunity to shape the course content made them feel more personally invested. For

example, Participant 9 remarked, "Choosing what we study made me feel excited to come to class," illustrating the role of personal relevance in enhancing motivation. These results echo Ushioda's (2011) argument that when learners see direct relevance between classroom activities and their own interests, their motivation tends to increase.

Engagement was another area where significant differences emerged between the experimental and control groups. The quantitative data revealed improvements in both cognitive and behavioral engagement, echoing the findings of Skinner, Kindermann, and Furrer (2009), who argue that engagement is essential for deep learning. In the present study, participants in the experimental group were more attentive and active in class, likely because the course content reflected their preferences and input. This aligns with sociocultural theory, which underscores the importance of meaningful, contextually relevant tasks in promoting learner engagement (Vygotsky, 1978). The results also correspond with flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), which suggests that engagement is maximized when learners are challenged at an optimal level and feel a sense of control over their learning environment. As Participant 18 explained, "I paid more attention because I knew the lessons were designed around our input." This sentiment reflects Reeve's (2012) findings that autonomy-supportive environments, such as those created through syllabus negotiation, foster higher engagement levels.

The development of learner autonomy was one of the most significant outcomes of the negotiated syllabus, as indicated by both the quantitative data and qualitative narratives. The experimental group demonstrated greater autonomy in posttest measures, supporting Little's (1991) assertion that learners become more autonomous when given responsibility for decisions about their learning. This finding also aligns with Holec's (1981) definition of autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's own learning, as evidenced by the learners' increased self-regulation and decision-making skills. The qualitative interviews further illustrated how syllabus negotiation empowered learners to take control of their educational experiences. For example, Participant 10 noted, "I realized that I needed to take more responsibility for my own learning." This shift toward learner autonomy is consistent with Benson's (2011) view that autonomy is both a process and a goal in learner-centered pedagogies. By enabling learners to engage in decision-making, the negotiated syllabus fostered the development of essential skills for autonomous learning, including self-regulation and reflective thinking.

An unexpected yet important outcome was the enhanced sense of collaboration and peer support reported by participants. The process of negotiating the syllabus fostered a collaborative environment in which learners felt more connected to one another. This finding aligns with social constructivist theories, which emphasize the role of social interaction in cognitive development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), and supports Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), wherein learners reach higher levels of understanding through collaboration with peers and teachers. Participants noted that working together to shape the course objectives strengthened their sense of community and mutual support, as reflected in Participant 5's comment:

"Working with my classmates to design the course helped us bond." This sense of collective responsibility and support mirrors the findings of Gibbs (2009), who observed that collaborative approaches in learning environments often lead to improved academic outcomes and increased student satisfaction.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive results, some challenges emerged during the negotiation process. A few learners reported difficulty balancing their individual preferences with the group's overall needs, which occasionally led to conflict or indecision. These findings reflect similar concerns noted by Breen and Littlejohn (2000), who caution that while negotiated syllabi are beneficial, they require careful facilitation to ensure that all voices are heard. This aligns with the concept of distributed cognition (Hutchins, 1995), which underscores the complexities of collaborative decision-making and the importance of effective mediation in resolving conflicts and achieving consensus. Participant 6's comment, "At first, I felt overwhelmed because I wasn't used to being asked to help plan the course," illustrates the initial discomfort some learners may experience when transitioning to more active roles in their education. However, such challenges are not necessarily negative, as they can foster critical thinking and negotiation skills—valuable competencies for learners' long-term development (Nunan, 1988).

The findings also underscored the pivotal role of the teacher as a facilitator rather than a traditional authority figure. In line with Dam's (1995) work, learners valued the teacher's role in guiding discussions and supporting their decisions rather than imposing a pre-designed syllabus. This shift in the teacher's role is crucial in fostering an environment where learners feel empowered to take ownership of their learning. It aligns with the principles of transformative pedagogy (Mezirow, 1997), in which the teacher acts as a catalyst for learners' self-directed growth and critical reflection. As Participant 13 observed, "The teacher didn't just tell us what to do. Instead, they helped us figure out what we wanted." Such facilitative teaching also reflects Freire's (1970) view of the teacher-student relationship as a co-constructed process. The teacher's ability to balance guidance with learner autonomy proved essential for the successful implementation of the negotiated syllabus.

3.1. Implications for Educational Practice

The findings of this study have significant implications for educational practice, particularly in designing curricula that foster learner autonomy and engagement. The positive impact of the negotiated syllabus on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement suggests that giving learners a voice in course design can lead to more active and meaningful participation in the learning process. Educators should consider incorporating elements of negotiation into their syllabi, enabling students to contribute to decisions on topics, assignments, and assessment methods.

Moreover, the observed increase in both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation highlights the potential of a negotiated syllabus to address diverse motivational needs. By providing learners with autonomy, educators can nurture intrinsic motivation while still meeting extrinsic motivators through clearly defined goals and expectations. This dual approach may be particularly advantageous in contexts where external assessments play a significant role in shaping learners' experiences.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that negotiated syllabi can serve as an effective strategy for enhancing motivation, engagement, and autonomy in EFL classrooms. However, their successful implementation requires skilled facilitation by teachers and transparent communication of expectations. Teacher training programs should, therefore, prioritize equipping educators with the strategies needed to manage classroom negotiations effectively and to support learner autonomy without sacrificing necessary structure.

Finally, the improvement in learners' decision-making and self-regulation skills suggests that a negotiated syllabus can prepare students for lifelong learning. As learners become more adept at managing their education and making informed decisions, they are better positioned to navigate future academic and professional challenges. Educational institutions should consider adopting negotiated syllabi as a means of fostering these essential 21st-century skills.

4. Conclusions

This study provides compelling evidence that a negotiated syllabus significantly enhances EFL learners' motivation, engagement, and autonomy. By involving learners in syllabus design, motivation was strengthened, as students found personal relevance in the content, supporting theories that emphasize goal setting and intrinsic motivation. Engagement in the experimental group also increased markedly, with participants demonstrating heightened attention and activity in class. This aligns with sociocultural perspectives, which hold that meaningful, contextually relevant tasks are essential for sustained engagement. Notably, the study revealed that syllabus negotiation fosters autonomy, empowering learners to take ownership of their educational journeys. This finding echoes Little's (1991) and Benson's (2011) assertions that autonomy is a critical outcome of learner-centered approaches. The collaborative nature of the negotiation process also promoted a strong sense of community among participants, enhancing peer support and mutual responsibility. This sense of collective involvement resonates with social constructivist principles and illustrates the positive impact of collaborative learning environments.

While the benefits were clear, the negotiation process also presented challenges, including difficulties in balancing individual and group preferences and occasional discomfort among learners unaccustomed to active participation in syllabus design. However, these challenges encouraged the development of critical thinking and interpersonal skills, both of which are valuable for learners' long-term growth. The teacher's role as a facilitator proved essential; by guiding rather than

directing, the teacher enabled students to co-construct their learning experience, thereby fostering both autonomy and collaboration. This facilitative approach underscores the importance of a supportive, empowering learning environment. Overall, the study reaffirms that negotiated syllabi not only enhance motivation, engagement, and autonomy but also contribute to a collaborative classroom culture that is vital for effective language learning.

Despite these promising findings, certain limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focused on a relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Future research should include learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to determine whether these outcomes hold true in other contexts. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported measures of motivation, engagement, and autonomy, which may introduce bias. Combining self-reported data with observational methods could provide a more comprehensive understanding of learner behaviors and outcomes.

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