

Learner Autonomy: English Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

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Madiha Senouci, Université Mohammed Lamine Debaghine, Setif2

madiha_senouci@yahoo.fr

Résumé

Cet article vise à explorer les croyances des enseignants d'Anglais de l'autonomie de l'apprenant et de leurs pratiques pédagogiques pour promouvoir l'apprentissage autonome dans la classe. Les participants sont 33 enseignants d'Anglais à l'université de Setif2. Pour la collecte des données, un questionnaire adapté est utilisé et analysé quantitativement et qualitativement. Les résultats révèlent que la majorité des enseignants comprennent le concept de l'autonomie de l'apprenant et son rôle dans l'apprentissage des langues. Cependant, ils ont émis des réserves sur l'utilité de certains principes de l'autonomie de l'apprenant, comme la participation des apprenants à la prise de décisions sur les objectifs du cours, l'évaluation de l'apprentissage et la gestion de la classe. En outre, les enseignants affirment fournir aux apprenants des stratégies visant à améliorer leur apprentissage autonome. Certains défis pour la promotion de l'autonomie de l'apprenant sont également abordés, ainsi que certaines des implications pédagogiques pour les enseignants, les apprenants et les décideurs.

Mots clés : L'autonomie de l'apprenant, Croyances des enseignants, Enseignants d'anglais, Les pratiques en classe.

Abstract

This paper aims to explore EFL teachers' beliefs of learner autonomy and their teaching practices to promote autonomous learning in the classroom. The participants are 33 English teachers at Setif2 University. For data collection, an adapted questionnaire is used and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings reveal that the majority of teachers understand learning autonomy and its influential role in language learning. However, they are negative about the feasibility of some of learning autonomy principles such as involving students in decision-making about objectives of the course, learning assessment and classroom management. Although teachers are cautious about their roles in promoting learning autonomy, they report that they actually provide learners with a range of opportunities to enhance their autonomous learning inside and outside the classroom. The paper reveals and discusses some of the challenges for promoting learning autonomy along with the pedagogical implications for teachers, learners and policy makers.

Key words: Learner autonomy, Teachers' beliefs, EFL teachers, Classroom practices.

المخلص

لقد أصبح دور الأستاذ في تطوير استقلالية المتعلم مجالا مهما من مجالات البحث في تعليم اللغة وتعلمها. تهدف هذه المقالة إلى استكشاف معتقدات اساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية حول استقلالية المتعلم وممارساتهم التعليمية لتعزيز التعلم المستقل في اللغة الانجليزية. تحقيقا لهذا الغرض ، تم اخذ عينة مكونة من 33 أستاذًا في قسم اللغة والأدب الانجليزي بجامعة محمد لمين دباغين سطيف-2. لجمع البيانات ، تم استخدام استبيان وتحليله كميًا وكيفيًا. وقد كشفت النتائج أن غالبية اساتذة الانجليزية على دراية بمفهوم استقلالية المتعلم ودورها المؤثر في تعلم اللغة. غير انهم اظهروا تحفظهم حول جدوى بعض مبادئ استقلالية التعلم ، مثل مشاركة الطلاب في اتخاذ القرارات حول أهداف الدرس وتقييم التعلم وإدارة الصف. وقد جاءت الدراسة بنتيجة ان الاساتذة يقدمون للمتعلمين مجموعة من الفرص لتعزيز التعلم المستقل داخل وخارج الفصول الدراسية. كما تم الكشف عن بعض التحديات التي تواجه تطوير استقلالية المتعلم ، بالإضافة الى بعض النصائح التربوية للأساتذة والطلبة لتعزيز التعلم المستقل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استقلالية المتعلم ، معتقدات الاساتذة ، معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية ، الممارسات الصفية.

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly developing world, instant decision-making is necessary for a successful functioning. In the foreign language educational setting, helping learners become independent decision makers is a direct way for maximizing their chances for success in life. The concept of "learning autonomy" (LA) has emerged under the heading of communicative approach for promoting the role of the learner as the key agent in the language learning process, and the shift from the teacher-centered classroom towards a learner-centered system. In the Algerian higher education context, the License, Master Doctorate (LMD) system, which was implemented in 2004, seeks to develop learner autonomy as one of the major goals of university teaching. Under this system, teachers are required to support their learners through developing the skills that allow them to control and take responsibility of their learning. With reference to the fact that teachers' beliefs are of great effect on their teaching practices, this study aims to explore the beliefs of a group of Algerian EFL teachers about LA and their teaching practices to promote it.

1.1 Emergence of Learning Autonomy

Since the 1970s, the word autonomy, which means law in Greek, has entered the vocabulary of language research and taken a growing importance in the field of language learning. Galileo was among the first to hint to the importance of autonomy with his famous saying: "You cannot teach a man anything; you can help him find it within himself" (Galileo Galilei, in Benson, 2001, p.23). This notion was largely associated with individual's independency in all aspects of his daily life. Then, in the early 1980's, the idea of autonomy first appeared in language teaching and learning thanks to Holec (1981), the pioneering figure in LA, contributed to the development of autonomy in the field of language learning. His work is an initiation to implementing LA in language teaching and learning, which aimed at providing the learner with opportunities and skills for lifelong learning. Furthermore, Holec (1981) took leadership of

"Centre de Recherches et d' Applications en Langues" (CRAPEL), at the university of Nancy, France, which emphasized the application of the theory of autonomy in adult education (Benson, 2001, p. 9). The publications and works of CRAPEL paved the way for autonomy to prosper and be integrated in the field of education and research. New researchers and educators have benefited a lot from CRAPEL and used its ideology and documents to further research in the area and experiment the notion of autonomy in learning, which resulted in a considerable amount of works around autonomy in relation to different aspects of learning and its huge importance in language learning.

1.2 Definition of Learner Autonomy

When it comes to the field of education, autonomy has acquired specific interpretations as related to the teaching and learning process. In this respect, Holec (1981) defines autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning", which he then explains as the ability "to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning" (p.3). Trebbi (1996) adds that "taking charge of one's own learning" is a tautology and a prerequisite as no learning occurs unless the learner is in charge" (p.290). In this respect, Crabbe (1993, p.443) argues that the essence of learner autonomy lies in the learners' rights to exercise his or her own choices in learning and freedom from the choices imposed by social institutions. From these definitions, we understand that autonomy is related to being independent. However, "Independence [...] is not the absence of guidance, but the outcome of a process of learning that enables learners to work with such guidance [...] getting their needs considerable insightful planning and action." (Knight, 1996, p.35). According to Aktas (2015, p.2), autonomy is not context-free: the extent to which it can be practiced is influenced by a number of factors such as learners' personality, motivation, learning needs and the educational environment, within which learning is taking place. In addition, autonomy is not a steady

state achieved by learners, for autonomous learners might be autonomous in one situation, but not in another, and they may need teacher's guidance and direction at certain level in their learning process.

1.3 Definition of Learning Autonomy in Language Learning

When it comes to the more specific concept of language learning autonomy, Macaro (2008, p.59-60) defines autonomy of language learning as learner's decisions about their own language learning as the language learner or user taking control of the language being learnt and the goal and purpose of that learning. This type of autonomy entails being able to say what you want rather than producing the language of others, because the ultimate objective of foreign language learning is not the acquisition of ready-made given knowledge, but the ability to say what one wants to say in a different language. Sinclair (1999) adds that "that autonomy in language learning is principally concerned with providing learners with situations and opportunities for exercising a degree of independence" (p.310). In other words, these kinds of situations and opportunities might range from activities in the classroom, which provide students with chances to choose what they want to learn, to allowing them to participate in out-of-class project work and cooperative learning.

Furthermore, according to Benson and Voller (1997, p.2), the term language learning autonomy can be used in five ways:

- for a situation in which learners study entirely on their own;
- for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
- for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education;
- for the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning;
- and for the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

Similarly, Oxford (2003) proposed a comprehensive definition of learning autonomy which:

Integrates four perspectives: a technical one focused on the physical situation, a psychological one focused on characteristics of learners, a socio-cultural one focused on mediated learning and a political-critical perspective focused on ideologies, access, and power structures (cited in Martinez, 2008, p.106)

The technical aspect of learner autonomy includes the technical skills such as learning strategies and task completion, which are easy to be promoted in education. The psychological aspect of learner autonomy refers to innate capacity and the cognitive attitudes and beliefs affecting learning. The socio cultural aspect entails knowing how to make use of others as interlocutors and source of information within cultural context. The political version of autonomy refers to control over learning content in relation to power in learning and teaching.

Overall, since its emergence to the present time, autonomy has proven its positive impact on the learning process with the teacher as the key element for the successful implementation of autonomy in EFL classroom. In this respect, the field of autonomy is not a separated field but a social and mental system, which is open to changes, developments and various stages, and cannot be developed without the support and guidance of an instructor.

1.4 Teachers' Beliefs

Learner autonomy is related not only to the learner, "but also to the teachers' own learning and teaching experiences and their beliefs about autonomy" (Lamb 2009, p. 1). Teachers' beliefs are those "beliefs that they have about education, teaching, and learning which conduct their actions and behaviors as teachers" (Salimi & Ansari, 2015, p. 1108). The importance of teachers' beliefs is highlighted by Tobin, Tippins, and Gallard (1994), who say that:

future research should seek to enhance our understanding of the relationships between teacher

beliefs and education reform [...] Many studies reviewed suggest that teacher beliefs are a critical ingredient in the factors that determine what happens in classrooms (cited in Tarman, 2012, p.1965)

In this respect, the belief teachers have about LA is a determinative component of their teaching behaviours and practices, which in turn affect their willingness to adopt new teaching methods or strategies relevant to LA. Therefore, understanding teachers' beliefs about LA helps designing appropriate language activities that target the promotion of autonomous learning within EFL learners.

1.5 Previous Studies on Teachers' Beliefs on Learner Autonomy

Recently, teachers' beliefs have been the subject of inquiry to clarify how beliefs affect teachers' practices. Many studies are conducted to uncover the beliefs and practices of teachers in relation to LA. To start with, Balcikanli (2010) explores teachers' beliefs about LA in 112 Turkish EFL teachers in Gazi University. The results reveal that teachers have positive beliefs about LA principles. They feel the need to include students in decision-making process (e.g., objectives of course, classroom management, homework task and selecting materials). However, they are cautious and reluctant about including students in decision making of time, place and textbook of course. Another study by Borg & Al Busaidi (2012), exploring the beliefs and practices of LA of 61 EFL teachers at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, indicate that teachers hold a range of different positive beliefs about LA. The latter is mostly perceived as involving learners to have freedom and ability to make choices and decisions about how they learn. Besides, teachers have different beliefs about the degree of LA, which is perceived to be low and does not reflect the level of university learners, who are supposed to have high degree of LA. On the other hand, teachers agree that LA has positive effect on EFL learning. In addition, teachers are more positive about the desirability of involving learners in language course decisions and less

positive about its feasibility. This latter is more salient in relation to selecting materials, topics and activities in contrast with objectives and assessment. Another finding entails that teachers feel they promote LA through different activities and strategies; and that they face challenges in promoting LA. All of these findings make teachers theoretically positive and practically cautious.

Al- Asmari (2013) tries to explore the beliefs of 60 teachers from different countries about LA. The results reveal that teachers expect learners to work independently and to be involved in taking decisions about language learning. It is also stressed by the researcher that teachers show willingness to promote autonomous learning and should be provided with appropriate training for the application of LA principles. The study of Duong (2014) aims to investigate teachers' beliefs of the promotion of LA and teaching practices in 30 EFL teachers at Thai University. The findings indicate that teachers are aware of the concept of LA and teacher's role in autonomous language learning. However, they report encountering some difficulties in promoting LA due to the gap between their beliefs of LA and its practical implementation in the classroom. A further study by Salimi & Ansari (2015) explores LA beliefs of 35 Iranian EFL teachers. The results indicate that teachers have positive beliefs of LA and its effect on EFL success; and that teachers should help their learners develop autonomy. Promoting LA is perceived to be achieved through working alone at the library and inside and outside classroom using the internet, making decision about learning materials, activities, and assessment. Alibakhshi (2015), through in-depth interviews, investigates the challenges faced by 23 Iranian EFL teachers when trying to promote LA. The results reveal the existence of three areas of challenges. First, institution-related challenges, such as the fact that the ministry of education makes all decisions and teachers are forced to follow the prescribed policies with no room for teachers or learners to make changes in objectives, types of materials used and the method of evaluation.

Second, learners-related challenges, such as students' de-motivation and total dependence on the teacher, poor language level within crowded classrooms. Finally, teacher-related challenges, such as the lack of relevant sources, lack of teacher autonomy, lack of experience with implementing LA and the fear of losing authority while promoting LA.

Alhaysony (2016) duplicates the study of Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012). She explores the beliefs of 77 EFL teachers about LA at Saudi Arabia. The results indicate teachers' positive beliefs about LA and its importance for language learning. Participants report that learning autonomy means responsibility, control, choice, motivation and decision. However, there exists a gap between LA desirability and feasibility, as teachers were negative about the extent to which learner autonomy can practically be promoted. Teachers claim that students should be given opportunities to set goals, objectives and choose topics and activities. They differ in their beliefs about learners degrees of autonomy. Some teachers think that their learners are autonomous as they are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and have the right to comment on their learning; others think that their learners are not autonomous because they lack motivation, rely on teacher, are unaware of strengths and weaknesses, unwilling to take responsibility of learning and lack of motivation. Another study by Meisani & Rambet (2017) explores the belief of one Indonesian teacher about LA and the practices that the teacher used to enhance it. The results of the questionnaire reveal that LA is perceived as both teachers and learners sharing responsibility with, teachers being responsible for supporting and promoting LA. This latter is claimed to be promoted through giving learners opportunities to work on projects inside and outside the classroom and choose learning methods, materials and assessment procedures.

Similarly, many other studies have been conducted to explore teachers' beliefs and practices of LA and they all share the major findings and conclusions with slight differences in relation to cultural differences (Joshi, 2011; Yoldirim, 2012; Duong & Seepho, 2014; Al-Zeebaree & Yavuz,

2016; Cakici, 2017; Harati, 2017). Despite the existence of this intensive research about the topic, very few studies have tackled teachers' beliefs and practices within the Algerian higher education context (Ghout, 2015). Therefore, this study comes to bridge the gap by further exploring Algerian EFL teachers' beliefs and practices towards LA.

1.6 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore EFL teachers' beliefs of learner autonomy and to identify the desirability and feasibility of implementing learner autonomy within teaching practices. In addition, it aims to determine the extent to which Algerian EFL teachers are practically implementing LA principles while teaching.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1- What does 'learner autonomy' mean to EFL teachers at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University?
- 2- What are teachers' beliefs of the desirability and feasibility of promoting learner autonomy?
- 3- To what extent do teachers believe their learners are autonomous?
- 4- To what extent do teachers believe they actually promote learner autonomy in their EFL classes?

2.2 Participants

This study was conducted with 33 teachers from the department of English language and literature at Mohammed Lamine Debaghine University, Setif2, Algeria. They are 28 females and 5 males with teaching experience that varies between 1 to 25 years and educational qualification that ranges from License to Doctorate.

2.3 Instrument

The instrument used for data collection is an adapted questionnaire from Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012) with some modifications. The modifications

are: 1) omitting “statement 21” of the second section about “*Learner autonomy is promoted by independent work in a self-access centre*”, since this latter is not available at the target’s population university; 2) reordering the numbering of sections; 3) and omitting irrelevant questions to the present study. The final version of the questionnaire consists of four major sections (cf. Appendix). The first one is about the background information of participants. It contains 4 statements about age, gender, highest qualifications and teaching experience respectively. The second section is about different beliefs of LA. It consists of 36 statements that can be measured on a five point Likert-scale, structured as “strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree, and strongly agree”. The 36 statements are derived according to the following constructs:

1. Different belief on learner autonomy [Technical (2-6-31), Psychological (11-28-31-33-36), Social (3-16-19-24-29), and Political (4-7-14-21-26)].
2. The role of the teacher in promoting learner autonomy (34-18-23-8).
3. The effect of cultural contexts on learner autonomy (13-22).
4. The effect of age on learner autonomy (1-20-10).
5. The effect of proficiency on learner autonomy (9-25-33).
6. The effect of learner-centered methodology and learner autonomy (27-15-17).
7. The benefits of learner autonomy for language learning (35-12-5).

The third section aims to elicit teachers’ beliefs about both desirability and feasibility of including learners in different language course decisions (e.g. deciding about assessment or setting objectives), and developing in learners certain LA skills and abilities (e.g. identifying their own strengths or weaknesses). It consists of 14 statements in the form of Likert-scale items.

Section four consists of two questions concerning the extent to which teachers think their learners are autonomous and whether they try to promote LA through their teaching practices. For

both questions, teachers were asked to explain and exemplify to support their answers. The internal reliability of the questionnaire calculated by Cronbach’s alpha was at $\alpha = .80$ that is superior to .70, which means that the tool is reliable in terms of its consistency over time.

2.4 Procedure

The data for the study was collected in November 2017. The participants of the study all participated in the research voluntarily. A total of 45 questionnaires were handed to teachers or sent to them via email attachment. Due to the participants’ busy timetable, the questionnaires were collected a week later. Thirty (33) teachers completed the questionnaire.

For data analysis, the close-ended questions of the collected questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS .22) to calculate the descriptive statistics (e.g. mean, frequency and percentages). The answers to the open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively through thematic analysis in which common themes are identified and categorized.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings were analyzed under four main sub-headings related to the four research questions: teachers’ understanding of learner autonomy, teachers’ beliefs of the desirability and feasibility of promoting learner autonomy, teachers’ beliefs of the autonomy of their learners and teachers’ beliefs of their practices in promoting learner autonomy.

3.1 Teachers’ Understanding of Learner Autonomy

This section is to provide the answer to the first research question about teachers’ understanding of learner autonomy. For better understanding, the data will be presented in subsections corresponding to seven constructs in accordance with the ten constructs of LA suggested by Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012, p.10). The first construct in the current research includes the first four constructs of the original study.

3.1.1 Different beliefs on learner autonomy

This subsection comprises four main constructs about LA: technical, social, psychological and political. The overall results of teachers' beliefs are presented in figure 1.

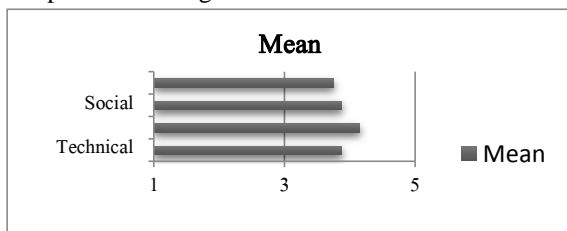


Figure 1. Mean levels of support for four orientations to learner autonomy.

Figure 1 reveals teachers' significant support of all the four orientations. The psychological orientation comes first with a mean value of 4.15, followed by the social and technical orientations with mean values of 3.88 and 3.87 respectively; while the political orientation comes last with mean value of 3.75. Next, a detailed presentation of the results will be revealed.

3.1.1.1 Psychological orientations on learner autonomy

Table 1. Mean levels of support for the psychological orientations to learner autonomy.

N°	Items	Mean	Percentage (Rank)	Response Level
1	Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence	4,09	81,81 (4)	Agree
2	Learning how to learn is key to develop learner autonomy	4,21	84,24 (1)	Agree
3	The ability to monitor one's learning is central to learning autonomy	4,12	82,42 (3)	Agree
4	Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated	4,30	86,06 (2)	Agree
5	To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	4,03	80,60 (5)	Agree
Total Degrees		.154	83	Agree

This psychological orientation is the most supported by teachers. The results indicate that the majority of teachers agree upon the statement "*Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated*" and "*Learning how to learn is a key to develop learner autonomy*". The mean values for these statements are 4.30 and 4.21 respectively; followed by the statements about the ability to evaluate learning, being confident learner and the ability to monitor learning as the major

psychological attributes for being autonomous. This finding confirms the findings of Duong (2014), Duong & Seepho (2014) Salimi & Ansari (2015), Alhaysony (2016) and Meisani & Rambet (2017). In general, teachers agree that motivated, self-confident students are more likely to develop LA when equipped by study skills and strategies for monitoring and evaluating their learning.

3.1.1.2 Social orientations on learner autonomy

Table 2. Mean levels of support for the social orientations to learner autonomy

N°	Items	Mean	Percentage (Rank)	Response Level
1	Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete task alone	3,85	76,96 (4)	Agree
2	Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other	4,06	81,21 (1)	Agree
3	Learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together	3,64	72,72 (5)	Agree
4	Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy	3,88	77,57 (3)	Agree
5	Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy	3,97	79,39 (2)	Agree
Total Degrees		3.88	77.6	Agree

Teachers agree that LA is a matter of knowing when and how to learn alone or with others. They favor the statements of "*Learner*

autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other" and "*Learning to work alone is central to the*

development of learner autonomy” with mean value of 4.06 and 3.97 respectively. Teachers believe that giving students opportunities to learn cooperatively or to complete tasks alone are both central to the development of LA. Similar findings are reported by Al Asmari (2013), Duong (2014) Ghout (2015) Salimi & Ansari (2015), Alhaysony (2016),

Alzeebaree & Yavuz (2016) and Meisani & Rambet (2017), and refuted by Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012), whose participants are unsure about the importance of cooperative group work in promoting LA.

3.1.1.3 *Technical orientations on learner autonomy*

Table 3. Mean levels of support for the technical orientations to learner autonomy.

N°	Items	Mean	Percentage (Rank)	Response Level
1	Independent study in the library is an activity which develops learning autonomy	4,15	83,03 (1)	Agree
2	Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom	3,67	73,33 (3)	Unsure
3	Out of class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy	3,79	75,76 (2)	Agree
Total Degrees		3.87	77.4	Agree

The results for this orientation indicate that the statement of “*independent study at the library is an activity which develops learner autonomy*” is the most supported by teachers, with a mean value of 4.15. It is followed by the statements of “*out of class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy*”, and “*autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom*”, with mean values of 3.79 and 3.67 respectively. The majority of the participants agree

upon the fact that learning autonomy is about learning outside the classroom through independent study at the library or doing out of class tasks using the internet. This finding supports the previous research of Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012), Duong (2014), Salimi & Ansari (2015) and Alhaysony (2016).

3.1.1.4 *Political orientations on learner autonomy*

Table 4. Mean levels of support for the political orientations to learner autonomy.

N°	Items	Mean	Percentage (Rank)	Response Level
1	Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn	4,03	80,60 (1)	Agree
2	Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy	3,91	78,18 (2)	Agree
3	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do	3,67	73,33 (4)	Unsure
4	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed	3,36	67,27 (5)	Unsure
5	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials	3,79	75,75 (3)	Agree
Total Degrees		3.75	75	Agree

This political orientation of LA scores as the least favored by teachers with mean value of 3.75. The results indicate that though teachers are cautious, they agree that students should be involved in decision making about their learning and be given opportunities to make choices about the learning materials, the kinds of activities and to a less extent the learning assessment. This finding is supported by results of Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012) Salimi & Ansari (2015) and Alhaysoni (2016).

3.1.2 *The Role of the teacher in promoting learning autonomy*

In this subsection, teachers' beliefs about the role of the teacher in promoting learner autonomy are revealed. Table 5 presents the major finding in this area.

Table 5. The role of the teacher in promoting learner autonomy

N°	Items	Mean	%	Rank	Response Level
34	Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher	2,88	57,57	2	Unsure
18	Learner autonomy cannot develop without the help of the teacher	3,33	66,66	1	Unsure
23	Learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher	2,73	54,54	3	Disagree
8	The teacher has no important role to play in supporting learner autonomy	2,00	40	4	Disagree
Total Degrees		2.74	54.8	Unsure	

From table 5, it is noticed that the total mean value of teachers' answers indicates 2.74, which makes teachers unsure and reluctant about their roles in enhancing LA. They disagree upon the statements of "*Learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher*" and "*The teacher has no important role to play in supporting learner autonomy*", with mean value of 2.72 and 2, respectively, which entails that, teachers admit the important role of the teacher in promoting LA with cautious beliefs of that role. They are unsure about the extent of their roles in helping students become autonomous. From their answers, it can be deduced that learners should be given some independence

and not be dependent on the teacher, who plays the role of a guide. This finding is different from the ones of Joshi (2011), Al Asmari (2013), Duong (2014), Duong & Seepho (2014) Ghout (2015), Salimi & Ansari (2015) and Alhaysony (2016) Alzebaree & Yavuz (2016), which rev-eal that the majority of teachers had a clear understanding of the important role they play in promoting learner autonomy.

3.1.3 The effect of cultural contexts on learning autonomy

In this subsection, teachers' beliefs about cultural universality of LA are revealed.

Table 6. The effect of cultural contexts on learner autonomy

N°	Items	Mean	%	Rank	Response Level
13	Learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all cultural backgrounds	3,61	72,12	1	Unsure
22	Learner autonomy is a concept which is not suited to non-Western learners	2,18	43,63	2	Unsure
Total Degrees		2.89	57.8	Unsure	

As displayed in table 6, the mean value of teachers' responses indicates 2.89. This means that teachers are not sure about the cultural universality of LA. They cannot confirm whether Algerian learners, with their Algerian cultural background, can achieve LA or not, for the latter might be considered to belong to Western culture. This finding contradicts the findings of Salimi & Ansari

(2015), Alhaysony (2016), and is similar to Borg & Al-Busaidi's (2012).

3.1.4 The effect of age on learning autonomy

In order to uncover teachers' beliefs about the relation between age and developing LA, items 1, 10 and 20 were employed to elicit teachers' beliefs in this area.

Table 7. The effect of age on learner autonomy

N°	Items	Mean	%	Rank	Response Level
1	Language learners of all ages can develop learning autonomy	3,12	62,42	2	Unsure
20	It is possible to promote learner autonomy with both young language learners and with adults	3,70	73,94	1	Unsure
10	Learner autonomy is only possible with adult learners	2,27	45,45	3	Unsure
Total Degrees		3.03	60.6	Unsure	

Table 7 summarizes teachers' beliefs of the relation of age to developing LA. Teachers favored the statement about "*It is possible to promote*

learner autonomy with both young language learners and with adults" with mean score of 3.81, followed by "*Language learners of all ages can*

develop learning autonomy” and “*Learner autonomy is only possible with adult learners*” with mean values of 3.12 and 2.27 respectively. From these data, teachers believe that age has no significant influence on learners’ ability to develop autonomy. For the majority of teachers, learners of all ages, young or adults, have the potential to develop LA. This finding is identical to the results from Borg &

Al Busaidi (2012), Salimi & Ansari (2015), Alhaysony (2016) and Meisani & Rambet (2017).

3.1.5 The effect of language proficiency on learning autonomy

In this subsection, teachers’ beliefs of the potential effect of language proficiency of the learner on his ability to develop LA are gauged.

Table 8. The effect of language proficiency on learner autonomy

N°	Items	Mean	%	Rank	Response Level
9	It is harder to promote learner autonomy with proficient language learners than it is with beginners	2,70	53,94	3	Unsure
25	Promoting autonomy is easier with beginning language learners than with more proficient learners	2,94	58,79	2	Unsure
33	The proficiency of language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy	3,39	67,88	1	Unsure
Total Degrees		3.01	60.2		Unsure

As displayed in table 8, most teachers agree with the statement about “*The proficiency of language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy*”, followed by “*Promoting autonomy is easier with beginning language learners than with more proficient learners*” and “*It is harder to promote learner autonomy with proficient language learners than it is with beginners*” respectively. From these responses, it is clear that teachers do not perceive any connection between learner language proficiency and learning

autonomy for they think that all language learners, beginners or proficient, have the ability to develop LA. This finding is identical to Borg & Al Busaidi (2012) and Alhaysony (2016).

3.1.6 The effect of learner-centeredness methodology and learning autonomy

The following table summarizes teachers’ beliefs of the effect of learner centeredness on promoting learner autonomy.

Table 9. The effect of learner-centeredness methodology and learner autonomy

N°	Items	Mean	%	Rank	Response Level
27	Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centered classroom	4,12	82,42	2	Agree
15	Learner autonomy implies rejection of traditional teacher-led ways of teaching	3,39	67,88	3	Unsure
17	Learner centered classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy	4,15	83,03	1	Agree
Total Degrees		3.89	77.8		Agree

When it comes to teachers responses in relation to learner-centeredness and LA, the majority of teachers agree with the statements of “*Learner centered classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy*” and “*Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centered classroom*” with high mean values of 4.15 and 4.12 respectively. This means that teachers perceive the importance of the learner-centered classroom for the promotion of LA, since the traditional teacher-led and centered classrooms are not helpful and should be rejected for better and easier LA promotion. This

result is in line with previous research including Balcikanli (2010), Borg & Al Busaidi (2012), Alhaysony (2016) Alzebaree & Yavuz (2016) and Meisani & Rambet (2017).

3.1.7 The benefits of learning autonomy for language learning

This subsection is devoted to the last part to answer the first research question. It uncovers teachers’ beliefs of the importance of learner autonomy for language learning.

Table 10. The benefits of learner autonomy for language learning

<i>N°</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Response</i>
34	Individuals who lack autonomy are not likely to be effective language learners	3,39	67,88	3	Unsure
35	Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would	4,09	81,88	2	Agree
36	Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner	4,30	86,06	1	Agree
<i>Total Degrees</i>		3.93	78.60	Agree	

Table 10 presents the results about teachers' beliefs of the benefits brought to language learning by LA. It is clear that the mean value for teachers' responses range from 3.39 to 4.30. It is a strong indication to teachers' agreement on the great contribution of LA to the field of language learning. They believe that learning autonomy is a key element to a more effective and successful language learning. This finding supports the ones of Balcikanli (2010), Borg & Al Busaidi (2012), Salimi & Ansari (2015), Ghout (2015), Alhaysony (2016) and Alzebaree & Yavuz (2016).

3.2 Teachers' Beliefs of the Desirability and Feasibility of Promoting Learner Autonomy

In this section, the second research question, -What are teachers beliefs of the desirability and feasibility of promoting learner

autonomy? - will be addressed. This question covers two main areas. First, teachers' beliefs about the desirability and feasibility of involving students in decision making about language learning (e.g., the objectives of the course, the materials used, the learning assessment). Second, teachers' beliefs of the desirability and feasibility of developing "learning to learn" skills in students for better autonomous learning (e.g., identifying their strengths and weaknesses, monitoring their learning, learning cooperatively).

3.2.1 Desirability and Feasibility of Student Involvement in Decision Making

Table 11 summarizes the main findings regarding teachers' beliefs of the desirability and feasibility of students' involvement in decision-making.

Table 11. Desirability and feasibility of students' involvement in decision- making

<i>Items</i>		<i>Desirability</i>				<i>Feasibility</i>			
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Response level</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Response level</i>
Learners are involved in decisions about									
1	The objectives of course	2,52	62,88	5	QD	1,88	46,97	6	SF
2	The materials used	3,09	77,27	3	QD	2,30	57,58	3	SF
3	The kinds of tasks/activities they do	3,21	80,30	2	QD	2,55	63,64	2	QF
4	The topics discussed	3,45	86,36	1	VD	2,91	72,73	1	QF
5	How learning is assessed	2,15	53,79	7	SD	1,82	45,45	7	SF
6	The teaching method used	2,67	66,67	4	QD	2,12	53,03	4	SF
7	Classroom management	2,24	56,06	6	SD	2,00	50,00	5	SF
Total		2.76	69.05	QD		2,23	55,63	SF	

QD: Quite desirable; **VD:** Very desirable;
SD: Slightly desirable; **SF:** Slightly Feasible;

QF: Quite Feasible

The findings in table 11 indicate that in all cases, teachers are more positive about the desirability of involving students in decision making than they are about its feasibility. On one hand, students' involvement in decision-making is

perceived to be most desirable about the topics discussed, the kinds of tasks and materials used and least desirable with the teaching method, the objective of the course, classroom management and learning assessment respectively. This finding is identical to the ones of Yildirim (2012) and Alhaysony (2016). On the other hand, students' involvement in decision-making is seen to be most

feasible with the topics, the activities and materials used and least feasible with the objective of the course and the assessment of learning. This finding supports Borg & Al-Busadi (2012), Yildirim (2012), Duong(2014), Duong & Seepho (2014), Salimi & Ansari(2015), Ghout (2015), Alhaysoni(2016) findings, but contradicts Balcikanli (2010), Cakici(2017) and Harati(2017) who claim that teachers are positive about involving

Table 12. Desirability and feasibility of "learning to learn" skills in students

Items		Desirability				Feasibility			
		Mean	%	Rank	Response levels	Mean	%	Rank	Response levels
Learners have the ability to									
1	Identify their own needs	3,39	84,85	4	VD	2,76	68,93	2	QF
2	Identify their own strengths	3,55	88,64	1	VD	2,76	68,93	2	QF
3	Identify their own weaknesses	3,52	87,88	2	VD	2,79	69,69	1	QF
4	Monitor their progress	3,30	82,58	5	VD	2,52	62,87	6	QF
5	Evaluate their own learning	3,09	77,27	7	QD	2,15	53,78	7	SF
6	Learn Co-operatively	3,27	81,82	6	VD	2,73	68,18	4	QF
7	Learn Independently	3,52	87,88	2	VD	2,73	68,18	4	QF
Total		3,38	84,42	VD		2,63	65,80	QF	

QD: Quite desirable; **VD:** Very desirable;
SF: Slightly Feasible; **QF:** Quite Feasible

The findings, illustrated in table 12, indicate that in all cases, the difference between teachers' beliefs of the desirability of students developing autonomous abilities is significantly higher than its feasibility. This finding goes hand in hand with the one of Borg & Al-Busadi (2012). Teachers are most positive about the desirability of students' developing the ability to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and learn independently, and least positive about learners' ability to learn cooperatively, monitor and evaluate their own learning. In terms of feasibility, identifying needs, strengths and weaknesses are perceived as the most feasible abilities with monitoring learning and evaluation leaning as the least feasible confirming the findings of Duong (2014) and Alhaysony (2016).

3.3 Teachers' beliefs of the autonomy of their learners

In this section, the answer to the third research question, about the extent to which teachers

students in decisions about the objectives of the lesson, teaching methodology and classroom management.

3.2.2 Desirability and feasibility of "Learning to Learn" Skills in Students

Table 12 summarizes the main findings regarding teachers' beliefs of the desirability and feasibility of students' "learning to learn" skills.

believe their students are autonomous, will be presented. Justifications for teachers' answers are to be classified and discussed as well.

The results show that the majority of teachers (26) believe that their students are not autonomous. Among the 7 other participants, 6 were unsure and only one participant believes his students are autonomous. This finding contradicts the ones of Joshi (2011) Duong (2014) and Alhaysony (2016) who reported the majority of their participants as perceiving their students to be autonomous.

Teachers are provided with an open-ended part of the question to justify their answers for not perceiving their students' autonomy. Teachers explain their beliefs to be due to a number of reasons. First, the Algerian educational system encourages the teacher-centered classrooms and the spoon-feeding methods of teaching, which makes students passive and completely rely on the teacher as the only source of knowledge. This leads to students reaching college with no previous experiences for learning autonomy. On the other hand, learners lack self-awareness and decision making, lack of responsibility for their learning and

progress, lack of motivation, self-confidence, and interest are reported to be the major reasons for students lack of learning autonomy. Similar findings are reported by Borg & Al Busaidi (2012), Yildirim (2012), Al Asmari (2013), Alibakhshi (2015) and Alhaysony(2016).

Teacher's beliefs are against most of the teachers' expectations as they claim that university students are expected to be independent and rely on their own. Teachers do not mention any element about the effect of culture on developing LA, which confirms Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012)'s finding about the cultural universality of LA.

3.4 Teachers' beliefs of their role in promoting learner autonomy

In the last part of the questionnaire, teachers are asked about the extent to which they believe they promote LA with teaching practices. Then, they are asked to provide examples of the activities and strategies they used for LA promotion if they do; or reasons for not considering it if they do not. Their answers will be discussed to answer the fourth research question.

The results reveal that the majority of the participants (25 out of 33) claim that they try to promote LA while teaching English, 2 teachers are unsure and 6 disagree. This result is similar to those of Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012) and Alhaysony (2016).

Teachers who feel they promote LA provide a range of activities and strategies they use in EFL classroom. Among these are the following examples:

- Raising students' awareness of the importance of LA since the LMD system requires autonomy for more effective learning.
- Designing activities and materials, which encourage LA in relation to students' needs, interests and preferences, and giving students the opportunities to decide about what and how they want to learn under the guidance of the teacher.
- Engaging students in activities, which foster their LA and make them aware of the study skills and strategies of autonomous learning such as problem solving.

➤ Encouraging students to monitor and evaluate their learning through providing feedback to check their progress and make self-assessment (e.g., downloading applications for learning assessment).

➤ Encouraging group work activities to develop independent work with others (e.g., work cooperatively and assess each other's works)

➤ Encouraging out of class activities through assigning home works to be worked on outside the classroom and to do projects and research.

Similar findings are reported by previous research such as Balcikanli (2010), Joshi (2011), Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012), Duong & Seepho (2014), and Ghout (2015) Alhaysony(2016) Harati(2017) Meisani & Rambet (2017).

On the other hand, the small number of teachers who are not sure or disagree that they promote LA while learning mention a number of factors and constraints. Among these are the dominance of the traditional public education, which is controlled by the centralized government with its prescribed curricula and materials leaving no room for any educational programs for the promotion of autonomy, despite the fact that the LMD system is meant to enhance LA. Other factors such as the crowded classrooms, learners total reliance on the teacher, learners lack of motivation and interest in being autonomous and teachers' lack of training in LA are all cited as the main obstacles in implementing LA principles in teaching practices. These findings support the ones of Balcikanli (2010), Borg & Al-Busaidi(2012), Al Asmari (2013), Duong & Seepho (2014), Alibakhshi(2015), Alhaysony (2016), Cakici(2017) and Harati (2017).

4. Conclusion

The purpose of the current study is to investigate teachers' beliefs about LA in language learning. The results of the questionnaire reveal valuable information about teachers' understanding and practices of LA in the EFL classroom. The teachers show understanding of the notion of learner

autonomy and its importance for effective language learning. Their definitions be summarized as follows: 'Learner autonomy is a notion that can be developed by motivated, self-confident learners, who are given freedom for decision making about their learning under the guidance of the teacher within a learner-centered classroom'. Accordingly, learners need to be provided with appropriate skills for monitoring and evaluating their learning, and opportunities to work cooperatively and outside the classroom. This leads to more effective language learning, by successful autonomous learners. When it comes to the issue of desirability and feasibility of involving students in decision making and learner abilities, the results indicate a significant gap between the extent to which teachers feel the desirability of engaging students in decision making about their learning and teachers' beliefs about its feasibility. They limited learners' responsibility to choosing topics, activities and materials. A similar gap exists between the teachers' beliefs of the desirability and feasibility for students to develop certain abilities related to LA. In this respect, teachers prove to hold positive belief about LA, with negative attitudes towards its practical implementation in the classroom. On the other hand, teachers are negative about the autonomy of their students, providing some reasons for their students

not being able to develop features for LA, such as the lack of motivation, self-confidence, lack of previous experiences of autonomous learning and total reliance on the teacher. Finally, the majority of teachers believe they promote LA while teaching and mentioned a number of pedagogical strategies such as raising learners' awareness of the importance of learner autonomy, encouraging cooperative activities and individual out of class language learning activities.

5. Pedagogical Implications

With regard to the results of this study, a number of pedagogical implications should be highlighted. First, in order to promote learner autonomy, teachers are required to introduce the concept of LA to learners and equip them with the necessary strategies and learning opportunities to develop and practice LA. Second, policy makers need to consider addressing LA when designing the educational programmes, which makes it easier for the teacher to provide appropriate learning opportunities for learners to practice and develop their abilities for autonomous learning. Finally, the administration needs to consider providing healthy educational conditions for effective autonomous learning such as minimizing the number of students per class

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Appendix**Questionnaire**

Dear participants,

The following questionnaire is submitted to you in order to collect information about your perceptions of learner autonomy in EFL classroom. The information and results obtained are for research purposes only.

Section One: Personal Information

1. Age: -25 ☐ 25-30 ☐ 30-40 ☐ 40-50 ☐ 50+ ☐

2. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

3. Highest Qualifications:

Licenec ☐ Master ☐ Doctorate ☐ Othes ☐

4. Years of experience as an English language teacher:

0-4 ☐ 5-9 ☐ 10-15 ☐ 15-19 ☐ 20-24 ☐ 25+ ☐

Section Two: Learner Autonomy:

Please give your opinion about the statements below by ticking ONE answer for each.

	Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Language learners of all ages can develop learning autonomy					
2	Independent study in the library is an activity which develops learning autonomy					
3	Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete task alone					
4	Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn					
5	Individuals who lack autonomy are not likely to be effective language learners					
6	Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom					
7	Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy					
8	Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher					
9	It is harder to promote learner autonomy with proficient language learners than it is with beginners					
10	It is possible to promote learner autonomy with both young language learners and with adults					
11	Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence					
12	Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would					
13	Learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all cultural backgrounds					
14	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do					
15	Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centered classroom					
16	Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other					
17	Learner autonomy implies rejection of traditional teacher-led ways of teaching					
18	Learner autonomy cannot develop without the help of the teacher					
19	Learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together					
20	Learner autonomy is only possible with adult learners					
21	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed					
22	Learner autonomy is a concept which is not suited to non-Western learners					
23	Learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher					
24	Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy					
25	Promoting autonomy is easier with beginning language learners than with more proficient learners					
26	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials					
27	Learner centered classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy					
28	Learning how to learn is key to develop learner autonomy					
29	Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy					
30	Out of class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy					
31	The ability to monitor one's learning is central to learning autonomy					
32	Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated					
33	The proficiency of language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy					
34	The teacher has no important role to play in supporting learner autonomy					
35	Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner					
36	To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.					

Section Three: Desirability and Feasibility of Learner Autonomy

Below there are two sets of statements. The first gives examples of decisions **LEARNERS** might be involved in; the second lists abilities that learners might have. For each statement:

- First say how **desirable** (i.e. ideally), you feel it is.
- Then say how **feasible** (i.e. realistically achievable) you think it is for *the learners you currently teach*

You should tick **TWO** boxes for each statement — one for desirability and one for feasibility.

	Desirability				Feasibility			
	Undesirable	Slightly desirable	Quite desirable	Very desirable	Unfeasible	Slightly feasible	Quite feasible	Very feasible
Learners are involved in decisions about:								
The objectives of course								
The materials used								
The kinds of tasks and activities they do								
The topics discussed								
How learning is assessed								
The teaching method used								
Classroom management								
Learners have the ability to:								
Identify their own needs								
Identify their own strengths								
Identify their own weaknesses								
Monitor their progress								
Evaluate their own learning								
Learn Co-operatively								
Learn Independently								

Section Four: Your Learners and Your Teaching

This section contains two open-ended questions. These are an important part of the questionnaire and give you the opportunity to comment more specifically on your teaching.

- To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Choose ONE answer:

In general, the students I teach English most often have a fair degree of learner autonomy.

Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Unsure ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree ☐

Please comment on why you feel the way you do about your students' general degree of autonomy:

- To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Choose ONE answer:

In general, in teaching English, I give my students opportunities to develop learner autonomy.

Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Unsure ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree ☐

Please comment. You may want to explain why and how you promote autonomy, if you do, or to explain why developing learner autonomy is not an issue you focus on in your teaching:

Thank you very much for your collaboration!