

Libyan EFL Teachers' Beliefs about Learner Autonomy at a Libyan University

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Abstract:

The study investigates Libyan EFL teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy at a Libyan University in Libya. The aims of this study are to explore teachers' perceptions and perspectives of learner autonomy in teaching English to undergraduate students and to investigate the role of Libyan EFL teachers in promoting undergraduate Libyan EFL students' autonomy in Libya. Mixed method approach is used in order to triangulate data. The methods to collect data are questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The sample includes 40 Libyan EFL teachers who are chosen purposely. Thematic analysis is used to analyse the data into a priori themes and emergent themes. The results show that the majority of the teachers have positive attitudes towards learner autonomy. The findings reveal that Libyan EFL teachers encourage students in their classrooms to be independent learners. They implement different teaching strategies that indicate the four roles: organizer, facilitator, counselor, and manager. Furthermore, the findings reveal that while a significant percentage 95% out of 40 teachers promote learning as social participation, a small number of respondents encourage their students to engage in English practices outside class. The results also highlight the significance of creating conducive atmosphere and engaging students in decision-making process in order to promote learner autonomy. However, although teachers use various techniques to enhance learner autonomy, the findings show that they encounter a number of challenges like students' focus on passing the exam with high grades, students' lack of independent skills, rules and regulations of the faculty that enhance teacher-centred approach, and insufficient resources.

Keywords: learner autonomy, teacher's strategies, perceptions, beliefs, independent learning, autonomous learning.

آراء معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية الليبيين حول التعليم الذاتي في

إحدى الجامعات الليبية

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المخلص:

تبحث الدراسة في تصورات معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الليبيين حول التعليم الذاتي في إحدى الجامعات الليبية في ليبيا. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف تصورات المعلمين ووجهات نظرهم حول التعليم الذاتي في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية للطلاب الجامعيين والتحقيق في دور معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الليبيين كلغة أجنبية في تعزيز التعليم الذاتي لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية الليبيين في ليبيا. يتم استخدام نهج الطريقة المختلطة من أجل تثليث البيانات. طرق جمع البيانات هي الاستبيانات والمقابلات شبه المنظمة. تشمل العينة 40 مدرساً ليبياياً للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية تم اختيارهم عن قصد. يستخدم التحليل الموضوعي لتحليل البيانات في مواضيع مسبقاً ومواضيع ناشئة. تظهر النتائج أن غالبية المعلمين لديهم مواقف إيجابية نحو التعليم الذاتي. تكشف النتائج أن معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية الليبيين يشجعون الطلاب في فصولهم الدراسية على أن يكونوا متعلمين مستقلين. يقومون بتنفيذ استراتيجيات تعليمية مختلفة تشير إلى الأدوار الأربعة: المنظم والميسر والمستشار والمدير. علاوة على ذلك تكشف النتائج أنه في حين أن نسبة كبيرة من 95% من أصل 40 معلماً يشجعون على التعليم كمشاركة اجتماعية، فإن عدداً صغيراً من المستجوبين يشجعون طلابهم على الانخراط في ممارسات اللغة الإنجليزية خارج الفصل. كما تسلط النتائج الضوء على أهمية خلق جو ملائم وإشراك الطلاب في عملية صنع القرار من أجل تعزيز استقلالية المتعلم. ومع ذلك، على الرغم من أن المعلمين يستخدمون تقنيات مختلفة لتعزيز التعليم الذاتي، إلا أن النتائج تظهر أنهم يواجهون عدداً من التحديات مثل تركيز الطلاب على اجتياز الاختبار بدرجات عالية، وافتقار الطلاب إلى المهارات المستقلة، والقواعد واللوائح الخاصة بالكلية التي تعزز النهج المتمحور حول المعلم، وعدم كفاية الموارد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم الذاتي، استراتيجيات المعلم، التصورات، المعتقدات، التعلم

المستقل.

1. Introduction:

There is an emphasis on learner autonomy that relies on learner-centered approach. Alonazi (2017) stated that there has been a movement from traditional approaches to learner-centred and communicative approaches. Learner autonomy emphasizes the role of the learner (Jacobs & Farell, 2001). Therefore, the concept of autonomy is linked with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in language learning (Nunan, 1997). Nowadays, the notion of autonomy plays an important role in modern language education because it can assist learners to see learning as a self-directed way and life long process (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Camilleri (1997) and Benson (2006) indicated that autonomy can contribute to learner's independence, self-esteem, self-direction, creativity, and it can strengthen teachers' power to create environment that enhances learners to be autonomous. Furthermore, autonomy is seen as a social process and according to Masouleh and Jooneghani (2012), it is a construction of knowledge within the participants in shared activities as Horvath (2007) stated that it refers to participation, negotiation in decision-making, reflection, independence, self-evaluation and cooperation. Moreover, autonomy can relate to the learner's ability to be creative, has self-esteem, and engage in arguments (Tomasouw & Marantika, 2019). In general, autonomy is associated with "liberty and the right to self-government" (Horvath, 2007, p.103). However, Yan (2012) argued that autonomy requires understanding and awareness of the roles of teachers and learners. Learners select their learning strategies that are appropriate to their learning needs and evaluate their progress. Thus, they become effective learners who are responsible for their own learning. Although autonomy can change responsibilities from teachers to learners, the responsibility of teachers should be reinforced.

Researches state that learner autonomy is crucial to language learning and they suggest that it needs more support. It can be said that the significant aspect of education is to teach students how to be motivated, enthusiastic, and autonomous as this can assist learners to be creative and independent to achieve their goals in the future. The importance of autonomy is that it can assist learners to acquire knowledge and skills in class and apply them in the real-life situations. However, in Libya, students rely greatly on their teachers to provide them with knowledge that they memorize for the exam. English language has been taught by traditional methods as an academic subject rather than as a means of communication for a long time and the emphasis is on rote learning. According to Almahjoub (2014), Libyan students are unwilling to be responsible for their own learning and they have a passive role in their learning. However, the current Libyan education system is in the reform and development stage. The new English curricula are based on CLT which emphasizes the

development of students' communicative competence and learner autonomous learning for long life skills. Therefore, fostering learner autonomy can be regarded as one of the most important goals that tutors should pursue as it is a significant element of lifelong learning.

1.1 The aims:

The aims of the current study are to explore Libyan EFL teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy in English language teaching and to investigate the role of Libyan EFL teachers in promoting undergraduate Libyan EFL students' autonomy in Libya.

1.2 The research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Libyan EFL teachers about learner autonomy at Faculty of Humanities in Libya?
2. What are the challenges that Libyan EFL teachers face in promoting of learner autonomy?

2. Literature review:

2.1 Autonomous learning:

Autonomous learning is one approach to learning that is more effective than other approaches (Palfreyman & Smiths, 2003). Horvath (2007) described autonomous learning as complex and multi-faceted concept. Autonomous learning is considered as aspect of management. For instance, Holec (1981) identified it as the ability of learners to self-direct their learning in terms of selecting material, methods, place and time of learning and take responsibility for various aspects of the learning process. However, it can be considered as the cognitive aspect of autonomous learning as Horvath (2007) indicated that it includes critical thinking, planning, evaluating, reflection, a conscious effort on the part of the learner in order to monitor the learning process from the beginning to the end. Autonomous learning is also defined as "manifestation of the behaviors associated with resourcefulness, initiative, and persistence in learning" (Yurdakul, 2017, p.16). The desire to learn, learner initiative, learner resourcefulness, and learner persistence are considered as the main factors that can affect autonomous learning (Meyer, 2001; Derrick et al., 2007). Independent learning can take place inside or outside classroom, and this can contribute to lifelong learning since learners develop knowledge and skills as Zhifeng stated that autonomous learning is "the growth of knowledge, skill, talent, and development of a person at any time and in any environment by any means, with the help of his own efforts"(2017, p.1259). Furthermore, Gibbs defines autonomous learning as:

extensive independent use of the library and other information sources rather than formal teaching. Lecturers' time is concerned more with identifying clear

learning goals, providing support and feedback during learning, and assisting in the collation, presentation and assessment of learning outcomes than with conventional teaching (1992, pp.41-42).

From the above definition, it can be inferred that Gibbs compares between traditional teaching where learners depend too heavily on their teachers and independent learning whereby learners are responsible for their own learning with the guidance, support, and feedback from the teacher. Autonomous learning is also defined as a “process, a method and a philosophy of education whereby a learner acquires knowledge by his or her own efforts and develops the ability for enquiry and critical evaluation” (Candy, 1991, 459–466). Thus, to be autonomous learners, learners need to be responsible of their own learning in terms of acquiring knowledge and developing critical thinking. Although there are many definitions of learner autonomy, according to Alonazi (2017), it is generally defined as learners take the responsibility for their own learning.

Littlewood (1999); Benson (2001); Ng et al. (2012) stated that autonomous learners can take the responsibility for their own learning. Yurdakul (2017) added that autonomous learners can engage in activities and evaluate its effectiveness. In other words, learners make a decision to take the responsibility for setting goals, planning, and actions in the learning context in the process of autonomous learning (Derrick, 2001). Autonomous learners are likely to be reflected, flexible, curious, motivated, less dependent on their teachers, and having desire to understand what, why and how they learn (Horvath, 2007). It can be said that motivation is an essential element in creating autonomous learners. Masouleh and Jooneghani (2012) described autonomous learners as active learners who have insight and tolerance, take risks to communicate in the target language, follow different strategies to learn, and focus on content, form, fluency, and accuracy. Zhifeng (2017) pointed out that self-regulated, self-management, self-control, self-design, self-conscious, self-adjustment, self-awareness are essential aspects of autonomous learning that refer to selecting learning method, determining the goals, monitoring, and evaluating the learning results.

It can be inferred that if learners have these characteristics, they are quite likely to be autonomous learners. Therefore, this study focuses on the perceptions of Libyan EFL teachers about learner autonomy and whether their students have these characteristics or not.

2.2 The role of the teacher:

Teachers employ different roles depending on the methods of teaching. According to Yan (2012), in the traditional classroom, teachers carry out teaching plans and give tasks to learners to answer. Furthermore, the teacher dominates the class and his/her role is transmission of knowledge into students.

The teacher acts as a lesson planner, an assessor of the learners' performance, a controller of practices, and a source of the materials. The relationship between teachers and their learners is authority and learners follow passively what is taught (Yan, 2012). Learners have no opportunity to use the language in activities (Zhifeng, 2017). It can be said that this type of learning is called dependent learning which is completely different from independent learning or autonomous learning in which students have reaction and awareness of their own learning.

It can be argued that during the process of autonomous learning, the teacher acts as 1) an organizer, 2) a facilitator, and 3) a counselor (Alonazi, 2017). The teacher acts as an organiser who organises activities and games that are appropriate to learners' level in order to meet their learning needs. The teacher gives clear instructions as the success of any activity depends on learners' understanding exactly what they are required to do. In addition, the teacher acts as a facilitator who provides psycho-social support such as raising learners' awareness and motivating them to learn autonomously and efficiently. Moreover, the teacher as facilitator provides technical support such as helping learners to plan, to overcome the challenges, and to get rid of anxiety and to encourage them to acquire knowledge and skills, and to evaluate themselves. On top of that, the teacher encourages learners to produce their language, assess learners' work and progress, correct errors, select materials that can stimulate learners and build their confidence. Moreover, the teacher acts as counselor who gives advice, offers feedback, and assists learners to be self-monitors and to work effectively and efficiently Richard and Rodgers (1986, p.78, cited in Yan, 2012). Teachers also scaffold learners to be independent through using different strategies such as continuous practice in order to assist learners to improve their ability to solve problems independently and to enhance self-confidence (Zhifeng, 2017).

However, there is a misconception about the teacher's role in independent learning. Yan (2012) stated that "learner autonomy means that the teacher transfers all control to the learners and thus becomes a redundant part of the learning process" (p.557). This means that learners need to develop skills in self-motivation, evaluation, research, and judgment that enable them to be responsible for their own learning. Similarly, Gardner and Miller (1999) and Yurdakul (2017) emphasized that learners are fully responsible for their own learning in the process of autonomous learning. In contrast, Little (1990) pointed out that autonomous learning does not mean learning without a teacher because students in class are not left totally responsible for their own learning. Masouleh and Jooneghani (2012) argued that the ability of taking charges of one's own learning needs guidance and support as it is not innate. It seems

wrong to assume that learners come to the class with knowledge and skills that enable them to plan, monitor, assess their learning, and to make decisions on content. Knight (1996) states that “independence is not the absence of guidance, but the outcome of a process of learning that enables learners to work with such guidance” (p.35). It can be argued that teachers play an essential role in developing the autonomy of the learners. Self-instruction is not the same as autonomy as it means that learners work alone without the intervention of the teacher (Benson, 2001). In brief, autonomy is a reciprocal approach in which teachers develop themselves and students get advantages by taking responsibility for their own learning, and this is quite likely to help students both in classroom and in their life (Eren, 2020). In a similar vein, Yurdakul (2016) reported that autonomous learning includes the ability of learner to learn independently and teachers apply strategies that have the potential to assist learners to learn effectively and efficiently. However, Yan (2012) stated that “autonomous learning is not necessarily learning alone, nor is it necessarily learning without a teacher” (Yan, 2012, p.559). Although a significant part of learning can be done without teacher intervention, teachers play an essential role in fostering independent learning (Joshi, 2010). It can be said that teachers play an essential role in developing learner autonomy.

Autonomous learner and autonomous teacher are inseparable (Benson, 2001). It can be argued that teacher autonomy refers to the independence of the teachers in decision making in the classroom. However, it is noteworthy to say that learner autonomy depends on teacher autonomy. Little (1990) justified this by saying if teachers have no idea about autonomous learners; it is unreasonable to expect them to promote learner autonomy. Thus, teachers need to take control on their own teaching through applying self-managing and reflective methods. According to Shaw (2002), teacher autonomy is the ability to take control of one’s own teaching in terms of planning and practicing teaching activities, and making decisions about critical issues in their duties. It also refers to the freedom from pressure of administrators and other teachers (Shaw, 2002). Professional teachers need to have power to influence, voice in their actions, and freedom in their educational environment (Öztürk, 2012; Vahasantanen, 2015). Camilleri (1997) indicates that teachers should create learning environment that can foster learner autonomy. Teachers can create opportunities for students to involve in the classroom activities and they can provide students with circumstances that stimulate students’ interest and motivation (Afria & Tersta, 2020). Moreover, Horvath (2007) states that teachers should assist learners to overcome any learning challenges, develop awareness on their own learning, and monitor learners’ learning. The role of the autonomous teacher is not only transmission of knowledge, but also they act as monitors, advisers, and

sources of information. Telli et al. (2008) indicated that an ideal teacher is someone who provides guidance and support, builds confidence in learners, encourages his/her learners, establishes non-authority teacher-student relationship, and earns them respect.

2.3 Previous studies:

Many studies have been conducted about teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy and the strategies used to foster it. For instance, Rafidah's study (2020) about teachers' strategies in enhancing independent learning in the State of Islamic University of Sunan Ampel Surabaya highlighted the significant role of the teachers in using strategies that have contributed to enhance learners' independence. However, Rafidah did not elaborate further to identify the strategies. A recent study conducted by Khunwong and Sappapan (2022) about secondary school teachers' strategies to foster learners' autonomy in Bangkok in terms of psychological, technical, social, and political dimensions have found that teachers' practices in all dimensions indicated a high level of fostering learners' autonomy. In a similar vein, the study of Karimah (2020) about the strategies that teachers in English language classroom use to enhance learners' autonomy revealed that activities relate to psychological dimension are the most ones used by teachers, followed by social, technical, and political dimensions respectively. Furthermore, Wiraningsih and Santosa (2020) stated that despite the fact that EFL teachers in Indonesia face challenges that refer to institutional policy and learner's background, they use strategies to enhance autonomy like shared activity, effective planning, and time management. Another study highlighted the significance of promoting learner autonomy in terms of improving learners' performance and pronunciation. For instance, the study of Lengkanawati (2017) about teachers' implementing of learner autonomy to teach pronunciation highlighted that learners' performance has been improved significantly as learners become enthusiastic to practice pronunciation outside classroom.

While some studies have been conducted on teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy and their strategies to promote it, others focus on novice teachers' perceptions of teacher autonomy. For instance, Xu (2015) conducted study about the development of autonomy of four novice EFL teachers in a traditional school in China and the effect of teachers' collaboration in lesson preparation on the development of teacher autonomy. The findings indicated that teacher's collaborative lesson preparation (i.e. product-oriented and problem-based collaboration) have a positive impact on the development of teacher autonomy as it contributes to decrease anxiety of the teachers. The study of Eren (2020) study about teacher autonomy from cross-cultural perspective revealed that although teachers from different cultural backgrounds have different

interpretations to the concept of autonomy and classroom practices, their perspectives and perceptions complete each other. Furthermore, Feryok (2013) conducted a study about the teacher's role in developing learner autonomy in Japan. The study was based on zone of proximal development and imitation. The findings indicated that teacher autonomy is essential as cognition and practices build on it.

However, in the Arabic context, the study of Al-Asmari (2013) about English language instructors' perceptions at Taif University in Saudi Arabia found that instructors have positive attitudes towards learner autonomy, but they prefer not to guide their learners to be autonomous because the education system in Saudi Arabia depends on the authority of the teachers and sharing responsibility can lead to losing control that they have had for their teaching life. Al-Asmari has added that teachers do not feel comfortable with encouraging autonomy, and this is due to the fact that if teachers enhance autonomy, learners will think that their teachers are not qualified to do their jobs appropriately. He also concluded that teachers have desire to teach communicative skills by using learner-centred approach and group discussion, but they encounter a number of challenges such as poor facilities and unmotivated learners. Furthermore, the study of Alonazi (2017) about the roles of teachers in promoting learner autonomy in Riyadh in Saudi EFL secondary schools indicated that English language teachers promote autonomous learning and they use various strategies like teachers' ongoing self-reflection of their teaching methods, the elimination of school policies that limit teachers' independence, and the provision of professional development programs on learner autonomy. However, they face challenges that relate to students' lack of independence in classroom, the rules and the regulation of the place, and teachers' lack of fundamental techniques to enhance independent learning. Alibakhshi (2015) stated that the main challenge that Iranian EFL teachers face in enhancing autonomy in different universities in Tehraniran is teachers' limited knowledge of autonomy.

Other studies focus on learner autonomy for instance; Tomasouw and Marantika (2019) conducted a quantitative study about learner autonomy as strategy to enhance the quality of learner at the German Language education program. The findings revealed that learners have motivation to learn and to develop their own learning strategy as they engaged in learning with their colleagues and as a result reflection has been enhanced. However, the study of Afria and Tersta (2020) about undergraduate students' perceptions of autonomous learning in one of the public school in Indonesia showed that students' autonomous learning is between secondary level and low level, and this is due to the fact that students have misconceptions about the concept of

autonomy. While some studies focus on the autonomy of teachers and learners, other studies highlight the significance of collaboration among students and the role of the teacher in fostering that interaction. For instance, Vangrieken et al. (2017) make clear that autonomy does not mean acting alone, it can be a combination between a desire to engage and integrate with others and preference for working individually.

However, in the Libyan context, the study of Almahjoub (2014) about the perceptions of teachers and learners of autonomy in a secondary school in Libya indicated that teachers have positive attitudes towards autonomy in terms of providing learners with opportunities to be active and responsible of their own learning in collaborative work. He also stated that education policy in Libya promotes learner responsibility and autonomy can be expressed in different ways.

It can be said that although there is extensive research conducted about autonomy, little of it has focused specifically on Libyan EFL teachers' perceptions for the significance of developing independent learning at university. It becomes particularly valuable to undertake a study that investigates their perceptions and perspectives of learner autonomy. Conducting this study can make a significant contribution by bridging the existing research gap and offering a valuable insight into independent learning in the Libyan educational context.

3. Methodology:

Mixed method approach was used to investigate Libyan EFL teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy and the challenges that they face in enhancing it. This approach was chosen because it has the potential to provide the full picture about the topic under investigation rather than using only one approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). It was appropriate and practical as it allowed the generation of both "statistical data" as well as qualitative "comments from students".

The combination of qualitative and quantitative has the potential to provide in-depth understanding of the topic under investigation Johnson et al. (2007). Moreover, mixed methods approach was used in order to overcome any limitations that might be found of using the quantitative and qualitative approaches separately and to combine the strengths of both approaches (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

The sample was 40 Libyan EFL teachers who taught English to undergraduate students in English language department. The participants were chosen purposely according to the following criteria: they are Libyans, EFL teachers, teaching English to undergraduate students, but they are different from each other in ages, their previous experiences, and their background. The ethical

issues as stated by (Bera, 2011) such as permission, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and sensitivity were taken into the researcher's consideration during the research process. First of all, quantitative data through questionnaire were collected. Questionnaire was chosen in order to get statistical data to inform the interviews. The questionnaires were distributed to Libyan EFL teachers of English at the faculty of Humanities. The sample was forty participants: 20 males and 20 females. The questions used were closed-ended and they were designed to meet the aims of the study and to gain statistical data. It was a two-phase research design, starting with quantitative data collection through a questionnaire, followed by qualitative data collection through interviews. Semi-structured interview was selected because it has the potential to allow the researcher to probe unexpected responses and to ask for clarification if necessary. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 of the participant who participated in the questionnaire sample. The interviews allowed the researcher to probe and to add depth and detail into Libyan EFL teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy that cannot be noticed through a questionnaire alone. Moreover, the interview can contribute to validate data and ensure the credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2003).

Table (1): Teachers' qualifications and experiences of teaching

Teacher Number	Qualifications	Experience
15 (37.5%)	Ph.D	7-11 years
25 (62.5%)	Master degree	5-10 years

However, the data were analysed manually and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data into codes, sub-codes and themes.

4. Findings and Discussion:

The findings of the questionnaires and interviews revealed that the majority of the participants had positive attitudes towards autonomous learning in their English classes. The interview data indicated that some teachers motivated their students by asking them to engage in English practices outside classroom in order to improve their four English skills. Mais, for example, stated that *"I always recommend my students to improve their English via listening to BBC news, reading English newspapers and magazines"* (Mais interview). It is clear that the exposure to language through listening to native speakers of English can contribute to develop students' listening, speaking, and writing. The reality is that when students listen, read, and watch native speakers of English, they can learn the use of the language in the context and acquire fluency in language as stated by Zahra: *"when students read and listen to real materials, they understand the language effectively and efficiently. By the time, learners can*

differentiate between using formal, informal language, become fluent and improve their comprehension” (Zahra interview).

The findings of this study are in line with Zhifeng (2017) who pointed out that independent learning can take place inside and outside class and this is likely to enhance lifelong learning because learners develop their knowledge and skills on regular basis.

Table (2): Teachers’ responses to items that relate to learner autonomy

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neuter	Strongly disagree	Disagree
1. I ask students to further their study outside class.	5 12.5%	0 % 0	1 2.5 %	20 50 %	15 37.5 %
2. I ask students to prepare the lecture before class.	18 45%	15 37.5%	1 2.5%	3 7.5%	3 7.5%
3. I encourage my students to interact with their colleagues and tutors in classroom.	37 92.5%	3 7.5	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
4. I use brainstorm technique when I introduce the topic.	25 62.5%	10 25%	2 5%	2 5%	1 2.5%
5. I use student-centred approach.	35 87.5%	0 0%	0 0%	5 12.5%	3 7.5%
6. I emphasize working in pairs and groups.	35 87.5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	5 12.5%
7. I ask students to take notes during the lecture.	20 50%	0 0%	0 0%	15 37.5%	5 12.5%

Table (2) illustrates that a significant proportion, 92.5% out of 40 respondents encouraged their students to interact with their colleagues in the class. Within questionnaire, 87.5% of respondents who said that they use student-centred approach also indicated that they emphasize working in pairs and groups. The table also shows that a small proportion, 12.5%, mentioned that they ask students to further their study outside class.

Within the items, a significant proportion, 92.5% of respondents who encouraged their students to interact with their colleagues and teachers in shared activities in class, also indicated that they established shared group on the telegram to exchange their thoughts and ideas and to share their knowledge. This attributed to foster active learning and a shared sense of responsibility. The data of the interview also revealed that learning as social participation (i.e situated learning) was beneficial because it assisted students to think critically, develop interaction skills, and to accept others. For example, Manal reported that:

I ask my students to divide themselves into groups in order to prepare assignment. Thus, they are required to meet and work together outside classroom in order to divide the work among them. They meet each other regularly and they discuss the topic with each other for the sake of the whole group. I give them a deadline to submit their assignment; I guide them via recommending useful references and providing two feedbacks on their writing. (Manal interview).

The above comment highlights the significance of learning as social participation in terms of developing knowledge and skills and give and take in order to complete the required work. It is clear that each student was responsible for part of the assignment, s/he searched and read references and wrote to finish his/her part. This assisted students to be self-directed and take responsibility for their own work. Thus, they became different persons (i.e. independent learners). Manal also highlighted the importance of teacher's support through providing constructive feedback and a reference list as writing is work and progress. The findings of the questionnaire showed that 75% out of 40 provided constructive feedback to their students. In other words, students were given an opportunity to review their work through formative and summative submissions. Richards and Rodgers (1986) and Gibbs (1992) highlighted the significance of the teachers' role as counselor who provides support in the form of the feedback.

In addition, Jana said that:

I know the advantages of working in pairs and groups. Students become thinking out of the box and do not accept things outright. Students also become work and interact with their Sudanese and Philistines colleagues. (Jana interview)

It is obvious that working with others has many advantages. For Jana, it leads to developing students' critical thinking and students become open-minded and accepting others from other nationalities. The findings of the current study indicated that working in pairs or small groups gave students opportunities to be collaborative and share responsibilities since they were working together with the support of the teacher. A previous study conducted by Almahjoub (2014) about the perceptions of teachers and learners of autonomy in a secondary school in Libya indicated that providing learners with opportunities to be responsible for their own learning in shared work is significant; however, he did not elaborate further. The current study investigated the importance of working with others; explained the impact of situated learning on the other in terms of becoming open-minded and developing empathy towards the other.

Table (4) shows that within questionnaires, a slight majority 90% of respondents reported that creating a comfortable learning environment promoted independent learning. Evidence suggests that the sense of belonging

and being comfortable with colleagues and the teacher is the extent to which students feel that they are accepted, respected, and supported by the teacher and their peers in the classroom. The feelings of being responsible, competent, and part of the learning environment are important in creating conducive learning atmosphere and they are likely to enhance students' motivation, cooperation and confidence to be independent learners. Nour, for instance, stated that:

When students feel comfortable in the class, this has a positive impact on their learning. I do my best to organize the activities that suits their level, divide my students into groups, I tell students to feel free to speak, to ask any question without any hesitation, and to provide any suggestion. This can enhance encourage them to engage with others, to help each other in a cooperative manner and to be confident. (Noura interview)

Similarly, Sara added that:

I create a safe and welcoming environment, and this reduces power relationship between me and my students. As a result, rapport of trust is established. This encourages students to work hard and to engage in the learning process efficiently. If I ask them to prepare a piece of writing, they work on it enthusiastically and bring it on time. (Sara interview)

Sara's comment indicates that creating conducive atmosphere and establishing a trust relationship with students play an essential role in promoting independent learning. This can be due to the fact that students felt respected, well-being, and valued.

Richards and Rodgers (1986, p.78, cited in Yan, 2012) discussed that the teacher acts as an organiser of activities that are appropriate to the level of their students. Furthermore, the teacher acts as facilitator who motivates their students to learn independently, provides support, and encourages them to produce their language, and assess their work and progress. The teacher also acts as counselor who scaffolds students to be independent through using different strategies that have the potential to help learners to be autonomous, active and confident (Zhifeng, 2017). However, the current study investigated the significance of creating comfortable environment in relation to learner autonomy had not been significantly discussed in the previous studies.

Table (3): Learning as social participation

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neuter	Strongly disagree	Disagree
8. I create a supportive autonomous atmosphere in the classroom.	36 90%	0 0%	0 0%	4 8%	0 0%
9. I encourage students to prepare presentations with their colleagues.	10 25%	0 0%	10 25%	10 25%	10 25%
10. I encourage students to collaborate.	30 75%	10 25%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
11. I provide a constructive feedback on their work.	27 67.5%	3 7.5%	1 2.5%	6 15%	3 7.5%
12. I ask students to form groups and to work together.	38 95%	0 0%	1 2.5%	1 2.5%	0 0%
13. I ask students to present any chosen topic.	20 50%	15 37.5%	3 7.5%	1 2.5%	1 2.5%
14. I allow students to negotiate the time of exam and the deadline for assignments.	25 50%	25 50%	0 0%	0 0%	0 %

The findings of the questionnaire indicated that almost half of the participants 50% said that negotiating time of mid-term exam and the deadline of the submission are beneficial. The data from the interview showed that by engaging students in the decision-making process, this lead to enhancing flexibility, increasing their confidence, reducing academic stress, and taking ownership of their learning. Majd said that:

Students have the right to choose the suitable time of the mid-term exam. This helps them to build confidence in their abilities, give them sufficient time to prepare themselves to get better results, decrease their fear, and make them feel that they are responsible for their own learning. (Majd interview)

Shaw (2002) argued that teachers should have the right to make decisions about educational issues that concern them; however, the impact of involving students in decision making and negotiating time with them had not been argued in the previous literature so far. The current study found out the importance of engaging students in decision-making since it is beneficial for promoting flexibility, building confidence, taking ownership of learning, and decreasing anxiety.

However, the data indicated that although the majority of Libyan EFL teachers have positive attitudes towards the implementation of autonomy in teaching English, they encounter a number of challenges. Most teachers mentioned that all students focus on passing the exam with high grades rather

than becoming independent learners. The results of the questionnaire demonstrated that approximately 38 out of 40, 95% of respondents agreed that students want to pass and get high grades: “*When I ask my students to prepare presentation, some of them prepare slides and others are reluctant. They keep saying we know the evaluation will be mid-term 40 and final exam 60*”. (Omer interview)

The findings also highlighted that about 67% of teachers reported that their students lack of independent learning skills because they are familiar with traditional methods of teaching such as grammar- translation method and rote learning. The data showed that teachers mentioned that their students want their teachers to feed them with knowledge because they used to be familiar with teacher-centred approach during the secondary school stage:

I ask my students to write about a certain topic, I want them to search, read, and write. I encourage peer review in order to improve their progress. I ask them to draft and redraft, but they get bored. They always keep asking about the exam, they want to remember the material and get high grade. During the secondary school stage, students are required to memorise the material and answer the questions in the exam. Therefore, it is not easy to apply independent their learning, especially with first semester students. (Emad interview)

The above comment indicates that the teacher used various strategies to encourage his students to be autonomous. However, it is clear that students are affected by their previous experiences in which teacher-centred approach and spoon-fed knowledge are essential. Thus, Emad considered it challenge to use independent learning. The findings of this study with regard to students’ lack of autonomous skills are consistent with the study of Alonazi (2017), however, the context and the sample were different because Alonazi’s study was conducted in Saudi with Saudi teachers at secondary school, while the current study was conducted in Libya with Libyan teachers at university.

With regard to the challenges, a significant number 55% of participants reported agreement that the policy of the faculty and the rules and the regulations of the department do not support autonomous teaching and hinder teachers’ freedom to make decisions about instructional methods. One of the teachers told that:

I was teaching Syllabus Design module when students complained because I ask them to search for references in order to read and summarize the thoughts and ideas of the authors (silence). They want me to feed them with knowledge and to summarise the sheet in order to memorise it for the exam. I stopped teaching the module based on the decision of the head of the department (tears). Another teacher taught the module by using teacher-centred approach. (Mohand interview)

The above comment revealed that the Libyan education system enhances teacher-centred approach and the good teacher is the teacher who explains every single word to their students, while students are silent. Repetition and memorization for the exam are also important values in the education system in Libya. It is clear that Mohand followed techniques in order to assist his students to be independent learners; however, students are unfamiliar with student-centred approach. Therefore, they complained. The findings of the current study are consistent with the study of Al-Asmari (2013) who stated that teachers at University in Saudi feel uncomfortable with promoting autonomy because students may perceive their teacher as unqualified for teaching. Furthermore, Alonazi's (2017) study on the roles of teachers in promoting learner autonomy in Saudi secondary schools found that the rules and the regulation of the place is one of the obstacles that English language teachers face in enhancing learner autonomy.

The findings revealed that 85% of respondents considered insufficient resources as problem that has a negative impact on the implementation of learner autonomy. For example, Wael said that:

I used my mobile phone to allow students to watch video because the projector was out of order. I did not have a speaker because it was out of charge. During the listening lecture, I relied on the internet connect; however, there was poor internet signals. (Wael interview)

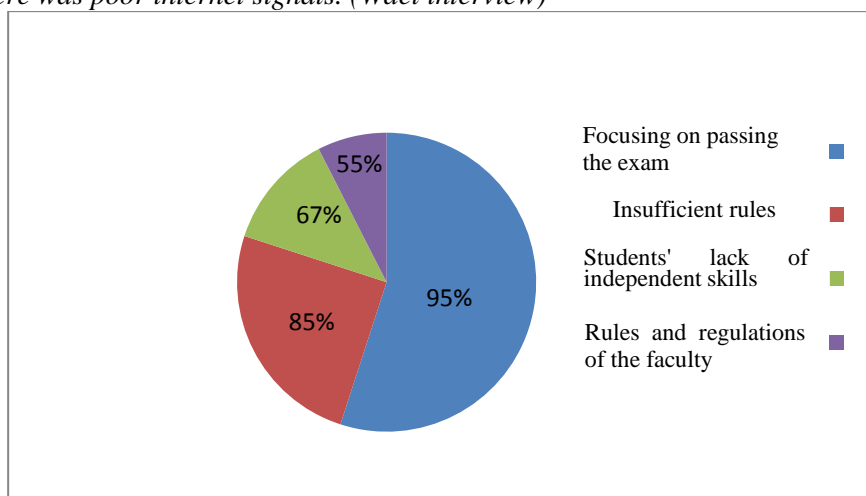


Figure (1): Reasons for Studying English

The findings also revealed that almost all teachers perceived effective teaching involves not only transferring knowledge to students, but also guiding

students on how to learn independently and equipping them with effective learning strategies. The findings are consistent with Almahjoub (2014) who stated that teachers provide guidance, support, and instructions to assist students in their learning journey. This has the potential to help students to understand what needs to be done and how to complete the task effectively to enhance their learning.

5. Conclusion:

Based on the results of this study, almost all Libyan EFL teachers have positive attitudes towards learner autonomy. Thus, they apply different techniques to enhance learner autonomy. For instance, teachers encourage their students to engage in English practices outside classroom and they also promote learning as social participation in which students work in peers and groups inside and outside classroom with the guide of the teacher. In addition, teachers create a comfortable classroom environment and engage students in decision-making process. Although teachers in the current study have positive attitudes toward learner autonomy, they face a number of challenges. They perceive their students focus on passing the exam with high grades and the policy of the faculty and the department that promote teacher-centred approach and rote learning. Moreover, students' lack of independent skills and insufficient resources are also considered as challenges that adversely affect the implementation of learner autonomy. The participants in the study suggest that teachers' regular reflection on their own teaching, reducing the rules and regulations that hinder the application of learner autonomy, and providing teaching aids and technical support can significantly enhance the development of learner autonomy.

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