Learner Autonomy in the Language Classroom:
An Analysis of Libyan University Learners' and Teachers' Perceptions of and Beliefs about Autonomy and How They Might Impact on Learner Behavior

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الملخص:

في ضوء حقيقة أن متعلمي اللغة لديهم معتقدات مختلفة حول تعلم اللغة، تهدف هذه الورقة إلى استكشاف تصورات المعلمين والمتعلمين ومعتقداتهم حول استقلالية المتعلم، كما تلقي الضوء على مدى توافق معتقداتهم مع سلوكهم في الفصل الدراسي، مشيرا إلى بعض نتائج الأبحاث التي توفر فهما لمدى تأثير معتقدات المتعلم على سلوكه، وكيف يمكن لتلك المعتقدات أن تعزز أو تعيق استقلاليته. تم إجراء سلسلة من المناقشات الجماعية المركزة مع عدد من الطلاب والأساتذة تم اختيارهم عشوائيا من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية التربية بجامعة مصراتة، ليبيا. كشفت البيانات أن هناك نوعين من المعتقدات. حيث اعتبر المعلمون ومعظم الطلاب (النوع الأول) أن إستقلالية المتعلم هي مسؤوليته ومشاركته في صنع القرار. وبرروا لعدم إستقلالية المتعلمين في فصولهم الدراسية بوجود العديد من العقبات والإحتياجات للمتعلمين، والتي من الممكن أن تؤثر بوضوح على سلوكهم وممارساتهم الصفية. وأعرب بعض المتعلمين الآخرين (النوع الثاني) عن مواقفهم السلبية تجاه إستقلالية المتعلم وآمنوا بالدور المهيمن للمعلم الذي ينظر إليه على أنه صانع القرارات الوحيد. وأظهر هذا النوع من المتعلمين تأثيرا قويا لمعتقدات المتعلم على سلوكه، حيث يمكن استخلاص هذا بلا شك من استجابات المتعلمين. ووفقا لهذا الإختلاف في المعتقدات، فإنه يكون من واجب المعلمين مراعاة هذا الإختلاف، في المعتقدات، وكذلك بين المتعلمين، وتفسيره في استراتيجيات التدريس. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، ونظرا لأنه من المفترض أن يكون الطلاب في كلية التربية مؤهلين كمدرسين بعد التخرج، فمن الضروري تغيير تلك المعتقدات السلبية حول إستقلالية المتعلم تدريجيا، لأن استراتيجيات التدريس الخاصة بهم في المستقبل ستتأثر بمعتقداتهم، ومن ثم فمن غير المحتمل أن تؤدي إلى بيئة تعلم مستقلة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استقلالية المتعلم، مفاهيم، معتقدات، متعلم، معلم

Abstract:

In view of the fact that language learners hold different beliefs about language learning, this paper aims to explore teachers' and learners' perceptions of and beliefs about learner autonomy. It also sheds light on the extent to which their beliefs are congruent with their behaviour in the classroom, referring to some research findings which provide insight into the impact of learner beliefs on learner behavior, and how they may promote or obstruct learner autonomy. A series of focus group discussions were

conducted with a number of students and teachers, randomly selected from the English Department, College of Education, University of Misrata, Libya. The data revealed that there are two types of beliefs. The teachers and most of the students (first type) perceived autonomy as learner responsibility and engagement in the decision-making process. They justified the absence of autonomy from their classrooms as a consequence of many obstacles and needs of learners, which could clearly affect their behaviour and classroom practices. The other some of learners (second type) expressed their negative attitudes toward autonomy and believed in the dominant role of teacher who is perceived as the only maker of decisions. This type of learner has demonstrated a strong impact of learner beliefs on learner behaviour, as this could be undoubtedly extracted from the learners' responses. According to this variation of beliefs, teachers should take into account the different types of beliefs and learner, and interpret them into teaching strategies. Besides, due to the fact that the students at the Faculty of Education are assumed to be qualified as teachers after graduation, it is essential to gradually change those negative beliefs about autonomy, because their teaching strategies in the future will be influenced by their beliefs and, hence, they are not likely to lead to an autonomous learning environment.

Keywords: autonomy, conceptions, beliefs, learner, teacher

1. Introduction

Learner beliefs have a huge influence on learner behavior and they can lead to or obstruct learner autonomy. "All behaviour is governed by beliefs and experience. It follows that autonomous language learning behaviour may be supported by a particular set of beliefs or behaviours. The beliefs learners hold may either contribute to or impede the development of their potential for autonomy" (Cotterall 1995: 196). A similar view is indicated by White (1999: 443-444) who argues that "expectations, which are developed prior to experience with a particular process, context or role, are also shaped by beliefs. Such expectations may influence how individuals react, respond and experience a new environment".

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Since the nature of the Libyan learning context seems to some extent traditional and dominated by the teacher (see Orafi and Borg, 2009; Ellabiedi, 2011), students are not usually offered the opportunity to share with their opinions or make decisions about language learning. While these studies discussed preparatory and secondary school contexts in Libya, this study has similar characteristics in that some Libyan university students and

teachers seem to hold strong beliefs about traditional learning and teaching, which conflict with the mere principles of learner autonomy. In fact, seeing the teacher as the figure authority in the classroom is more likely to be common among university students, and this does not contribute to leaner autonomy.

1.2 Research Objectives:

Looking at the research problem presented above, a research study was desired to address the range of beliefs students and teachers might hold about autonomy, and to explore the learners' readiness for autonomy. This paper, also, aims to discuss some of the learners' needs that, if met, may promote autonomy, and to highlight some obstacles which may hinder or obstruct any opportunity of its implementation in the classroom.

1.3 Significance of the Study:

The importance of this study can be drawn from what Cotterall (1999: 2) points out, "investigation of the beliefs which inform different behaviours in the language classroom is useful in making teachers aware of different learner types that need to be accommodated".

1.4 Related Studies:

Research showed that learners hold different beliefs about language learning. (Horwitz, 1999; Horwitz, 1987; Wenden, 1986; Benson and Lor, 1999; Cotterall, 1999, Yang, 1999). There is evidence that some learners believe that they are responsible to do most of the work in the classroom, and to brainstorm their own strategies in the learning process if certain needs are met. A series of interviews were conducted by Benson and Lor (1999) with undergraduate students at the University of Hong Kong to evaluate the students' responses about independent learning. The data shows three major headings gathered from the interviews: work, method and motivation. These three broad categories of beliefs can be clearly stated as: "you need to work hard", "you need to have a good method of learning" and "you need to have a source of motivation". Above all, two different beliefs were observed from the interviews. The first extract suggests that the leaner should collect and absorb grammatical concepts, word patterns, and so on, in order to learn. They believed that they should have a good basis of the language before they use it. The second extract conceptualizes language learning as an environment which the learner must be surrounded with in order to learn the language in use. In addition, a study made by Yang (1999) revealed that students held some conflicting beliefs which were reflected in their use of strategies. These findings demonstrate that learners carry variable beliefs

about language learning which definitely affect the strategies they use to learn the language.

2. Review of Related Literature:

2.1 Learner Beliefs: Concepts and Types:

Learner beliefs are what knowledge and background might learners hold about learning or language learning. According to Wenden (1999), this term (learner beliefs) can be used interchangeably with metacognitive knowledge which is described as what learners know about learning. It is acquired from the environment, maybe instinctively by observation or imitation, or intentionally by listening to teachers, parents or classmates and getting instructions and guidance, about how to learn, from them. However; although learner beliefs and metacognitive knowledge have a quite similar meaning, and learner beliefs, at the same time, are considered as features of metacognitive knowledge, they are still distinct in that beliefs are more persistently held by learners while metacognitive knowledge is more changeable over time. What Wenden indicates concerning learner beliefs and metacognitive knowledge clearly demonstrates that both of them can affect the task (the activity) which includes pre-task engagement and discussion in a way that learners can call upon their previous knowledge and beliefs to deal with a particular task and any challenges it might pose and, thus, to decide what approach could be suitable for the task.

Language learners have a variety of beliefs about a range of elements which can affect their behaviour. The classification made by Richards and Lockhart (1996) organizes learner beliefs into eight categories: 1) Beliefs about the nature of English. 2) Beliefs about speakers of English. 3) Beliefs about the four language skills. 4) Beliefs about teaching. 5) Beliefs about language learning. 6) Beliefs about appropriate classroom behaviour. 7) Beliefs about themselves. 8) Beliefs about their goals. For instance, as for beliefs about the nature of English, learners who believe that learning a foreign language is an easy thing might do better than those who regard it as difficult. As for learner beliefs about language learning, for example, it indicates that learners who believe that English is a communicative language will be more interactive and involved in more group work and participation in the classroom. Whereas; those who believe that English is just like any other school subject, will behave according to this belief and, therefore, they are more likely to focus only on what might be included in the exam, and they will behave less actively and autonomously in the classroom.

2.2 Beliefs and Culture:

The culture of learners can also have a huge impact on their beliefs. For example, some students believe in interaction in the classroom and consider it as an effective factor which leads to successful learning, while others from different cultures believe in student silence and teacher talk. Cortazzi and Jin (1996, cited in Cotterall 1999) explain the term "culture of learning" as something which describes how values and beliefs about what comprises good learning affect learners' behaviour in the language classroom, and emphasize the importance of examining the beliefs and expectations which learners and teachers hold. For instance, some teachers may follow a certain strategy in the classroom which might seem unexpected and strange for the learners, consequently, there may be unobserved gaps between teachers and learners or between learners themselves. Wen and Johnson's (1997, cited in Cotterall 1999) share the same view as Cortazzi and Jin in that there is a huge impact of belief variables on strategy variables, supporting the view that learners' previous beliefs and expectations about language learning should be taken into consideration by teachers and materials' writers. Both views show the importance of learners' pre-existing beliefs and how they strongly influence the way how teaching and learning take place.

There were several studies which used the BALLI (Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory) as a research tool to investigate learners' beliefs about language learning. One of those studies, for example, was made by Horwitz (1999) who investigated learners' beliefs about the general difficulty of language learning. There were learners of mixed nationalities; Asian, Turkish and American, and many BALLI items were used. One of those items, for instance, stated that some languages are easier to learn than others. In this study, Asian and Turkish learners of English responded to this item with a percentage ranging from 63% to 72%, whereas, American learners' response to this item ranged in a percentage from 86% to 90%. Asian and Turkish learners were less convinced than American learners about whether some languages are easier to learn than others, nevertheless, they believed more strongly in the role of vocabulary learning as a key to foreign language learning. This clearly shows how learners' beliefs were different as they were influenced by nationalities and culture.

2.3 Learner Autonomy: Characteristics and Responsibilities

One crucial factor which is considered as a characteristic of autonomous learners, and can substantially influence learner behavior in the classroom, is learner confidence. Wang and Palincsar (1986, cited in Cotterall, 1995) point

out that learners might hold, in their beliefs, unreasonable assessment about their abilities in language learning. These beliefs which learners hold could be as a result of previous experiences in language learning or it is just learner intuitions about his\her capability. It is said in the literature that there is a strong association between academic success and learner confidence. This confidence reflects a belief in learner ability to influence the product of learning. Learner awareness of previous experiences can promote or impede confidence depending on learner recognition of the language learning process, which teachers need to reflect on by investigating their learners' beliefs (Cotterall, 1995). These findings are reliable due to the fact that learners perform better and tend to behave more autonomously in the classroom when they are self-confident. This can be proved by Wenden (1991) when she claimed that learners cannot be autonomous in their learning unless they feel confidence in their ability to learn successfully.

The role of the teacher as a facilitator and a counselor is quite important in fostering learner autonomy. The teacher needs to engage the learners in the decision-making process in order to foster more autonomous learning strategies which might change any erroneous beliefs they might hold about language learning. As Tudor (1993, cited in Cotterall 1995) suggests, teachers should prepare their learners to be more autonomous in the classroom by increasing their learners' self-awareness as language learners and their awareness of learning goals and of language itself. As a facilitator, the teacher may possibly find strategies which may help learners express their needs. In addition, Wenden (1986) assumes that we need to discover what students believe or know about their learning, and, therefore, to provide activities by which students could examine these beliefs. We, as language teachers, also need to know what possible impact these beliefs might have on learning in order to realize what characterizes successful language learning. Furthermore; as Richards and Lockhart (1996) emphasize, teachers should explain the hypothesis behind their classroom practices to their learners in order to match these practices to the students' expectations, otherwise, there will be misunderstanding and mistrust between teachers and their learners.

In fact, it is argued that autonomous language learning can assist learners change their erroneous beliefs about language learning. Classroom teachers need to help their learners make decisions about what learning strategies and techniques they find helpful and need to follow, and give them the agency to decide what type of activities they feel confident with and would like to do.

As Littlewood (1996) indicates, the main concept of autonomy is the capability and eagerness of learners to make choices independently. What learners believe and think about language learning needs to be accommodated by the teacher in order to be aware of what learning strategies should be followed in the classroom. The teacher should also know how to change their learner beliefs, when necessary, so that learners can cope with those strategies. This could be supported by what Horwitz (1987) points out that students use less effective learning strategies when they have erroneous beliefs and, consequently, the teacher should change these beliefs, by discussing them with students, into more valuable ones. What Horwitz suggests is quite significant for the reason that even though some learners hold some strange beliefs about language learning, they are more likely to be open to change these beliefs if they feel their role is effective in the learning process, than if they are forced to encounter new learning strategies imposed by their teacher.

3. Research Methodology:
3.1 Research Approach:

The overall approach is qualitative. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the study was to look in depth at the beliefs and perceptions of a small number of university teachers and learners in Libya. Interviewing the teachers and learners about their perceptions and beliefs about autonomy was considered to be an appropriate way of understanding their classroom behaviour. As Dornyei (2007) points out, qualitative research takes place in a natural setting and describes social phenomena in which the individuals' opinions, experiences and feelings are highlighted, and where the goal of the research is to explore the views of the participants in the situation being studied.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis:

Data was collected through focus group discussions. A focus group is similar to a less structured interview. It has a good feature of collecting data from many participants at once. In a focus group, the researcher can guide, monitor and record the discussion which is organized on a particular research topic. A focus group discussion can provide the researcher with a rich understanding of participants' beliefs and experiences (Gill et al, 2008).

The researcher led all the discussions and prepared the questions; which were based on the main objectives of the study, and derived from the information

presented in the literature review. The questions were semi-structured where the participants could respond to some follow up questions raised from the original questions. Since the questions were open-ended, probing for further clarification was used by the moderator of the discussions. As McMillan and Schumacher (2006) identify, probing is a skill that enables the interviewer to ensure complete and accurate responses. As the use of open-ended questions required probing, it also necessitated the use of audio-recording. This, also, could be emphasized by McMillan and Schumacher who argue that the information collected by a tape recorder is more complete and objective. Thus, all the sessions were audio-taped (with the permission of the participants), then transcribed verbatim. The same questions were used with the three groups of students to ensure internal reliability and to identify any similarities or differences in their views. The teachers, of course, were asked a bit different questions which might be raised from the students' sessions. The narrative data from all the sessions were analyzed using qualitative methods.

3.3 Context and Participants:

There were three groups of fourteen students in total; studying English language at the College of Education, University of Misrata, Libya. Besides, there was one group of teachers consisting of two teachers (three teachers were invited to the discussion, but one teacher was absent). The students are all females since they are the majority of the students at this college, and all of them are Libyan. The two teachers are Libyan females, as well. Although the data sample is small, it could be argued that the students and teachers, who participated in this study, can be considered a fairly typical sample of the wider group from which they are drawn. A more detailed description of the participating teachers is presented below:

Name	Gender	Qualification	Teaching Experience
Z	Female	MA	13 years (9 Y. in schools/ 4 Y. at University)
A	Female	MA	13 years (11 Y. in schools/ 2 Y. at University)

3.4 Research Procedure:

Three classes from which the students were randomly selected (as volunteers) were visited, and the research plan was discussed with them, then later, with

the teachers. The participants, after that, were given consent forms to sign their agreement to participate in the study. The students' group discussions were held first. Then, a follow-up focus group discussion with the teachers was conducted later; to allow them discuss some ideas and themes emerged from the students' discussions. Each group discussion lasted for about an hour.

3.5 Research Question:

In addition to the reviewed literature presented previously (secondary data), primary data was also collected through the focus group discussions in order to help answer the following research question:

To what extent are practices and behavior of the teachers and learners congruent with their understandings and beliefs?

4. Results:

This section presents an analysis of the findings of the four group discussions. Themes emerged from the transcripts to reveal the students' and teachers' perceptions and beliefs about learner autonomy, indicating the actual practices and behaviour in their classrooms.

4.1 Perceptions and Beliefs about Autonomy:

Most of the students and teachers who participated in my study perceived autonomy as a fundamental element in language learning.

> One student (Lubna) said, *"We should be responsible for our learning so that we become more enthusiastic, and individuality and creativity are much enhanced due to autonomous learning"*

> One teacher (Asma) said, *"I believe in giving the students the opportunity to work themselves, and my role is only as a guide"*

Although these students showed good attitudes toward autonomy, the term "autonomy" or "independent learning" did not seem well understood by some other students.

> For example, Ibtisam said, *"an example of autonomy is when the teacher gives me a lesson and I prepare it at home"*

There is also an exception student who is holding different beliefs about autonomy. She believes that it is the teachers' job to do all the work in the classroom.

> Fatima said, *"I like the teacher who does everything"*

In relation to the process of decision-making; which is a basic principal of autonomy, traditional beliefs could be derived from the discussions;

> One student (Warda) said, *"Decision-making is the teacher's job"*

4.2 Needs for the Implementation of Autonomy:

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The students highlighted some crucial factors needed for the implementation of autonomy. Some of these factors; proved with some extracts from the responses, are presented below:

4.2.1 Encouragement:
one important factor that was repeatedly mentioned by the students, and which was perceived as vital for the implementation of autonomy, is the teacher's encouragement. Below are some extracts from the discussions:

> *"I'd like to say to my teacher: encourage us" (Hawa), "I need encouragement from the teacher" (Safa), "ask me and push me" (Ibtisam)*

4.2.2 Assistance:
another fundamental element that would help students be autonomous is the teacher's assistance.

> *"The teacher should help us be critical thinkers and autonomous learners" (Khadija)*

Another student, when she was asked whether she is ready to change her beliefs about language learning if she discovered that she is holding erroneous beliefs, she said,

> *"I accept to change my mistaken beliefs if I get some help from the teacher" (Aisha)*

4.2.3 Attention:
the students also showed their need to be paid more attention from the teacher.

> *"we need attention from the teacher" (Hawa), "I want to say to the teacher: pay attention to me" (Ibtisam), "I want to be given more attention and opportunity to talk more. I want the teacher to listen to me" (Wafa)*

4.2.4 Practice/work:
a great students' desire to do some work themselves could be drawn from the discussions. They showed their eagerness to be responsible for their own practice.

> *"I want to say to my teacher: put us in the situation" (Afia), "we need to do a lot of presentations – it makes us feel more independent" (Safa and Fatima), "we want to do research in groups – the teacher's role is only as a mentor- just gives us a topic and asks us to search about it" (Zainab), "we need to do group discussions and presentations" (Wesal and Wafa), "we feel a passive role" (Ibtisam)*

4.2.5 Understanding hypotheses behind practices: the students addressed the need to understand the intentions behind the work they are doing. They stated that understanding the objectives of each class and the objectives of the whole course of a subject is very essential. Below are some extracts from the students' responses:

Hanadi said, "Not in every class I know about the class objectives – when I miss the objectives I feel lost and I gain nothing"
"I need to know what the benefit of what I'm studying is" (Safa)
"Knowing what we are doing is important" (Aisha)

4.2.6 Feedback: the students emphasized the need of feedback for any independent work they do themselves in order to know whether their work meets the class/course objectives. Some extracts are presented below:

Hanadi: "my teacher: give us feedback about our presentations"
Warda: "we need feedback – we need formative assessment of our work"

4.2.7 Sharing in making decisions: the students showed a great resentment of the ignorance of their role in the decision making process. For example,

Iman said, "I want to make my own decisions, I want the teachers to listen to me"
Lubna stated that, "we should be involved in the decision-making process. Our opinions about class activities, for example, should be taken into the teachers' account"

4.3 Constraints Obstructing the Implementation of Autonomy

Besides to the list of needs expressed by the students, and which they considered crucial for the implementation of autonomy, some obstacles emerged from the discussions seeming to obstruct learner autonomy. The students drew attention to the following barriers:

4.3.1 Teacher dominance and lack of encouragement: some students described the teacher as the dominant in the class. They argued that they do not have the opportunity to work independently, or even have a chance to express their needs.

Wesal: "the teacher is the dominant"
Warda said, "I like to be independent, but some teachers do not encourage me to do any work myself, that's why I sometimes feel I resign myself to attending the class"

4.3.2 Teachers' misconception of autonomy: another type of teacher, who is assumed to advocate autonomous learning, did not demonstrate the real understanding of "Autonomy". Some teachers seemed to understand autonomy as the student's responsibility for doing all the work, and the teacher's role is only observing the student's work, and not doing any other work. As one student identified,

> *"Teachers should prepare the lesson and explain it to us – the teachers here ask us all the time to give presentations and presentations…" (Aisha)*
>
> *"As some students complained, teachers are not doing anything in the class; we do all the work, preparation, presentations, conversations, etc". (Reported by Zainab - a teacher)*

4.3.3 Traditional teaching strategies: it could be elicited from the students' responses; which indicated the lack of teachers' encouragement, feedback, attention, etc, that the teaching methods and techniques followed by the teachers are, to some extent, traditional.

> *"I want to say to my teacher: please, make language learning a natural process" (Warda)*

4.3.4 Beliefs and culture: the teachers, here, indicated some constraints that could impede the process of autonomy, and which they related to students' beliefs and culture.

> *Zainab (a teacher) stated that, "some students, for example, refuse talking about some social topics such as wedding", Asma (a teacher): indicated that, "students' shyness is a real problem".* A very crucial point is also highlighted by Asma (a teacher) that, *"a common belief among our students is that the teachers should do most of the work, but we should change this type of belief in future"*

4.3.5 The rapid introduction of autonomy: most of the students experienced traditional teaching strategies in their secondary schools; where the concept of autonomy is not often recognized. After they came to college, they encountered very different approaches and styles of learning and teaching.

> *As Zainab (a teacher) said, "the teacher should gradually introduce the concept of autonomy first in order to ease the process of autonomous learning, and they should explain the hypotheses behind it"*
>
> *"We were receiving information at the secondary school; I was shocked when I first came here" (Lubna)*

5. Discussion and Implications:

This qualitative study aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of learners and teachers' perceptions of and beliefs about autonomy, and also to highlight the impact of these beliefs on learners' and teachers' behavior in the classroom, in order to answer the research question. It also sheds light on some of the constraints obstructing the implementation of autonomy. The findings show that the learners and teachers defined learner autonomy as taking responsibilities and sharing in making decisions. However, there were some students who did not demonstrate correct understanding of autonomy. Besides, some students showed negative beliefs about autonomy, and they believed in the individuality of the teacher in the decision-making process. Research found that students hold different beliefs about language learning. Some students believe that learning a language is a collection of things (grammatical concepts, word patterns, etc.), whereas others regard learning a language as an environment which the learner needs to respond to (Benson and Lor, 1999).

The second set of results indicates the chances of the implementation of autonomy. The data clarified some obstacles and needs for the implementation of autonomy; such as encouragement, attention to students, assistance, understanding the hypotheses behind the teacher's practices, feedback, etc. The students stated that for the implementation of autonomy to be real, the teacher should be aware of their needs which, if not paid attention to, can work as real obstacles which may obstruct or hinder the implementation of autonomy. As discussed by some students in the focus group discussions, some teachers ask them to do lots of presentations and research with a very little assistance, or even guidance, and without feedback most of the times. In fact, students' negative beliefs about autonomy might be much more enhanced due to the teachers' ignorance of their needs. Consequently, teachers should take into account their learners' beliefs and needs before they transfer responsibility to them. This can be emphasized by what Wenden (1987) identifies, teachers should discover their students' beliefs and translate them into teaching strategies so that learners can approach second language learning more successfully and autonomously.

Moreover; Learner expectations of teacher authority can obstruct responsibility transfer from teachers to learners (Cotterall, 1995). These expectations seemed to be common beliefs among our students; and this was clearly stated by one of the teachers, that the students believe in the teacher's responsibility for doing most of the work. Lots of students, of whom the

participants in this study were drawn, were not used to be independent when they were at their secondary schools, the thing which put great responsibilities on them when they came to college and experienced a different and more independent role of learner. This rapid transition from the passive and dependent role of learner into a more independent and autonomous one can present an obstacle which may lead to the obstruction of autonomy. It could be elicited from the discussions that, although most of the participants in the study showed positive beliefs about autonomous learning, the actual implementation of autonomy does not seemingly exist in their classrooms. The findings emphasized the need for a gradual, smooth introduction and transition of autonomy, taking into account the students' pre-existing beliefs, experiences, and expectations.

On the contrary, there are teachers who are not advocates to autonomy. It could be noticed from the findings that some teachers still follow traditional teaching approaches and techniques where the class seems to be under their absolute control. This behavior could have been derived from old beliefs held by the teachers. As Richards and Lockhart (1996: 30) point out, "all teachers were once students, and their beliefs about teaching are often a reflection of how they themselves were taught". Accordingly, students cannot be autonomous if their teachers are not proponents of autonomy, and thus, a change in the learners' beliefs is not likely to be existent unless there is a change in the beliefs of the teachers.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined the college learners' and teachers' perceptions of and beliefs about leaner autonomy in the Libyan setting. The findings demonstrate that the learners carry various beliefs about language learning which definitely affect their behavior and the strategies they use to learn the language. It was found that the teachers and most of the students; who participated in this study, perceived learning as the responsibility of the learner and the opportunity to share in making decisions. Nevertheless; some students identified learning as receiving information from the teacher; who was seen as the responsible individual for doing all the work in the class. It could be drawn from the findings that, although the conception of autonomy was positively perceived by a wide range of participants, its implementation has not seemed to be widely demonstrated in the classroom. This might be due to different reasons. One possibility is the negative beliefs some learners hold about language learning; such as their expectation of the dominant role of teacher who is perceived as the figure authority in the class. Another

prospect is the needs and obstacles, raised from the discussions, which could stand as real barriers against the achievement of autonomy. Therefore; this paper suggests that teachers should pay more attention to those needs and obstacles, and make a gradual transfer of autonomy; otherwise, learners may reject it as it seems to be a considerable responsibility for them, which they are not used to afford.

In the final analysis, as Wright (1987, cited in Cotterall, 1995) points out, role is a complex factor. Besides, as McDonough (2007) argues, teacher role is essential and difficult. It aims at providing supportive and challenging learning environment. Thus, teacher's and learner's understanding of role is fundamental, and the confusion in understanding their expected roles may not lead to autonomy. It could be illustrated that the learning process needs a facilitator teacher who fosters autonomy in the classroom and, at the same time, an active learner who seeks knowledge and works hard in order to make sense of that autonomy.

7. Recommendations for Further Studies:

A further study could be conducted on a longer term to see to what extent learner beliefs can be changed and autonomy can be promoted; following the recommended techniques and strategies which might help foster autonomy. Observing an autonomous classroom and recognizing possible changes in learners' and teachers' beliefs and behavior, over a longer period of time, is a matter of value.

Another study could be purely examining teachers' beliefs about autonomy and their behaviour in the classroom, recommending some useful tips and ideas on how teachers can change their erroneous beliefs which may affect their behaviour and hinder the process of learner autonomy.

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