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Saudi Elementary EFL Teachers' Beliefs about Young Language Learner Autonomy: Possibilities, Challenges, and Practices

CI 598

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Abstract

This descriptive survey study aimed to explore elementary EFL teachers' beliefs about the language learner autonomy concept, the extent of its applicability for young learners, its constraints within the local educational context, and teachers' current promoting practices of young learner autonomy in their classrooms. The study utilized a 68-item Likert-scale structured questionnaire developed and administered to male and female EFL teachers at elementary public schools in Saudi Arabia, Dammam. Quantitative data were collected from 85 teachers and analyzed through simple descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that the teachers showed fair awareness of the effectiveness of language learner autonomy and reasonable knowledge about its promoting principles concerning language learning. However, they tend to understand learner autonomy primarily in terms of using learning resources independently. On the other hand, they showed less trust in their young learners' ability to be engaged in autonomous learning practices. Using language learning strategies, problem-solving skills, and self-learning reflection were fundamental practices in autonomous learning. However, teachers in this study relatively underestimated their young learners' abilities in these areas, yet they highly appreciated young learners' ability to work collaboratively. Teachers believe that the local institutional constraints are hindering their autonomy-promoting roles to a great degree. The lack of learning resources and big classes with mixed-level learners were perceived as the most hindering factors. The study indicated teachers' current autonomy-promoting practices. The teachers mainly support the psychological and social dimensions of autonomy, while the technical and political dimensions are less supported. However, observation and a larger sample are needed to support these results. The study provided future pedagogical implementations and suggestions for further studies.

Keywords: Autonomy, language learner autonomy, teachers' beliefs, young learners, Saudi elementary education

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the past few decades, the interest in language learner autonomy has grown since it was introduced in relation to the foreign language learning field by Henri Holec (1981) as "the ability to take charge of one's learning" (p.3). Within the academic field, language teachers play a crucial role in promoting learner autonomy as one of their responsibilities (Dam, 2003). However, according to Little (1995), "It is unreasonable to expect teachers to foster the growth of autonomy in their learners if they do not know what it is to be an autonomous learner" (p.175). Benson & Voller (2014) noticed that although there has been a growing interest in learner autonomy and its importance in language learning, it is still associated with uncertainty about its concept and practices due to its variety of definitions. The different degrees of autonomy, which result in different natures of learners' and teachers' roles, are some of the justifications for the different versions of learner autonomy (Nunan, 1997). Therefore, the concept is often associated with several misconceptions among teachers and learners, which form the underlying reasons for their resistance to embracing its practices. In addition, some obstacles inhibit the practical implementation of learner autonomy in EFL classrooms, such as the cultural resistance to the new educational roles of teachers and learners (Tapinta, 2016; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018), the doubts about its feasibility in some EFL educational contexts (Butler, 2015; Doğan & Mirici, 2017; Haji-Othman & Wood, 2016; Lengkanawati, 2017), and its interrelationship with other factors such as learners' motivation, proficiency, and age (Rañosa-Madrunio, Tarrayo, Tupas, & Valdez, 2016).

These doubts and concerns are more concerning young language learners' autonomy, although young children's autonomy is clearly perceived in their early life as they show willingness and tend to negotiate about their desires (Salmon, 1998). However, young learner autonomy is perceived from different perspectives within educational contexts. According to Komorowska (2004), it could be more challenging to introduce full autonomy to young learners. On the other hand, Pinter (2006) emphasized that it is essential to introduce learner autonomy as early as possible as an initial step to prepare learners to change their attitudes towards their roles and to take charge of their learning. Little, Dam, and Legenhausen (2017) indicated that autonomy is perceived in learners of all ages. It is a pre-existing attribute in children, and the teacher's role is to direct this capacity towards language learning.

Locally, learner autonomy has started to receive attention in Saudi Arabia as life-long learning has been acknowledged as an educational goal of Vision 2030 (Vision 2030, 2019). Some initiatives attempt to realize it in secondary schools or at the tertiary level. However, the association between language learner autonomy and children has not been established yet. In the Saudi-related literature, a few studies have been conducted regarding teachers' and learners' beliefs and practices regarding promoting learner autonomy in EFL classrooms at university and secondary school levels. However, young learner autonomy has not received significant study in the Saudi EFL context. Therefore, this paper explores EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding young language learners' autonomy at elementary public schools in Saudi Arabia's Dammam. It tackles their beliefs about its concept, applicability, challenges, and practices.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Every year, thousands of Saudi students struggle with their studies in universities where English is used as a medium of instruction (Alshumaimeri, 2010; Alshumaimeri, 2019; Wedell & Alshumaimeri, 2014). This led the Ministry of Education to introduce preparatory year programs as a prerequisite for specialization at universities. Students are taught basic language skills during the preceding year according to their levels. At this level, the necessity of leading independent learning is growing. However, recent studies revealed that teachers of these programs perceive their learners as non-autonomous, dependent, and demotivated (Al Haysony, 2016; Alrabai, 2017a; Asiri & Shukri, 2018; S. Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017) despite the teachers' attempts to enroll them in active roles in their learning. Therefore, studies recommended introducing autonomy at an early age in school. According to Tamer (2013), teacher-controlled classrooms since early childhood have serious adverse effects on learners' ability to be critical thinkers and autonomous learners in the future. So, a change in roles needs to start earlier, and teachers have a big part to play in getting students ready for it.

Furthermore, the low levels of language proficiency perceived in Saudi university students are referred to many reasons, among which are the settings of EFL teaching at public schools; for example, the large classes with mixed-level learners, the limited time assigned for EFL classes, accompanied by a heavily loaded curriculum (Alrabai, 2016), and the absence of teacher assistants in public-school classrooms. These settings burden EFL teachers with

improving their students' language levels and maintaining their effort outside the class. In teaching children, classroom management while teaching is an additional concern (Hechst, 2017). According to studies, promoting autonomy at school benefits dealing with such educationally constraining settings (Amritavalli, 2011; Fonseka, 2003; Kuchah & Smith, 2011; Sarwar, 2001; Smith, 2003). Also, the growth of knowledge, the need to prepare students for the workplace, and the fact that technology can help develop learner autonomy make it impossible to ignore the need to make learners independent.

Since teachers' practices are influenced to a great extent by their beliefs and attitudes (Almarza, 1996; Borg, 2015), this study aims at investigating elementary EFL teachers' beliefs about young language learner autonomy, their expectations about their young learners' language autonomy potential, the extent to which obstacles hinder their autonomy-promoting roles, and their current promoting practices of learner autonomy in the classroom. Accordingly, remedial pedagogical implications will be suggested.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine elementary EFL teachers' beliefs about the concept of language learner autonomy, the extent of its applicability for young learners at elementary public schools, and the challenges teachers might face in promoting young learner autonomy in the local educational context and the extent to which they hinder teachers' promoting roles. It also aims at identifying teachers' current autonomy-promoting practices in classrooms.

1.3 Research Questions

The central research questions that this study aims to answer are:

1. What do elementary EFL teachers know about language learner autonomy?

2. How much, in the opinion of elementary EFL teachers, does learner autonomy apply to young people in public elementary schools?

3. What challenges might elementary EFL teachers face in helping their young learners become more autonomous within the local context? To what extent might they hinder teachers' autonomy-promoting roles?

4. What practices do elementary EFL teachers currently offer to develop their young learners' autonomy?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study makes an unprecedented contribution to the literature on young learner autonomy in the Saudi context. Most previous studies that explored EFL teachers' beliefs and practices of learner autonomy in the Saudi context were conducted at university and secondary school levels, while barely enough has been written about learner autonomy at an early age. Therefore, this study aims to address the gap and explore the area of young learner autonomy through investigating elementary EFL teachers' beliefs about its concept, applicability for young learners, challenges, and current practices. To this, the study created a complicated and localized tool that other researchers interested in the field can improve and use.

The study has several pedagogical contributions to the field. It provides educational stakeholders with an insight that helps form plans to promote young language learners' autonomy or change attitudes towards it. Previous studies in the Saudi context showed a low level of autonomy among Saudi language learners and called for introducing it early. Considering teachers' beliefs, this study can contribute to realizing language learner autonomy as a stated goal in Saudi elementary education. At the level of beliefs, this study will serve as a guide for the designers of teacher professional development programs to address the misconceptions in teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy, raise their awareness of its importance, and widen the expectations of their young learners' potential. At the level of practice, this study gives an initial indicator of teachers' classroom performance in developing learner autonomy. It can give an insight into the strategies of young learner autonomy that teachers should be equipped with and alternatives needed to deal with challenges while promoting learner autonomy. The study will help school administrators find and fix problems that teachers say get in the way of young learners becoming independent. This will be done by helping schools get more resources and materials and improve how the curriculum is taught.

Furthermore, curriculum developers can be informed about the permissible extent to which young learner autonomy should be introduced in current curriculums based on teachers' beliefs. This extent can be gradually increased until reaching a satisfying level of autonomy.

Lastly, this study looks at the autonomy of young learners in Saudi Arabia, and it may contribute to the Saudi 2030 vision for education to realize lifelong learning as an essential skill for the 21st century.

1.5 Limitations of the study

The study has several limitations:

1. The study population is limited to male and female EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia, Dammam City, during the academic year 1440/2019.

2. The young learners in this study are meant to be the students of elementary public schools in fourth grade, fifth grade, and sixth grade. They are usually at the ages of nine, eleven, and twelve, respectively. Children younger than nine do not receive English education in Saudi public schools, while children older than twelve develop advanced cognitive, social, and psychological skills that are not the subjects of this research.

3. Young learner autonomy in this study is within the frame of Saudi formal education, specifically at elementary public schools. Private schools aren't included because they teach English in different ways, which makes the study population less similar.

4. The study's main aim is to investigate teachers' expectations of the applicability of learner autonomy for their young learners and the obstacles they might face, regardless of their actual practices, since it is an initial attempt to understand the situation. However, this study's fourth question indicates teachers' autonomy-promoting practices that need to be verified using qualitative data collection methods.

The rest of the study is organized as follows: The next chapter presents the background of the topic and earlier related studies in EFL and Saudi contexts. The methodology of the study is demonstrated in chapter 3. The findings are presented in chapter 4. The results and conclusions are discussed in detail in chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Theoretical background and Review of the Literature

This section is divided into two parts. The first part will present theoretical background on the concept of young learner autonomy, teachers' roles in promoting it within the classroom context, and its applicability for young learners from theoretical and practical views. The second part aims to review studies conducted to examine teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia and EFL educational contexts similar to the Saudi EFL settings. This part ends with a brief idea about teachers' obstacles while implementing learner autonomy.

2.1 Theoretical Background

2.1.1 Different Definitions, Different Degrees:

A great deal has been written about learner autonomy in foreign language learning, and various attempts have been made to define it. The term was first introduced to the foreign language learning field by Holec (1981) as' the ability to take charge of one's learning' (p.3). Focusing on meta-cognitive skills, David Little (1991) defines autonomy as "a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (p.4). In (2009), he developed a model of autonomy based on three aspects: involvement, reflection, and authentic use of language. A comprehensive definition of language learner autonomy was made by Benson and Voller (2014), who put it into five categories. They indicated that learner autonomy might refer to the settings where learners study entirely on their own; the skills used in self-directed learning; the innate ability reshaped by formal education; the practice of learners' responsibility for their learning; or the situations in which learners decide on the direction of their learning.

Benson and Voller included most learner autonomy perspectives reported in the related literature in their definition. Some definitions concern learners' independence, ranging from the extreme detachment from teacher and classroom (Dickinson, 1987) to controlled learning within the classroom context (Phil Benson, 2008). Other definitions focus on the learner's responsibility for learning (Holec, 1981). This suggests that a learner should make decisions about all of his learning aspects, starting from the objectives, contents, methods, techniques, and evaluation. Others define learner autonomy in cognitive processes such as decision-making and independent thinking (D Little, 1991). This variety in learner autonomy definitions is due to the dynamic nature of the term that keeps changing according to the context and the required

degree of autonomy (Agustina & Fajar, 2018). Nunan (1997) says that learner autonomy is a matter of degree and that "autonomy is not an absolute concept" (p. 193).

Accordingly, different versions of foreign language pedagogies have been introduced to develop learner autonomy. They vary according to the degree and the educational context in which learner autonomy is presented. Littlewood (1999) distinguished two types of autonomy: *proactive* autonomy, in which learners set their learning objectives, and *reactive* autonomy, in which learners set their resources autonomously to fulfill a prescribed goal by the teacher or the curriculum. The former type is usually associated with western students, while the latter is usually discussed in an Asian context (Littlewood, 2002). Kuchah and Smith (2011) differentiated between developing autonomy as an explicit goal of teaching, called "pedagogy for autonomy," and a "pedagogy of autonomy," in which the teacher utilizes learners' pre-existing autonomy for learning (p.131).

Benson (2008) identified two approaches to developing learner autonomy: process-oriented and product-oriented. The process-oriented approach gives learners freedom of choice to practice their autonomy during the learning process, while the product-oriented approach provides learners with activities that produce autonomous learners. Freedom of choice, in this case, is not necessary. According to the learners' level of autonomy, weak and robust pedagogy for developing learner autonomy are two distinctions made by Smith (2003). The weak version is used when learners don't have autonomy and is meant to help them develop autonomy. The strong version is used when learners already have autonomy and is meant to give them a chance to practice their autonomy.

2.1.2 Components:

Benson (1997) mentioned three concept dimensions to identify language learner autonomy components. They are the psychological, technical, and political dimensions. Oxford (2003) added a fourth dimension, a sociocultural dimension. The technical dimension aims at equipping learners with skills and strategies that enable them to learn independently. The psychological dimension is about learners' emotional and cognitive ability to learn. The political dimension is concerned with enabling learners to control their learning by making free choices regarding the content and process. The sociocultural dimension emphasizes the social interaction and negotiation between learners and their environment. For each dimension, you

need to think about four themes: the context; the role of the learner; the motivation to learn; and the learning strategies.

In an attempt to define young autonomous learners, a recent study by Suphandee, Sripai, Woonprasert, Ardwichai, & Suphandee (2018) aimed to identify the indicators of young language learner autonomy in Thai students in sixth grade at primary school. Seven humanities experts assessed the indicators and social science experts, discussed them with 11 expert language teachers, and confirmed them by surveying and interviewing 600 students. There were 13 indicators classified into four components. The first indicator is about knowing how to study, including learning, identifying strengths and weaknesses, using learning resources, and having the skills to research. The second indicator is having problem-solving skills, including the four language skills, making decisions, and gathering information strategies. The third indicator consists of self-efficacy, confidence, positive learner self-image, and identity. The fourth sign is a love of learning, which includes knowing how important it is to learn, having fun and being excited about learning, and valuing the love of learning.

This paper adopts the definition of language learner autonomy proposed by Nga (2014). She defined it as a "learner's willingness and ability to take responsibility to plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate his/her learning in tasks that are constructed in negotiation with and support from the teacher" (p.1). This definition includes three main principles of autonomous learning, as defined by Little (2009): freedom of choice; reflection; and negotiation. It includes the contributions of two responsible partners: learners and their responsibility for their learning; working with teachers; and helping learners develop autonomy in their learning. The following section defines teachers' roles in promoting young language learners' autonomy.

2.1.3 Teachers' Role in Promoting Learner Autonomy:

Promoting autonomous learning in the classroom does not diminish teachers' roles but makes them more sophisticated. A teacher in an autonomous classroom acts as a facilitator, counselor, resource person, and manager (Camilleri, 1997b; Voller, 1997). A facilitator enables learners to plan their learning independently by helping them to set their goals based on their needs, decide on materials, and reflect on their performance. A counselor creates a safe environment by helping learners identify their strengths and weaknesses and dealing with obstacles and problems they face. A source person raises learners' awareness of other available resources in the language. He can be a source of materials and activities. He can be a language

source for students who need extensive support (Voller, 1997). A manager plans long-term and short-term learning, individual and cooperative activities, and applies suitable assessment methods (Camilleri, 1997b). In learner autonomy literature, there is a distinction between teachers' autonomy-supportive and autonomy-suppressive behaviors. Examples of teachers' autonomy-supportive behaviors are providing learners with opportunities to make decisions, stimulating self-initiation, decreasing teachers' control, and helping learners to express their feelings and opinions (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987). Eleven teachers' autonomy-suppressive behaviors were identified by Reeve and Jang (2006). They are about the increasing amount of teachers' talk, control, and providing feedback that inhibits learners' intrinsic motivation. This paper adopted Wawrzyniak-Śliwska's (2017) six principles of the teacher's role in promoting young language learners' autonomy. They include making a safe environment, helping students set goals based on their needs, giving students choices, teaching cognitive and linguistic strategies, getting students to work together and negotiate, and getting students to think about themselves.

2.1.4 Creating a safe learning environment

Confidence, motivation, self-esteem, and positive attitudes towards oneself and language learning are essential indicators of an autonomous learner. According to Pinter (2006), they are the foundation for all children's learning. The younger learners are, the more critical they become. They are a result of teachers' creating a safe learning environment. It can be created by teaching young learners some affective strategies and raising their awareness of language learning principles. Affective strategies create positive attitudes towards learning and identify how learners' feelings and emotional states affect their learning. They can be realized by providing plenty of praise and positive feedback on children's achievements and overlooking what they cannot do; encouraging them to take risks while learning; encouraging them to express their opinions and feelings about the English lesson and their progress; listening to them; and respecting their feelings. Raising children's awareness of the language learning process protects them from frustration and helps them cope with obstacles and maintain self-motivation. This can be realized by understanding the time, patience, and training needed for the learning process and by dealing with mistakes. This principle is important in teacher-centered learning environments because it helps students feel safe about taking on new roles and responsibilities (Ikonen & Ikonen, 2013).

2.1.5 Setting objectives

Identifying learners' needs, strengths, weaknesses, and interests is the basis of setting autonomous learning goals. It can be realized by negotiating with students about the processes that underlie learning, such as problem identification, so that learners become aware of their own needs and can set their own goals (Ikonen & Ikonen, 2013; Usuki, 2007). Learners who set their goals are more willing to take charge of their learning and to reflect on their performance to assure the achievement of those goals.

2.1.6 Offering choices

The different perspectives on learner autonomy emphasize providing learners with freedom of choice as a fundamental principle in promoting autonomy. Autonomous learners are encouraged to make decisions regarding their learning objectives, content, activities, teaching methods, learning strategies, teaching aids, and evaluation techniques. The vitality of these decisions ranges from choosing what to do first to participating in designing the course (Ikonen & Ikonen, 2013; Nga, 2014; Usuki, 2007). Providing a child with freedom of choice increases his/her involvement and motivation to learn. However, choices made by children need to be related to their learning process. Superficial choices, such as choosing a favorite colored pencil, do not contribute to building autonomy. An important consideration that should be taken into account is that a child whose foreign language is primary should be based on his age and cognitive abilities rather than on his little proficiency (Wawrzyniak-Śliwska, 2017).

2.1.7 Teaching cognitive strategies and language strategies

Teachers can help children learn the language by teaching them cognitive strategies. These strategies are concerned with enhancing young language learners' ability to deal with linguistic information effectively, such as organizing and categorizing information; memorizing words or rhymes; rehearsing; using different visual and other meaningful clues; predicting; and using deduction while listening or reading a story (Pinter, 2006). Furthermore, while learning a language and engaging in interactive activities, children can learn cognitive and linguistic strategies unconsciously (Karmiloff-Smith, 1983; Kirsch, 2012).

2.1.8 Collaborative group work and communication

Theoretically, collaborative group work is considered one of the autonomous language learning principles for young learners for two reasons. First, it is supported by Vygotsky's

(1986) social development theory. It suggests that learning occurs during interaction with more experienced peers, such as parents, teachers, or peers. Bruner (1985) has developed the concept of scaffolding, which implies helping a child to learn through facilitating problems he or she faces (Cameron, 2001). The second reason for adopting collaborative group work in the EFL classroom is that using English is simultaneously the means and the objective of communication. According to Pinter (2006), to realize collaborative work effectively, teachers should teach young learners some supportive social strategies such as listening to each other, taking turns in games, being tolerant and understanding differences, controlling shyness and fear of speaking, and participating in setting up class rules for acceptable manners. Teachers should be sensitive to individuals and friendship groups (Hartup, 1992). Practically, Wawrzyniak-Śliwska (2017), in his project of implementing young language learner autonomy principles in Poland, has experimented with involving children in designing group projects and posters. Children could write stories, letters, picture descriptions, and play scripts in English. They rehearsed mini-dialogues and plays and participated in many team games and competitions. These activities were in group and pair work. However, making children use English all the time was the most challenging part of collaborative work, as children felt secure using their native language and wanted their teachers to do so. In teacher-learner interaction, constant use of English with children was vital. When children could not understand, body language, facial expressions, pictures, and gestures were used as alternatives. Also, asking peers for interpretation was another option. While in learner-learner interaction, children were allowed to use their native language while planning in group work. Caretaker talk, in which a teacher uses half English and half of the native language, helps students feel secure. The first language was only used in emergency cases. The scaffolding of teachers reduced the first language use by the end of the course. Children became eager to use English, and they began reminding their peers to use it.

2.1.9 Involving students in self-reflection

Reflection is essential to promoting autonomy. After setting goals and working to achieve them, young learners need to look back at their learning process by answering questions about what they know, what they have learned, how they learned it, why, and what they can do to progress, hoping to use the new knowledge in the future. Self-assessment tests, reflective inquiries, logbooks, and portfolios manifest metacognitive strategies (Dam & Legenhausenb, 2011). That allows students to think about their learning process. Reflection

should be done in the target language (Betakova, 2000). According to Wawrzyniak-Śliwska (2017), this part is not easy to apply to children because of their low level of English and because they are unwilling to look back at their learning. However, he found that children are interested in answering random questions about their learning while learning rather than reflecting after they learn. He came to the conclusion that young learners can reflect on what they have learned if it is done in a way that is appropriate for their age and when children need to reflect on new situations.

2.1.10 The Applicability of Young Language Learner Autonomy

Children's ability to be autonomous learners has been questioned among educators. However, autonomy has been perceived as one of the innate characteristics that a child is born with. According to Little (2012), autonomy can be felt in children's tendency to request, protest, and negotiate adults' commands. Erikson (2000) and Allport (1969) confirmed that the first signs of autonomy appear when children start to explore their surroundings at the age of two. From the age of 6 to the age of 12, a child develops the coping abilities of rational thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving (Engler, 1985). Suppressing this early tendency to be autonomous conflicts with the child's natural development and results in low self-esteem, reducing the opportunity to develop autonomy at an older age (Brzezińska, 2000).

Furthermore, the principles of young learner autonomy correspond with child learning and development theories. According to Piaget (1970), children learn from active interaction with their surroundings while exploring them. Similarly, autonomous learners tend to find their own ways of active learning. In addition, Vygotsky (1986) observed that a child's knowledge and cognitive ability to solve problems are boosted through verbal communication with adults who work with children. Relatedly, Bruner (1985) focused on the importance of scaffolding, in which an adult helps children to learn the language. This helps with the social part of learner autonomy and highlights the teacher's role in helping kids learn on their own.

However, in the schooling context, educators have few controversial doubts about the extent of children's ability to take responsibility for their learning. Kamorowska (2004) pointed out that it is impossible to introduce full autonomy for young learners as they need the teacher's close observation; however, limited and controlled autonomy can be applied. Similarly, Stępniewska-Dworzak (2004) confirmed the need for the teacher's direct support while children learn since they cannot work independently. As with adults, teaching young learners

to be autonomous might not have obvious advantages. Firstly, children are in the process of developing various skills at once. They are still developing their first language systems besides cognitive, social, and emotional ones (Keskil & Cephe, 2001). Therefore, the lack of maturation in these aspects makes young learners slower compared to adolescents who develop cognitive and linguistic strategies that enable them to remember vocabulary and form correct grammatical structures (Aitchison, 2003; Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978). Furthermore, children do not have a clear purpose for learning a language, unlike adults who look forward to a job and passing an exam through language learning (Clark, 1990). Also, young learners don't have well-developed reading and writing skills that would help them learn a language (Cameron, 2001).

On the other hand, proponents of young learner autonomy believe that children need to be introduced to the concept in their early schooling (Pinter, 2006). David Little indicated that autonomy is a common feature among learners regardless of age (Little, Ridley, & Ushioda, 2002). Furthermore, he thinks that promoting learner autonomy in adults can be used with young learners because these techniques are similar to how a child develops through "problem-solving in a context of social interaction" (Little, 1991, p. 46). Others confirmed that it is difficult to foster learner autonomy at an advanced age when learning attitudes and habits have already been formed (Cichoń, 2002; Habrat, 2008). "It is difficult to change the processes and to think of stereotypes in people whose personalities have already been formed" (Biedroń, 2004, p. 86). Little (1991) said that students in high school can be resistant to learning on their own and would rather learn from their teachers.

Moreover, Betakova (2000) gave a theoretical justification for the need to adopt learner autonomy principles with young learners. She insisted that young learners should not be taught rules explicitly in their first language as they do not well absorb abstract ideas. Instead, they should be immersed in interactive communication in the foreign language through cooperative work to utilize their ability for language acquisition (as opposed to language learning in adults) and to maximize their exposure to the target language inputs (see Krashen, 1985).

In an attempt to prove that learner autonomy can be associated with young learners in Poland, although it is not officially implemented in primary schools, Wawrzyniak-liwska (2017) has made an attempt to prove that He concluded that it is possible to implement learner autonomy principles with children as long as they align with the children's cognitive and psychological characteristics. In the real world, a few classroom-based studies that were done

with relatively young learners have shown that even young learners can learn a language on their own.

In Denmark, Dam and Gabrielsen (1988) conducted a longitudinal study that lasted for six years starting in 1980 to examine the extent to which young learners of age eleven could make decisions regarding their learning of English as a foreign language. They found that young learners can be involved in planning, organizing, managing, and evaluating their learning regardless of their linguistic abilities. Students were able to select suitable content and the process of their learning. Over the six years, the young learners maintained an interest in taking responsibility for their learning. Using a collaborative process contributed to their communicative competence development. Dam and Gabrielsen were surprised to find that the problems teachers told them about had less to do with learner resistance and more to do with teachers not doing their jobs right.

Learning from Dam and Gabrielsen's experience, Hanne Thomsen (2000) started applying learner autonomy principles in teaching the German language to Danish students aged 13 and up, who were dependent and passive about their learning. Later, she taught English to younger Danish learners at age 12 who had learned English for only two years (Thomsen & Gabrielsen, 1991). She gained success in both experiences. The results showed that students could select materials and activities and negotiate with their peers about their choices. Later on, Thomsen (2000) narrated her comprehensive experience teaching relatively young learners, aged 10 to 17, in mixed-ability classrooms. In her paper, "Learners' favored activities in the autonomous classroom," she elaborated on her general approach and the activities she used. She applied the learner autonomy principles we discussed earlier, including setting goals based on needs and interests, making choices of activities and materials, cooperative work, and reflecting on learning using logbooks and posters. She tackled the problem of mixed-ability students by using various activities, encouraging learners' initiatives, and focusing on learners as individuals rather than as a whole class.

However, Chambers and Sugden (1994) doubted the possibility of generalizing these positive results of the Danish projects to other contexts. They attributed the success of the Danish project on young language learner autonomy to five significant factors. It is helpful to examine them closely for this study. First, foreign language teaching and learning has a high status in Denmark compared to other countries such as England. In addition, the Danish language, English, is the language of commerce, the media, and education in Denmark. It is

taught for over a compulsory 600 hours to all students from ages 11 to 16. A second foreign language, mainly German or French, is an entrance requirement for the academic branch from age 16 to 19. Secondly, students are familiar with the cooperative learning approach as Danish education has clearly stated involving learners in decision-making as one of its principles in all school subjects since 1976. Third, the less centralized education system in Denmark increases the potential for learner autonomy. The syllabus is content-free, and examinations are prepared, marked, and modified by schools. Let students select the topics they would present for an exam. Fourth, teachers receive at least 100 hours a year of professional development training, which is crucial in promoting autonomy practices in their teaching. Finally, the early compulsory introduction of English at all Danish schools since 1960 has contributed to increasing English competence among Danish people and increasing its use in daily life. It is easy for students to bring English materials to the class as they are available in their surroundings.

Similarly, another justification that limited the success of young language learners' autonomy in the Danish context and similar European countries was made by Fenner and Newby (2006). They attributed this success to the nature of the national curricula at primary school levels in these countries. They are framework curricula where the syllabus content is not explicitly prescribed. That allows learners to practice using the foreign language in contexts of their own choice. However, this is not the case with upper levels, in which choosing a higher authority determines the content, the school, the teacher, and mainly the textbook writers. This is confirmed by Thomsen (2000) herself, who notes that although the national curriculum provides a specific framework, "what, why, and how are still genuine open questions that can be discussed and decided upon in cooperation" (p.94).

A moderated view of the effectiveness of introducing young learner autonomy principles was reported by Dunne (2013), who observed the development of learner autonomy in the sixth grade of 20 female children in terms of planning, reflecting on learning, and involvement in group work, besides the accompanying challenges of these processes. She found that children needed considerable help setting their objectives and making decisions, yet they planned better when they were involved in collaborative work. She indicated that due to the short time of her 12-week experimental action research, the young learners made little progress in planning and reflecting on their learning; however, their awareness of these principles has been established. She concluded that developing young learners' autonomy is a long-term process that includes many challenges for teachers and learners (Hattie, 2009).

Recognizing the long-term nature of promoting autonomy, Habrat (2008) indicated that it is essential to introduce learner autonomy as early as possible as an initial step to prepare learners to change their attitudes towards their active roles and to take charge of their learning. Learners' awareness of the learning process and content is the first level of Nunan's (1997) model of autonomous learner actions. His model has five levels: "awareness, involvement, intervention, creation, and transcendence" (p. 195). The beginning level is being aware of the goals, content, and strategies, while the ending level includes transferring what is learned in the classroom to the real world and becoming a researcher and a teacher of knowledge. He stated that "fully autonomous learners are a rarity" (p. 201). Accommodating conditions of young learners' autonomy in other countries should not give us excuses to abandon trying to learn from their experiences. There is successful experience of implementing learner autonomy even under challenging circumstances, as shown in the following part.

2.1.11 Obstacles

The problems associated with promoting learner autonomy and related to children's age and ability have been discussed above. However, external factors hinder teachers' roles in promoting their young learners' autonomy in the classroom. These factors can be related to the learners, teachers, and educational system. Low levels of learners' proficiency, motivation, and willingness to take charge of their learning are often considered by teachers as a hindrance to their promoting role of learner autonomy. Institutional factors such as lack of resources and restricted curriculum content and its delivery circumstances are considered obstacles by many teachers. However, some European educators have proved that fostering learner autonomy can be adjusted to suit all learning settings as it does not have a specific form. Others presented utilizing learner autonomy, implanted in learners, as a rescuing solution in difficult educational circumstances (Phil Benson, 2018; Fonseka, 2003; Kuchah & Smith, 2011; Sarwar, 2001; Smith, Kuchah, & Lamb, 2017).

In Cameron, Africa, remarkable findings of a practical study narrated by Kuchah and Smith (2011) show that implementing language learner autonomy practices is possible even in challenging circumstances. In the context of crowded classes of more than 200 students, low language proficiency, a local curriculum based on textbooks and an examination-centered assessment system, and the absence of technology, textbooks, materials, and even desks in classrooms, Kuchah (2011) innovated some practices to rescue his teaching mission, without previous knowledge of learner autonomy principles. He focused on four core practices that

helped him endure such difficult circumstances. First, he got to know the students' needs, interests, and talents to build a rapport with them. Second, he negotiated with students to decide the goals and how to achieve them. Third, he allowed students to provide learning resources of their own. Fourth, he built up good credit with school administrators and teachers, which facilitated changing school and curriculum restrictions. Compared with "autonomous classroom" features developed by Dam (1994, 2008), Kuchah's practices were aligned with learner autonomy theoretical principles. This shows that language learner autonomy is not only possible under challenging circumstances, but it is the solution to overcome these obstacles.

According to Pinter (2006), young learner autonomy can be developed within the day-to-day practices of any language classroom without changing the curriculum, though it can be a part of the curriculum. Developing learners' cognitive autonomy (Klus-Stańska, 2009, as cited in Wawrzyniak-Śliwska, 2017) or independent thinking (Little, 2003) is another coping strategy to develop autonomy within a restricted curriculum. It enables learners to investigate, discover, reflect, and think creatively and independently (Okoń, 1997). "These students think about what they are learning and don't just accept what the teacher or coursebook says. They try to find solutions on their own and learn how to deal with problems on their own."(Wawrzyniak-Śliwska, 2017).

According to Wawrzyniak-Śliwska (2017), one of the main obstacles to implementing language autonomy principles with young learners in Poland is the teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the teacher and learner roles and the lack of knowledge about learner autonomy principles, benefits, and barriers, besides teachers' doubts about the utility of using the target language with children in the class. Teachers' misconceptions about autonomous learning can result in their resistance to implementing it. For example, Trebbi (2008) indicated that teachers' misunderstanding of "pedagogical freedom" leads them to think of supportive autonomy guidelines as constraints. He came to the conclusion that "teachers' internal constraints, such as their attitudes and beliefs, are more of a barrier to innovation than external constraints" (42).

2.1.12 Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions

Investigating teachers' beliefs has received increasing attention in EFL teaching literature. Teachers' beliefs are conscious and subconscious conceptualizations and views about teaching and learning (S. Borg, 2001; Haney, Czerniak, & Lumpe, 1996; Khader, 2012). They

include teachers' beliefs about themselves, their learners, and the curriculum (Calderhead, 1996). Teachers form their beliefs based on their previous learning experiences, teaching, personalities, and the school of education (Kindsvatter, 1988). These beliefs represent the basis of teachers' behavior, decisions, and performance in the classroom (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). They act as a filter through which teachers receive new information (Nespor, 1987), and their influence on teachers' classroom practice is more profound than that of teacher education (Crawley & Salyer, 1995; Kagan, 1992; Richardson, 1996).

According to Wawrzyniak-Śliwska (2017), teachers' beliefs about the definition of young learner autonomy affect their classroom practices and the extent to which they desire to engage their students in active learning. If a teacher defines young learners' autonomy merely in terms of self-reliance in simple class routines, such as packing their bags or writing neatly, this will be the only area in which children can practice autonomy in the classroom. If a teacher thinks that young learners cannot make suitable choices for their learning, he or she will not involve them in planning or creating lesson activities, materials, or assessment tools. In contrast, if a teacher sees that children are cognitively mature enough to take responsibility for their learning, he or she will involve them in planning, making-decisions, and creating materials for their learning.

Similarly, teachers' performance in class is affected by their beliefs about the extent to which external circumstances can be hindering. Teachers who think these obstacles can entirely or partly hinder their roles in promoting their students' language autonomy will perform differently than those who think these obstacles are the proper situations to foster autonomy and that it is the only solution to tackle them (Kuchah & Smith, 2011; Smith et al., 2017). However, teachers' positive beliefs do not always match what teachers do in the classroom. Misconceptions in their beliefs have inevitable hindering effects on their performance (Dobson & Dobson, 1983; Pearson, 1985; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1986).

2.1.13 Studies on EFL Teachers' Perspectives towards Learner Autonomy in an EFL Context

Reviewing studies on teachers' beliefs about language learner autonomy in the EFL context is helpful. These studies are significant in that they share similar features with the current study. They share similar research tools, data analysis, and constrained educational circumstances in which they were conducted, similar to the current study. Camilleri (1997b)

coordinated a project conducted by seven researchers, including him, in six European countries to investigate teachers' beliefs about the extent to which learners should be involved in making decisions regarding 13 aspects of autonomous learning activities, including the goals, content, materials, tasks, evaluation, and classroom management. The researchers used a unified form of a detailed questionnaire to collect quantitative and qualitative data from elementary and secondary school teachers. The overall results of the studies showed that teachers tend to support involving learners in autonomous classroom practices partly. This relative reluctance to support learner autonomy was mainly justified by restrictions in the educational contexts in these countries. However, it shows teachers' openness to change and development as they did not show strong resistance to learner autonomy. Camilleri (2007) did a similar study and found that the teachers were much more optimistic about the students' choice of materials, setting of goals, and self-evaluation.

Adopting this questionnaire in the Turkish educational context, Balçıkanlı (2010) found that 112 student teachers were positive towards learners' involvement in autonomous learning activities, particularly in methodology, selecting materials and activities, and classroom management. However, they were conservative towards involving their future students in making decisions about the time and place of the course and the textbooks. It is important to note that these teachers have not experienced teaching, and their positive responses might be in light of their language learning experience.

Another study in the Turkish context using the same instrument was conducted by Sofracı (2016). He has investigated 68 EFL teachers' beliefs about the extent to which Turkish university learners should be involved in autonomous practices. The results of the study revealed that the majority of the teachers were supportive of learner autonomy. However, there were some items found to be more supported compared to others, namely, involving learners in the decision of time, place, and pace of the lesson; record keeping; course objectives; course content; selecting course materials; interaction pattern; classroom management; and homework tasks.

The difference between the results of these studies can be justified by the age of the students and the difference between school and university educational contexts in terms of teachers' autonomy and restrictions on curriculum delivery. Considering the age factor, the educational context is distinctive in learner autonomy. There is a lack of studies on teachers' beliefs about young learners' autonomy. However, by looking at Saudi teachers' beliefs about

adult learner autonomy, we can better understand the circumstances, its realization, and local constraints.

2.1.14 Studies on EFL Teachers' Perspectives towards Learner Autonomy in Saudi Arabia

Language learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia is a relatively new research area that started receiving researchers' interest at the end of the last decade. Most of these studies showed teachers' awareness of learner autonomy; however, the obstacles that hinder its practical implementation in classrooms are apparent. Therefore, few studies investigated Saudi EFL teachers' perspectives and practices on learner autonomy. The following is a comprehensive review of the related studies.

Almutairi (2007) has suggested that one of the important reasons behind the absence of promoting learner autonomy in Saudi EFL teaching was the lack of practicing teacher autonomy by teachers. The priority that is given to conformity and adherence to external authority affects students who act according to their teachers' instructions with little autonomy, more reliance on teachers and with the absence of decisions regarding their learning. For conformity, teachers are required to deliver curriculum lessons that are externally pre-prepared in most aspects, starting from their objectives, implementation procedures, activities, the time allotted, and the assessment criteria.

Conducting a survey, Al Asmari (2013) explored the beliefs, practices, and prospects of learner autonomy for 60 EFL teachers working in the English Language Centre at Taif University in Saudi Arabia. He found that teachers noticed a low degree of their students' autonomous performance in the classroom. Although these teachers realized the importance of the learner-centered approach and involving students in making decisions regarding their learning, they believed there was a need for learner and teacher training to improve learners' autonomy.

However, the extent to which learner autonomy is achieved in the classroom can be beyond teachers' beliefs and practices. Learners' desire and ability to respond to these practices interfere and play an important role. These were the findings of Al Haysony's (2016) study, which examined the perceptions and practices of 77 EFL teachers at Al Jouf University in Saudi Arabia. Teachers were interested in promoting their students' autonomy by offering them

chances to develop autonomy inside and outside the classroom. However, students showed reluctance and a lack of motivation to take these chances.

Alrabai (2017a) studied the Saudi EFL teachers' perspectives on learner autonomy and interviewed 136 English teachers at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia. He used a survey and an interview to find that teachers were aware of their responsibility for promoting their students' autonomy. The teachers admitted their students' dependent and passive roles in learning. However, they identified some autonomy-hindering factors related to the learners, teachers, and the institution.

In like manner, Borg & Alshumaimeri (2017) obtained similar results in their study to explore teachers' beliefs, practices, and constraints concerning learner autonomy by using a questionnaire held by 359 teachers in an English orientation program at one of the Saudi universities. Findings showed that although teachers set learning autonomy as an objective of their teaching and could describe their attempt to achieve it, they showed a relative dissatisfaction towards the possibility of enhancing learner autonomy for external reasons such as the curriculum, culture, lack of motivation and low English proficiency. Most of these teachers were non-Arab.

Alonazi (2017) got similar results in conducting a study on 60 Saudi EFL secondary school teachers using a questionnaire. Teachers stimulate learner autonomy in their classrooms using a variety of strategies. But they saw problems and obstacles, like students who didn't know how to learn on their own, schools with strict rules, and teachers who didn't know how to help students learn on their own.

Replicated findings were revealed by Asiri & Shukri (2018), who investigated the beliefs of 50 female teachers at King Abdul-Aziz University using a closed and open questionnaire. The findings show that teachers are aware of learner autonomy and its principles, but they admit their need for training. They similarly identified restrictions they face while fostering it caused by learners' low level, teachers, institutions, and time.

Studies on teachers' beliefs about their students' language autonomy correspond with studies on the actual students' readiness and levels of learner autonomy. Using a questionnaire held by 121 students in their prior year at a Saudi university, Tamer (2013) found that the students showed an adequate level of motivation and confidence in their abilities; however,

they presented resistance to holding responsibilities for their learning and to being involved in autonomous activities.

Alrabai found similar results. In 2017, he conducted a series of three studies to explore the area of learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia, regarding students' levels, readiness, and teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy. The subjects of the studies were 319–630 students in different levels of public education aged from 15–25 and 136 English teachers at King Khalid University. In the three studies, his primary data collection instrument was a survey, along with an interview or an achievement test. His findings showed that the learners were not autonomous and consequently low language achievers (Alrabai, 2017b). He also found that although learners' perceptions showed a moderate motivation and ability to learn autonomously, their sense of responsibility, independence, and involvement in autonomous activities was low (Alrabai, 2017c). The results of these studies backed up the results of the third study, which showed that teachers thought their students were dependent and played a passive role (Alrabai, 2017a).

Alzubi, Singh, and Pandian (2017) aimed to measure learner autonomy among 208 male students of the Preparatory Year at Najran University. Using a closed-statement questionnaire, the results showed low language learner autonomy among students. Although they showed medium levels in information literacy, metacognition, and self-reliance, their sense of confidence and learning control was low.

The above studies showed that teachers were aware of their role in promoting language learner autonomy, though some admitted their need for training. They also confirmed implementing autonomy-fostering practices in their teaching. But they all agreed that students didn't learn on their own and didn't respond to these practices because they relied on teachers to learn.

Some studies recommended introducing learner autonomy at an earlier age as a solution. Tamer (2013) attributed the dependency of Saudi learners to the traditional teacher-student relationship, which brings up students who are used to following rather than leading. This "starts early in elementary school and continues through secondary school and high school... When these students come into universities, they mostly bear the characteristics of dependent learners" (p. 12).

However, young learner autonomy has not yet been explored in Saudi Arabia. Published studies explored learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia in terms of EFL teachers' beliefs and practices, and students' levels were conducted at the university level, and only one was conducted at the secondary school level. The results of these studies can't be used to say how independent young learners are in Saudi Arabia as a whole because young learners and adults learn and teach languages differently.

So, the goal of this study is to fill in the gap and learn more about young learners' independence by looking at the thoughts, actions, and hopes of EFL teachers at Saudi primary schools in Dammam.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This part presents the methodology of this study, including the research design, the population and sample, the instrument used to collect the data, and the means used to analyze the data of the research, which aims to answer the following questions:

1. What do elementary EFL teachers know about language learner autonomy?
2. To what extent, according to elementary EFL teachers' views, is learner autonomy applicable for young learners at elementary public schools?
3. What challenges do elementary EFL teachers might face in helping their young learners become more autonomous within the local context? To what extent they might hinder teachers' autonomy promoting roles?
4. What are the practices that elementary EFL teachers currently offer to develop their young learners' autonomy?

3.1 Research Design

In this study, a quantitative research method with a descriptive survey design was applied to present a better understanding of elementary EFL teachers' beliefs about young learner autonomy, its extent of applicability, practices, and challenges in Saudi public schools, Dammam. This research design helps to identify the characteristics of the participants and phenomena (Sekaran, 2002). According to Borg and Gal (1979), descriptive survey research is widely used to explore educational questions about "what is", and they are often used to collect data about "the percentage of respondents who hold or do not hold a certain opinion" (p.282).

3.2 Instrumentation

The study utilized a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire which was designed for the purpose of the study and administered to the study population including all female and male EFL teachers at elementary public schools in Dammam city, KSA. Although there are many established questionnaires used in studies concerned with teachers' beliefs about language learner autonomy (Asiri & Shukri, 2018; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017; Nguyen, 2014; Szocs, 2017), they were all designed to suit the context of adult learner autonomy. Therefore, this questionnaire is built based on several studies on young learner autonomy in the EFL context. Furthermore, its items were localized to suit the circumstances of teaching English in Saudi Arabia to reach a reasonable degree of accuracy.

The questionnaire includes 40 main items (68 sub-items) distributed in four sections. The first and second sections of the questionnaire were compiled from questionnaires developed by Borg & Al Busaidi (2012), and Camilleri (1997b), respectively. They were slightly modified to suit the age of young learners and the local context. The third and fourth sections are constructed by the researcher based on the literature review on young learner autonomy, basically the practical study of Kuchah & Smith (2011) in applying language autonomy in difficult circumstances, and the empirical study narrated by Wawrzyniak-Śliwska (2017) in Teaching Young Learners Project that was implemented at Gdańsk University Teacher Training College, in Poland.

The first section consists of 13 items that explore teachers' understanding of language learner autonomy concept, its principles, its importance in language learning, and the teacher's role in promoting it. Participants are required to express the degree of their agreement to the statements on the five-point Likert scale: (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Unsure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Disagree). The Second section includes 10 main items under each there are 2 to 4 sub-items. It investigates teachers' beliefs about the applicability of young learner autonomy with their students. It requires participants to identify the extent of applicability of 10 young learner autonomy practices in the classroom. They include involving students to decide on appropriate learning objectives, content, materials, learning and teaching methods, activities, settings of the activities, classroom management, reflecting on learning, and expressing self and fears confidently. Participants should choose the extent on the five-point Likert scale: (1 = Not at all, 2 = Little, 3 = Partly, 4 = Much, 5 = Very much). The third section contains 7 main items including 2 to 3 sub-items. It examines teachers' beliefs about the constraints that might hinder their roles in promoting their students' learner autonomy in the current educational context. They are factors related to the teacher, learners, classroom settings, curriculum, support, EFL settings, and classroom management. Teachers are required to identify the extent of hindrance by these factors on the five-point Likert scale ranging from not at all to very much. The fourth section consists of 10 items about teachers' beliefs about their promoting practices of young learner autonomy in the classroom. Teachers are required to rate the frequency of implementing the given practices on the five-point Likert scale: (1 = Not at all, 2 = Little, 3 = Partly, 4 = Much, 5 = Very much). These practices include providing students with a safe environment, learning strategies, and chances for taking decisions, setting goals, cooperative working, and learning reflection. A version of the questionnaire is presented in Appendix A.

3.3 Piloting, Validity and Reliability Testing

The questionnaire went through drafting and piloting procedures to ensure its validity and reliability. The first detailed draft was of 75 main (99 sub-items) items. It was reviewed by the supervisor who is an expert in the field to assess its validity, the affiliation of the questionnaire to its dimensions, its clarity, and suitability to the research objectives. Necessary modifications were made after reducing the number of items to be 40 main items (68 sub-items). An online version of the questionnaire was created using Google Forms for easier access to participants. The questionnaire was piloted to ensure reliability in 3 different stages. Following the think-aloud protocol (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2011), the questionnaire was first discussed with 3 colleagues in TESOL program of the Curriculum and Instruction department, at King Saud University and who have experienced teaching young learners. They recommended reducing the length of the questionnaire and simplifying specialized terms as teachers do not have time to fill in a questionnaire that takes more than 20 minutes. Therefore, another version with fewer items and simplifying terms was made and piloted on Telegram group discussion of Smart Class Curriculum. It includes 3295 male and female English teachers at elementary public schools around the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, the number of responses was not sufficient. Therefore, a final attempt was made to make the questionnaire accessible to teachers by making an Arabic-translated version to avoid misunderstanding and to reduce the amount of time required to fill in the questionnaire. The final pilot sample consisted of 27 English elementary teachers at public schools in Riyadh. The questionnaire reliability was determined by measuring Cronbach's alpha value ($\alpha = 0.942$). It shows high reliability as Alpha coefficients of 0.70 or higher are believed to be acceptable (DeVillis, 1991).

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	27	100.0
	Excluded[a]	0	.0
	Total	27	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.946	68

3.4 The Context, Population, and the Main Sample

The target population of the study consists of (59) female and (58) male English language teachers at all elementary public schools in the city of Dammam, Saudi Arabia, during the academic year 2018-2019. The taught students are in fourth grade, fifth grade, and sixth grade. In public schools, English is first introduced in fourth grade. For all elementary grades, two English classes are taught per week. Each class lasts for 45 minutes (Alshumaimeri, 2019). Textbooks and syllabuses are written and prescribed centrally by the Ministry of Education. The current textbook prescribed for the English subject is Smart Class. Four units are to be covered from the textbook during the semester. Students from all grades take two written tests in addition to continuous assessment throughout the semester. Student number ranges from 35 to 39 students in a class. According to the English language supervisors in Dammam, most of the schools lack equipped language laboratories, libraries, and language resource room. Some teachers themselves bring their materials and their computer devices to cover up the shortage of resources.

The study sample consists of 52 female and 33 male English language teachers at elementary public schools in Dammam, KSA. They were selected through the convenience sampling as the target population is finite and homogeneous. They form 72.6% of the population. 61% of the participants are female teachers, while 39% are male teachers. The low percentage of male participants compared to females is referred to the researcher's limited access to male schools due to the separation between male and female schools. More details about the sample will be discussed in the result section (chapter 4).

3.5 Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed through direct contact with the teachers or through contacting the male and female supervisors in the education offices in the east and west of Dammam, who conveyed an online version of the questionnaire to their teachers through social network apps. The online version was used for its advantages in terms of facilitating access to male teachers and saving time. Responses were growing gradually by resending the questionnaire from time to time. The final number of respondents was 52 female teachers and 33 male teachers.

3.6 Data Analysis

The survey quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS statistical analysis software (Version 22) to produce descriptive statistics including frequencies, means, standard deviations and percentages to identify the degree of participants" agreement on the statements of the questionnaire. They will be illustrated when the results are presented.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Demographic Data

Table 1 shows the demographic information of the study participants and includes their gender, academic qualification, experience teaching young learners, and the level of their current students. The questionnaire was available for all (117) EFL teachers at Dammam elementary public schools (59 female and 58 male teachers). The total number of responses received was 85 (52 female and 33 male teachers), constituting 72.6% of the population.

Variable	Answer	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	33	38.80%
	Female	52	61.20%
	Total	85	100%
Higher Qualification	Bachelor's	82	96.50%
	Master's	1	1.20%
	Doctorate	0	0.00%
	Others	2	2.40%
Teaching Experience years of young learners	0-4	14	16.50%
	5-9	34	40%
	10-14	14	16.50%
	15-19	20	23.50%
	20+	3	3.50%
Level of taught students	Fourth grade	28	32.90%
	Fifth grade	12	14.10%
	Sixth grade	45	52.90%

Table 1. Demographic data of the study sample (N=85)

The highest percentage of the total sample was presented by female teachers (61.2%), while male teachers represented only 38.8% of the sample due to the easy access to female teachers who are segregated from male teachers. Most teachers (96.5%) hold a bachelor's degree qualification, a common requirement for teaching EFL at local schools. Most teachers are well experienced in teaching young learners, as (40%) of them have five to nine years of teaching experience, followed by teachers with 15 to 19 years of experience (23.5%). About half of the participants (52.9%) currently teach sixth-grade students, while the rest of the samples teach fifth and fourth-grade students..

4.2 Teachers' Knowledge about Learner Autonomy

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the sample responses in Section 1 of the questionnaire. This section consists of 13 items that address the first research question: 'what

is elementary EFL teachers' knowledge of language learner autonomy?' The items are ranked according to the mean scores of the participants' responses.

#	The item	Disagree %	Disagree %	Unsure %	Agree %	Agree %	Mean	SD	Ranking	General Attitude
4	Using learning resources (library, internet) develops L.A.	0.0	1.2	3.5	45.9	49.4	**4.44**	**0.63**	1	Strongly agree
11	Developing L.A. at early age facilitates future language learning.	0.0	5.9	9.4	36.5	48.2	**4.27**	**0.86**	2	Strongly agree
1	L.A. allows language learners to learn more effectively.	2.4	2.4	9.4	50.6	35.3	**4.14**	**0.86**	3	Agree
5	Learners' confidence enhances L.A.	0.0	8.2	14.1	35.3	42.4	**4.12**	**0.94**	4	Agree
2	The importance of teachers' role in supporting L.A.	0.0	4.7	9.4	56.5	29.4	**4.11**	**0.76**	5	Agree
7	Setting learning goals by students enhances L.A.	0.0	3.5	18.8	47.1	30.6	**4.05**	**0.80**	6	Agree
9	Learning strategies are a crucial feature of developing L.A.	0.0	3.5	15.3	55.3	25.9	**4.04**	**0.75**	7	Agree
8	Choosing activities by students enhances L.A.	0.0	1.2	22.4	57.6	18.8	**3.94**	**0.68**	8	Agree
12	It is easier to promote L.A. in children than in adults.	0.0	16.5	12.9	40.0	30.6	**3.85**	**1.04**	9	Agree
6	Co-operative group work supports L.A.	4.7	7.1	14.1	48.2	25.9	**3.84**	**1.04**	10	Agree
10	Evaluating learning by students enhances L.A.	0.0	4.7	21.2	62.4	11.8	**3.81**	**0.70**	11	Agree
3	Learning to work alone is central to developing L.A.	1.2	8.2	20.0	52.9	17.6	**3.78**	**0.88**	12	Agree
13	L.A. can be applied within the current educational system.	10.6	17.6	30.6	30.6	10.6	**3.13**	**1.15**	13	Neutral
	The overall mean and St. Deviation						**3.96**	**0.38**		Agree

Table 2. Teachers' knowledge of language learner autonomy

A collective analysis of the teachers' responses shows that the percentage of agreement on all items is high as it ranges from 95,3% to 70,6%, except for item 13. Teachers' agreement on item 13: "Learner autonomy can be applied within the current educational system," was only 41.1%. 30% of teachers were unsure about the statement, while 28.2% disagreed with it. This item received the highest percentage of disagreement in section 1. In addition, it can be seen from the descriptive data in Table 2 that item 4 has the highest mean of all (M = 4.44). This suggests that most EFL teachers strongly agree that using learning resources is the most effective practice for promoting learner autonomy in language learning. This is followed by items 11, 1, 5, 2, and 7.

Overall, the total calculated mean of all responses in the first section (M = 3.961, SD = 0.38) shows that the majority of the EFL teachers are optimistic about the importance of learner autonomy in language learning, and there is a proper shared knowledge among them about the principles of promoting learner autonomy and the significance of their roles in fostering it. However, they were neutral about the suitability of the current educational system for developing autonomy in learners (M = 3.13, SD = 1.15).

4.3 Teachers' Beliefs about the Applicability of Young Language Learner Autonomy

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the sample responses in the second section of the questionnaire. It addresses the second research question: 'To what extent, according to the teachers' views, is learner autonomy applicable for young learners at elementary public schools?' There are ten categories; each category mainly has 2 to 3 items. The items are ranked according to the mean score based on the participants' responses. The mean of each category was calculated and ranked accordingly.

Young learners can decide properly on:	#	Questionnaire Items	Not at All	Little	Partly	Much	Very Much	Item Mean	SD	Ranking	Category Mean	Ranking
			%	%	%	%	%					
1. Objectives	1	Long-term	14.1	22.4	50.6	9.4	3.5	**2.66**	**0.96**	20	2.80	7
	2	Short-term	12.9	24.7	37.6	20.0	4.7	**2.79**	**1.06**	17		
	3	Personal objectives	11.8	15.3	44.7	21.2	7.1	**2.96**	**1.06**	8		
2. Course content	4	Topics	20.0	34.1	31.8	12.9	1.2	**2.41**	**0.99**	27	2.64	8
	5	activities	11.8	27.1	29.4	24.7	7.1	**2.88**	**1.13**	12		
3. Materials	6	Texts	14.1	34.1	24.7	25.9	1.2	**2.66**	**1.05**	22	2.87	4
	7	Audiovisual aids	11.8	25.9	30.6	25.9	5.9	**2.88**	**1.11**	11		
	8	Realia	10.6	21.2	28.2	29.4	10.6	**3.08**	**1.17**	3		
4. Co-operative learning methods	9	Peer teaching	5.9	20.0	27.1	37.6	9.4	**3.25**	**1.07**	1	3.20	1
	10	Group discussion	8.2	23.5	21.2	38.8	8.2	**3.15**	**1.13**	2		
5. Activities	11	Classroom activities	7.1	25.9	32.9	28.2	5.9	**3.00**	**1.04**	7	2.97	3
	12	Homework activities	8.2	22.4	32.9	30.6	5.9	**3.04**	**1.05**	4		
	13	Outside classroom activities	8.2	24.7	42.4	20.0	4.7	**2.88**	**0.98**	12		
6. Activity settings	14	The place of the activity	10.6	24.7	44.7	15.3	4.7	**2.79**	**0.99**	17	2.84	6

	15	The time/ order of the activity	11.8	30.6	36.5	17.6	3.5	**2.71**	**1.01**	19		
	16	Whom to work with	10.6	14.1	43.5	24.7	7.1	**3.04**	**1.05**	4		
7. Classroom management	17	Position of seating	17.6	21.2	28.2	25.9	7.1	**2.84**	**1.20**	15	2.87	4
	18	Classroom rules and discipline matters	16.5	20.0	28.2	24.7	10.6	**2.93**	**1.24**	10		
	19	Keeping records of attendance and doing work	16.5	22.4	30.6	22.4	8.2	**2.84**	**1.19**	16		
8. Learning independently	20	Language learning strategies	18.8	31.8	36.5	9.4	3.5	**2.47**	**1.02**	24	2.60	9
	21	Problem-solving strategies	23.5	24.7	37.6	11.8	2.4	**2.45**	**1.05**	25		
	22	Learning resources	15.3	20.0	34.1	22.4	8.2	**2.88**	**1.17**	14		
9. Reflection on progress	23	Self-assessment tests	23.5	36.5	34.1	3.5	2.4	**2.25**	**0.94**	28	2.48	10
	24	Portfolios	20.0	22.4	35.3	16.5	5.9	**2.66**	**1.15**	21		
	25	Logbooks	23.5	28.2	32.9	11.8	3.5	**2.44**	**1.09**	26		
	26	Answering reflective questions orally	20.0	24.7	37.6	14.1	3.5	**2.56**	**1.07**	23		
10. Expressing themselves confidently through:	27	Express feelings, needs, strengths, and weaknesses.	8.2	17.6	43.5	24.7	5.9	**3.02**	**1.00**	6	2.98	2
	28	Taking risks while learning and being tolerant of making mistakes.	5.9	25.9	42.4	21.2	4.7	**2.93**	**0.95**	9		
The overall mean and St. deviation								2.8013	.73965			

Table 2. The sample responses about the applicability of learner autonomy for young learners.

The mean scores of the 28 items range from (3.25 to 2.25), representing (partly to little) on the 5-point Likert scale. Considering the mean scores, from the teachers' views, none of the items received (much) or (very much) support for involving young learners in the ten classroom autonomous practices.

Ranking the ten categories from the highest to the lowest mean value reveals that teachers remarkably considered "co-operative learning," including peer teaching and group discussion, as the most important classroom practice in which young learners should be involved, as it received the highest agreement percentage of (47%). This is followed by the teachers' acknowledgment of young learners' ability to enjoy a safe environment by expressing their needs confidently and taking risks while learning. Next comes the ability to choose the proper types of activities, mainly homework activities (agreement percentage =36.5%), and the ability to choose suitable materials, specifically realia (agreement percentage =40%).

On the other hand, teachers did not appear to welcome the participation of young learners in other classroom practices. Regarding the lowest mean score (2.25), it can be stated that category No.9: 'Reflection on Progress', is the little practice that young learners should be involved in, according to the teachers' beliefs. All items under this category received high percentages of disagreement, starting from being involved in self-assessment tests (disagreement percentage =60%), using logbooks to track progress, answering reflective questions orally, and creating portfolios. The second lowest mean score was (2.60) in category No.8: "learning independently" as teachers doubt students' ability to use language learning strategies, problem-solving strategies, and learning resources with high percentages of disagreement (50.6%, 48.2%, and 35.3%) respectively. Next comes involving students in making decisions about the course content (the topics), the long-term objectives of the course, and choosing materials (texts and audio and visual aids).

Students' ability to make decisions regarding the activity settings and classroom management appeared in the middle ranks, as most of the percentages were distributed between small and partially options.

The overall mean of this section (M = 2.80) indicates that teachers believe that young learners can be partly involved in autonomous learning practices and make appropriate decisions regarding their learning process.

4.4 Teachers' Beliefs about the Challenges of Young Language Learner Autonomy in the Local Context

Hindering factors	# Questionnaire items	Not at all	Little	Partly	Much	Very much	Mean	Category Mean	SD	Ranking
		%	%	%	%	%				

1. Factors related to teachers	1	I do not know how to promote L.A.	36.5	25.9	30.6	4.7	2.4	**2.11**	2.63	**1.04**	17
	2	I do not have autonomy in teaching.	25.9	20.0	27.1	10.6	16.5	**2.72**		**1.39**	14
	3	It might reduce my respect and role as a source of knowledge.	44.7	15.3	27.1	8.2	4.7	**2.13**		**1.21**	16
	4	I need additional effort and time to prepare activities and materials to foster it.	5.9	12.9	24.7	32.9	23.5	**3.55**		**1.16**	7
2. Factors related to young learners	5	They are unmotivated enough to be autonomous learners.	12.9	23.5	25.9	17.6	20.0	**3.08**	3.18	**1.32**	11
	6	They are unwilling to take responsibility for their learning and prefer me to tell them what to do.	3.5	30.6	22.4	22.4	21.2	**3.27**		**1.21**	10
3. The current classroom settings	7	The significant number of students in class.	9.4	12.9	14.1	20.0	43.5	**3.75**	3.73	**1.38**	2
	8	The individual differences in students' levels in the class.	2.4	14.1	25.9	25.9	31.8	**3.71**		**1.13**	3
4. The current Curriculum	9	The curriculum does not offer activities that develop L.A.	16.5	18.8	25.9	28.2	10.6	**2.98**	3.42	**1.25**	12
	10	There is no time in the curriculum to add extra activities which develop L.A.	3.5	16.5	22.4	28.2	29.4	**3.64**		**1.17**	6
	11	The current assessment system of students' performance hinders promoting L.A.	4.7	17.6	16.5	30.6	30.6	**3.65**		**1.22**	5
5. Lack of support	12	The lack of necessary learning resources (Library, language laboratory, aids).	7.1	10.6	18.8	24.7	38.8	**3.78**	3.56	**1.27**	1
	13	There is conservation about children's use of technology to foster L.A. outside the class.	8.2	14.1	31.8	25.9	20.0	**3.35**		**1.19**	9
6. The current EFL settings.	14	Children have limited language proficiency.	8.2	14.1	28.2	28.2	21.2	**3.40**	3.55	**1.21**	8
	15	Children have little exposure to English because of the limited time and number of English classes.	10.6	11.8	12.9	27.1	37.6	**3.69**		**1.36**	4
7. Classroom	16	Implementing learner autonomy affects classroom	22.4	21.2	23.5	21.2	11.8	**2.79**	2.72	**1.33**	13

managem ent issues		management and causes noise.									
	17	Using a rewarding and punishment system has adverse effects on children's motivation	27.1	21. 2	20. 0	23. 5	8.2	**2.65**		**1.32**	15
The overall mean and St. Deviation								**3.19**		**0.73**	

Table 3 The sample responses about learner autonomy. Challenges in the local context

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of the sample responses in the third section of the questionnaire. It addresses the third research question: "What challenges do elementary EFL teachers face in helping their young learners become more autonomous within the local context?" There are seven hindering factors; each factor mainly has 2 to 4 items. The individual 17 items were ranked according to the mean score based on participants' responses. The mean of each category was calculated and ranked accordingly.

The overall mean of this section (M = 3.19) shows that EFL elementary public-school teachers perceive that the constraints in the current educational context greatly hinder their roles in promoting young language learners' autonomy.

Respectively, the lack of school learning resources, the crowded classes with mixed ability students, the limited time and number of English classes, and the current restricted curriculum and assessment system received (much) agreement among teachers to be seen as learner autonomy restrictions. At the same time, factors related to learners' willingness and motivation to take charge of their learning, classroom management, and teachers' knowledge of learner autonomy were seen as (partially) getting in the way of teachers' role in promoting young learners' autonomy (means ranged from 3.18 to 2.64).

Remarkably, item 12: "The lack of school support and necessary learning resources, such as a library, language laboratory, and teaching aids," was perceived as the most hindering factor in promoting learner autonomy by teachers, as it received the highest mean among all the individual items in the list (M = 3.78). Another hindering factor perceived by a high percentage of teachers is the current classroom settings at elementary public schools; the crowded classroom (63.5%) with mixed-ability learners (57.6%), with an overall mean of (M = 3.73). Next, three other factors were ranked nearly the same. They are the limitations posed on the time and number of English classes, the assessment system, and the curriculum delivery (M = 3.69, 3.65, and 3.64, respectively).

Notably, teachers put less blame on themselves and their students. More than half of the teachers (62.4%) thought that items 1: "The lack of teacher's knowledge about promoting learner autonomy" and item 3: "Teachers' resistance to learner autonomy as it reduces their leading role" were not applicable to them. Simultaneously, 43% of teachers believed that classroom management had nothing to do with promoting learner autonomy.Learners' lack of motivation and willingness to be independent received indistinctive responses. Item 5: "Learners are unmotivated to be autonomous" received 37.6% of agreement and 36.5%) of disagreement. While item 6: "Learners are unwilling to take learning responsibility," received an agreement of (43.5%) and a disagreement response of (34.1%).

4.5 Teachers' Beliefs about their Promoting Role of Young Language Learner Autonomy in Classroom

The fourth research question was, "What practices do elementary EFL teachers offer to create an autonomous classroom environment?". Ten items in the questionnaire require teachers to identify the frequency of their learner autonomy promoting practices from their point of view. Table 5 below presents the descriptive statistics of the sample responses obtained. The items are ranked according to the responses' mean score, and the highest response percentages are underlined. On the left column of the table, items were classified into six leading promoting practices of learner autonomy carried out by teachers in the classroom.

L.A promoting practices	#	Questionnaire items	Not at all	Little	Partly	Much	Very much	Mean	SD	Ranking
			%	%	%	%	%			
Safe environment	2	Raising students' awareness of the time and practice required for language learning.	1.2	9.4	18.8	47.1	23.5	3.82	0.94	1
Communication and collaborative learning	6	Using authentic materials to stimulate verbal communication.	0.0	14.1	25.9	40.0	20.0	3.66	0.96	2
Safe environment	1	Giving positive feedback and focusing on achievement.	2.4	9.4	35.3	37.6	15.3	3.54	0.95	3
Setting goals	3	Helping students identify their levels, needs, and interests.	1.2	11.8	35.3	38.8	12.9	3.51	0.91	4
Reflection	8	Asking students reflective questions about their learning process:	2.4	20.0	22.4	35.3	20.0	3.51	1.10	4

		[What/how/why] …they learned and will learn.								
Independent learning	10	Referring students to external resources (websites, apps, books)	4.7	24.7	20.0	30.6	20.0	3.36	1.19	6
Independent learning	5	Teaching students the study skills and language learning strategies.	5.9	21.2	25.9	34.1	12.9	3.27	1.12	7
Making decisions	9	Involving students in deciding on classroom rules.	4.7	23.5	31.8	24.7	15.3	3.22	1.12	8
Making decisions	4	Give students a list of options to choose among.	10.6	23.5	43.5	12.9	9.4	2.87	1.08	9
Making decisions	7	Involving students to create their materials and self-access center.	14.1	25.9	29.4	22.4	8.2	2.85	1.17	10
The overall mean and St. deviation								3.361	0.704	

Table 4. The sample responses about their learner autonomy promoting practices in the classroom

Creating a safe learning environment through raising students' awareness of their learning process and providing positive feedback (items 2, 6) were among the practices with the highest mean values in this section. They were ranked 1 and 3 with means of M = 3.82 and M = 3,54) respectively. Stimulating communication through authentic materials (item 2) was ranked with an M of 3.66. Helping students to set their goals based on identifying their needs (item 3) and involving them in reflecting on their learning (item 8) were equally ranked in the fourth position with a mean value of M = 3.51. Encourage independent learning by teaching students to use external learning resources (item 10) and language learning strategies (item 5) were followed. While the lowest means were for involving students in making decisions, represented by involving students to create their materials (item 7), choose among a list of options (item 4), and decide on classroom rules (item 9) with means of (M = 2.85, M = 2.87, and M = 3.22). However, the lowest means were still near the midpoint (3).

The overall collective mean of all responses in this section (M = 3.36 and SD = 0.70) indicates that teachers partly used supportive young learner autonomy practices in their classrooms.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study contributes to the literature by exploring a new area in the field of young language learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia by investigating the beliefs of EFL teachers at elementary public schools. It examines their understanding of its concept, their beliefs about its applicability for young learners, and the current challenges within the Saudi educational context. It also investigates their beliefs about promoting roles of young learners' autonomy in the classroom. Data was gathered using a localized instrument built by the researcher to suit the age of young learners and the current teaching context. The study population (of 117 teachers in Dammam elementary public schools) was homogeneous to collect a representative sample (of 85 teachers). This study has limitations as collecting qualitative data, using observation and interviews, can better understand teachers' beliefs about young learner autonomy. However, using a detailed questionnaire for this study might satisfy its aim to explore the area for the first time and to give an initial understanding of the overall tendency of teachers' beliefs about four primary areas of young learner autonomy: the concept, the applicability, the challenges, and the teacher's promoting role. The study results can follow directed and focused studies on young learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia.

Discussion of Question 1: The first question in this study sought to investigate how elementary EFL teachers understand the learner autonomy concept, including their conscious attitudes towards its effectiveness in language learning, its classroom promoting practices, and its applicability for young learners and the local context.

The results of this question, as already noted, show that the majority of the teachers were **optimistic** about the importance of learner autonomy in language learning, and there was a proper shared knowledge among teachers about the principles of promoting learner autonomy in the classroom and the significance of their roles in fostering it. Remarkably, they were **optimistic** about promoting it at an early age. However, they were **neutral** about the suitability of the current educational system for developing autonomy in learners.

The teachers perceived the importance of the six promoting classroom practices of learner autonomy, discussed in chapter 2, in the following order: the independent use of learning resources, confidence as an indication of a safe environment, setting learning objectives, using learning strategies, making choices, collaborative work, and evaluation. In the light of learner autonomy dimensions developed by Oxford (2003), we can conclude that

the teachers of this study support learner autonomy in all four dimensions, including the technical, psychological, political, and social perspectives concerning the order. However, the degree of support for these dimensions varies (Alrabai, 2017c; Amirian & Noughabi, 2017; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017). The result of showing positive attitudes towards all learner autonomy dimensions comes along with most of the studies on EFL teachers' beliefs that used Borg's questionnaire on which the items of this section are based.

In this study, the teachers showed a balanced understanding of learner autonomy degree that fits the formal institutional context. Most teachers have seen the independent use of learning resources (such as the library, the internet, and self-access centers) as the most effective practice for developing learner autonomy, with the highest agreement percentage (95.3%) in this section. However, they did not disclaim their responsible role in fostering their students' learner autonomy with a high percentage of (85,9%). Furthermore, the percentages of teachers who agreed that working alone (item 3) and working cooperatively (item 6) are both central to developing learner autonomy were similar, (70,6%) and (74.1%) respectively. However, these two latter items received relatively lower agreement than most of the other items in this section as they were ranked 12 and 10 out of 13 (with means of 3.78 and 3,84, which are still above the midpoint (3)). The relatively lower percentage in these two items can be attributed to the following justifications. The low support of 'working alone' hopefully reflects teachers' assertation on their promoting role, in contrast with working without a teacher. While the less support for 'working cooperatively,' compared with the high support of 'using learning resources,' might imply the tendency to view learner autonomy as an individual rather than social attribute through co-operation and social interaction, as well as individual work, are central principles of promoting learner autonomy in a classroom context (Dam, Eriksson, Little, Miliander, & Trebbi, 1990). This justification is supported by the results of questions 2 and 4, in which collaborative work received the highest rate of agreement as a feasible activity with young learners. This contradiction can be attributed to the reason that some teachers' promoting practices of co-operative work is a result of the curriculum requirements or to use of a sound teaching strategy in isolation of the intention of fostering learner autonomy.

Most participants showed great appreciation of the effectiveness of learner autonomy in language learning and, specifically, its role in facilitating future learning when it is introduced at an early age (items 1 and 12), as they were ranked 3 and 2 out of 13). On the other hand, regarding the possibility of developing learner autonomy with young learners and

within the current educational system (items 12 and13), teachers show some doubts as the percentage of disagreement responses were the highest (16.5% and 28.2%) combined with a high percentage of unsure responses of (12.9% and 30.6%). The gap between desirability and feasibility of learner autonomy in teachers' beliefs has been reported by many previous studies in EFL learner autonomy literature in different countries; for example, in Oman, Iran, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Cyprus, and Hungary (Al Haysony, 2016; Amirian & Noughabi, 2017; Asiri & Shukri, 2018; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017; Farahi, 2015; Lengkanawati, 2017; Nasri et al., 2015; Shahsavari, 2014; Сиванов, 2016). However, only Szocs's study (2017) showed a different result in which teachers were more optimistic about the feasibility of learner autonomy than about its desirability. This contradiction was attributed to the small sample size (n=9) in Szocs's study. The gap in this study can be explained by the second and third questions of the research, which elaborate on teachers' beliefs about the feasibility degree of learner autonomy for young learners and the constraints in the local context.

Discussion of Question 2: The second research question investigated the extent of young learners' ability to be involved in making decisions regarding their learning process and their ability to be involved in classroom autonomous practices from their teachers' point of view. There was a strong tendency among teachers to choose the medium scale, '**Partly'** option (M=2.80). This indicates that most teachers believe that young learners can be partly involved in autonomous learning practices and partly make appropriate decisions regarding their learning process. This is interpreted so that teachers do not resist developing young learners' autonomy in the classroom. However, they pose limitations to the extent to which children take charge of their learning, and they prefer to collaborate and negotiate with learners in most areas and resist it in a few other areas.

These limitations can be justified for two reasons. First, the teachers emphasize their support for their students' learning and prefer to see the learning process as a shared responsibility between the teacher and the young learner. This might be combined with some doubts about the young students' ability to be significantly involved in autonomous practices or combined with the underlying effect of the teacher-centered approach on teachers' beliefs. The second justification is that teachers in this study might estimate their young students' ability against the local context where there is a restricted curriculum with a lack of supporting

resources and a large number of students with limited language classes. Section 3 of the questionnaire investigates the factors that might interact with teachers' estimation of their young learners' ability to be active participants in classroom autonomous practices.

This overall result is consistent with the findings reported by most of the researchers who participated in the project, *Learner Autonomy: The Teachers' View* (Camilleri, 1997a; Camilleri, 1997a; Dogs, 1997; Dousma, 1997), who used a unified questionnaire, on which the items of this section are based, to investigate secondary teachers' beliefs, as well as elementary teachers' beliefs about their young learner language autonomy (Dogsa, 1997). However, some characteristic findings in this study do not conform with the previous studies. Below is a discussion of the salient results.

The results showed that teachers valued co-operative learning as the most desirable activity in which young learners can be involved, specifically peer teaching and group negotiation. Similarly, Al Asmari's study (2013) showed that Saudi secondary teachers' most favored autonomy-promoting practices are: communicative teaching skills and group discussions. This is supported theoretically by Piaget's (1970) idea that children learn through actions and interaction with their surroundings. It also corresponds with the social development theory developed by Vygotsky (1986), who suggested that child learning occurs during interaction with others who are more experienced, such as parents, teachers, or peers. Peer teaching is one of the manifestations of the scaffolding concept developed by Bruner (1985), which implies helping a child to learn through facilitating problems he or she faces. Hartup (1992) emphasized the benefits of peer interaction in children's social and intellectual development and eventually in adulthood. Practically a relationship between collaborative learning and language proficiency has been observed. Shahamat and Mede (2016), using a triangulated approach of pre-and post-tests, diaries, and observations, asserted the positive consequences of collaborative learning on the proficiency and social-affective learning of Turkish EFL young learners in the fifth grade aged 10-12. Oliver and Azkarai (2019) have found that ESL young learners aged 9-12 can engage with each other collaboratively regardless of their proficiency. Dunne (2013) recognized the efficiency of collaborative and cooperative learning in young learners' ability to plan; therefore, she considered collaborative learning as "the foundation stone on which to build all the other skills necessary to promote autonomous learning' (p.97).

However, we have not investigated teachers' realization and implementation of co-operative learning in a way that guarantees developing learner autonomy. Superficial group work includes “Simply assigning students to groups and telling them to work together does not in and of itself result in co-operative efforts” (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998, p. 28). Spencer Kagan (1992) emphasized four principles that identify a co-operative learning activity. They are positive interdependence, equal participation, simultaneous interaction, and individual accountability. They require each member to contribute to group work through simultaneous interaction, negotiation equally and reporting the contributions of others. Matthews, Cooper, Davidson, and Hawkes (1995) went further by clarifying that 'co-operative learning, in which there is an obvious intervention from the teacher, is only a mean to achieve 'collaborative learning' which is essential to develop a substantial degree of autonomy in which students are responsible for planning, implementing and evaluating the whole group activity. Therefore, observation or interviews are needed in future studies to investigate teachers' understanding of group work.

Teachers' estimating of young learners' ability to make choices varied according to the learning and teaching area. There was a 'partly' tendency to involve young learners in choosing realia aids, homework, whom to work with, classroom activities, personal objectives, classroom rules, audio and visual aids, outside classroom activities, positions of seats, keeping records, respectively. This relative tendency is gradually reduced in the following areas: choosing short terms objectives, the place of the activity, the time of the activity, long-term objectives, texts, and topics.

Learning /teaching area	Mean	Learning/ teaching area	Mean
Realia aids	3.08	Short-term objectives	2.79
Homework activities	3.04	The place of the activity	2.79
Whom to work with	3.04	The time of the activity	2.71
Classroom activities	3	Long-term objectives	2.66
Personal objectives	2.96	Texts	2.66
Classroom rules	2.93	Topics	2.41
Audio and visual aids	2.88		
Outside classroom activities	2.88		
Positions of seats	2.84		
Keeping records	2.84		

Table 5. The extent of applicability to involve young learners in learning areas in teachers' views

It is noticed that teachers' partly tendency to involve children in making choices gradually reduced with areas related to the curriculum and matters decided by a higher authority, as teachers do not have the opportunity to choose the time and place of their classes because the school administration decides them. This result aligns with some studies using a similar

questionnaire (Balçıkanlı, 2010; Camilleri, 1997b). While the order of the lessons, the short-term and long-term objectives, texts of the lesson, and the topics are prescribed by the Saudi Ministry of Education.

Using language learning strategies and using problem-solving skills are two main aspects of autonomous and independent learning. However, they were underestimated by the teachers in the study. On the other hand, young learners' ability to use language learning strategies and be involved in self-assessment received the lease agreement from the teachers' point of view. This contradicts Kirsch's (2012) findings that showed the ability of six young language learners at primary school to develop a range of cognitive and linguistic strategies over an academic year though they were not receiving direct instructions. These strategies were developed through leading autonomous learning in the classroom that required young learners to reflect on their learning to enhance their learning strategies.

Furthermore, there was strong resistance to involving students in all forms of self-reflection and self-evaluation, including self-testing, portfolios, logbooks, and reflective questions. They received lower agreement compared with other categories. This result is similar to the ones by George Camilleri and Antoinette Camilleri (1997), as teachers in their studies were reluctant to involve learners in summative assessment as it determines the placing and certification of students. Similarly, Kohonen (2000) concluded that it is not easy for young language learners to perform self-assessments based on abstract and difficult-to-understand rubrics. They also can not decide on the degree of their language skills unless they are aware of the language proficiency standards the adult examiner knows. However, portfolios (Debyser, 1997; Schneider, 1997), logbooks (Dam, 2000; Dam & Legenhausenb, 2011), and reflective questions (Wawrzyniak-Śliwska, 2017) are other alternatives of assessment tools that were reported to suit younger learners. Little (1999) suggested that young learners can determine what they can do with the language in concrete tasks as their skills become visible and easy to assess. Creating portfolios is an example of assessing visible learning. However, Kohonen (1999) noted that portfolios confused a group of young learners. This might be a reason for disfavoring portfolios by the teachers of this study. Dam (2011), in her practical study of implementing learner autonomy principles with young learners, noticed the effectiveness of using logbooks as a reflection tool by which learners could identify their strengths and weaknesses; as a result, they could be involved in self-assessment. Answering random reflective questions during problem-solving learning situations proved its suitability for young learners (Wawrzyniak-Śliwska, 2017).

Finally, there is a need to identify the underlying reasons for teachers' support or resistance to the above aspects of autonomous young language learning by employing interviews and observation in future studies. There is also an assumption that teachers' responses in this section might reflect their readiness for promoting learner autonomy rather than the actual learners' ability from the teachers' point of view.

Discussion of Question 3: The third question in this study aimed to explore the challenges in the current educational context and to what extent they hinder elementary EFL teachers' promoting role of young learner autonomy. As already noted, the results of this question show that most elementary EFL teachers believe these challenges are hindering their promoting roles to a great degree.

Teachers see the institutional factors as the main constraints that hamper their roles in promoting young earner autonomy. According to the teachers, the most hindering factor is the lack of school support in providing necessary learning resources, such as a library, a language laboratory, and teaching aids, besides the absence of utilizing learning resourcing outside the classroom, which can be partly attributed to the conservation about children's use of technology for learning (item 13), as relatively (46%) of the teachers agreed and (32%) partly agreed on this item. Perceiving the lack of learning resources as the most hindering factor confirms the result of the first question of this study, which implies that teachers mainly understand autonomous learning as the independent use of learning resources outside the class. Teaching crowded classrooms with mixed-ability learners were the second most hindering factor. This result corresponds with similar studies at Saudi schools (Alrabai, 2017c; Tamer, 2013). Many students are a prominent issue in EFL classrooms at Saudi public schools (Alrabai, 2017c; Ara Ashraf, 2018; Bahanshal, 2013) and can affect teachers' performance. There are three other following factors ranked nearly the same. They are the limitations posed on the time and number of English classes, limitations on the assessment system, and the curriculum delivery. Lack of teacher autonomy and even school autonomy regarding the curriculum is a dilemma discussed extensively in the literature of language learner autonomy in EFL settings, specifically in Saudi settings. However, many researchers and teachers practically presented learner autonomy as a rescue solution under challenging circumstances, such as lack of resources, prescribed curriculum, local school policy, and large classes with diverse learners in

developing countries (Amritavalli, 2011; Fonseka, 2003; Kuchah & Smith, 2011; Sarwar, 2001; Smith, 2003).

On the other hand, teachers put less blame on themselves, their classroom management, and their students. Most teachers see themselves as aware (62.4%) or partly aware (30%) of how to promote their young learner's autonomy. This is consistent with the result of this study's first question, which shows teachers' awareness of the basic principles and importance of learner autonomy. This also aligns with university teachers' beliefs about themselves in Saudi Arabia (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017). Furthermore, the prominent attitude of the sample was directed to the belief that applying learner autonomy principles to young learners does not affect classroom management. This corresponds with the study made by (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017) at the university level and confirmed by Hechst (2017), who indicated that although the major challenge faced by teachers of young learners is maintaining classroom management, positive encouragement and involving children in making choices regarding their learning makes them intrinsically motivated and responsible for their learning which results in self-discipline and fewer disturbances. Learners' lack of motivation and willingness to be independent received indistinctive attitude, as teachers' responses distributed nearly similarly on the options (not at all, little, partly, much). We can derive that teachers do not see their young learner characteristics as a main hindering factor, unlike several studies made at the level of secondary school and universities in Saudi Arabia (Al Haysony, 2016; Alrabai, 2017c; Asiri & Shukri, 2018; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017) which revealed that teachers considered Saudi learner-related factors as the main hindrance of promoting learner autonomy. This inconsistency can be attributed to the difference in characteristics between young and adult learners. Young learners are more flexible regarding language learning. Issues such as effective filter, negative attitudes against a foreign language, and poor previous language learning experience are less noticed with young learners (Alrabai, 2017b; Yule, 2010). In addition, lack of motivation and willingness is not considered a fixed barrier in this regard. Autonomous learning and motivation are linked, so we cannot determine which comes first. DeCharms (1984) claimed that motivation could be enhanced by encouraging learners to lead personal control over their learning and to take responsibility for it. On the other hand, Spratt (2002) concluded that motivation is a critical factor that influences the extent to which learners are ready to learn independently. Therefore, teachers should try to raise motivation before they train students to become autonomous.

In addition to the mentioned constraints, we can add another challenge teachers have not considered. It is the probability of the misconceptions in teachers' beliefs about the concept of learner autonomy, their young learners' capacity, and what they see as obstacles beyond their promoting role.

Discussion of Question 4: The fourth research question focused on teachers' beliefs about their classroom promoting the role of young learner autonomy. These beliefs reflect teachers' beliefs about the concept, the applicability, and the obstacles of young learner autonomy, which were discussed previously in questions 1, 2, and 3 in this study. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) indicated that "the extent to and manner in which learner autonomy is promoted in language learning classrooms will be influenced by teachers' beliefs about what autonomy is, its desirability and feasibility" (p. 6)

The overall reading of the results shows that teachers are **partly** using supportive young learner autonomy practices in their classrooms. Ranking practices from the highest to the lowest applied, teachers tend to create a safe classroom environment and encourage communication in the first place. They help students to identify their needs and interests and to reflect on their learning. They partly support independent learning and involve students in making decisions and choices regarding their learning. The range of mean values (3.82 to 2,85) is not distinctive.

Most teachers tend to create a safe classroom environment to a 'much' degree. They confirmed raising students' awareness of the effort and time required in the language learning process. Teachers showed a tendency to provide positive feedback by encouragement and praise. This result corresponds with the local study of Alonazi (2017), who investigated autonomy promoting roles of Saudi secondary school teachers and concluded that teachers tend to play the role of a counselor by creating a safe learning environment. Slattery and Willis (2001) emphasized providing "a secure and supportive environment which gives the children confidence to try out language" (p. 11). According to Printer (2006), creating positive attitudes toward learning are the foundation for all children of all ages. The younger learners are, the more critical they become. Awareness of the learning process helps learners cope with obstacles and be patient and tolerant with mistakes, which results in retaining self-motivation, while encouragement helps raise learners' self-esteem and confidence and boost motivation. However, further investigation is needed to ascertain that encouragement and praise are

provided by teachers unconditionally as informative feedback rather than as a form of reward. Based on Piaget's (1965) definition of autonomy, Hechst (2017) indicated that autonomy should be fostered independently of rewards and punishment as they are suppressive autonomy practices that reduce intrinsic motivation, which is a vital component in promoting autonomy.

Encouraging co-operative and independent work are the following promoting practices. Teachers promote communication, which is necessary for collaborative work, to a **'much'** degree. At this point, teachers' practice aligns with their belief in question 2, as teachers highly estimated the ability of young learners to be involved in co-operative learning with the highest mean (M=3.20). Helping students identify their needs and interests and reflecting on their learning come next. However, encouraging independent learning by teaching students the language learning strategies and referring them to external learning resources received fewer positive responses though the majority of teachers in question 1 believe that learner autonomy is developed mainly through the independent use of learning resources with the highest mean (M=4.44). This difference between beliefs and practices can be justified by the results of this study's second and third questions. In question 2, the teachers showed a less positive attitude about young learners' ability to use learning resources independently. While in question 3, teachers believe that the lack of learning resources at school is the first hindering factor in their promoting role of young learner autonomy.

The teachers were least interested in allowing students to make decisions about their learning (items 4,7 and 9). This result contradicts the results found by Hechst (2017), who investigated teachers' promoting roles of autonomy in young children at preschool. He found that teachers were aware of providing children with a list of choices to choose from. They involved children in creating their own materials and forming the classroom rules as these practices contribute to developing autonomy in young learners. This less interest can be attributed to the local curriculum and school policy that limits teachers' autonomy (as noted in question 3). However, it might be attributed to the view expressed by Trebbi (2008), who debated that total freedom of choices about learning autonomy is not likely to be realized. Besides the constraints related to the curriculum, the educational system, and the teacher's beliefs, she identified 'autonomy supportive constraints' that require learners' to work constructively, such as the criteria used in critically reflecting on their learning. In teaching the French language to Norwegian students at age of 14, Trebbi (1995) concluded that providing students with open opportunities for making free choices was confusing specifically with topics and activities they are unfamiliar with. "In the long run, arbitrary choices proved unproductive

for learning." (p.37). Therefore, she suggested that learner autonomy can be fostered within institutionalized systems even if autonomy is not expressed as an explicit objective, and this can be realized through changing the nature of control from teacher's direct control to indirect control. Bailey (2001) has introduced the idea of providing the children with two positive choices which are both acceptable. It helps young learners feel safe to make decisions, fostering their autonomy and motivation (Hechst, 2017). Finally, questionnaires to explore EFL elementary teachers' beliefs about their autonomy-promoting roles might not be sufficient to study their actual practices in the classroom. Therefore, observation is needed in further research.

5.1 *Summary and Conclusion*

This study contributed to the literature by exploring a new area of young language learner autonomy in the Saudi EFL context. It sought to answer four questions to reach an initial understanding of Saudi EFL teachers' beliefs about young language learner autonomy at elementary public schools. It examined the teachers' understanding of the young learner autonomy concept, the extent of its applicability for their young language learners, the constraints within the Saudi educational context that affect teachers' autonomy promoting roles, and teachers' current promoting practices of young learner autonomy in the classroom, from their point of views. The study results can be a base for more directed studies on young learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia. Methodologically, the study contributed to presenting a localized questionnaire that other researchers in the field can use, considering the age of young learners and the current teaching context. Several practical pedagogical implications can be drawn from the present research. This study has some limitations. Collecting qualitative data, using observation and interviews, can give a better understanding of teachers' beliefs about young learner autonomy. However, using a detailed questionnaire for this study might satisfy its aim to explore the area for the first time and to give an initial understanding of the overall tendency of teachers' beliefs about four broad areas of young learner autonomy: the concept, the applicability, the challenges, and the current teacher's promoting practices.

This research revealed that elementary EFL teachers reasonably understood the learner autonomy concept. They showed strong positive attitudes towards the importance of young learner autonomy in future language learning. They were aware of the importance of their roles in promoting it. The results showed that teachers' understanding of learner autonomy primarily used learning resources independently. However, to ranging degrees, they recognized the effectiveness of involving learners in setting goals, learning strategies, making choices, group

work, and self-evaluation. On the other hand, teachers were doubtful about the suitability of the current educational system for the successful implementation of young learner autonomy principles.

Concerning the applicability of young learner autonomy, the overall results showed that teachers think their learners can be partially engaged in making decisions and other autonomous learning activities. Confirming their role in helping young learners in their learning, the teachers preferred collaboration with young learners in most learning areas and resisted engaging learners in a few other areas. The teachers perceived co-operative learning as the most desirable activity in which young learners can be involved, specifically peer teaching and group negotiation. On the other hand, the teachers less estimated young learners' ability to make proper choices and learn independently using language learning strategies and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, there was strong resistance to recognizing young learners' ability to reflect on their learning using self-assessment tests, logbooks, reflective inquiries, and portfolios.

Teachers perceived some local challenging educational settings as hindering factors of their promoting role to a much degree. The lack of learning resources and big classes with mixed-level learners were perceived as hindering factors. The teachers put less blame on themselves and their young learners' readiness. The limited time and number of English classes and the loaded and restricted curriculum and assessment system are the following young learner autonomy constraints.

The fourth question showed that teachers partly support their young learners' autonomy in their teaching practices. Creating a safe environment and encouraging communication using the foreign language were their most frequent practices; involving students in making decisions regarding the activities, materials, and classroom management were the least used in the classroom. The research findings carry recommendations for further studies and some pedagogical implications in the field.

5.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study has several limitations that can be addressed in further studies. The study explored the beliefs of a relatively small population of elementary EFL teachers in only one city of Saudi Arabia, Dammam, with the exclusion of teachers at private schools. This might ensure homogeneity of the sample; however, any general conclusions drawn from this study should be considered with caution. Further studies in the field can be conducted considering other cities in Saudi Arabia, and elementary teachers at private schools can be included. In

addition, a further study can also be conducted with young learners in the same settings to explore their attitudes towards taking charge of their learning. It can be followed by comparing teachers' and young learners' beliefs and expectations. The sample can be enlarged and varied by including the beliefs of English language supervisors and learners' parents to comprehensively understand the attitudes toward young learner autonomy on a larger scale.

Moreover, a questionnaire was the only research method used for collecting data in this study. Therefore, to comprehensively understand teachers' beliefs, future studies must investigate beliefs and practices using interviews and observation, which were not applied in this study. Observations are needed to investigate teachers' practices against their beliefs. Interviews help determine teachers' underlying reasons for supporting or resisting some practices of autonomy and in what way local obstacles might hinder teachers' autonomy-promoting roles.

In addition, variables regarding teachers' gender, years of teaching experience, and academic qualifications might influence teachers' beliefs, and they were not included in the results of this study. The age of taught students can also be considered while interpreting results, as age is a distinctive factor in children's learning.

5.3 Pedagogical Contributions

Identifying Saudi teachers' beliefs about young learner autonomy is an initial step toward understanding their practices and reforming the current EFL teaching and teacher education. Supporting the practices of young learner autonomy in Saudi schools requires collaborative efforts from stakeholders, including teachers, teacher educators, the Ministry of Education, curriculum designers, learners, and their parents.

Based on the results of this study, teachers need to embrace the mission of fostering young learner autonomy as a part of their responsibility (Dam, 2003). The perceived obstacles; such as large classes, mixed-level learners, and lack of resources, do not absolve them from the responsibility; instead, they are considered as motives for implementing learner autonomy principles as a rescuing plan (Amritavalli, 2011; Fonseka, 2003; Kuchah & Smith, 2011; Sarwar, 2001; Smith, 2003). Furthermore, teachers should be aware that autonomy is not a pre-ready product that can be achieved through applying certain practices; however, it is a process tailored for and by learners with the help of their teachers to meet learners' particular needs. Each experience of implementing learner autonomy is distinctive according to each learner, teacher, and school (Dunne, 2013). Moreover, teachers must remember that promoting learner

autonomy is a long-term process (Hattie, 2009) that has different degrees and starts with raising learners' awareness of their learning process (Nunan, 1997).

Teacher educators are in charge of providing in-service EFL teachers with training courses to address misconceptions in their beliefs, demonstrating that practicing learner autonomy is not a matter of using resources individually. However, it is a process in which learners set their learning goals, make decisions regarding their learning process, work independently and collaboratively to achieve the goals, and reflect on their performance, all of which occurs in a safe environment created by the support of the teacher. In addition, teacher educators need to widen teachers' expectations of their young learners' potential. In this study, teachers need to appreciate young learners' ability to self-reflection, make choices, and use language learning strategies and problem-solving skills. This can be achieved by equipping teachers with strategies for young learner autonomy and with alternatives that help them to deal with challenges while promoting learner autonomy.

Colleges of education are in charge of providing undergraduate teacher-students with pre-service teacher education that emphasizes promoting learner autonomy in young and adult learners as a priority. Such a step is by the Saudi vision 2030, which sets lifelong learning skills as one of its educational objectives (Vision 2030, 2019).

The Ministry of Education should consider realizing teacher autonomy as one of its reforming plans. Teachers should practice autonomy in teaching to develop their learners' autonomy (David Little, 1995). Teachers should make decisions regarding learning and teaching objectives, content, materials, activities, assessment techniques, and other curriculum delivery details. Collaboration between teachers, textbook writers, and curriculum designers can be facilitated to create an autonomy-promoting curriculum and pedagogy. Learners also can be involved in such collaboration. Furthermore, removing autonomy promotion constraints that teachers might face should be taken into consideration; for example, there should be a plan for reducing the number of enrolled students in EFL classrooms and increasing the time of English classes at the elementary level, such as two 45-minute classes per a week are not enough to realize autonomy principles in the classroom. Additionally, learners and their parents must also be informed of what is expected from young learners in an autonomous classroom environment.

More importantly, language learner autonomy among young learners and difficult educational circumstances needs to be investigated to examine how learners' autonomy is

realized in language classrooms and what practices teachers follow to promote it. Teachers can be research partners and participate in the field by conducting action research studies aiming to realize autonomy in their classrooms.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Elementary EFL Teachers' Beliefs about Young Language Learner Autonomy

This study is conducted as a part of the Master's degree program in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the College of Education, King Saud University. It aims to explore English teachers' beliefs about Young Learner Autonomy at Dammam elementary public schools. This can be an initial step for introducing language learner autonomy at an early stage by local educational stakeholders in the future.

Choose the statement that best expresses your opinion about Young Learner Autonomy at Saudi elementary public schools. There is no right or wrong answer here, and the questionnaire will take less than 10 minutes to complete. All information given here will be kept confidential and only used for research purposes.

Your background

Gender

□ Male □ Female

Years of experience as an English language teacher for young learners

□ 0-4 □ 5-9 □ 10-14 □ 15-19 □ 20+

Level of students you most often teach

□ Fourth grade □ Fifth grade □ Sixth grade

Highest qualification

□ Bachelor's □ Master's □ Doctorate □ Other

First: The concept of learner autonomy

Q1: What do you know about learner autonomy?

Tick the box of your choice: 0 = Totally disagree 1 = Disagree 2 = Unsure 3 =Agree 4 =Totally agree

1. Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would.	0	1	2	3	4
2. The teacher has an important role to play in supporting learner autonomy.	0	1	2	3	4
3. Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy.	0	1	2	3	4
4. Learner autonomy can be developed most effectively through the independent use of resources such as the library, the internet, and self-access centers.	0	1	2	3	4
5. Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence.	0	1	2	3	4
6. Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy.	0	1	2	3	4
7. Students who set their own learning goals are more likely to be autonomous learners.	0	1	2	3	4
8. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice regarding the activities they do.	0	1	2	3	4
9. Teaching students "how to learn" strategies is a key feature to develop learner autonomy.	0	1	2	3	4
10. To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	0	1	2	3	4

11. Developing learner autonomy at an early age facilitates successful language learning in the future.	0	1	2	3	4
12. It is easier to promote learner autonomy in children than in adults.	0	1	2	3	4
13. Learner autonomy is a concept which can be applied within the current educational system.	0	1	2	3	4

Second: Applicability of young learner autonomy at school

Q2: To what extent do you think your young learners are able to be involved in the following learning areas? Tick the box of your choice: 0 = Not at all 1 = Little 2 = Partly 3 =Much 4 =Very much

1. Selecting appropriate language learning objectives that suit their levels:

Long-term objectives of the course	0	1	2	3	4
Short-term objectives of the lesson	0	1	2	3	4
Personal objectives based on needs and interests	0	1	2	3	4

2. Deciding on appropriate content of the lesson:

Topics	0	1	2	3	4
activities	0	1	2	3	4

3. Selecting and creating appropriate materials of the lesson:

Texts	0	1	2	3	4
Audio visual aids	0	1	2	3	4
Realia	0	1	2	3	4

4. Involving in the following cooperative learning and teaching methods:

Peer teaching	0	1	2	3	4
Group negotiation and discussion	0	1	2	3	4

5. Choosing appropriate learning activities:

Classroom activities	0	1	2	3	4
Homework activities	0	1	2	3	4
Outside classroom activities	0	1	2	3	4

6. Deciding on appropriate settings of the activities:

The place of the activity	0	1	2	3	4
The time\ order of the activity	0	1	2	3	4
Whom to work with	0	1	2	3	4

7. Deciding on appropriate classroom management:

Position of student seating	0	1	2	3	4
Classroom rules and discipline matters	0	1	2	3	4
Keeping records of attendance and done work	0	1	2	3	4

8. Learning independently and finding their learning procedures by themselves:

Using language learning strategies (how to read, write, speak, listen effectively).	0	1	2	3	4
Using problem solving strategies	0	1	2	3	4
Using learning resources (library, self-access centres, internet) effectively.	0	1	2	3	4

9. Reflecting on their learning progress, rather than be tested, by using:

Self- assessment tests	0	1	2	3	4

Portfolios	0	1	2	3	4
Logbooks where children record [what/why/how] …they learned and what is their next step.	0	1	2	3	4
Answering orally spontaneous questions about [what/why/how] …they learned and what is their next step.	0	1	2	3	4

10. Expressing themselves confidently through:

Talking about their, feelings, needs, strengths, and weaknesses.	0	1	2	3	4
Taking risks while learning and being tolerant with making mistakes.	0	1	2	3	4

Third: Challenges of implementing young learner autonomy within the local educational context

Q3: To what extent do you think the following situations hinder your role in promoting language learner autonomy in your young learners? Tick the box of your choice: 0 = Not at all 1 = Little 2 = Partly 3 =Much 4 =Very much

1. I cannot develop young learner autonomy in my students because of factors related to my teaching:

I do not know enough about how to promote young learner autonomy.	0	1	2	3	4
As a teacher, I myself do not have autonomy in teaching.	0	1	2	3	4
Autonomous learning might reduce my respect and role as a source of knowledge.	0	1	2	3	4
It takes additional effort and time from me to prepare activities and materials that foster autonomy in children.	0	1	2	3	4

2. I cannot develop young learner autonomy because of factors related to my young learners:

The students are unmotivated enough to be autonomous learners.	0	1	2	3	4
Learners are unwilling to take responsibility for their learning and prefer me to tell them what to do.	0	1	2	3	4

3. I cannot develop young learner autonomy because of these classroom settings:

The big number of students in the class.	0	1	2	3	4
The individual differences in students' levels in class.	0	1	2	3	4

4. I cannot develop young learner autonomy because of the current Curriculum:

The curriculum does not offer activities that develop learner autonomy.	0	1	2	3	4
There is no time in the curriculum to add extra activities which develop learner autonomy.	0	1	2	3	4
The current assessment system of students' performance hinders promoting learner autonomy	0	1	2	3	4

5. I cannot develop young learner autonomy because of the lack of support:

The lack of necessary learning resources (Library, language laboratory, aids).	0	1	2	3	4
There is conservation about children's use of technology to foster learner autonomy outside the class.	0	1	2	3	4

6. I cannot develop young learner autonomy because of the current EFL settings.

Children have limited language proficiency.	0	1	2	3	4
Children have little exposure to English because of the limited number and time of English classes.	0	1	2	3	4

7. I cannot develop young learner autonomy because of the classroom management issues:

Implementing learner autonomy affects classroom management and causes noise	0	1	2	3	4
Using a rewarding and punishment system has negative effects on children's motivation	0	1	2	3	4

Fourth: Teachers' current practices

Q4: To what extent do you use the following teaching practices in your classroom?
Tick the box of your choice: 0 = Not at all 1 = Little 2 = Partly 3 =Much 4 =Very much

1. Giving positive feedback and focusing on achievement.	0	1	2	3	4
2. Raising students' awareness of the amount of time and practice required for their language learning process.	0	1	2	3	4
3. Helping students identify their levels, needs, and interests.	0	1	2	3	4
4. Giving students a list of options to choose among.	0	1	2	3	4
5. Teaching students the study skills and language learning strategies.	0	1	2	3	4
6. Using authentic materials to stimulate verbal communication.	0	1	2	3	4
7. Involving students to create their materials and self-access center.	0	1	2	3	4
8. Asking students reflective questions about their learning process: [What/how/why] …they learned and will learn.	0	1	2	3	4
9. Involving students in deciding on classroom rules.	0	1	2	3	4
10. Referring students to external resources (websites, apps, books).	0	1	2	3	4