EFL University Teachers' Beliefs About Learner Autonomy and the Effect of Online Learning Experience

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Abstract

Learner autonomy (LA) has always been viewed as an essential component of successful language learning. It is one of the factors that contributes to creating a learning community in which learners are capable of developing their knowledge and skills. Since it plays an essential role in language learning process, it can be reflected in both students' and teachers' beliefs as well as practices. Despite its importance, EFL teachers' perceptions are insufficiently explored in the Saudi context. To address this gap, this study deals with teachers' own reflection on how they perceive learner autonomy in Saudi universities and what they do to make their students autonomous learners. It also explores their views about the effect of the online teaching experience during COVID-19 pandemic on LA. To do this, a questionnaire designed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) was used in addition to semi-structured interviews to explore in more detail the teachers' perceptions of LA. The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data showed that teachers hold a variety of perceptions of LA and have highly positive attitudes towards enhancing it. They also believe that it is theoretically desirable to promote LA among EFL students; yet, it is partially attainable in the practical ground. Additionally, the experience of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift from face-to-face setting have created more opportunities for more practices of LA. Teachers' role cannot be disregarded since they create adequate opportunities for LA development. Although a number of obstacles that would hinder LA can be identified, some solutions can be of great appeal in encouraging LA in EFL contexts.

Keywords: learner autonomy, EFL teacher, desirability, feasibility, COVID-19

1. Introduction

There have been continuing efforts in the Saudi community nowadays to achieve the 2030 Vision. This vision is an ambitious yet attainable plan reflecting long-term aims and expectations that is based on three pillars: an active society, a prosperous economy and a determined nation. As a result, a huge improvement can be noticed in all life aspects, and education is not an exception. One of the main stated objectives in the 2030 Vision is to reform the academic and educational system and, hence, provide students with "the compassion, knowledge, and behaviors necessary for resilient and independent characters to emerge. The focus will be on the fundamental values of initiative, persistence and leadership, as well as social skills, cultural knowledge and self-awareness" (Vision 2030, 2017, p. 28). This remarkable transfer, though progressive, can be observed within the field of education in Saudi Arabia, leading to greater emphasis on learners (Ahmad, 2016). Accordingly, the field of second language education has witnessed an increasing concern about learner-centered approach of teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) that involves techniques and strategies that give some control to the learner and account for his/her needs, objectives, and preferences (Ahmad, 2016; Al-Shehri, 2020). This shift from teacher-centered classroom to learner-centered classroom has led to more emphasis on the advantages of learner autonomy, henceforth (LA), in enhancing language learning (Alonazi, 2017).

By empowering EFL students and promoting their LA, faculties of English in Saudi universities would achieve one of the Vision's objectives with regard to English language learning (Shawaqfeh, 2018). University EFL teachers need to promote LA in the classroom by supplying their students with all self-learning required skills (Yasmin, & Sohail, 2017). Thus, their role as controllers in the prevailing traditional instruction has to be modified as they are required to adopt various roles of facilitator, counselor, mentor, assessor, and resource and

to change the classroom environment from teacher-centered to autonomy-supportive (Reeve, 2006; Tawalbeh & AlAsmari, 2015; Bajrami, 2015; Alonazi, 2017; Javid, 2018; Shawaqfeh, 2018; Darasawang, 2021).

Despite being a significant, though not easily attained, feature of successful language learning, studies on LA are limited as they focus on EFL students' beliefs and behaviors, leaving teachers' perceptions and practices insufficiently explored. Despite the importance of LA, very few studies have been conducted to investigate LA from the perspectives of EFL teachers in the Saudi context (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019). To the best knowledge of the researchers, investigations into LA have not yet dealt with perspectives towards LA as demonstrated by university teachers of English during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia.

Hence, this study explores EFL university teachers' conceptions towards LA in general and the extent to which it is desirable and feasible to promote LA. Additionally, it aims to find out if teachers depict any effect of online learning environment during the COVID-19 pandemic on LA from their perceptions, viewpoints, and practices. It is hoped that this study could shed light on how English teachers, especially those working in Saudi universities, figure out LA and what types of teaching practices they employ to enhance it. Since LA can be promoted among university students at any level, it seems vital for English teachers to be conscious of this feature so as to help their students be more autonomous, not completely teacher-dependent which contributes to the successful language learning.

2. Literature Review

LA is a complex construct that is surrounded by misconceptions regarding its nature and implementation. For example, it can be understood as learning in isolation or learning without the help of a teacher (Benson, 2011). Al-Busaidi & Al-Maamari (2014) argued that the different conceptualizations and definitions of LA depend on the context in which it is used and the research focus. Holec (1981), one of the pioneers in the field, defined LA as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning … to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning" (p. 3). Benson (2011) stated that "autonomy can be broadly defined as the capacity to take control over one's own learning" (p. 2).

LA can mean different things to different teachers (Al-Busaidi & Al-Maamari, 2014); and because teachers' beliefs affect their performance and influence what they do and how they learn (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019), it is highly recommended to study LA from teachers' perspectives which in turn can help in developing the teaching and learning process. Yasmin and Sohail (2017) strongly believed in the importance of investigating EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in developing LA as well as discovering the strategies they use to make their students autonomous. To achieve this goal, semi-structured interviews were conducted with sixteen EFL teachers from four public universities in province Punjab. The results showed that EFL teachers generally followed a teacher-centered approach. Hence, it was recommended to raise teachers' awareness of the importance of enhancing LA in the language classroom.

Yasmin and Sohail conducted another study in 2018 to examine EFL teachers' beliefs in LA and found that teachers defined LA as learner independence and responsibilities in taking control of their learning. Yet, the teachers asserted that the learning environment did not support the development of LA. The researchers argued that teachers needed to raise their awareness of the importance of LA as a central component of successful learning. In the same year, they conducted another study to explore EFL teachers' beliefs regarding the relationship between LA and learning English and the results showed a close connection between the two as developing LA supported proficiency in language learning.

Rahimi and Fahimi (2021) agreed on the importance of exploring EFL teachers' beliefs in LA and their roles in promoting it as well as raising teacher's awareness of its benefits in order to develop autonomous learning. For such a purpose, 160 EFL teachers answered an open-ended questionnaire and the results showed that the participants associated LA with learner independence, self-assessment and decision-making regarding learning materials, methods, styles and activities. The participants also believed that they could help their students be autonomous in spite of the fact that students faced some obstacles which constituted a gap between the teachers' beliefs and practices.

Chang (2020) conducted a mixed-method study to explore the extent to which EFL teachers valued the concept of LA and promoted it in their classes. The study also examined whether there were any differences between teachers' beliefs and actual practices. The results showed that the teachers believed in the importance of LA, but there was a significant difference between their beliefs and practices, which resulted from low motivation of students and their passive attitudes towards learning, in addition to the teaching demands pressure that teachers suffered from.

Joshi (2011) made a survey of autonomous activities performed by EFL Master students and explored the perceptions of the students and their teachers of the roles played by both in creating and developing LA. Analysis of the data, collected through a mixed-method approach, showed that both students and teachers had a highly positive attitude towards autonomous learning and they both believed in their roles as an important factor in developing LA. Al Asmari (2013) strongly believed in the role of teachers in developing and supporting LA through creating an autonomous classroom environment by addressing the students' experiences and raising their awareness of the benefits of LA. He investigated the opinions of 60 EFL teachers at the university level regarding the concept of LA and its practices and prospects in their classes. The findings showed that developing LA could be achieved through providing learner training as an integral part of teaching.

Using a mixed method approach, Barillaro (2011) investigated EFL teachers' perspectives in Vancouver, Canada. The study showed that the participants had a good understanding of the concept of LA and a positive attitude towards it. The teachers believed that they were responsible for most teaching and decisions inside the class and that students were responsible for progress and learning outside the class. However, most teachers did not see their students as autonomous which might be due to many constraints in the school system such as large class size, curriculum and time pressure. Wan (2018) investigated teachers' beliefs about LA and found that teachers were very positive about LA, particularly regarding its importance, possibilities to foster it, teachers' responsibilities, and solutions to overcome the constraints to develop autonomy. The teachers were less positive towards the students' abilities, self-confidence and willingness.

Javid (2018) investigated the perspectives of Saudi EFL university teachers of LA and focused on the effect of gender on their perception regarding the role of textbooks, teaching materials, support of EFL teachers, learning strategies, students' motivation and self-evaluation. The results showed that the participants had very positive attitudes towards LA and that only 6 items from the 35-item questionnaire used in the study indicated significant gender-based differences.

Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) designed a questionnaire, which has been adopted in this study, to investigate the beliefs and reported practices regarding LA of 61 EFL university teachers in Oman. Interviews were also conducted with the teachers to explore their beliefs in depth. The results showed that although teachers had different conceptualizations of LA, they commonly believed that it referred to strategies of independent learning. The participants were theoretically positive towards LA but less optimistic regarding the feasibility of practicing it. They also believed that fixed curriculum, students' limited experience of independent learning, and lack of motivation were the most important factors that hindered the development of LA. Using the same questionnaire, Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) examined EFL university teachers' beliefs and practices of LA and the constraints that hindered its implementation. The participants were 359 teachers working in an English preparatory year program in a Saudi university. The results showed that although teachers believed in the importance of promoting LA, they believed that it was not feasible due to a number of factors such as lack of learners' motivation, low proficiency level, curriculum, and society. The teachers also believed that LA referred to independent learning with no or little teacher help.

Ahmadianzadeh, Seifoori, and Hadidi Tamjid (2020) adopted the same questionnaire that was developed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) to explore EFL teachers' beliefs of LA and their actual practices in relation to experience and licensure. The researchers also designed a class observation form based on the questionnaire to collect data in addition to a semi-structured interview. The results showed that the teachers' beliefs in autonomy were significantly different in terms of experience and licensure and that their practices were significantly different in terms of experience only. Analysis of the interview data showed that the importance of strategic investment in developing autonomy was ignored by the participants and that policy makers and learner's expectations were seen as two factors that challenge autonomous practices. Using the same questionnaire, Amirian and Noughabi (2017) examined the feasibility and desirability of LA in the Iranian context from the perspectives of EFL teachers. The results indicated that most teachers showed understanding of LA but with no interest in its desirability and feasibility which required a deeper investigation to explain the reason behind the teachers' views.

Despite the fact that research has been done to examine EFL teachers' beliefs in LA, such beliefs among university teachers of English in the Saudi context are insufficiently explored, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic which constitute a literary gap. This study aims to explore how LA is perceived by EFL teachers in Saudi universities and to find out if there is an effect of the online teaching experience during COVID-19 pandemic to reinforce learner autonomy from their points of view.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative measures were used to accomplish the research goal. The first instrument was a questionnaire designed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) which included Likert-scale items and two open-ended questions to explore how LA was perceived by EFL university teachers. Additionally, a semi-structured interview was conducted to explore in more detail the teachers' perceptions of LA (See Appendix A). Quantitative statistical analysis was used to analyze the data collected through the questionnaire and qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected through the questionnaire open-ended questions and the interview.

3.2 Questions of the Study

The current study is carried out to explore LA from the EFL university teachers' perspectives, seeking for an inquiry of the related issues. Precisely, the study addresses the following questions:

1) What are the EFL university teachers' conceptions about learner autonomy?

2) What are the EFL university teachers' perceptions about the desirability and feasibility of enhancing learner autonomy?

3) Do EFL university teachers believe that their students are autonomous learners? If yes, to what extent?

4) Do EFL university teachers believe they create a supportive environment of leaner autonomy to their students? If yes, how?

5) Based on EFL university teachers' perceptions and teaching experiences, is there any effect of online learning environment during the COVID-19 pandemic on enhancing students' LA? How?

3.3 The Research Instruments

Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) devoted more than two months to carefully design the questionnaire as they strongly believed that research findings depend to a large extent on the instruments used in collecting data. Designing the questionnaire was based on different sources such as reviews of related studies and debates on the literature to identify important points such as definitions of LA and teachers' role in fostering it. The questionnaire included 4 sections; the first section consisted of 37 Likert-scale items to elicit the teachers' perceptions of the nature of LA. The second section consisted of two sets of statements consisting of seven items each; the first set was about learners' decisions and the second set was about their abilities, and the teachers were asked to express their views about the desirability and feasibility of these points. The third section included 4 items; two of which were open-ended questions to elicit the teachers' views on the degree of LA in their students and the opportunities they provided their students with to develop LA. The fourth section included the demographic questions.

In addition, the present study involves a semi-structured interview to explore in more detail how teachers viewed LA based on their online teaching experience. Specifically, teachers were first asked to clarify, from their point view, what LA was and what characteristics would make students autonomous. Then, the participant teachers were given the chance to explain the different kinds of activities they planned to use in online teaching to enhance LA in their students and whether these activities actually created opportunities for students to develop their autonomy. The participants then commented on whether their students were successful in achieving LA throughout their online learning experience during COVID-19 pandemic and, if yes, to what extent. The remaining interview questions involved discussing the challenges faced by students that might hinder their autonomy and what teachers could do to help them overcome these challenges. The effect of the curriculum as well as online learning versus face-to-face learning, whether positive or negative, on the development of LA was also involved in the discussion.

3.4 Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

The development of the questionnaire by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) went through a number of stages of revising and modifying to ensure the content validity of the questionnaire items. In addition to consulting different resources, Borg and Al-Busaidi asked an academic colleague who had experience in designing questionnaires to revise it which resulted in rewriting, adding and deleting some items. After such modifications and careful revisions, they piloted the questionnaire with the assistance of a colleague who worked in a center of English language at a university in Turkey. In spite of the fact that the setting was geographically different, the context was similar to their study which served the purpose of piloting it. The pilot questionnaire was filled by 18 preparatory year teachers. The questionnaire was further revised based on the analysis of the teachers' responses and statistically analyzed using Cronbach's alpha which was 0.83 that indicated "a good level of

conceptual relatedness among item" (Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012, p. 11). Since the context of the present study was to a large extent similar to the context of the study conducted by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), it was not necessary to obtain a reliability test of the questionnaire. To ensure the reliability of the interview questions, they were revised by two professors who were experienced in conducting related research in the field. They provided some suggestions and modifications to the interview questions which were taken into consideration. The interview question, after being modified, were piloted with three EFL teachers and they reflected their appropriateness to the purpose of the study.

3.5 Participants

The total population of the present study was 66 English language teachers in 7 universities located in Saudi Arabia. The main consideration when selecting the participants was that they were EFL instructors teaching English to specialist students at the English department at Saudi universities. The participants' years of experience as English language teachers were wide-ranging. About 34% of the participants had 1-9 years of experience, 47% had 10-20 years of experience, and 19% worked more than 20 years as English teachers. Also, the participants' highest qualifications were varied. A large percentage were doctors (75%); 20% were Master's holders; 3% were Bachelor's holders; and only 2% were diploma holders. The majority of the participants were females (92%); and only 8% were males. As for their nationalities, most participants were Saudi Arabian (about 89%); other nationalities involved Egyptian (6%), Jordanian (1.6%), Sudanese (1.6%), and American (1.6%).

3.6 Research Procedure

The study followed a mixed-method approach. The questionnaire adopted from Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) was administered online to different Saudi universities instructors, both males and females. The study aimed to collect data that would reflect variable perspectives from a large number of instructors with different academic backgrounds and experiences. At the very beginning, a limited number of replies were received which led the researchers to redistribute the questionnaire with a valuable assistance from colleagues in different academic institutions. After two months devoted for collecting responses, 66 responses were received and considered appropriate to fit the purpose of the research and give a picture of the EFL teachers' perceptions of LA.

The questionnaire included a separate section for participants to add their contact details if they would like to be interviewed to discuss in depth their views on LA. Eight individuals showed their interests and they were interviewed via the Zoom platform for an average of 45-60 minutes. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, it was preferred to meet the interviewees online. According to Borg (2006) interviews are usually conducted face to face, however, they can also be administered from distance.

4. Results

The participants' responses to the closed-ended part of the questionnaire were quantitatively analyzed in order to explore their notions about LA. Specifically, the data were statistically analyzed using SPSS 18. Descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency counts and percentages) were calculated for all items. The Grounded Theory was used to analyze the qualitative data. The interview data were first manually transcribed; then both the responses to the open-ended part of the questionnaire as well as the transcribed interview data were coded and revised by the present researchers and some categories were created. Some relationships between these categories were established to obtain a theory. According to Dornyei (2007), two important criteria should be met: a. adapting certain sequential coding system and b. producing some theory as an outcome of the analysis. To ensure the appropriate coding and categorization, they were verified by an academic expert. Minor modifications were suggested and were considered by the researchers.

4.1 Quantitative Data

To obtain an accurate representation of the respondents' conceptions, Appendix B specified the exact levels of agreement/disagreement with each statement in Section 1 of the questionnaire. Indeed, the 37 Likert-scale items in Section 1 were analyzed statistically in terms of frequency counts and percentages to find out which items have received the highest agreement among participants as represented in the following table.

Table 1. Highest levels of agreement with section 1 items

Item	Percentage of agreement
Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy.	89.4
Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy	87.8
The teacher has an important role to play in supporting learner autonomy.	84.8
Independent study in the library is an activity which develops learner autonomy.	81.8
Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence.	81.8
Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.	81.8
Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner.	81.8
Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy.	80.3
Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn.	78.8
To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	77.3
Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other.	77.2
Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom.	77.2
Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do.	77.2

The main finding that could be drawn from Table 1 was that the respondents significantly tended to view LA as being able to carry out one's learning. 89.4% of participants agreed on the importance of learning strategies mastery as it was regarded very influential in enhancing students LA. Additionally, students who can, independently, study in the library were viewed as autonomous learners by 81.8% of the participants. Likewise, a large number of teachers believed that LA refers to students' ability to make choices about how they learn (78.8%) and what types of activities they do (77.2%). Autonomous learners are also capable of evaluating their own learning as asserted by 77.3% of participants. As a result, LA was also viewed by 81.8% of the participants as a positive factor in fostering successful language learning.

A high percentage of responses (87.8%) reflected that collaborative-based activities are a key in enhancing students' LA, especially those that give learners opportunities to learn from each other (77.2%). Similarly, learning outside the classroom was considered very effective in developing LA by 77.2% of the participants, particularly the out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet (80.3%). Nevertheless, the teacher's essential role in supporting LA was also asserted by a considerable number of responses (84.8%). Confidence as well as motivation were regarded as essential factors in enhancing LA. More confident and more motivated students are more likely to develop LA than those who are less confident and less motivated as it was reflected by equal percentages of agreement (81.8%).

Regarding the remaining responses to the questionnaire items that reflected the participants disagreement with and neutral views towards LA, the frequency counts were almost equal which led the researchers to disregard them except for the following items:

Table 2. Highest levels of disagreement with section 1 items

Item	Percentage of disagreement
Learner autonomy is only possible with adult learners.	77.2
Learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher.	66.6
It is harder to promote learner autonomy with proficient language learners than it is with beginners.	57.6

As can be entailed from Table 2, LA is not restricted to adult learners as indicated by 77.2 % of respondents. 66.6% of the responses showed that LA does not require total independence of the teacher and 57.6% disagreed that LA is harder to be promoted with proficient language learners than it is with beginners.

The items in Table 3 seemed to be controversial among participants since they received almost equal levels of disagreement/agreement. Learning without a teacher as well as promoting LA in teacher-centered classrooms reflected uncertainty among the participants.

Table 3. Equal levels of disagreement/agreement with section 1 items

Item	Percentage of disagreement	Percentage of agreement
Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher.	45.5	42.4
Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centred classrooms.	42.4	43.9

As for the desirability and feasibility of enhancing LA, teachers' perceptions are summarized in Table 4. Generally, a considerable number of the participants viewed all items as being quite/very desirable. However, responses towards feasibility were swinging among the two polars: unfeasible/very feasible.

Table 4. Percentages of teachers' perceptions of the desirability and feasibility of enhancing LA

	desirability				feasibility			
	Undesirable	Slightly desirable	Quite desirable	Very desirable	Unfeasible	Slightly feasible	Quite feasible	Very feasible
Learners are involved in decisions about:								
The objectives of a course	12.1	18.2	39.4	30.3	24.2	37.9	28.8	9.1
The materials used	6.1	13.6	48.5	31.8	13.6	39.4	34.8	12.1
The kinds of tasks and activities they do	4.5	19.7	37.9	37.9	9.1	33.3	36.4	21.2
The topics discussed	4.5	12.1	39.4	43.9	4.5	33.3	33.3	28.8
How learning is assessed	13.6	27.3	39.4	19.7	19.7	42.4	30.3	7.6
The teaching methods used	7.6	25.8	39.4	27.3	16.7	34.8	36.4	12.1
Classroom management	16.7	25.8	24.2	33.3	19.7	30.3	30.3	19.7
Learners have the ability to:								
Identify their own needs	1.5	10.6	40.9	47	1.5	33.3	45.5	19.7
Identify their own strengths	6.1	16.7	27.3	50	9.1	24.2	50	16.7
Identify their own weaknesses	4.5	15.6	31.8	48.5	10.6	33.3	34.8	21.2
Monitor their progress	4.5	12.1	34.8	48.5	3	39.4	39.4	18.2
Evaluate their own learning	6.1	15.6	30.3	48.5	7.6	37.9	37.9	16.7
Learn co-operatively	3	15.6	31.8	50	1.5	30.3	40.9	27.3
Learn independently	4.5	12.1	27.3	56.1	7.6	24.2	43.9	24.2

To illustrate, teachers believed that it is desirable to involve learners in decisions about the objectives of the course with a percentage of 39.4% quite desirable and 30.3% very desirable. Also, involvement of learners in making decisions about the materials was viewed as quite desirable by 48.5% of the participants and very desirable by 31.8%. Equal number of responses (37.9%) indicated that it is quite/very desirable to include learners in making decisions about the types of tasks and activities they perform. 39.4% and 43.9% of the responses showed that it is quite desirable and very desirable, respectively, to allow learners to decide about the topics discussed. Furthermore, the participants mostly agreed that it is quite/very desirable for learners to be capable of identifying their own needs (40.9/47), strengths (27.3/50) and weaknesses (31.8/48.5), monitoring

their progress (34.8/48.5), evaluating their own learning (30.3/48.5), as well as learning cooperatively (31.8/50) and independently (27.3/56.1).

Regarding the feasibility of promoting LA, a considerable percentage of responses reflected that it is unfeasible/slightly feasible to involve learners in decisions about the objective of the course (24.2/37.9) and in assessing their learning (19.7/42.4). However, participants believed that it is quite feasible/ very feasible to involve learners in making decisions about the topics discussed (33.3/28.8). Furthermore, learners' abilities to identify their own needs and strengths are quite feasible/ very feasible by a percentage of (45.5/19.7), (50/16.7) respectively. Learners' ability to monitor their progress is quite feasible/very feasible by 39.4/18.2% of the participants. Additionally, 40.9/27.3% of responses showed the feasibility of the ability of learners to learn cooperatively while 43.9/24.2% reflected the feasibility of their ability to learn independently.

4.2 Qualitative Data

The qualitative analysis led to the following categories: teachers' conceptions about LA, teachers' perceptions of LA during the COVID-19 pandemic, the teachers' role in fostering LA, challenges for developing LA and suggested solutions, the effect of subject and curriculum in developing LA, and online learning vs. traditional learning.

4.2.1 Teachers' Conceptions about LA

The participants provided numerous definitions of LA that revolve around the following ideas:

- self-learning and knowing how to learn and developing good strategies of learning,

- students' ability to search by themselves and depend on themselves in finding extra materials,

- being involved and motivated to find information and educate themselves and raise their self-esteem,

- students' ability to investigate, explore, and construct their own learning,

- learner dependence on him/her-self for the learning process. Sometimes it is totally self-learning. Other times, there is supervision and monitoring from the teachers. Generally, it is student-centered process,

- students' ability to take responsibility, fully or partially, of their own learning which involves planning, evaluating, and monitoring their language learning.

The participants agreed that such abilities come from teachers' encouragement and students' motivation. They all strongly believed that the teacher's role in the learning process is essential and can never be ignored in the sense that LA never means learning with no teacher. It can be seen as self-learning with the assistance and help of the teacher. In this respect, T1 said: "It is your teaching, then you inspire them to search things on their own. Dependence comes from encouragement." T2 added: "LA is flexible, it is not one side or one way. You give your students the power to study, then come to you for help." T3 strongly believed that the teacher should give her students the chance to be autonomous and depend on themselves by creating suitable opportunities for them. In general, the participants saw that autonomy is related to the students' motivation which is developed and supported by the teacher.

The participants believed that autonomous learners are those who show their personal efforts through their performance, for example, by providing extra materials that are far from the course book. Also, students can reflect their autonomy through rich argument, negotiation, and self-confidence. T3 said, "An autonomous lady stops me and starts asking and arguing. She is a producer not just a receiver." Additionally, the students' independent personality and critical thinking in their answers are good signs of LA. The learners who love to take most of the roles and parts in the learning process are autonomous learners. T4 argued that autonomous learners never see boundaries for learning and the opposite is true. T2 believed that autonomous learners are those who are continuously constructing and investigating their own knowledge regardless of their proficiency level.

T5 defined autonomous learners as students who can, independently, set their learning goals, plan and evaluate their learning, have motivation to learn, use various study skills and solve potential learning problems. T6 described autonomous learners as those who can manage the learning process on their own in the long run so they can set their goals and identify materials and resources to support these goals and they can find ways to maintain their motivation until they can reach the goals.

4.2.2 Teachers' Perceptions of LA During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Since the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a sudden shift from face-to-face learning into online-learning, all participants agreed that this situation created opportunities for most students to improve their LA. Despite the

fact that the participants belong to different educational settings, all approved that students were exposed to a new situation that helped to uncover their inner autonomous skills that they practiced for the first time. Additionally, students with positive attitudes towards LA in traditional settings were more advantageous to utilize the numerous features of online learning in enhancing their computer-based skills.

According to the participants, the students showed some signs of autonomy through online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were successful in accessing several online platforms with different tools and features, for the first time for most of them. Most students, as reported by T2, attended on certain time, participated in circumstances that were different from the regular traditional ones, solved many technical problems and learned many new things in a relatively short time with a completely different experience. All these features of LA as shown by students mirrored the fact that online learning during the pandemic helped students to grow and become more independent.

Anyhow, there are usually individual differences. Some students were more autonomous than others which indeed, according to T6, highlighted the advantage of groupwork in this regard. As a result, students with low autonomy and poor academic performance would adhere to work with more autonomous students. In some situations, according to T1, some excellent students took the responsibility of completing challenging tasks, answering quizzes and exam questions and provided them to their less autonomous partners. This, in turn, required teachers to be more tentative to these cases and find ways to support students' LA and self-monitor of their learning.

4.2.3 The Teachers' Role in Fostering LA

The participants believed that teachers play a key role in creating LA-enhancing activities and open new fields for the students to think, plan and search. For example, T1 stated that she, as a reading teacher, asked her students to read about certain topics such as the different uses of 3D devices and bring more concrete examples on how such devices can be employed. The participants also claimed that LA can be fostered through activities and tasks that require critical thinking skills such as writing pieces of critical reviews that express their opinions towards controversial issues and make their personal voices heard. In addition, students can be asked to consult extra resources to develop independent researching skills and raise their awareness of the importance of working autonomously.

Furthermore, teachers can make specific individual LA-fostering activities as main components in the coursework. For example, students' performance in presentations, as claimed by T4 and T3, is a fuel for enhancing the students' level of LA. This is because autonomous learners are excellent presenters as they provide extra information, discuss and persuade the audience, and are always ready for questions because they have enough knowledge of the content of their work. Activities that could foster LA are various; some are individual, others are collaborative. Presentations, for example, can be required as an individual task where each student has to summarize a lecture and add her own examples and present it for her colleagues.

The participants also suggested that other activities can be collaborative where students, for instance, are divided into groups to work on developing a review of an article; they would be asked to add their names so their contributions can be assessed to ensure involvement of all students. Another participant gave an example of a group project where students apply certain theoretical concepts on real life situations. Students would, for instance, apply the speech act theory by identifying and analyzing the acts in situations extracted from a talk show or a movie. This can foster the students' LA as they can remember, later on, these concepts and apply them on what is going around them.

T2 claimed that she carefully designed tasks that help students develop autonomy. She provided guidelines from the beginning and watched students' progress until the end of the activity and provided feedback and help when needed. For example, she asked her students to video record themselves talking about something they like, for example, motivating someone in difficult circumstances. She asked them to give justifications and argument for their choice and provide evidence such as statistics, quotations and studies. Some teachers believed that exchanging ideas and providing feedback for each other can help students develop a good level of LA.

4.2.4 Challenges for Developing LA and Suggested Solutions

All participants strongly agreed that language classrooms in the Saudi context are typically teacher-centered and that the students' role is secondary. One challenge, as reported by T6, is the idea of spoon-feeding; some students come to class thinking that if the teacher does not spoon-feed them, then she is not doing her job. In addition, teachers are not allowed to give extra references and students, as a result, do not know how to search because of greater reliance on the teacher. There are cultural beliefs among students and their parents that the

teacher is mostly responsible for the teaching and learning process. Parents do not support expressing beliefs and critical thinking from childhood. The participants also believed that fear of losing grades is a major challenge that prevents students from developing autonomy because there is a common belief among students that they will lose marks if they do not give exact answers. Some students believe that the teacher is always correct and that providing an answer that is different from the teacher's answer will result in losing grades. They claimed that Saudi students are not allowed by teachers to negotiate.

One participant affirmed that students at higher levels would have a high degree of autonomy and they usually need less monitor than beginners who come from a highly structured environment. In high school, instructors and parents are used to keep track of students' progress and they are, for example, constantly reminded to study for exams or to complete their assignments before deadlines. With this shift to higher education, and being involved in online learning, beginners usually need more support to understand how to manage their own learning and be more autonomous.

Additionally, the participants stated that large classroom size can definitely reduce opportunities of providing tasks that develop LA. This is because the teacher can hardly understand students' personalities, preferences, and needs in large classes and give them equal chances. In addition, the English level of the student is a major challenge of LA. Students who are reluctant to speak because of their low English level have less confidence to develop LA. Lacking motivation to learn is also a serious problem. Also, personality diversity was seen as a major challenge; for example, some students are introverted while others are extroverted and the teachers, thus, should give them different tasks according to their personalities.

Several solutions for the potential challenges for developing LA were suggested. The participants agreed that raising students' awareness of the importance of LA-enhancing activities is a key strategy to overcome the idea of spoon-feeding. To help students with low motivation, teachers should highlight the positive of their work and use different teaching techniques throughout the semester. They also need to show students that all efforts are appreciated even if they need modifications. Teachers should also create a student-centered context by raising students' self-esteem and providing them with workshops and courses, especially beginners, that help them develop study skills and self-learning strategies. LA can also be fostered by helping students according to their learning styles and preferences by manipulating teaching techniques and evaluation processes and establishing clear class rules.

Raising parents' awareness of the importance of developing LA in their kids from childhood is also important to raise autonomous learners. The participants also argued that it is necessary to reduce the number of students in class because it is difficult to discover the students and their personalities and give them equal chances in large classes. It is also important to give students some space to participate in important decisions in the learning process. For example, T2 said that the students can be given the chance to change some items in the syllabus during the first week of the semester only if they have strong justifications and can convince her. This would help them be involved, motivated and read the syllabus carefully. According to the participants, providing students with instructions for life-long learning, relating their learning to their demands in the future, and showing the importance of learning English for the labour market and 2030 vision expectations are of great importance for fostering LA.

4.2.5 The Effect of Subject and Curriculum in Developing LA

Some participants believed that fostering LA depends to a great extent on the subject. For example, T1 stated that skill courses allow for more autonomous learning where the students can take some role of the teacher while content courses require more effort from the teacher. T3 argued that skill courses are the first block through which students can develop LA and be ready for more difficult courses.

On the other hand, T4 believed that subjects and curriculum do not have an obvious effect on developing LA; it depends on the students and their readiness and desire to work and develop LA. This view was also supported by T2 who argued that the curriculum is just a material that can be manipulated by the teacher. T5 had a similar view as she saw curriculum as a mean to deliver information and that language teachers have the fundamental role in facilitating, monitoring, and creating chances for their students to be responsible for their learning. If the teacher can set the syllabus and choose the material, there is always a space for creating a curriculum with integrated learning activities that could help students work independently and be more self-directed, as T6 argued.

4.2.6 Online Learning vs. Traditional Learning

Both online learning and face-to-face learning can be helpful in fostering LA. In other words, teachers can promote LA in both contexts. Traditional learning contexts may guarantee that students work collaboratively in class, present their work in front of their colleagues, attend class on time, participate more, become more encouraged to work in group and learn from each other, get more involved in discussions, etc. Nevertheless, online learning requires students to be more attentive, know how to access different online resources, etc. Particularly, some participants believed that online learning saves time and effort of both teachers and students and allows for using online applications and consulting extra resources. Also, students try to help themselves more, for example in understanding a difficult point or watching a missed class in online learning. Also, students appear to be more confident in making presentations in online classes. Some participants argued that online learning can be more helpful if it includes clear rules regarding all potential problems such as missing classes and plagiarism. All participants agreed that blended learning is the best situation because it includes benefits of both types of learning; students need to be physically involved in the social context in class activities and they also need to practice using technology for their learning.

5. Discussion

This study aims at exploring the perceptions of EFL teachers in Saudi universities about LA and finding out if there is an effect of the online teaching experience during COVID-19 pandemic to reinforce learner autonomy from their points of view. The analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data yields consistent results. LA is mainly viewed as being able to carry out one's learning and mastering learning strategies as they are considered very significant in enhancing students LA. Furthermore, studying independently in the library and performing out-of-class tasks, especially the ones that require internet, are viewed as signs of autonomous learners. LA can be defined as the students' ability to make choices about how they learn and what types of activities they do as well as their ability to evaluate their own learning. In their study, Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) found that teachers had a set of conceptions about LA, the most prominent of which was that the freedom of learners to make decisions and choices in learning as expressed by 95.1% of the participants. Likewise, Duong (2014) concluded that teachers' definition of LA mainly involved decision-making ability, learner independence, psychology of learning, and levels of learner autonomy.

The concept of LA also involves the students' ability to construct their own learning by adapting different approaches of investigation and exploration and utilizing various appropriate problem-solving skills. In addition, total learning independence, whether with teachers' monitoring and supervision or not is another face of LA as it is mainly a student-centered approach. However, learning without a teacher would be a misconception among teachers as highlighted by Agustina (2017). Equally, being able to take responsibility of different learning tasks such as planning, assessing and observing ones' learning is a trait of LA. Further instances include being on time, being active in circumstances that are different from the regular traditional ones, solving technical problems and acquiring new skills in a relatively short time with a completely different experience. This is in line with Ahmadianzadeh, Seifoori, and Hadidi Tamjid (2020) who found that the nature of LA, from teachers' viewpoint, involves engaging learners in the process of decision making, learner self-evaluation, upgrading and self-monitoring. This is also consistent with many previous studies in the related literature (Martinez, 2008; Yoshiyuki, 2011; Amirian & Noughabi, 2017).

Co-operative group work activities, particularly those that enable learners to learn from each other support the development of LA. Shi and Han (2019) found that cooperative learning helps in fostering LA and developing learning attitude, motivation and interest. They also indicated that group work can develop language competence and raise awareness of how learning resources are used. Similarly, Díaz Ramírez (2014) indicated that learners can develop their autonomous skills through cooperative tasks where they support each other and share common interests. However, the participants in the present study shed the light to the importance of considering students' individual differences in online team-work leaning. Less autonomous students with poor academic performance would adhere to work with more autonomous students in completing challenging tasks. This requires teachers to be more attentive to properly administer online group work and find ways to support students' LA through collaboration. LA is also perceived as a crucial factor that enhances successful language learning. It is important to note that age is not a very influential factor in LA development as both young and adult learners can equally learn autonomously. Scott et al. (2015) found that individual differences, personal experience and age are important factors that influence the degree of LA. Particularly, they proved that LA develops through time and that mature students are more autonomous than their younger peers.

Regarding the desirability and feasibility of LA, involvement of learners in decisions about the objectives of the course, the materials used, the topics discussed, and the types of tasks and activities performed by students is desirable. The students' ability in identifying their own needs, strengths and weaknesses, observing their progress, assessing their own learning as well as learning collaboratively and independently are also desirable among teachers. Ahmadianzadeh, Seifoori, and Hadidi Tamjid (2020) found that the desirability of LA was based on a number of factors such as educational improvement that is based on students' needs, supporting life-long learning, encouraging learners' self-confidence, academic upgrading and promoting self-monitoring.

Although some LA practices are viewed as ideally desirable, they are sometimes realistically unachievable. Teachers' positive perceptions should not be confused with feasibility of improving LA. Such a view is held by Yoshiyuki (2011) who found out that Japanese teachers of English are not fully ready to promote autonomy in their learners despite they possess optimistic attitudes towards LA improvement. Similarly, Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) found out that all participants held more positive opinions about the desirability of LA than its feasibility. They argued that involving students in making decisions about learning materials, topics and tasks seem to be most feasible; however, making decisions about learning objectives and evaluation is least feasible. To involve learners in decisions about the objectives of the course and in assessing their learning seem to be unfeasible. However, it turns to be feasible to involve learners in making decisions about the topics discussed, identifying their own needs and strengths, and monitoring their progress. It is also feasible that learners can develop the ability to learn cooperatively and independently. The gap between how desirable it is to develop LA and how feasible it is to practice it has been identified in the previous literature (Lee, 2009; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Reinders & Lazaro, 2011; Haji-Othman & Wood, 2016; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019). Holding such positive attitudes would be the first step towards the feasibility of promoting LA.

Due to the sudden shift from face-to-face learning into online-learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, ample opportunities for LA enhancement are created regardless of the differences in educational contexts. Although the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic has represented a significant challenge to both academic institutions as well as students and teachers worldwide, alternative digital teaching/learning modes have been implemented and proved to be beneficial. Al Ghazali (2020) shed light on the various pathways virtual learning offers to students and the opportunities it provides in fostering self-access learning. The students' intrinsic autonomous skills are discovered through their participation in such a new challenging learning situation. Students who have positive LA attitudes in traditional contexts are more capable of making sufficient use of the different features of computer-based learning to adequately support their online learning skills. During the pandemic, they have succeeded in using several online platforms with different features. LA can be represented in attending on a certain time, participating in circumstances that are different from traditional ones, solving technical problems and learning new things in a relatively short time with a completely different experience. Such LA behaviors reflect the positive effect of the pandemic in students' autonomous growth. Al Ghazali (2020) eventually asserted that "disrupted classes do not necessarily mean disrupted learning when self-access learning is facilitated and students' motivation and autonomy are enhanced" (p. 114). As Maru et al. (2021) showed, students' attitude toward the idea of being independent learners in this epidemic era is primarily optimistic although several factors such as poor Internet connection and distraction might hinder them to pursue LA.

As for the context in which LA can be developed, both online and traditional learning settings can equally be utilized since there are distinctive features available in each context but absent from the other. For example, in traditional learning settings, students find more chance for participation and collaboration. However, online learning contexts allow for the use of online applications and extra materials in a way that saves time and effort. Raya and Fernández (2002) strongly believed that the growth of new technologies enables learners to have a more autonomous role in setting their own learning objectives and syllabi and determining the way and time they prefer. Fuchs, Hauck and Müller-Hartmann (2012) indicated that students can develop their autonomy by raising their awareness of the importance of online multiliteracy skills and the use of web resources and social networking tools in virtual learning contexts. They argued that those who are more skilled in multimodality and multiliteracy are more capable of self-directing their learning. In the same regard, many researchers stated that one of the most important traits of LA is the students' ability to reflect on their own learning and that online learning can offer such an opportunity (Jones, 2001; Toyoda, 2001; Kim, 2014). Nevertheless, according to the participants of current study, the optimal learning environment is the blended one which offers advantages of both learning types.

Teachers play a facilitating role in offering students various opportunities for planning, exploring and thinking critically in a way that improves their argumentation and justification skills. Despite the fact that the participants strongly advocate learners' role in developing autonomy, they also value their role in facilitating the conditions

and offering encouragements for LA enhancement since, as they argued, LA does not mean total independence of the teacher. Joshi's (2011) findings compiled with the fact that teachers' role should always be a combination of a facilitator, a co-worker, and an authoritative. Balçıkanlı (2010), Tok (2011), and Yunus and Arshad (2015) also confirmed that teachers, by taking on different roles: facilitator, counselor, and resource, can enhance LA to a high degree. Furthermore, teachers can design their syllabi that involve LA tasks as one of the main components in the coursework such as presentations and critical reviews. Providing concise guidelines, monitoring students' performance, and utilizing self-, pair-, and teacher-corrective feedback are all different teaching practices to improve LA. Little, Ridley, and Ushioda's (2003) findings showed that EFL teachers play the role of facilitator through fostering students' ability to reflect on their learning experiences and monitor their learning progress. For successful LA enhancement, teachers need to shift their roles from being knowledge transmitters to learning facilitators. This can be achieved by involving students in selecting and modifying the content of their learning (Nguyen, 2014). This is consistent with what Zhuang (2010) concluded that it is crucial for teachers to establish a smooth and positive relation with students in order to create autonomous environment.

As for the challenges faced by students that hinder their autonomy, the nature of the classroom in the Saudi context is typically teacher-centered in which the students' role is minor. This is advocated by Yasmin and Sohail (2017) who stated that traditional practicing teachers where the class is teacher-directed is a hinder of LA development. Another challenge is related to the students' and parents' cognition of spoon-feeding where they assume it is the teacher's role to be the source of knowledge on which they rely. In addition, the structured learning environment in high school does not usually prepare students for independent learning at university level. As a result, they usually do not have the independent learning skills necessary for successful academic accomplishment due to lacking the knowledge of the rules and regulations of the institutions. These findings are consistent with the findings of Alonazi (2017) where 60% of the participants identified these factors as main constraints that hinder LA. Fear of losing marks and possible negatives attitudes that teachers might hold against poor performance are two other major challenges. Such traditional behaviors would mirror the "teachers' intolerance towards difference of opinion and their stress on learners to follow what they think right" (Yasmin & Sohail, 2017, p. 157). Another obstacle is associated with large class size in which it is demanding for teachers to have enough understanding of the students and to obtain balance of chances. Similar obstacles in enhancing LA were identified by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) who grouped them into a) learner factors such as lack of independent learning skills, b) institutional factors such as a fixed curriculum, and c) teacher factors such as low expectations of students' LA skills. This is also corresponding with the results obtained by Reinders & Lazaro (2011).

To avoid such obstacles, it is highly recommended to raise awareness among parents of the significance of developing autonomy in their kids from childhood. Teachers should also raise students' awareness of the importance of LA as a key factor in successful language learning as well as encouraging them in many different ways such as praising good performance and appreciating all efforts. Harmer (2007) believed that teachers should provide help and be available when required, but they should also resist the desire to spoon-feed the students. Providing guidance is supportive in making students more autonomous in their learning. Creating student-centered classroom with clear class rules and manipulating pedagogical techniques that consider different learning styles and preferences would be a fruitful solution to overcome these challenges. Zhuang (2010) strongly asserted that it is crucial for teachers to create a positive relationship with their students in order to create a student-centered class with an autonomous environment. Decreasing the number of students in class can also be very helpful as teachers can manage the classroom and get to know their students well. It is also significant to involve students in making decisions related to the course such as allowing them to provide suggestions to modify the syllabus or some requirements of the course. Many studies have emphasized that students should be regarded as equivalent partners in adjusting the time and pace of the course (Nunan, 1997; Benson, 2011; Al Asmari, 2013). Alonazi (2017) indicated that some strategies such as involving learners in modifying the objectives of the course and the materials used for their learning are usually helpful in promoting LA. He found that more than 70% of the surveyed participants indicated that they create opportunities for their students to express their opinions about classroom activities and tasks. This result goes hand in hand with those of Camilleri (1997), and Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012).

Therefore, students' motivation and involvement should be enhanced. Benson's (2001: 86) statement in this regard emphasize that 'the link between autonomy and motivation is well-established at a theoretical level'. This, in turn, can help in raising the students' self-esteem and motivation. Indeed, affective variables can play a significant role. For example, the more confident and motivated students are, the more likely to develop LA. Alonazi (2017) agreed on the importance of raising students' motivation to create an LA atmosphere by selecting

the resources based on their needs and using technology that motivate them to use English outside the classroom. Another way to foster motivation is through helping students acquire skills and strategies needed for life-long learning. Shedding the light to the significance of their major for the workforce and relating it to the 2030 vision can also be very helpful. From the perspective of many researchers, this should foster students' motivation and encourage them to learn English autonomously for a better job. Unquestionably, such approaches can create a motivating learning environment (Ushioda, 2011; Javid et al., 2012; Al Asmari, 2013).

The effect of subject on developing LA is a controversial issue. Some courses such as skill courses can help learners develop autonomy while content courses require more dependence on the teacher. On the other hand, students' desire and willingness is a major determinant of the degree to which they can improve their autonomy regardless of subjects and curricula. Richards and Rodgers (2003) and Richards and Farrell (2005) strongly believed that the curriculum can be an LA enhancing factor if it is based on a bottom-up approach in which both teachers and students are given the chance to participate in the process of decision making. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) argued that LA is "hindered by a full curriculum in which content and assessment were centrally defined". Additionally, this view is held by Keuk and Heng (2016) and Tapinta (2016) where the top-down manner in curriculum development hampers LA.

6. Conclusion

This study explores the perceptions of EFL teachers in Saudi universities about LA and examines their views about the effect of the online teaching experience during COVID-19 pandemic on LA. The examination of the quantitative and qualitative data shows that teachers hold a variety of perceptions of the concept of LA and have highly positive attitudes towards reinforcing LA. For teachers, it is theoretically desirable to promote LA among EFL students; yet, it is partially attainable in the practical ground. Luckily, the experience of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift from face-to-face setting have paved the way for more practices of LA. Teachers' role cannot be disregarded since they create adequate opportunities for LA development. Although a number of obstacles that would hinder LA can be identified, some solutions can be of great appeal in encouraging LA in EFL contexts.

The current study is limited to examining the conceptions of LA and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. A limited sample of EFL teachers at the university context participated in the study. The data collection instruments involved a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview.

Based on the analysis of data, curriculum developers are encouraged to create LA enhancing content. Teachers are also recommended to design their syllabi in a way that fosters LA. Campaigns of raising parents' awareness of the importance of LA in different educational contexts are highly recommended. As well, raising students' awareness of the importance of LA through training courses and workshops is highly recommended.

7. Future Research

Future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies using other data collection instruments such as classroom observation. They would also explore students' perspectives of LA and compare students with different proficiency levels. Online and face to face settings can also be compared in fostering LA. Investigations of the effect of affective factors on LA can also be conducted.

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Appendix A

Interview Guiding Questions

1) From your own point of view, what is learner autonomy (LA)?

2) Who are autonomous learners?

3) What kinds of activities have you used in online teaching to foster LA in your students? Have these activities created opportunities for students to develop their autonomy? How and why?

4) After online teaching experience during COVID-19 pandemic, did you recognize your students as autonomous? To what extent, why, and how?

5) Have you noticed any challenges faced by your students that hindered their autonomy? If yes, how did you help your students to overcome these challenges?

6) Did you see any effect of the curriculum, whether positive or negative, on the development of LA? How and why? Did the curriculum for the subject you taught help develop LA for the students? How and why?

7) Which can be more helpful in developing LA, online learning or face-to-face learning?

Appendix B

Table B1. Exact percentages of agreement/disagreement with each statement in Section 1 of the questionnaire

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
Language learners of all ages can develop learner autonomy.	7.5	13.6	12.1	47	19.7
Independent study in the library is an activity which develops learner autonomy.	7.5	0	10.6	50	31.8
Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone.	7.5	9.1	9.1	53	21.2
Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn.	6.1	6.1	9.1	50	28.8
Individuals who lack autonomy are not likely to be effective language learners.	7.5	22.7	30.3	25.8	13.6
Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom.	7.5	6.1	9.1	53	24.2
Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom.	7.5	4.5	16.7	40.9	30.3
Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher.	10.6	34.8	12.1	34.8	7.5
It is harder to promote learner autonomy with proficient language learners than it is with beginners.	18.2	39.4	15.2	18.2	9.1
It is possible to promote learner autonomy with both young language learners and with adults.	7.5	6.1	15.2	48.5	22.7
Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence.	7.5	1.5	9.1	42.4	39.4
Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would.	7.5	0	24.2	43.9	24.2
Learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all cultural backgrounds.	6.1	13.6	10.6	43.9	25.8
Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do.	7.5	0	15.2	54.5	22.7

Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centred classrooms.	13.6	28.8	13.6	28.8	15.2
Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other.	7.5	7.5	7.5	57.6	19.7
Learner autonomy implies a rejection of traditional teacher-led ways of teaching.	13.6	19.7	24.2	27.2	15.2
Learner autonomy cannot develop without the help of the teacher.	13.6	28.8	24.2	28.8	4.5
Learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together.	9.1	7.5	15.2	51.5	16.7
Learner autonomy is only possible with adult learners.	24.2	53	13.6	7.5	1.5
Learner autonomy is promoted by independent work in a self-access centre.	7.5	9.1	19.7	54.5	9.1
Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed.	6.1	18.2	25.8	36.3	13.6
Learner autonomy is a concept which is not suited to non-Western learners.	40.9	34.8	15.2	7.5	1.5
Learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher.	12.1	54.5	16.7	16.7	0
Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy	7.5	1.5	3	68.2	19.7
Promoting autonomy is easier with beginning language learners than with more proficient learners.	12.1	40.9	21.2	18.2	7.5
Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials.	7.5	10.6	15.2	53	13.6
Learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy.	7.5	4.5	15.2	45.5	27.2
Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy.	7.5	1.5	1.5	50	39.4
Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy.	7.5	9.1	10.6	40.9	31.8
Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy.	7.5	1.5	10.6	42.4	37.9
The ability to monitor one's learning is central to learner autonomy	7.5	1.5	16.7	51.5	22.7
Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.	7.5	1.5	9.1	37.9	43.9
The proficiency of a language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy.	7.5	21.2	22.7	31.8	16.7
The teacher has an important role to play in supporting learner autonomy.	7.5	0	7.5	59.1	25.8
Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner.	7.5	1.5	9.1	33.3	48.5
To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	9.1	1.5	12.1	48.5	28.8