

Learner Autonomy Transfer: The Need for Explicit Teacher Training

May 2024 – Volume 28, Number 1

<https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.28109a2>

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Abstract

Autonomous learning in EFL refers to learner involvement, reflection and target language use. Teachers play a vital role of mediators and facilitators in self-regulated method. Thus, their perception of self-regulated practices dictates their implementation of this approach. While research has predominantly focused on inadequate management of autonomous learning in school mostly due to lack of appropriate teacher training, this study examined whether novice teachers who were exposed to extensive autonomous practices were likely to implement this method in their teaching. Twelve novice teachers were interviewed to examine their perception of learner autonomy and their management of this method. It was found that three-thirds of the respondents experienced a gap between familiarity with autonomous learning and a favorable attitude to this approach and their deficient integration of self-regulated learning. Although learner-related and institution-oriented factors played a role in this gap, it was mostly caused by the respondents' not being genuinely autonomous. This may be due to indirect exposure rather than explicit introduction of the learner autonomy approach. The insights of this research may assist curriculum designers and heads of teacher training programs to rethink course composition to guarantee the transfer of methodologies into EFL classes.

Keywords: Learner autonomy, Teacher training, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Teacher's genuine belief in learner autonomy, Explicit instruction

Over the last three decades, language research has transitioned from teacher-centered to learner-centered methods. This shift has been accompanied by the emergence of communicative language teaching pedagogy focusing on the centrality of communication in a foreign language classroom. Both the realization of the importance of learner-centered pedagogy and the necessity to interact in a target language are tightly connected with the concept of learner autonomy.

The idea of learner autonomy was initially articulated by Holec who defined it as the “ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (1981, p.3). Following Holec’s articulation of this construct, it has been extensively researched by multiple scholars (Benson & Voller, 1997; Dickenson, 1987; Little, 1991; Littlewood, 1996, 1999; Nunan, 1997; Oxford, 1999; Tudor, 2001). Later, learner autonomy research was expanded to learning a foreign language. In this

domain, autonomous learning refers to learner involvement, reflection and target language use (Little et al., 2017). Language learner autonomy is said to be the key to successful acquisition of the target language (Dafei, 2007; Mohamadpour, 2013; Tilfarlioglu & Ciftci, 2011) and higher level of engagement and motivation in learning a foreign language (Dincer et al., 2012; Spratt et al., 2002; Ushioda, 2011).

In countries where English is taught as a foreign language, there are limited practice opportunities. Outside the classroom students converse in their native tongue and rarely use English for communicative purposes. In-class factors, such as limited time allocated for learning English and large class sizes further impede the enhancement of English proficiency. Thus, learners must develop learner autonomy and take responsibility for their learning processes to compensate for the deficiencies and limitations of target language instruction (Hu & Zhang, 2017; Kanazava, 2020).

Teachers play a major role in promoting learner autonomy in a foreign language classroom. They direct and monitor students' activities, advise on the most effective learning strategies and provide appropriate resources (Camilleri, 2007; Dam, 1995; Joshi, 2011; Voller, 1997). They guide learners in setting goals and making decisions, encourage self-reflection (Bharathi, 2014; Dam, 1995; Little, 1991; Thomsen, 2010; Turloiu & Stefansdottir, 2011) and serve as emotional facilitators (Alrabi, 2021; Benson, 2011; Yunus et al. 2011). They also promote authentic interaction in the target language (Benson, 2011; Little, 2020; Nunan, 1997).

A plethora of studies has shown that even though teachers hold favorable beliefs regarding learner autonomy, the implementation of this agenda in the classroom is often limited due to student-induced factors, institutional limitations and teacher-related factors. In the latter regard, the most frequently mentioned explanation for deficient learner-autonomy implementation is inadequate training of teachers in learner-autonomy. Teachers who have not experienced self-regulated learning in their teacher training studies are unlikely to develop a sense of autonomy and help their students become independent and stakeholders of their learning processes (Burkert & Schwienhorst, 2008; Castle, 2006; Dam, 2007; Little, 2020).

Thus, by examining and analyzing a teacher training program that accentuates self-regulated learning it would be possible to find out whether receiving autonomous training will generate learner autonomy agency in teachers, i.e., whether autonomous training is indeed the key to producing autonomy-promoting school teachers.

While a vast body of research has addressed the need for teacher training in learner autonomy (Burkert & Schwienhorst, 2008; Han, 2020; Huang, 2009; Khotimah et al., 2023; Little, 1995; Sert, 2006; Smith & Erdogan, 2007; Viera, 2007; Wang, 2017), to the best of my knowledge there was no examination of the transfer of learner autonomy in EFL (English as a Foreign Language). In other words, no research has studied whether EFL teachers who have received training in autonomous learning indeed developed into teachers who promoted learner autonomy in their pedagogy. Therefore, the purpose of the current research is to find out whether incorporation of learner autonomy methodology in the teacher education program is utilized in the subsequent English language school practices.

To this end, this study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the essence of autonomy-related training received by novice teachers?

2. What is the novice teachers' perception of the learner autonomy methodology and of themselves as autonomous learners?
3. Is there a transfer of learner autonomy into classroom practices?

Literature review

Definition of learner autonomy

Learner autonomy is an educational construct, which was framed by Holec in 1981 as the “ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (p.3). Multiple definitions of learner autonomy have emerged since. Littlewood (1996) referred to “the learners’ ability and willingness to make choices independently” (p.427). Dickinson (1987) assumed a more active definition of autonomy as “the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of these decisions” (p.11). In a similar vein, Little conceptualized learner autonomy as a “capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action” (1991, p.4). The shared idea of the abundant definitions of learner autonomy is learner engagement and involvement in the learning process or as Dang (2012) phrased it, “the ability to understand and manage learning processes responsibly and effectively” (p.53).

The basic premise for learner autonomy is that individuals learn in different ways and autonomy will promote the most meaningful and effective learning. Since learning is a search for meaning, learners generate rules and mental models to make sense of experiences and construct their own world. Therefore, learning must enable students to engage in creating their individual meaning (Fener & Newby, 2000).

The core definition of learner autonomy as responsibility for one’s own learning is further deconstructed in literature into more detailed attributes such as setting the learning goals (Benson & Voller, 1997; Khotimah et al., 2019; Littlewood, 1999; Nunan, 1997); choosing the content learners find meaningful (Chan et al., 2002; Tudor, 2001); selecting learning strategies (Chan et al., 2002; Littlewood, 1999; Nunan, 1997; Oxford, 1999; Tudor, 2001) and performing self-evaluation (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009; Thanh, 2019). Hedge summarizes these properties of learner autonomy as “the ability of the learner ... to plan, organize, monitor the learning process independently of the teacher” (2000, p.410). The terms autonomous learning and self-regulated learning are used interchangeably in literature.

Learner autonomy in language learning

Following Holec’s influential work in the 1980s, the following decades saw a surge in research on learner autonomy in the language classroom. Learner autonomy is imperative in foreign language learning. Since classroom time is limited, classes are overcrowded and the opportunities to practice English outside the school premises are scarce, learners should acquire the tools and skills needed for independent language learning to compensate for the gaps of classroom teaching (Alonazi, 2017; Benson, 2016; Cakici, 2015; Hu & Zhang, 2017; Kanazawa, 2020; Lai et al., 2015; Smith, 2003). Self-regulated learning helps students improve their communicative skills and achieve proficiency in learning a foreign language (Dafei, 2007; Mohamadpour, 2013; Tilfarlioglu & Ciftci, 2011). Autonomous language learners are said to have higher motivation (Spratt et al., 2002; Ushioda, 2011) and to be more willing to participate in classroom activities (Dincer et al., 2012).

The three key principles crucial for autonomous language learning are learner involvement, reflection and target language use (Little et al., 2017). Autonomous language learners are actively involved in their own learning. They are involved in setting the learning goals, take charge of their learning and take initiative in planning, choosing the strategies and methods of learning and performing learning activities. This element of learner autonomy pertains to the notion of freedom the learner enjoys in the learning process as well as the use of higher order thinking skills (Alkan & Arslan, 2019; Bekleyen & Selimoglu, 2016; Dam, 1995; Little, 1991; Raya, 2007). In addition, independent learners reflect on their learning process and learning outcomes and engage in self-evaluation. Reflection increases language learners' awareness of their choice of methods and strategies for learning activities and projects and helps them refine their learning strategies to achieve greater efficiency (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009; Thanh, 2019; Turloiu & Stefansdottir, 2011). Furthermore, authentic engagement with the language is accentuated as a significant characteristic of the autonomous language learner since language is mainly used for communicative purposes (Dam, 1995; Griffiths, 2008; Littlewood, 1996). The interactive nature of language implies that cooperation is an essential and integral part of language learning. Group-based activities promote learner autonomy since learners collaborate to set goals, design a working plan and manage its implementation. Collaborative projects require cooperation between group members for achievement of the utmost outcomes (Cakici, 2015; Dislen, 2011; Smith, 2003).

Two of the autonomous learning principles outlined by Little et al. (2017), namely, learners' learner involvement and their self-evaluation, refer to the concept of learning strategies. The idea of strategies has received special attention pertaining to learner autonomy in general and autonomous language learning, in particular. Oxford (1999) asserts that strategies "reflect the learner's degree of autonomy and are mechanisms by which the learner develops still greater autonomy" (p.111). Research has established a firm relationship between autonomous language learning and strategies implementation (Chen & Pan, 2015; Daflizar et al., 2022; Iamudom & Tangkiengsirisin, 2020; Oxford et al., 2014; Rezalou & Altai, 2022; Samaie et al., 2015). Research has repeatedly shown that efficient implementation of strategies is related to language proficiency (Cohen, 1990; Foster et al., 2017; Habok & Magyar, 2018; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 1999, 2017; Phonhan, 2016). Thus, there is a three-fold connection between the use of strategies, learner autonomy and target-language mastery.

Teachers' role in autonomous learning

The interactional dynamics between teachers and learners caters for learner autonomy (La Ganza, 2008; Yan, 2010). Teachers are said to be the agents of generating learner autonomy in their students (Crabbe, 1993; Le et al., 2023; Reeve et al. 2021; Roth et al., 2007; Sierens et al., 2009). In an autonomous language classroom, the emphasis is on learning rather than teaching. Thus, a teacher's role has transitioned from imparting knowledge and information to guiding and monitoring the learners' progress and helping them construct and produce their own knowledge. Even though the learner rather than the teacher is the spotlight of the autonomous learning method, the latter plays a major role in the process, or as Little et al. put it, "...for most learners the growth of autonomy requires the stimulus, insight and guidance of a good teacher" (2000, p.4). Crabbe (1993) further reinforces the notion of the teachers' responsibility for fostering learner autonomy both within and outside the classroom. He claims that teachers should generate learner autonomy by designing classroom practices catering for autonomous learning and reinforcing autonomous learning strategies in their students. Thus,

teachers serve as active partners in the autonomous learning process engaging in a meaningful dialogue with their learners and considering how to support them in the optimal manner (Cotterall, 2017; Dam, 2007; Lamb, 2008; Sinclair, 2009; Smith & Ushioda, 2009; Ushioda et al., 2011).

Teachers' role is multifaceted. Voller (1997), for example, regards the teacher as a facilitator, a counselor and a resource. In a similar vein, Camilleri (2007) outlines three major characteristics of teachers in autonomous learning- managers (directing students' activities), counselors and providers of resources. Research introduces multiple responsibilities teachers bear in generating self-regulated learning. Teachers are said to raise learners' awareness of their responsibility for their learning process and to create transparency of the rationale of learning procedures (Cakici, 2015; Dickenson, 1992). They help students establish learning goals and involve them in decision-making regarding their learning (Dam, 1995; Joshi, 2011; Maulana et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2020). In addition, teachers guide learners in devising a plan for their learning and selecting appropriate materials as well as encourage them to use the learning styles and strategies compatible with their strengths and the task at hand (Fumin & Li, 2012; Joshi, 2011). They also promote learner self-reflection (Bharathi, 2014; Dam, 1995; Little, 1991; Thomsen, 2010; Turloiu & Stefansdottir, 2011). Furthermore, teachers serve as emotional facilitators, encouraging motivation, commitment and self-confidence, stressing the importance of mistakes, assisting learners in overcoming obstacles and being available to help in a supportive, compassionate and non-judgmental manner (Arabai, 2021; Benson, 2011; Yunus et al. 2011). Finally, in an autonomous foreign language class teachers promote natural interaction in the target language providing opportunities for pair and group work (Benson, 2011; Little, 2020; Nunan, 1997).

Since a teacher's role is salient in autonomous language learning, a teacher's beliefs and perceptions regarding autonomous learning are a crucial starting point in implementing this pedagogical approach (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Ismail et al., 2020). Research has repeatedly illustrated that teachers have positive views and beliefs regarding learner autonomy (Al Asmari, 2013; Balcikanli, 2010; Camilleri, 2007; Chan, 2003; Chang, 2020; Lai et al., 2013; Melvina & Suherdi, 2018). Teachers in these studies have emphasized the importance of providing opportunities for autonomous learning and involving students in decision-making procedures.

However, favorable beliefs are insufficient for ultimate management of the autonomous method. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), while behavior may arise from either extrinsic or intrinsic motivation, autonomous learning requires intrinsic or self-determined motivation (Lee, 2017; Lou et al., 2018; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Lou et al. claim that "self-regulation will be facilitated only if the degree of internalization of the activity is high (i.e., if the reason is intrinsic or comes from personally important goals)" (2018, p. 215).

The gap between teachers' support of autonomous learning and its implementation

Despite the favorable attitudes towards autonomous learning, in reality, it is often implemented in an inadequate or limited fashion. In other words, there is a discrepancy between teachers' beliefs regarding learner autonomy in the classroom and execution of these beliefs in their teaching practices. The obstacles to learner autonomy may be broadly classified into three categories: learner-related, institution and curriculum-induced and teacher-oriented.

Learner-related reasons include low motivation (Alhaysony, 2016; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012), insufficient experience with autonomous learning (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012), learners' reliance on teachers as sole providers of knowledge (Alhaysony, 2016; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Bullock, 2011; Edes, 2009) and exhibiting a strong preference for a dominant teacher role (Chan, 2002; Januin, 2007) and lack of awareness of their learning styles and strengths (Alhaysony, 2016). Littlewood (1996) and Holec (1988) refer to these hindrances on the student's part as a lack of ability and/or willingness. Students who don't understand the importance of autonomy and lack the skills necessary for independent learning, will not become self-regulated learners (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Miles, 2012). Likewise, low motivation and reduced self-confidence prevent the students from taking responsibility for their learning (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Dafei, 2007; Liu, 2011; Miles, 2012). Finally, collaboration between learners may pose various challenges such as inadequate group composition or limited collaborative skills of the members (Cakici, 2015; Little et al., 2017).

Institutional and curriculum factors are also reported to impede the implementation of autonomy in the classroom (Benson & Ying, 2013; Huang, 2009). Some of the factors mentioned are the pressure teachers encounter due to teaching demands and strict deadlines (Chang, 2020; Smith, 2003); inflexible and long curriculum (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Chan, 2003) and lack of support from the administration (Al Asmari, 2013).

Even though students' ability and willingness to learn autonomously and the curricular and institutional adaptation for this cause play a role in establishing self-regulated learning, teacher beliefs in the importance of learner autonomy and readiness to execute these beliefs are of utmost prominence in attaining this goal (Camilleri, 2007; Chang, 2020; Melvina & Suherdi, 2018; Ismail et al., 2020). Several teacher-related factors may hinder learner autonomy. First, teachers' concern regarding classroom management issues may pose an obstacle for autonomous classroom environment (Bullock, 2011). In addition, teachers' reluctance to ask students to make decisions related to classroom practices may challenge self-regulated learning (Chan, 2003).

Moreover, teachers may be afraid to lose control, especially veteran teachers who have experienced teacher-centered practices for most of their teaching careers (Bajrami, 2015; Lacey, 2007). Likewise, teachers are said to adopt mostly those practices that proved efficient and successful when first implemented. Conversely, negative first experience may inhibit further implementation of a teaching method (Phipps & Borg, 2009).

However, the teacher-oriented barrier most commonly mentioned in literature is the fact that teachers do not feel adequately trained or ready to implement autonomous practices in their classes (Burkert & Schwienhorst, 2008; Castle, 2006; Dam, 2007; Little, 1995; Nakata, 2011; Shahsavari, 2014). A plethora of research has supported the idea that only teachers who have experienced the principles of self-regulated learning first-hand can become teachers who promote learner autonomy in their students. In other words, teachers need to be exposed to autonomous practices to become true agents of learner autonomy (Lamb, 2008; Mansooji et al., 2022; Nakata, 2011). In Little's words, teachers striving to develop learner autonomy should "learn how to produce and manage the many varieties of target language discourse required by the autonomous classroom" (2007, p.27).

As a result of insufficient training, teachers don't have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the meaning of learner autonomy (Bullock, 2011; Nakata, 2011). "They view

it as a set of skills or abilities that learners need to master in order to learn independently [...] Teachers often associate autonomy with opportunities for independent learning, irrespective of whether learners engage with these” (Al Asmari, 2013, p. 3). In this regard, Benson (2005) mentions that learner autonomy is often narrowed down to solely teaching learning strategies. This partial and limited understanding and execution of the notion of learner autonomy is also evident in the teachers’ confusing learner autonomy with merely “adopting a more student-centered approach” (Chang, 2020). In a similar vein, teachers often misinterpret the idea of self-regulated learning as transferring all responsibility to the learner, while minimizing their involvement in the learning process (La Ganza, 2008). Finally, autonomy-oriented activities are often not properly planned and lack a structured design (Al-Busaidi, 2012; Nakata, 2011).

While previous research has accentuated the need for teacher training in learner autonomy as a prerequisite for learner autonomy agency in teachers, this study seeks to examine whether autonomy-oriented college education generates school instructors promoting learner autonomy in their pedagogical practices. It will attempt to answer the main research question: Is there a transfer of learner autonomy from the college training program into the school setting?

Method

Field

The research took place in the academic year 2022-2023 at Hemdat Academic College of Education, a college for the religious sector in the south of Israel. Being a college in the Israeli southern periphery the student population in the English Department is relatively small with an enrolment of 8-12 female students every year. 6-10 students graduate from the program and 5-8 enroll in schools as English teachers. Following the requirements of the Israeli CHE (the Council for Higher Education), the official authority for higher education in Israel which determines policy for the higher education system, the candidates have to produce a complete matriculation certificate with 5 points in English (minimal grade 80). They also take an English test that examines reading comprehension and writing skills and are interviewed by the Head of the English Department. The study program consists of courses and fieldwork in schools and lasts four years. During the fourth year, students enroll in school positions.

The college has been promoting autonomous learning for the past five years. Lecturers have been participating in various retreats, study days and workshops addressing the principles of autonomous learning, delivering practical pedagogical ideas and enabling hands-on experience. Lecturers were instructed to incorporate autonomous learning into their syllabi. Two-year distance learning during COVID-19 provided further opportunities for self-regulated learning. Following the distance learning period, the college has adopted a new studying framework, according to which every third study week is a-synchronous. Lecturers upload a teaching unit onto the Moodle platform and students need to familiarize themselves with the content of the unit and submit an assignment. In addition, online courses comprise one-third of the study program.

Ethics

I approached the respondents and briefly described the research and introduced the research question. The subjects were informed that their responses may be published, but their identities would not be disclosed as the researcher would use pseudonyms when referring to their reports. They were asked to sign a consent form as well as granted their permission to record the

interviews. The respondents were notified that the interviews might take up to an hour and a half and would be conducted face-to-face via Zoom. They were also told that they could quit at any stage of the interview. Consent from the college ethics committee was received prior to the interviews and the interviewees were made aware of this.

Participants

I approached all the lecturers from the English Department of the college and asked them to participate in the research. One of the lecturers refused to be interviewed stating that she was too busy. The other five lecturers willingly agreed to participate in the research. All the lecturers have been teaching in the college for over five years. The lecturers are referred to by pseudonyms in the research. Linda teaches literature courses; Melissa teaches literature and speaking proficiency courses; Rachel teaches grammar and technology and innovation courses; Tina teaches vocabulary and methodology courses; Jennifer teaches linguistics courses.

I also interviewed 12 novice teachers. They were contacted by e-mail and agreed to participate in the research. The graduates are all females in their twenties and thirties who have completed a four-year course of English Education studies. The rationale for researching the perceptions of novice teachers in their third and fourth career years is that the college program is vivid in their memory, but they are no longer characterized by hesitance, inexperience and insecurity typical of teachers in their first and second years. They all hold full-time positions in elementary and junior high schools of the Israeli south. Most schools are in the periphery. The graduate subjects were also assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Each of the lecturers has taught each of the graduates in one or more courses.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data-collecting methodology since this instrument lends itself to studying experiences and perceptions (Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2013). The use of semi-structured interviews allows a considerable degree of flexibility because researchers may rephrase the original questions according to the course of the interview or ask for further clarification and elaboration regarding a certain response. The interviews with the lecturers were aimed at finding out their perception of the concept learner autonomy and their implementation of independent learning in their teaching practice. The purpose of these interviews was to understand the nature of the self-regulated component in the teacher training program. Some of the interview questions were: Can you tell me about your perception of learner autonomy? Can you describe a situation in class that was related to learner autonomy? A complete protocol is in Appendix 1. Most interviews with the lecturers lasted around an hour.

The interviews with novice teachers took longer (between an hour and an hour and a half) and had a two-fold purpose. First, they examined how the novice English teachers viewed the concept learner autonomy and whether they perceived themselves as self-regulated learners. To this end, they were asked questions such as: Tell me about yourself as a learner. Can you recall learner autonomy situations in your studies in the college? Please tell me how you felt about these experiences. Second, they explored the teachers' management of self-regulated practices in their pedagogy. The protocol of the interviews with the novice teachers can be found in Appendix 2.

In addition to audio-recording the interviews, I took notes in the course of the interviews to be able to refer to the respondents' answers if necessary. Data transcriptions were conducted following each interview. As there were sufficient intervals between the interview sessions, I reflected on each interview and refined the techniques for the subsequent session. For example, the first lecturer interviewee pointed out that she was less familiar with the concept learner autonomy than with the term independent learning. I explained that these two concepts are referred to synonymously in literature and used them intermittently in the rest of the interviews. In addition, one question that was poorly understood by two respondents was rephrased to make it more comprehensible. I exchanged "How do you prefer to teach?" to "What is your favorite way of conducting a lesson?"

This research endeavors to understand whether learner autonomy training novice teachers receive transfers to their classroom practices after they graduate. Thus, the interview questions addressed the essence of autonomy-related training future teachers receive; novice teachers' evaluation of themselves as autonomous learners and teachers who promote learner autonomy and their implementation of this concept in their pedagogical practices.

Data Analysis

There were two phases of data analysis, first with regard to the information obtained from the lecturers' interviews and secondly, pertaining to the data received from the interviews with the teachers.

Content analysis was employed to devise thematic coding of the information, following Charmaz (2017), Gay et al. (2012), Corbin & Strauss (2014) and Mason (2017). First, the transcripts were profoundly reviewed to create familiarity with the data. Secondly, each transcribed interview was examined and the main themes and ideas were outlined. I further compared and contrasted the data of the respondents and labeled the discrepancies and the semblances with codes. Subsequently, I grouped similar codes into categories. For example, the codes 'the centrality of the learner', 'collaboration of team members' and 'choice and freedom' were grouped into the category 'comprehension of the concept learner autonomy'. The codes and categories were used to outline the findings. Finally, I compared the results of the current research with previous relevant literature and interpreted the unique findings of this study.

Findings

In this section teacher training lecturers' data analysis will be followed by analysis of the data obtained from the interviews with novice teachers. Interpretation of data derived from the instructors' protocols will shed light on the essence of the autonomous component in the teacher education program by revealing the lecturers' perception of self-regulated learning methodology and their management of this pedagogical approach in their courses. Analysis of the college graduates' responses will help understand whether autonomous training helps generate teachers who promote learner autonomy in school. It will address novice teachers' perception of self-regulated learning and their view of themselves as autonomous learners. Additionally, it will refer to the teachers' implementation of self-regulated practices in their classes. Highlights were used in some of the quotes to emphasize the finding.

The essence of autonomy-related training received by novice teachers

All the lecturers admitted that they enjoyed working in the college. They reported that the college encouraged academic freedom. Melissa admitted,

I am enjoying myself and **the space that is given to me** to develop my teaching methodologies. **No one tells me exactly what to do** and I just **go by what works and what doesn't**. I always **try new things** [...] each semester **I try one or two things and sometimes it fails**.

This quote clearly reflects the exploratory and evolutionary nature of learner autonomy. Indeed, the lecturers have been educated in a university setting and were mostly exposed to traditional teaching methods. Therefore, the idea of learner autonomy was innovative for them. They needed to develop the learner autonomy mindset in a gradual manner. Melissa recalled that she used to be very rigid and stuck to her notes for the first few years. And Linda admitted that similarly to students, lecturers need to gradually adjust to the idea of learner autonomy, “The truth is I am also on **a learning curve**.” The notion of the process is also evident in the cautious approach to learner autonomy adopted by some lecturers. Tina’s response indicated her attempt to find the balance between the designated content and learner autonomy. “**The commitment to the content of the course**. You have the **content that you need to cover** and **this autonomy** that could go sometimes in a **wrong direction** and you **will not reach the main content that you expected**.”

Even though the lecturers considered themselves as en route to mastery of learner autonomy methodology, they had a solid comprehension of this construct and understood the necessity of educating the college trainees to use autonomous practices. Likewise, they reported utilizing self-regulated experiences in their courses and their perception of their role in the self-regulated classroom was compatible with literature.

Firm comprehension of the concept learner autonomy and its importance for novice teachers

The lecturers understood the meaning of the concept learner autonomy. They referred to the most eminent principles of this pedagogical approach, namely, learner involvement, reflection and target language use (Little et al., 2017). First and foremost, they acknowledged the centrality of the learner in the autonomous language classroom. Rachel recounted,

Even if I have the materials ready and I have been using them already, I stop and think how can I teach this topic differently, **how can I start with them, not with myself, but with them so that they are activated and they get involved**.

And Melissa echoed her colleague’s message, “**It is the best not to start with you talking, but rather them talking**.” The centrality of the learner in the learning process also implies that he/she needs to recognize the learning goals. In this regard, Jennifer contended “Learner autonomy must include **students’ ability to identify the purpose, the aim** of what they are doing [...]”

This learner involvement was also reflected in the lecturers’ accentuation of learners’ responsibility for their learning, progress and success in the autonomous language classroom. In this regard, Linda, a literature lecturer, referred to the notion of learner freedom and choice reporting that her students could choose what poem to work on and what aspect to address in their writing.

Another self-regulated learning element addressed by the respondents was collaboration of team members. Jennifer referred to the students' commitment to their group and Rachel found a creative way to encourage the learners to be responsible for the success of their teammates,

Then slowly but surely, they come to a situation where they feel their **responsibility towards their group mates [...] the responsibility is towards their friends because it depends on them** how their friends are going to understand the topic, the explanation they will use, or how they will present their topic and how they will teach them.

It is evident that lecturers did not merely follow the college-imposed requirement to incorporate learner-autonomous practices in their syllabi, but wholeheartedly believed that novice teachers needed to become self-regulated learners. Linda asserted, "**They need to have the independent ability to read and interpret a text, to present it to their peers, so I think it is a very important part.** By introducing the vlogs **I am trying to grow these muscles.**" Melissa and Tina also mentioned the connection between self-regulated learning and development of critical thinking skills. Melissa shared, "By asking the students to engage with the literary piece and introduce their own interpretation prior to presenting my commentary I encourage them to develop **independent critical thinking.**"

Management of the learner autonomy method and the lecturers' perceived role in it

Along with understanding the theory behind learner autonomy, lecturers recounted multiple practical implementations of this pedagogical approach. Linda described the vlogs project, addressing the principles of learner involvement and self-reflection.

I expected them to really **be in charge of teaching their text. I give them the instructions, I give them freedom.** On the morning of the vlog I remind them, I send them all the links that they have to fill in, and then I leave it to them. **Within the structure there is a lot of freedom.**

And Jennifer's experience from the Interpersonal Communication course embodied a composite of all the core principles of the autonomous learning,

I asked them to find a movie and write scripts of situations that involved conflict solving skills according to the topics we covered, but **they were given free hand.** They **decided** who wants to work with whom and what movie they want to **choose** and which script. And then they **acted it out in front of their classmates.**

When asked about learner autonomous experiences in her courses Melissa chose the example of teaching fables. She referred to students' discussing various possible interpretations of fables as this genre lends itself to versatile meanings, "The thing here is **that it is open so there is no right or wrong, so everything you say is OK and that makes them fight for their opinion and not get scared of being heard.**" This pedagogical experience addressed the self-regulated learning elements of interaction, authentic use of target language, freedom and use of higher-order thinking skills.

Several lecturers also reported specifically discussing with their students the importance of the learner autonomy method and its potential application in their classroom practices. Melissa explained,

They need to be especially aware of everything we do in class to take it to their own future classes, but I also mention from time to time **this is an activity that you can do with your pupils** [...] we really talk about the importance of letting go, have them teach like, I call it **managing the lesson**. It is more **managing** than teaching.

The lecturer's thorough comprehension of learner autonomy principles and their systematic implementation of self-regulated practices in their courses corresponded with their perception of their role as mediators and facilitators. Rachel accentuated the facilitation aspect of the lecturer's role,

I think that we have to **create the environment** where learner autonomy is possible. We have to **lead** them into being autonomous. You have to **build the path** in order to make it happen. That's why the role of the instructor as a **facilitator** is very strong in developing the learner's autonomy.

The lecturers' responses pertained to the fine balance between involvement and enabling independent learning. On the one hand, the participants mentioned providing tools, scaffolding and clear guidelines and supervising the students' efforts. On the other hand, subjects emphasized the need to step back and enable the students to work independently. In this regard, Melissa said, "I am the **listener and the commentator and the critic. Everything but the lecturer.**"

Likewise, Rachel strived to combine these two aspects of learner autonomy. She reported "working together" with her learners asking them a question before and after each step, thus driving their work forward. She recounted a case when she spotted that a group was not on the right track and channeled their efforts into the appropriate direction.

By the same token, Melissa maintained the balance even though at times it was not easy.

I only challenge them. I have to kind of **plant thoughts and doubts and questions into their heads**, but I have to **put up with their interpretations**. Sometimes I do feel like I want to shout: Oh, my God! This is such a stupid interpretation! I can't believe you say that. But you have **to challenge it, and that's it**. But you **can't tell them that this is not the correct meaning**.

The positive results

Lecturers' reports of the results of implementing the learner autonomy method pertained to the final products as perceived by the lecturers and the learners; students' sense of satisfaction with the learning journey; their take-aways from engaging in this pedagogical approach; students' enhancement of social and affective factors and their current and future application of the autonomous practices in their teaching.

Lecturers reported that students both enjoyed the process of engaging with the autonomous assignments and experienced a sense of accomplishment with their deliverables. Thus, Jennifer shared, "Sometimes they are pleased with what they have done, **not just the result but also the journey.**"

The participants also referred to students' acquisition of essential skills due to the autonomous learning mode. Several lecturers mentioned development of students' creativity, original thinking, speech delivery and language proficiency.

Self-regulated learning was also said to benefit the students on the social-emotional level as indicated by Linda's account,

I think the results are very promising because they increase in a lot of cases the students' feelings of **self-efficacy, confidence, it empowers them**. It also gives them the opportunity to do a bit of **peer teaching** which is also important in our framework and I think their satisfaction level and their **participation levels** are showing that it is good for them. Sometimes they do it **in pairs**, so it is **SEL**, it's **working together**, it's **social, collaborative**.

Lecturers also related that novice teachers were willing to implement autonomous learning strategies in their classroom practices. Rachel explained, "When I asked them- are you going to use it because one of our purposes is to use it in their practice, **some said that they have already done during the course. Nobody said they wouldn't** [...]" According to these promising responses, the transfer of learner autonomous method into the school setting seemed probable.

The challenges

Along with the positive results of autonomous learning, the respondents admitted some hurdles. They unanimously mentioned the difficulty students experienced at the initial encounter with autonomous activities since even though learner autonomy is not a novel concept, it is not commonly used in the school setting. Linda and Rachel referred to the feelings of stress and fear that accompanied the beginning of the independent work of teachers in training and presented multiple examples. Melissa and Jennifer referred to challenges associated with group work such as finding the team composition disagreeable or having difficulties working out the meeting time, place and time frame required for working on the project.

Several lecturers also addressed the lack of enthusiasm some students experienced in the process of working on self-regulated activities. Linda, Melissa and Jennifer complained that a few students were lazy, did not make the effort required, were "cutting corners" and speaking Hebrew instead of communicating in English.

The likelihood of disregarding essential content was referred to as another drawback of learner autonomy. Tina's response clearly expressed this concern, "This autonomy business can be very **misleading** because they feel that they are doing whatever they want. They can be creative, but **not end up with a good knowledge of the material.**"

Moreover, the autonomous teaching mode was said to be taxing for the lecturer. Among other things, the respondents mentioned laborious preparation for self-regulated activities and assignments, the need for constant monitoring and ongoing feedback as well as maintaining the balance between independence and interference.

Even though lecturers expressed their excitement regarding the probable implementation of learner autonomy in school, they revealed some reservations regarding whether such transfer was possible. In this regard, Rachel referred to discrepancies between the teaching methods novice teachers experienced in their studies and the ones they were exposed to in a school setting. In addition, Jennifer claimed that as novice teachers would be overwhelmed with work, they are unlikely to find time to prepare for learner autonomy practices. Finally, school-related factors, such as high bureaucratic demands and lack of a role model, were mentioned by Tina and Rachel as potential barriers to adopting the learner autonomy method.

The graduate students' perception of the learner autonomy methodology and of themselves as autonomous learners

All the graduate students remembered their college years in a positive light. They praised the lecturers and recounted that they had learned a lot both theoretically and didactically. In general, while the novice teachers recalled multiple autonomous learning practices they had experienced in various courses and mentioned their mostly positive attitude to these pedagogical methods and activities, the majority of the respondents admitted that they implemented this method in a very limited manner due to various reasons.

Dual perception of the college program

On the one hand, college graduates appreciated the theoretical and practical knowledge they acquired in the course of their four-year training. On the other hand, they complained about the discrepancy between this knowledge and its inadequate implementation due to classroom management issues, which they were not trained to handle, as well as curriculum demands and time constraints.

Many of the novice teachers mentioned that they applied the practices and ideas they had learned in the college. Former students mentioned using methods of teaching grammar, vocabulary and literature. They referred to integrating the creative strategies they acquired in the college such as the use of games. One student also addressed the method of differentiating the subject matter according to levels she adopted from her studies in the college. Several students described various technological tools they were introduced to in the training program and later incorporated into their teaching. Many students reported currently using lesson plans and presentations they had devised for their fieldwork.

Despite the enthusiastic responses regarding the theoretical and practical knowledge gained in the college, the majority of the teachers mentioned a gap between this knowledge and the field. Mostly, they referred to classroom management issues they were not trained to handle. Andy and Natalie clearly stated that even though the lecturers were professional and they gained meaningful knowledge in the college, its implementation was hindered mainly due to discipline issues which they were not prepared enough to tackle. Marha's impression was very similar. She also felt the college provided inadequate preparation for managing a class and dealing with parents.

However, discipline issues were not the only obstacle to applying the college training into school practice. Sharon reported being constrained by a lack of time and curriculum demands.

Novice teachers' autonomous learning experiences

The students' responses regarding the exposure to autonomous activities, their perception of those and the graduality of the autonomy development echoed their lecturers' reports. Former college students mentioned abundant examples of learner autonomy experiences in all the courses. They referred to such projects as creating a pair vlog; working on a digital portfolio in a team; writing a seminar paper individually or in pairs; performing a jigsaw method project; engaging in presentations; creating digital thematic newsletters; sharing teaching materials on Pinterest; reading their peer's work and commenting on it; independently learning the contents of the a-synchronous sessions and many more.

They described these practices as being meaningful, boosting a sense of pride and self-confidence, encouraging collaboration, promoting learning of new study habits and pedagogical tools as well as promoting life skills. Naomi addressed the authenticity of the autonomous experiences,

Yes, we got a story in the literature course and I needed to write my own scene [...] I took all the information I had of characters and that was the moment **I was connected to the story the most**. I needed to **get into their mind, their way of seeing things, how they approached** the trial and **their point of view** and I got a good grade.

The advantage of the collaborative nature of autonomous learning was related by Andy, “If I had a project, I would like to **do it in pairs** because I tend to postpone. Then I have an **obligation** and the **commitment** and I would **adjust myself** to the working style of my partner.”

In addition, Eden recounted the multiple study habits and skills she had developed as a result of autonomous learning such as how to manage time, create a presentation and learn for a test.

Acquisition of didactic methods was also mentioned as a benefit of autonomous learning. Nicole recalled that as part of a project she created a game with a QR code for every station. She remembered that both her fellow students and the lecturer praised her creativity. Similarly, Tessa and Sharon referred to the increase in their creativity level due to the autonomous learning and its potential contribution to their subsequent pedagogical practice.

Novice teachers’ responses revealed that the tools they had acquired in the course of the self-regulated training also served them beyond the school framework. For example, Sarah exclaimed, “**It gave me tools for real life**.” Naomi elaborated on this notion, “After you leave the college [...] you need to **find your own answers, to make your own experience and have a point of view that is based on your experiences**.”

Comprehension of the concept learner autonomy

The majority of the novice teachers had a firm grasp of the concept learner autonomy and its major properties, namely, learner involvement, reflection and the use of target language, and even noticed deficient learner autonomy experiences. Since both the lecturers and the graduates admitted that there was no explicit teaching of the concept learner autonomy, the definitions provided by the latter were intuitive and stemmed from intense and continuous exposure to self-regulated projects.

Tessa, for instance, provided an elaborate explanation of her perception of the autonomous pedagogy, addressing several prominent principles such as interaction in the target language, collaboration and learners’ active participation and self-reflection and more specifically referring to the elements of scaffolding, structure, use of learning styles and strategies and choice of social composition,

The teacher gives her students the **pattern**, but they have their **space to do it their own way**. I can **match the material to the way I learn best**. For example, presentation can be considered autonomous. Everyone can present in different way: sing a song, write a poem. You are allowed to **work individually or in teams**. Yet, I think that as learners we **need to get some steps, stages, emphases**. Otherwise, we would feel lost. And I think if you do it and submit it

you **develop confidence** [...] He has this **sense of accomplishment** because he has worked on his own. It is very different from tasks which are copy-paste like a test. Here the **process is more complex**.

Nicole offered a more concise explanation referring to the two parties in the learning process, the student and the teacher: “The students can **choose** what task to do and how to do it so they could really try and **do things on their own**. **The teacher provides the structure and instructions and monitors the learning process**.” And Naomi opted for a metaphor, which clearly demonstrates her comprehension of the balance between the two partners. “**I think that the teacher will give you the rope and you will need to find your own way to reach it**. We have much information online, but we need to find what is right for us.”

Novice teachers’ criticism of the quasi-autonomous practices also indicated their solid understanding of the autonomous methodology. Tessa referred to the false freedom one of the lecturers offered as well as her extraneous considerations in conducting the autonomous practices,

But I think **the lecturer needs to whole-heartedly believe in the autonomous work**, because students can feel when **the lecturer is expecting to receive a specific product rather than giving freedom and choice to the learners**. Students can also recognize when the lecturer **gives them autonomy because she doesn’t have enough time or she needs her convenience**.

Nicole echoed the criticism voiced by her fellow teacher and volunteered an example of a lecturer who asked the students to be creative, but penalized any product that was not compatible with her idea of creativity. Ironically, the requirement to be creative was inconsistent with the lecturer’s rigid agenda. The respondent also referred to the inadequate instructions, saying, “It was all clear to her, but not to us because **there was no structure, not enough guidelines**.”

Genuinely autonomous?

Even though the novice teachers were familiar with the autonomous learning principles, reported engaging in plentiful self-regulated experiences and outlined numerous contributions of this teaching method, most of them were not genuinely autonomous. In line with the lecturers’ reports, they admitted that they could act autonomously when required to do so. When talking about her learners’ reluctance to perform autonomous projects, Eden said, “As a student, **I had no choice**. I am an adult and I understood that **if I don’t do it my grades will be low and then I won’t get my degree**.” In response to the question, “Are you an autonomous learner?”, Olga responded, “**I can be. I am flexible**. I could listen and take notes, but also learn independently.” And Marsha admitted that her autonomy was conditioned by several factors, “**No. It depends on the task, the teacher, the material**. If it is a material I connect to, I can work by myself, even read about it more in my spare time, but **if it is something I don’t really like, I will be less autonomous**.” Finally, Natalie plainly confessed that she was not an autonomous learner.

These reports were in line with the lecturers’ accounts. The latter thought that the novice teachers were not naturally autonomous. In response to the question whether the learners are autonomous, Melissa answered,

No. I would say that they follow orders really well and **when the order is to be autonomous they are autonomous. They have this ability**, but they wouldn't do it because people are naturally lazy so it is easier to just sit and when you are a student, you just want to be left alone and just summarize the points. **I have to force them, push them into autonomy.**

Similarly, Linda argued that the novice teachers needed to be guided towards autonomy, "When **given the opportunity to be autonomous**, and the possibility and the conditions, **they can be autonomous**. If we don't demand some autonomy, they won't be. It's much easier not to be."

Several novice teachers favored only particular aspects of learner autonomy, such as group work, because it relieved their workload, which indicated that they didn't appreciate this method in its entirety and were, therefore, only partially autonomous.

Both the lecturers and the teachers referred to gradual development of learner autonomy. Lecturers agreed that being provided with multiple practicing opportunities students gradually developed into autonomous learners. Linda referred to the process-oriented nature of this method and claimed that the lecturers needed to seize the opportunity and use the three-year program to develop it "step by step". Similarly, Rachel reflected that, like any other innovation, the learner autonomy approach will be adopted and assimilated gradually and accentuated the importance of experience in this process.

Resonating their lecturers' words college graduates repeatedly referred to their gradual development of the autonomous learning profile. Naomi admitted,

It was challenging, but it made me the learner that I am today. **Every task made me a little better. The way that I worked on it**, not the grade, not the way the lecturer saw it. **The way that I looked for answers and worked on my information and the research that I found online** and organized my findings made me a better learner.

Likewise, Sharon shared the contribution of the process she had undergone, recalling that she felt shy to express her opinion in the beginning and grew more confident due to autonomous learning experiences. She commented, "I enjoyed this **development in me**." And Eden mentioned the inevitability of the gradual acquisition of self-regulated learning strategies during COVID-19. By the same token, Nicole phrased the process-oriented evolution of independence in learning, saying, "After thinking about all the experiences that we had at college I think **you grew to be autonomous**."

Only four graduates wholeheartedly admitted they were autonomous learners. Naomi said,

I think **I like my own way**. That was **the best experience for me. The Corona was my gift**. In the beginning I felt it was a big mess and I didn't know where to start. But after a while I started to feel that I am **making my own way** into solving this course and the tasks. **That made me a better independent learner and a better teacher**.

Similarly, Talia's account was a true celebration of autonomy,

Actually, I feel **I am a very autonomous learner**. I feel **I was always an autonomous learner, also in high school**. I like when I have the knowledge of

what I need to know and then work my way there [...] **During the Corona, it was great for me.** I think for everyone it was a disaster. **For me it was a blessing.** I could do everything at my own time, I knew what I had to do and when I had to do it and I knew it was my responsibility and it worked very well for me.

Tessa also admitted she was an autonomous learner and referred to the efficient learning strategies she had developed in the course of her independent studying, **“In school I was a solitary learner. I prefer to work alone.”** She proceeded saying that she learned best working on a paper rather than studying for a test. Likewise, Sarah is a pure independent learner as indicated by her response, **“I like to learn alone, to learn languages alone, to read articles alone, sometimes to listen to podcasts etc. I remember myself as an independent learner from the first day of school.”**

Interestingly, three out of the four novice teachers who regarded themselves as autonomous admitted they used to be self-regulated learners even before enrolling in the college program.

Transfer of learner autonomy into classroom practices

Implementing learner autonomy in teaching

The gap between the training program and the field also seems to be true of autonomous learning. Even though the graduates reported that they were extensively exposed to autonomous practices in the college and seem to have developed the capacity to study independently as well as recognized the versatile contributions of this learning mode for their pupils, most have found it challenging to implement for various reasons.

Proper implementation of learner autonomy. Four out of twelve teachers made autonomous learning their teaching doctrine and implemented it as a routine. Nicol’s account clearly indicates her belief that pupils need to become autonomous learners,

I think it's very important to incorporate autonomy in teaching. It’s not easy in the beginning, but if we do it and if we are consistent, **it can become part of the routine and they would become autonomous learners.** And this is our expectation as teachers: not being as frontal as in the past, but embracing new ways and **giving our pupils the control and giving them their responsibility and the stage** to address the problems or the tasks the way they need and they want and to be creative.

Naomi went a step further and explained how a teacher may cater for learner autonomy via affective factors such as confidence, engagement and interest.

What we can do is bring their interest to the class, make them look for answers and that way they will learn English. And I think that **emotions and feelings are the best way to learn a language.** So, I allow them to use TikTok on my own terms. I go through everything before the class. Their creativity is on the roof. I think **we need to lead them to their own way, their own experience, to bring interest to the class and this way they will learn the most.**

These teachers regarded their role as mediators who provided clear guidelines and supported the pupils’ efforts. They mentioned several attributes pertaining to the teacher’s role that

conform to literature. Both Nicole and Naomi addressed scaffolding. Nicole referred to the graduality of training students to be autonomous and the involvement and monitoring of the teacher at every stage. In addition to the teacher's responsibility to guide the learners in the course of working on autonomous projects, Talia and Nicole also accentuated the instructor's role in scrupulously pre-planning these practices.

Tessa seconded Naomi's assertion that the knowledge is available for students online and thus perceived her role as promoting the learning process, teaching the pupils how to take responsibility for their learning, building their self-esteem and encouraging communication in English.

The autonomous projects and activities initiated by these four teachers employ principles that conform to learner autonomy literature. Nicole mentioned a treasure hunt activity, reflecting several elements of autonomous learning: students' collaboration and responsibility for the group outcome, independent exploration of the subject matter prior to its introduction in class (learner involvement), clear guidelines by the teacher as well as authentic engagement with the target language.

In addition to the properties mentioned by Nicole, Naomi reported mixing learners from different grades in the food-related project she had initiated to promote versatility of ideas and pupils' responsibility for their group members. Moreover, the higher-order thinking questions she introduced encouraged learners to research and use creative and original reasoning.

Talia's example demonstrated several essential attributes of learner autonomy, namely, pupils' responsibility for their learning, scaffolding, clear guidelines and structure, teacher's mediation and choice. The students were asked to choose "someone special" and present the "significant things he/she did in the world". Talia showed the class a model, explained the instructions and gave due dates for all the project stages. She told them that they would be working on the project both in class under her supervision and independently at home. She encouraged the students to consult her in the course of working on the project.

The project devised by Tessa provided another illustration of the fine balance in the teacher's role between involvement and stepping back and enabling independent work. She divided the students into groups and asked them to stage and film a scenario of a Jewish holiday. While she provided them with very specific and clear guidelines and was available to assist their efforts in class time, they were also expected to work on the project after school hours.

The teachers who acted upon autonomous learning principles also reported positive results of the autonomous experiences. They mentioned such gains as acquisition of language skills, collaboration between students, boost in self-confidence and motivation as well as engagement level and creativity. In addition, they emphasized the development of higher-order thinking skills.

Deficient implementation of learner autonomy. The remaining two-thirds of the teachers only occasionally applied autonomous strategies in their teaching and often misinterpreted their role in this method. Several teachers indicated that they taught mostly frontally since this guaranteed control over the classroom. Other college graduates in this category mentioned independent learning experiences, but admitted that these were sporadic. For example, Sarah mentioned that her school conducted an independent learning project twice a year and Eden implied that such an experience occurred only once a year.

Similarly, Olga's response to the question regarding autonomous practices in her classes indicates a very irregular implementation of these,

It is only grade 3, so **there are no projects**, but in grades 5, 6 **we have jigsaw sometimes**. We also have a **curriculum. We need to teach according to the book. We cannot have many projects. We can't spend too many lessons on projects. I can't give these little kids independence.**

Olga's reluctance to use the autonomous pedagogy is screaming from the page. In addition to the scarcity of autonomous learning practices some teachers mentioned activities that were partially autonomous or misinterpreted activities as autonomous, while, in fact, they were not. Leila recounted assigning parts of a text to groups in class and asking each group to present its section. The other groups had to say what they understood from the show. Even though the activity was collaborative and required independent work, the teacher seemed to have a minor role in it. Marsha's examples were also incompatible with the principles of autonomous learning. She mentioned several self-study computer applications pupils used with minimal intervention on her part. Undoubtedly, the most extreme example of misinterpretation of the learner autonomy concept was Andy's reference to students' working on exercises from the book as a self-regulated practice.

The inadequate management of the autonomous approach was also reflected in the eight teachers' perception of their role. Marsha laconically responded to the inquiry concerning her role, "Walking around them. If they need me, I always help." By the same token, Andy recalled, "I would sit and they would come to me. I would point to their mistakes and they would fix them. My role was emotional- I am here to help you and it is O.K. to make mistakes." And Natalie admitted that her role was mainly discipline-oriented.

The teachers in this category were often aware of their limited or inadequate application of the self-regulated method and expressed self-criticism and regret in this regard. Andy's repenting response is a clear indication of her disappointment at not being able to implement the autonomous approach and resorting to traditional practices instead.

I didn't have the patience. It sounds horrible. **I didn't have the emotional will because of the discipline issues.** I felt like... it sounds horrible. I felt like I couldn't trust that they would listen to their classmates because they were not listening to me or to the homeroom teacher. I couldn't get their attention most of time. **I blame myself mainly** because **I didn't have the patience.** But it was my fault because if I didn't fear to get disappointed, maybe I would be more creative, more supportive and in some ways more open to do it, more flexible. **I am not flexible** [...] The students who wanted to do more, I could have given them research to conduct.

Likewise, Eden realized that her teaching mode prevented her learners from being autonomous,

I think **I am a frontal teacher.** I know **it is not supposed to be this way**, but now I teach like this. I feel they need to learn how to learn by themselves. But **they can't do it if all I do is teach them frontally** and give them the instructions and check them. **They are always dependent on me. And they need to depend on themselves.**

Sarah's words also echo this self-reproach, "I think **I am not the teacher I want to be yet. I think I am too frontal. I need to teach them to work more independently.** Even though they say they can't and even though they are really tough."

Obstacles for learner autonomy implementation

The obstacles to implementing autonomous learning are compatible with those outlined in the literature. They fall into three major categories: teacher-oriented, institution and curriculum-induced and learner-related. Andy's self-criticism mentioned above clearly revealed that the barrier to learner autonomy laid partially in her personality. She confessed she lacked the patience needed to firmly establish this method and she was not flexible enough to implement it successfully. Other teachers admitted that controlling the class was their teaching agenda, which contradicts the values of autonomous learning. Olga, for example, asserted, "**I prefer the structured way. Then the pupils are with me. They are with me, and they are learning.**" And Natalie clearly revealed her need to take charge of classroom procedures, "I think that I should make sure that the students understand the material in the best way. So, **most of the time I am speaking and teaching and give them what they need.**" Likewise, Marsha referred to her aspiration to be in complete control of her students' learning as "perfectionism" and admitted, "**I need to know that every student has learned what he was supposed to [...] my students' knowledge is a reflection of me.**"

Another teacher-related challenge was said to be the time and effort required for the preparation of productive autonomous practices. Eden and Nicole emphasized the vast amount of organizational work prior to the initiation of an autonomous project and Sarah referred to the additional burden for the teacher in the course of working on the project.

Another major barrier to learner autonomy mentioned by nearly every respondent was the discipline issues that hindered the effective management of the self-regulated method. Teachers discussed the fact that students misbehaved and thus made it difficult for them to explain the instructions- a crucial stage in autonomous learning. Classroom management issues also arose in the course of working on the project. The noise level was above normal and sometimes the transition to a subsequent activity was impossible. Some students refused to do the work, needed constant monitoring or found it difficult to collaborate with their classmates. Lack of motivation was reported as another students-induced obstacle. Some disregarded the importance of autonomous work and perceived it as minor in comparison to the content and skills they were required to master for their matriculation exams.

Sarah's account comprehensively summarized student-oriented challenges to learner autonomy,

The students are really tough. Even though they are smart and they can do tasks and work independently and do a lot of things, they **lack self-discipline and they are not independent** in addition to the fact that there are **discipline problems in class.** This generation is also quite **lazy.** We are taught to promote independence, but when we get to school it doesn't happen because the **pupils don't want to work on their own.**

However, learners were not the only ones to blame for their deficient self-regulated skills. The school system also bore the fault for that. Teachers repeatedly mentioned that students were not used to working on their own and did not receive the opportunity to gain the tools for

autonomous learning. Natalie, Olga and Leila admitted that the deficiency in self-regulated learning skills was often due to curriculum requirements such as progressing in the book and preparing learners for a test or a matriculation exam.

Mostly, autonomous learning was practiced solely in the English lessons and was not encouraged by other teachers in school. It was, therefore, challenging to make learner autonomy a well-established practice. Marsha's comment suggested that it was difficult to accentuate learner autonomy without support from other figures in the institution, "It can be developed with the **cooperation of the English teacher and the homeroom teacher.**" This is also the implied message of Naomi's pupils' words, "In the beginning of the year I have students who tell me- **'I heard about your method of teaching,** I am not going to take any action. You will see me sitting at the end of the class'." This remark explicitly indicated that Naomi's teaching approach was exceptional and did not conform to the pedagogical approaches regularly administered in the school.

Some teachers also mentioned a lack of support from the management. For example, Naomi specifically referred to the fact that the principal posed a challenge for her autonomous endeavors, "**It was a little difficult with the new principal in the beginning. Principals like the old system of getting grades. They like numbers and tables.**"

Only a few teachers expressed their willingness to overcome the barriers to integrating the autonomous method into their pedagogy. These teachers realized that learner autonomy acquisition was a process for both the learners and the management and persistence might pay off. Naomi's responses indicated that viewing this method as a gradual process and displaying patience, persistence and consistency may bear fruit. She recalled a transformation in the initially reluctant students, "[...] **in the middle of the year I can see them engage more,** trying to express their opinion in short sentences. They **gradually understand** that they will get a good grade even if they make mistakes. This is my comfort." She also reported managing to change the original perception of the principal, "So, **it was a bit harsh in the beginning,** but **now she sees what I need.**"

Unlike Naomi, the majority of novice teachers got discouraged fairly quickly. They realized that learners were not ready for autonomous learning and gave up their attempts to train them otherwise.

Discussion

In response to the research question regarding the essence of the training program, the findings presented here demonstrate that it had a solid autonomous emphasis. In this respect, the college lecturers had a firm comprehension of the concept learner autonomy and recognized the importance of training learner autonomy-oriented teachers. They consistently implemented this pedagogy across the board. They regarded the development of learner autonomy as a continuous process and regarded themselves as mediators and facilitators.

The data analysis corresponding with the second research question "What is the graduates' perception of the learner autonomy methodology and of themselves as autonomous learners?" reveals student teachers' exposure to multiple autonomous practices, their favorable attitude to this pedagogical approach and appreciation of its numerous emotional, social and educational benefits of this method as well as their thorough comprehension of the major properties of self-

regulated learning. However, both the lecturers and the novice teachers admitted that the latter might not be genuinely autonomous.

With regards to the research question “Is there a transfer of learner autonomy into classroom practices?”, the lecturers’ doubts concerning the transfer of the self-regulated method into the school setting due to various obstacles were verified by the graduates’ data analysis. In this regard, only one-third of the novice teachers demonstrated transfer of learner autonomy into their classes. These teachers adopted self-regulated learning as their ultimate pedagogy and described genuine self-regulated practices they had administered in their teaching. These teachers also supported gradual evolution of learner autonomy.

The autonomous principles that stood out in their responses conformed to those outlined in the literature. They promoted their pupils’ responsibility for their learning, encouraging the use of strategies and evoking interest, engagement, exploration, curiosity and creativity. They encouraged collaboration and communication in the target language. In addition, their reports of their role in the self-regulated methodology were compatible with the literature. They provided scaffolding and clear instructions; guided their learners in the process of working on their projects; monitored the progress and assisted as needed.

Despite having gained extensive training in learner autonomy and their positive attitude towards this method, two-thirds of the teachers displayed partial or limited implementation of learner autonomy practices, disregarding the essential basics of this approach and neglecting their central role in this pedagogy.

The reasons for their inadequate or insufficient management of the autonomous approach as perceived by the teachers conform to the literature and fall into three categories: learners-related, institution and curriculum-oriented and teachers-induced. Learners were disruptive, lacked self-discipline, preferred to prepare for tests or exhibited deficient collaboration skills. In addition, there was often no cooperation from fellow teachers and thus, students were not used to autonomous practices. Moreover, the school management did not support autonomous practices and curriculum requirements were usually favored over independent projects.

These two types of obstacles, namely, learners-related and institution and curriculum-oriented, are referred to by Pelletier et al. (2002) as “pressure from above and pressure from below”. The writers assert that

[...] when authorities impose restrictions about a curriculum, make teachers responsible for their students’ performance, and pressure or reward teachers to produce good student performance, and teachers believe that their students are extrinsically motivated or possibly not motivated toward school, it is likely that teachers will become controlling with students (p. 187).

It is, therefore, probable that teachers in the current research felt reluctant to implement the autonomous practices due to the double resistance they have encountered.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory may also help explain the teachers’ hesitance to manage the autonomous practices in their classes. Cognitive Dissonance Theory implies that individuals strive to maintain consistency among versatile cognitions of beliefs and behaviors and would change their beliefs and behaviors if these cognitions are dissonant for the sake of reaching cognitive consistence (Festinger, 1957). In line with this theory, teachers may aspire to align the beliefs acquired in the course of the teacher education program with the practices expected

in the school system. (Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Guerra & Wubbena, 2017; Karaađaç & Threlfall, 2004). Thus, the novice teachers may have abandoned their inclination to implement the autonomous methodology in their school practices to conform to the institutional reality as projected by the learners, the veteran teachers and the school management.

However, teacher-related factors posed the utmost challenge to learner autonomy. Both literature and the research at hand referred to teacher personality factors such as limited patience and flexibility, their desire for classroom control and demanding preparation for self-regulated projects as interfering with learner autonomy management.

While inadequate teacher training was mentioned in research as one of the major teacher-related causes of the failure to apply learner autonomy with school pupils, the current research has examined the autonomous school practices of teachers who have received extensive autonomous training in the teachers' college. Thus, it may be reasoned that a lack of wholehearted belief in the autonomous method and insufficient or quasi-internalization of this approach had hindered its proper implementation in the school system (Aoki, 2002; Benson, 2011; Lamb, 2008; Nakata, 2011).

This possible explanation is in line with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). According to this theory, people may display a certain behavior as a result of intrinsic motivation because it is engaging and satisfying in its own right or be driven by extrinsic motivation, demonstrating a particular conduct for the sake of obtaining an external goal. In this regard, teachers who are not driven by intrinsic motivation, are not truly autonomous and will find it difficult to support autonomous practices in their learners (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Research has shown a direct correlation between teachers' epistemological beliefs regarding knowledge acquisition and the types of pedagogy they selected (Aypay, 2010; Bonner et al., 2020; Brownlee et al., 2009; Chai et al., 2006; Chan & Elliott 2004; Cheng et al., 2009; Feucht & Bendixen, 2010; Hofer, 2001; Sinatra & Kardash, 2004).

Therefore, the fact that teachers were not truly autonomous learners but rather acted autonomously upon request may explain their failure to implement autonomous practices in their pedagogical practices (Roth et al., 2007). Research has demonstrated that only teachers who have internalized the principles of the autonomous method in their learning can serve as agents of learner autonomy for their learners (Benson, 2012; Benson & Huang, 2008; Huang, 2007). In this regard, only three teachers have reported being self-regulated learners before enrolling in the college program. These teachers were the same ones who demonstrated proper implementation of the autonomous method. Naomi's example of convincing a reluctant principal and nurturing learner autonomy in initially unwilling learners illustrates the notion that teachers who genuinely believe in the learner autonomy approach overcome the obstacles posed by learners and the school system.

The implicit nature of learner autonomy instruction may provide a clue for the flawed internalization of learner autonomy by the teachers. Several studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between explicit learning and transfer of the acquired information and a similarly negative relationship between implicit teaching practices and knowledge application (Lee & Vakoch, 1996; Martz & Shepherd, 2003; Sun et al., 2023). Both the lecturers and the novice teachers in this study admitted there was no explicit instruction of this concept.

Thus, lack of direct and explicit instruction of the autonomous method may have hindered the novice teachers' genuine belief in this pedagogical approach and subsequently caused its

limited and inadequate implementation with their school pupils. This line of reasoning may be further supported by the discrepancy in the learner autonomy training and implementation between the lecturers and the teachers. While the former had an explicit training in learner autonomy, grew to believe in this pedagogy and successfully administered self-regulated practices in their courses, the latter have never been directly introduced to learner autonomy principles and thus mostly did not internalize this method and exhibited partial or flawed integration of autonomous learning in their teaching. Therefore, even though novice teachers were exposed to multiple autonomous practices in the course of their training program and developed favorable attitude to the self-regulated paradigm, there was a very limited transfer of this methodology into the EFL lessons.

Conclusions

Whereas literature emphasizes inappropriate training in autonomous learning as the major obstacle to implementing this method in schools, this research examined the autonomous practices of teachers who have received considerable training in learner autonomy. Nevertheless, the majority of teachers reported impaired application of self-regulated practices. The gap between the novice teachers' favorable attitude to learner autonomy methodology as well as their elaborate experience with this pedagogy, on the one hand, and their deficient transfer of this approach into their classes, on the other, may imply that they have not fully internalized the autonomous method. Even though they were exposed to it during the entire four-year program, they were not explicitly taught what learner autonomy meant nor have they studied a course in learner autonomy. Thus, their learning about this pedagogical construct is more intuitive and implicit as they have received no explicit instruction regarding it.

Thus, genuine internalization of a teaching method seems to be of utmost importance for the transfer of this method into one's teaching practice. Thereby, the four teachers who were truly autonomous learners (three of them even prior to the college program) managed to transfer the learner-autonomous principles into their teaching despite the institution-related and learner-oriented challenges they encountered.

Thus, this research clearly demonstrates that implicit training of novice teachers is not enough for the transfer of learner autonomy into the school system. Teachers need explicit instruction on the principles and practices of autonomous learning to develop sincere belief in this method and be willing to implement it despite challenges from fellow teachers, their superiors and the learners. An autonomous learning course combining theory and fieldwork may be beneficial for this cause. If novice teachers receive close mentoring and feedback when implementing learner autonomous practices in their fieldwork, they may internalize this method by the time they graduate and start their teaching careers.

This research addressed a single religious institution in the south of Israel, where both the staff and the students are females. It would be fascinating to replicate it in secular institutions with mixed-gender population in other areas of Israel and overseas. In addition, if the college agreed to adopt an autonomous learning course with a field component, it would be interesting to compare the degree of the transfer of this method with the findings of the current research. Finally, the findings rely on interview data only. Since it is known that there might be a discrepancy between subjects' reports and their actual behavior, it is recommended to supplement interviews with observations in future research.

The conclusions of this research may assist curriculum designers and heads of teacher training programs worldwide in outlining guiding principles to guarantee transfer of methodologies from a college program into classroom implementation, such as integrating an experiential component in the teacher education courses.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the participants for agreeing to take part in this study and the reviewers and editors for their suggestions and contribution to this article.

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To Cite this Article

Slabodar, I. (2024). Learner autonomy transfer: The need for explicit teacher training. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, 28(1). <https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.28109a2>

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Appendix 1

Interview protocol: lecturers in the teachers' college

1. Can you tell me about your teaching?
2. Can you tell me about your perception of learner autonomy?
3. Can you describe a situation in class that was related to learner autonomy?
*Another one
*pleasant/ one that you were not pleased with
4. Can you tell me about your role in autonomous learning?
5. Based on your experience, how do the students respond to autonomous situations?
6. Do you think this way of teaching promotes learner autonomy in your learners?
7. Can you tell me about the results of learner autonomy?
8. Can you tell me about the challenges of learner autonomy?

Appendix 2

Interview protocol: novice English teachers

1. Can you describe your learning experience in the college?
2. Tell me about yourself as a learner.
3. What can you tell me about the relationship between your studies and your teaching experience?
4. Please recall how you preferred to study. What ways of learning did you like?
5. Can you tell me what you know about learner autonomy?
6. Can you recall learner autonomy situations in your studies in the college?
 - * Another one
 - *Pleasant/ unpleasant
6. Please tell me how you felt about these experiences.
7. Can you describe yourself as a teacher?
9. Can you recall learner autonomy experiences in your teaching?
8. Please share how you feel about learner autonomy in your teaching.
9. Can you tell me about your role in autonomous learning?
10. What can you tell me about the results of learner autonomy?
11. What can you tell me about the challenges of learner autonomy?

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