

Exploring Learner Autonomy in a Saudi Arabian EFL Context

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Abstract

Learner autonomy has been deemed an effective channel through which learning takes place. Its significance in the context of language learning has long been studied by defining its various concepts and the roles played by teachers, learners, and institutions in advocating and promoting autonomous learning. This study explores the meanings and practices of autonomous learning in a Saudi higher education EFL context. It determines classroom activities and learner attributes that may help to enhance the development of learner autonomy and language learning in Saudi Arabia. To ascertain perceptions on learner autonomy, a survey was carried out with 44 female teachers working in an English Language Centre in a Saudi university and with 480 first-year female students. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with 16 teachers and 15 students. These perceptions were then used as a point of reference for comparisons between teachers and students.

The survey indicated that teachers were more positive about implementing learner autonomy in the classroom than students. However, when participants were interviewed, students revealed a high level of desirability and motivation to become autonomous. From the teachers there was general consensus on learner autonomy being beneficial, but they had limited experience on how it could be applied in the language classroom. The findings from both surveys and interviews confirmed that teachers and students have different perceptions on learner autonomy as a concept and in practice.

Overall, this study presents further understanding of learner autonomy in the context of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the study challenges the belief that young Saudi students are not interested in becoming autonomous learners. The study highlights the institutional and social barriers that both teachers and students need to overcome. One of the main contributions of this study is the insight given to the changes occurring in Saudi society and the generational gap between young female students and the older generation.

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Author's declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to Study

Theories and practices of language learning and teaching have long been a topic of debate, and learner autonomy is a concept that has produced much controversy. Many conflicting views of the importance of learner autonomy have emerged, especially since the shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred approaches in English language teaching. The conflict arises from the difficulty in defining the concept of autonomy, with some believing that autonomy means learners working independently, and others feeling that it means dispensing of the need for a teacher altogether. Originally the term “autonomy” was derived from the field of politics and moral philosophy, but the term’s meaning is elusive as it changes according to one’s point of view. Furthermore, it is a multifaceted concept whose meaning has been discussed from many perspectives by theorists (Benson, 2001). However, there is general consensus that an autonomous learner, as defined by Holec (1981), is one who is able to take charge of his or her own learning.

Developing autonomy plays a significant role in language learning. Learning a foreign language is a lifelong effort, not one that begins and ends in a classroom, and it takes hard work and commitment on the part of the learner. Many factors, such as motivation and interest, have an influence on individuals and their attitude towards learning. These factors may all have an impact on learner independence, which involves learners being able to direct and control their learning skills. Thus, learners can set their own objectives and apply a strategy devised by themselves to meet their goals. Consequently, it can be argued that the development of learners’ autonomy may start in a classroom environment but could also extend beyond it.

However, there is interdisciplinary discussion among academics and researchers with respect to the autonomy of learners and whether it is beneficial or not. It is clear that there is a need to re-examine this subject in greater depth, particularly in specific contexts such as foreign language learning in non-Western areas, and to conduct that examination more empirically while taking cognisance of the many developments that have occurred in this field over the last few decades. Finding appropriate strategies and developing autonomous characteristics that may support learners in their desire for independence is an ongoing quest.

1.2 Contextual Background of Study

This study was conducted in the English Language Institute (ELI) at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and the individuals under investigation were EFL female university teachers and learners. The presentation of the contextual background aims to provide essential information on the overall Saudi educational system as well as English language education for university students. The background information is presented to help the reader to make sense of this investigation of learner autonomy in a higher education Saudi context. The perceptions and opinions of the female participants make more sense when viewed within the contextual and cultural background of the study. This chapter therefore sheds light on the Saudi educational system in general and on the Saudi English language education in particular, with specific reference to the university in which the study was conducted.

1.2.1 The Education System in Saudi Arabia: An Overview

The education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is segregated by gender: boys and girls study separately during all their schooling and university years as per the requirements of the Islamic Holy law (Shari'ah). Consequently, male participants are excluded from this study due to segregation, as the study has been conducted by a female researcher. However, the separation of genders in the Saudi schooling system does not affect the quality of education (Huyette, 1985). They all study the same curriculum and take the same examinations.

Students from years one to twelve (ages 6-18 years old) can attend public, private, or international schools, all of which are monitored by the Saudi Ministry of Education (MOE). English language education in public schools starts in year four (age 9) as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum, whereas it starts at an earlier stage (as early as pre-school) in private and international schools. Tertiary education in KSA begins after students have passed examinations in year twelve.

If students wish to pursue their higher education abroad, the Saudi government offers overseas scholarship opportunities for both male and female citizens who are able to meet

specific requirements. These requirements mainly relate to the citizens' field of study and academic levels. Scholarships are available for both male and female students who have graduated from domestic as well as foreign universities. The overseas institutions approved by the government scholarship programme are carefully selected based on academic excellence and competitiveness in global rankings (MOE, 2016). Alternatively, students who wish to study in Saudi Arabia can choose from 26 registered state universities, 10 (established and licensed) private universities, and 41 (established and licensed) private colleges geographically distributed across the different regions of KSA (MOE, 2017).

King Abdulaziz University, the university in which the study was conducted, occupies a leading position among higher education sectors in KSA and is now considered one of the “most prominent universities in KSA in terms of the number of students, the diverse and integral scientific and theoretical fields of study. It offers educational programs for the preparation of graduates to do works in line with the community's changing educational needs” (MOE, 2016). Like all educational institutions in KSA, King Abdulaziz University (KAU) has two separate campuses for men and women. Each of the two campuses is equipped with academic services and facilities including a large library with up-to-date technologies and free Wi-Fi providing resources and access for students. KAU has witnessed immense progress, and it is now ranked 4th in the Arab region (QS University Rankings: Arab Region, 2016). Students who choose to pursue their studies in KAU can select from a wide variety of majors from a number of specialist fields reflecting the diversity of academic programmes in both social and natural sciences. Initially, however, students need to pass the preparatory year as part of the university rules and regulation.

1.2.2 The Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) at KAU

First-year students in KAU, as in most state universities in Saudi Arabia, must undertake a Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) before they get to choose their major at the university. The PYP launched in 2010 and, according to the Dean of Student's Affairs in KAU, “is designed to provide the new students with necessary information about the university's facilities, faculties and academic programmes” (KAU, 2010). All of the PYP courses are fixed. In other words, students are not allowed to elect, add, or delete any of the PYP courses, and they must pass all of the courses successfully. Students who fail to finish all courses in one year are allowed to study one extra semester. Moreover, the English

language course forms a major and mandatory component of the PYP for all full-time students. The importance of this course puts pressure on students as well as English teachers at the university, as failing the English course means that students will not be allowed to progress with their degree. Teachers must cover the curriculum in a limited timescale, and students are completely focused on passing their end-of-course exams.

1.2.3 The English Language Programme in KAU

KAU has a special English language programme for PYP students that is organised and operated by the ELI at the university. The ELI Dean, supported by Six Vice-Deans from the Men's and Women's campus, leads and manages all ELI administrative and academic operations. The ELI was the first institute within a Saudi university to be accredited by the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation, which is the only body that is formally recognised by the US Department of Education. This accreditation began in April 2013 and lasts for five years. The ELI takes its responsibilities for quality provision seriously; within the ELI there is also a Development Unit tasked with organising training sessions for teacher development to ensure that teachers' continuing professional development needs are addressed.

The mission of the ELI at KAU, as stated in their website, is to provide quality intensive instruction of EFL using a comprehensive and communicative curriculum in order to enhance students language skills and facilitate their college entry (2018). The ELI employs mainly Saudi staff, but a considerable number of teachers are from other nationalities, such as Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Pakistan, and India. A few teachers also come from English-speaking countries like South Africa, the USA, and the UK. The Saudi teachers must have a minimum qualification of a Bachelor's degree in English literature, linguistics, or translation. More recently many of the Saudi teachers have benefited from the overseas scholarship programme and hold higher qualifications, such as a Master's degree and a PhD. Some have also participated in national postgraduate courses open to Saudi citizens. Many of these Saudi and non-Saudi teachers have experience working in different contexts, including private schools, international schools, and English-speaking environments.

1.2.3.1 Determining students' levels of proficiency: Placement test

Upon starting a course at KAU, all PYP full-time students are obliged to take an initial diagnostic test; this test is the Oxford Online Placement Test (OOPT), which is aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The OOPT determines levels of proficiency in English and enables the students to be placed in classes according to their language ability. Students who do not attend are automatically placed in the lowest level as complete beginners; these students are known as the ELI 101 group.

1.2.3.2 Exemption from English courses

Exemption from English language classes is possible. The pass grade to ensure entry to degree courses is Lower Intermediate (CEFR B1+), so anyone who already has evidence of achieving this level or higher is automatically exempt. Exemption requires provision of a current iBT TOEFL certificate showing a score of 45 or above or an IELTS certificate with an overall score of 4.5 or above. Students must apply in good time for exemptions as the process takes five working days to complete, and any grades they have accrued before applying for exemption stay on their KAU academic record.

1.2.3.3 English Modules

A modular system is used for delivery of the English language programme to PY students. Altogether, the programme comprises four modules over the year, each lasting seven weeks. At 18 hours of tuition per week, the programme is very intensive. The university states that the English language teaching programme employs a communicative curriculum based on student-centred pedagogy. Each of the four modules corresponds to one level of the CEFR proficiency framework:

ELI 101 (Level 1): Beginner (CEFR A1)

ELI 102 (Level 2): Elementary (CEFR A2)

ELI 103 (Level 3): Pre-Intermediate (CEFR B1)

ELI 104 (Level 4): Intermediate (CEFR B1+)

1.2.3.4 Curriculum, textbooks, and the language classroom

The curriculum for the English programme is based on learner outcomes and, consequently, the assessments at the end of each module are designed to show achievement

of these outcomes. Course materials support this goal, as the materials are mapped to the CEFR proficiency level band descriptors. One textbook is provided for each level; these textbooks are produced in partnership with Cambridge University Press and have been developed for a one-year course to take students from Beginner level to Intermediate level.

The language classrooms are well resourced, with computers and other technology aids provided to facilitate interactive teaching and learning. Students can access a wide range of up-to-date digital and electronic services. Teachers are encouraged to make the language classroom as interactive and communicative as possible.

1.2.4 English as a Foreign Language in KSA

English as foreign language holds a high status in Saudi Arabia. In fact, English is the only foreign language that is taught as a compulsory subject in schools and universities in KSA. In higher education, English is the medium of instruction in many specialised majors such as medicine, sciences, and engineering. In addition, proficiency in English is now considered one of the main requirements for jobs and postgraduate studies (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). English is also a requirement for acceptance into the government overseas scholarship programme. Therefore, more and more Saudis believe that the English language is key for their own prosperity as well as the prosperity of their country (Al-Seghayer, 2014). Indeed, teaching and learning English has been very important to the Saudi economy, and there has been much investment in this area (Shabbir, 2006). Nonetheless, the outcomes are well below the expectations of the government; Saudi students' language proficiency and competence is still unsatisfactory.

1.3 Critical Review of Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language in KSA

Although communicative approaches have been recently advocated and highly encouraged in language education, the language classrooms in Saudi Arabia are still described as teacher-centred (Darandari & Murphy, 2013). Students rely heavily on memorisation techniques; they memorise grammar rules, new vocabulary, and reading and writing passages (Al-Sheghayer, 2015). Introducing communicative teaching methods into Saudi

classrooms has long been regarded as challenging mainly due to this cultural aspect of teacher dominance. Despite the best efforts of the Saudi Ministry of Education, teachers still tend to use traditional methods such as grammar-translation, audio-lingual, rote learning, and exam preparation (Abahussain, 2016).

The teacher is the central focus of any teaching or learning approach (Gulnaz, Alfaqih, & Mashhour, 2015). Therefore, a lack of English language competence on the part of the teachers is seen as a key barrier in introducing communicative activities into the English language classroom. Teachers may find it difficult to use communicative activities in the language classroom as they are reluctant to give control to the learners. Teachers may see sharing power as a loss of their position and, perhaps, of their authority.

It has been argued that teacher-centred approaches are still dominant in the Saudi classroom due to the lack of experience and professional training. Rahman and Alhosaini (2013) noted that many language teachers are not professionally trained and lack experience in the classroom. Alseghayer (2014) reports that teacher training programmes fail to prepare Saudi teachers well, and teachers need to be provided with ongoing professional development to enhance their knowledge. Khan (2011) states that Saudi teachers are not interested in attending training programmes because some teachers felt that attending such sessions would cause them academic embarrassment. This attitude is a barrier, in many ways, to teachers becoming autonomous learners in their own right. If teachers do not understand the concept of lifelong learning and take responsibility for their own professional development, they will not be able to offer effective support for self-directed learning activities for their own students.

In many ways, teacher-centred approaches act as a barrier to learner autonomy, as learners are taught to memorise the knowledge imparted to them by the teacher. Some have attributed adherence to this memorisation technique to the influence of the Islamic religion; memorisation of texts from the Quran, for example, has been fundamental to the Islamic education system (Alotaibi, 2014). Nevertheless, the importance of active learning involving student participation is also highly regarded in Islamic teaching methodology (Azram, 2011). It is recognised that learners should be active, not passive recipients of knowledge. On the basis of this, language teachers should be expected to use activities whereby their students could be active learners and apply knowledge of the language. It has also been recommended that English teachers should be taught how to apply new

technology in teaching English (Abebe & Woldehanna, 2013). Thus, teachers would be able to introduce new activities into the classroom.

Few studies have been conducted in Saudi Arabia relating to learner autonomy, and limited research has considered the perspectives of both teachers and students. This research gap exists despite the topic being of importance in the Saudi context, where learner autonomy at the level of higher education is fundamental to the Saudi government's aspirations of generating a knowledge economy. Powell and Snellman (2004) define a knowledge economy as having greater reliance on the production of knowledge-based outputs through use of intellectual capabilities, and such knowledge-intensive activities require independent thinkers who can create and find solutions to problems.

Pedagogical challenges for education tend to centre on training young people to be able to work in a globally competitive knowledge economy. Graduates need academic knowledge, but they also need the creative capability expected of an educated workforce. Much debate has surrounded these challenges, with researchers reporting concerns that school curricula are very similar around the world and largely based on Western values (Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Meyer, Ramirez & Soysal, 1992). It is therefore important to gain more understanding of education in other non-Western contexts. In addition, there is a need for a study that will help recognise and bring into focus knowledge and practices regarding learning autonomy, as this area promotes creativity and empowerment. It should, however, be noted that any study of learner autonomy cannot be separated from an understanding of the social and cultural context within which that learning operates, and that is why this study of learner autonomy has been conducted in a Saudi context.

1.4 Personal Inspiration and Positionality

Personal reasons drove me towards researching learner autonomy in A Saudi Arabian EFL context. I have an MA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and have taught English in Saudi Higher Education for a number of years. My own desire to see learner autonomy more widely recognised and practised in Saudi education inspired and initiated this research.

I had very limited knowledge on language teaching methods when I was teaching at KAU, since I studied English Literature in my (first) Master's at KAU. In addition, pre-service training was not available at the university when I was hired; academic

qualifications and English language competence were enough for the position of a lecturer at the ELC at that time. I recalled my first attempts of teaching as being a copy of my own lecturers at the university. However, it soon became clear to me that language teaching is complex and requires informed knowledge and on-going development. The new generation cannot be taught in the same way as my generation. I finally realised that relying on my language competence and experience or copying my lecturers would not allow me to improve in my profession, and that was when I decided to pursue my postgraduate studies in the UK. Studying abroad was an ideal plan for personal and professional development and to take a step back from teaching and spend time learning about language teaching pedagogy and contemporary language teaching methods.

My own introduction to the concept of learner autonomy came during my MA in TESOL studies in the UK. I came across the terms ‘autonomy’ and ‘learner autonomy’ for the first time in a TESOL Forum session. The speaker started the session by defining learner autonomy, then explained its pedagogical benefits and suggested ways to promote autonomy in different educational contexts. I felt an immediate interest in the topic, and I started comparing and contrasting my autonomous learning behaviour in the UK and in Saudi Arabia. As a Saudi female, being independent and totally in charge was rather unusual to me. I may have been a responsible learner, but I was not in charge of all aspects of my own learning, and certainly not of my life. I was rather seeking directions and sometimes instruction from others.

From my own experience of studying and living abroad, I can say with great confidence that developing autonomy has potential benefits not only in formal education, but also in all aspects of life. I wanted to make a contribution and be an active participant in elevating the quality of language learning in higher education in general and helping university students develop skills for their future. Experiencing for myself an autonomous way of learning in the UK made me feel that Saudi students deserve to be given the same learning opportunities in their home country.

In addition, writing a reflective portfolio at the end of the Master’s programme in the UK greatly contributed to developing my interest in autonomous learning. The portfolio allowed me to recall and document my learning experiences and teaching practices, and I reflected on the past, present, and future of myself as a learner and a language teacher. I selected ‘learner autonomy’ to be the main theme in my portfolio, and researching this

theme inspired me to further investigate the construct by conducting a small-scale project (in 2012) to explore the concept in my teaching context in Saudi Arabia. The aim of this project was to gain initial insights and general views on learner autonomy in my teaching context.

Consequently, I sent an online survey to 22 in-service English language teachers to seek their general perceptions on learner autonomy. It was clear that the term 'learner autonomy' appeared to be a new concept to Saudi teachers at the university, but there was a positive reaction towards this 'new' concept in terms of desirability. However, some teachers were unsure about the feasibility of implementing an autonomous way of learning in the classroom. In other words, learner autonomy was perceived as an abstract concept rather than a realistically applicable approach. I decided then that I should pursue a systematic investigation of the phenomenon.

To systematically investigate learner autonomy in my teaching context, it took much careful thought on how to position myself in order to inform my research study. To start with, I had to consider my advantageous position of being familiar with the study context, educational culture and possibly some of my potential participants. I was aware that many of my initial assumptions were possibly based on my knowledge and personal teaching experience at the university. On the other hand, I was not fully aware of the current English language programme at KAU, or of other major changes in the English language Institute, since I had been away for a number of years. For example, I had little knowledge and no experience in teaching within the modular system to understand its impact on language teaching and learning. I was also unfamiliar with the new administration and teaching staff, as well as the new generation of students.

When I started teaching at the ELC in 2005, undergraduate students were required to complete only two General English courses (ELCA 101 and ELCA 102), not necessarily in the first year. Students had the option to select the year/ term they wished to take the English courses. In other words, they did not have to be enrolled in the English courses in their first year, unlike the foundation year students at the moment. This allowed me to experience teaching a diverse group of students at different levels, from year 1 to year 4. Language teachers at the English Language Centre (ELC), including myself, participated in preparing exam questions and were personally monitoring their students' grading and achievements, but now there is a special committee which consists of a group of trained

coordinators assigned to prepare coursework and exams to be unified across all language classrooms. Moreover, the curriculum and textbooks were set, but there was flexibility in terms of how each teacher delivered classroom activities and textbook materials. Course duration was also different; it was 14 weeks long.

As mentioned above, the English Language Institute has grown in size and the number of students has increased significantly. Being both familiar and unfamiliar with certain aspects of the study context created in me a sense of insider/ outsider. I predicted that it was going to be difficult to extract myself from the research context, due to the many familiarities I shared with the study setting and participants. In other words, I had the advantage of the insider's knowledge of the sociocultural context of language teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia, yet I had to take the position of an outsider in some ways because of the many changes that had occurred at the university over the long period of my absence. Many researchers are confronted with this dilemma of how to position themselves and how to control the influences of their positionality throughout the study. However, the researcher's positionality does not always fit into a neat category, and might even shift during the study (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Thus, I have positioned myself as an insider/ outsider researcher, and have based all the decisions for conducting the study accordingly. I have also carefully handled the ethical considerations and implications of being an insider.

1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The overall aim of this study, *exploring learner autonomy in the Saudi EFL context*, is to assess to what extent the meaning of learner autonomy exists in Saudi culture and to determine language classroom activities that might help to enhance the development of learner autonomy. The study explores how learner autonomy promoted by teachers serves to reinforce society's values and those values provided through language education. Although learner autonomy is a concept that is theorised in Saudi education circles, little research has been carried out on the practical aspect of application. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap and investigate the reality of learner autonomy from the perspectives of both teachers and learners.

The study also aims to explore and discuss issues related to learner autonomy in practice, with particular reference to the nature and experience of learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia. In addition, it investigates strategies and attributes intended to promote

learner autonomy in the field of higher education, as well as to determine the effectiveness of such strategies, their impact on language education, and how they might be improved and developed.

The study therefore has the following specific objectives:

1. To explore teachers' and students' perceptions of learner autonomy in a Saudi educational EFL context.
2. To explore teachers' and students' attitudes towards autonomy development.
3. To investigate and assess classroom activities and practices fostering learner autonomy in the language classroom.
4. To investigate any learner characteristics that may have a positive impact on enhancing learner autonomy and language learning.
5. To explore any relationship between learner autonomy and language learning.
6. To investigate motivations and constraints regarding the development of learner autonomy from a Saudi perspective.

To achieve these objectives, a comprehensive review of the literature on learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia has been carried out. Then a survey was conducted with teachers and students to ascertain their perceptions of learner autonomy. In addition, interviews were conducted with teachers and students to explore the practices of learner autonomy in the classroom and how these practices contribute to English language teaching. These perceptions were used as a point of reference for comparisons between teachers and students.

However, since it was not yet clear whether there was evidence of autonomous characteristics in the context of study, autonomy was treated as a 'new' concept to learning and teaching. This assumption was based on the fact that in a collectivist culture (such as Saudi Arabia), the traditional teacher-centred approaches are still dominant. The notion of giving learners a bigger role, and allowing them to take charge and control is not a common practice in educational settings. Therefore, introducing this 'new' concept was likely to need structured representation and promotion.

Thus, the research questions that have been formulated to reach a better understanding of the reality of learner autonomy from the perspective of Saudi university teachers and students, and are as follows:

1. What are their perceptions of learner autonomy?
2. What classroom activities do they perceive to be enhancing the development of learner autonomy?
3. What are the main characteristics of an autonomous learner?
4. What is the relationship between learner autonomy and language learning?
5. What are the major constraints to promoting learner autonomy in the Saudi university EFL context?

1.6 Procedures

This research was conducted in Saudi Arabia at King Abdulaziz University. To carry out any research in an educational establishment, permission is required from the Ministry of Education; accordingly, permission was obtained. The research involved 44 teachers and 480 students altogether. In addition, as the study was carried out within a UK institution, the appropriate approvals were also obtained from the university.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Little research has been carried out on learner autonomy in the context of Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, where traditions of teacher-centred learning predominate. This study is therefore a significant step towards providing research focusing on the concept of learner autonomy within Saudi higher education language classrooms, as there is a definite lack of research in this field. This study is important because learner autonomy is fundamental to the Saudi government's needs for creative individuals who can contribute to the knowledge economy that Saudi Arabia is promoting. Understanding the barriers to learner autonomy may benefit Saudi society as it moves towards an education system that must compete in a global environment.

This study is also important for the methodology used, as this research marks the first time that both surveys and interviews have been employed to gauge in depth the perspectives of learner autonomy of both teachers and students in a Saudi public university context. Such views and opinions have been absent from other studies, where the phenomenon has been studied purely from the perspective of either teachers or students, employing either purely quantitative or purely qualitative methods. Exploring learner

autonomy in a non-Western context, such as Saudi Arabia, can lead to new discoveries about the topic. In addition, students' voices seem to be missing in most existing studies, including the small-scale study that I conducted in my Master's. It makes much more sense to investigate learner autonomy from the perspective of the actual learners as well as the teachers, and indeed being able to compare and contrast both sides has provided a unique contribution to existing literature.

1.8 The Structure of the Thesis

This first chapter has provided a rationale for the study and explained what the research is seeking to achieve. The chapter has also given a contextual background to the education system in Saudi Arabia and the English language courses taken by the participants in this study. The aims and objectives of this study have been set out, and the significance of the research has been explained. The rest of the thesis is presented in the following chapters.

Chapter Two: *The Literature Review* presents, explains, and evaluates findings from previous studies on this subject. It takes a wider perspective to look at other contexts where learner autonomy has been studied. Additionally, it provides the theoretical framework within which this study takes place. This framework is located within the domain of active learning and encompasses a humanist approach, constructivism, and learning preferences. The emphasis in this chapter is on learner autonomy, the characteristics of those learners who are most likely to develop autonomy, and the role of the teacher in supporting this development in the classroom by promoting specific activities.

Chapter Three: *The Methodology* describes the methods and methodologies. It provides information on why a mixed methods approach was undertaken, and it states the benefits that have been attributed to this approach. The chapter describes the design of the questionnaire, the piloting process, and the main study procedures. It describes the interviewing and data analysis for both qualitative and quantitative data. The validity and reliability of the data are discussed, and the ethical considerations are presented.

Chapter Four: *Results from the Survey* presents the findings of the survey carried out with teachers and students. Firstly, it presents the results from the teachers and provides an interpretation. Then it presents the results from the student questionnaires. A comparison is then made between both teachers and students in their views on activities that support learner autonomy, in their views on the importance of developing autonomous

characteristics, and in their views on how these characteristics can be enhanced to support learner autonomy in language learning.

Chapter Five: *Results from the Interviews* presents and analyses the results of the qualitative interviews by using a narrative format. The results are presented by providing the teachers' views on their understanding of learner autonomy and their role in developing autonomy in the classroom. The teachers' perceptions of the students, the constraints that prevent autonomy, and the activities that may promote autonomy are then presented. Students' views on their study at university, the attributes needed for autonomy, and any constraints and support they perceive are then presented. Students' suggestions for activities that may promote learner autonomy are outlined as well.

Chapter Six: *Discussion* synthesises and discusses the results. The chapter presents how the findings answer the research objectives and research questions. The ways in which both teachers and students perceive learner autonomy are discussed, followed by learner characteristics believed to promote such autonomy. Activities that may develop learner autonomy and the impact of learner autonomy on language learning are then discussed. Further discussions from the findings include motivations, relationships, levels of proficiency, and changing attitudes.

Chapter Seven: *Conclusion* summarises the key findings and the contributions to knowledge that this study makes. In this chapter, the recommendations and limitations of the study are also discussed, and ideas for further research studies are provided.

The next chapter presents a review of the literature, thereby giving context for the topic of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the concept of autonomy in education, which is important to the understanding of this study. Autonomy has been much discussed in literature over the past thirty years and has evolved together with models of learning delivery. This chapter presents the theoretical framework underpinning this study, then reviews the importance of learner autonomy in an educational context. As the focus of this study is on investigating learner autonomy in a language context, the chapter explores the literature relevant to language learning autonomy and learner characteristics where successful autonomy may take place. Some issues related to cultural differences may create barriers to becoming autonomous, and these issues are also discussed in this chapter. The chapter further reviews approaches for developing learner autonomy and presents arguments for autonomy in the language learning classroom. Teachers and students role are discussed, and the concept of teacher autonomy is also introduced. It then investigates ways in which these approaches are being implemented and identifies classroom activities and tasks that have been found to promote learner autonomy. All of these aspects are then placed in a Saudi context, and literature relating to Saudi education and autonomy is reviewed – although it is limited. The summary of the chapter discusses areas in which there are gaps in the literature and, therefore, potential for further investigation.

2.2 Theoretical Framework for the Study

Theories supporting this study relate to the pedagogical principles of active learning. Such principles encourage learners to actively participate in their learning and promote a more inclusive approach through which all students are engaged in learning activities (Petty, 2014). Consequently, the activities introduced into the classroom can determine the engagement and participation of learners. Likewise, the selection of such activities is significant to learner achievements. Petty (2014) suggests that passive methods (such as listening) do not improve learning and understanding for weaker students. Both weak and strong students benefit greatly from a learning experience which includes active methods. According to Benson's (1997) theory, there are three different kinds of learner autonomy, which he refers to as technical autonomy, psychological autonomy and political autonomy. Active learning falls within the psychological version of autonomy, which relates to the

behaviour of learners, their attitudes and motivations as well as their concept of self (Benson & Voller, 1997).

Oxford (2003) later added the sociocultural perspective to be the fourth version of autonomy, highlighting the importance of context, agency and motivation in relation to autonomy. Dam (1995) also emphasised the social aspect of autonomy and the value of learning in cooperation with others. Nevertheless, it is clear that all three versions of autonomy can overlap but there is a defined goal at the end, which the learner is setting out to achieve. Whether this is by being an active learner and participating in activities, by having the motivation and ability to succeed, or by making decisions about the content of learning, or indeed by using elements of all three, it is the learning objective that is most important.

To a great extent active learning requires a learner to take on the responsibility for their own learning and engage with the activities that will enable participation. There is an affective element introduced that makes the learner want to be involved. However, they must also have the technical ability to be able to learn by themselves (Lamb, 2017) and this means they will find ways to ensure they can achieve their objectives. The motivation for doing so is enhanced by a humanist approach, whereby individuals have a desire to develop themselves through shaping their own learning experiences (Atkinson, 1993; Stevick, 1980).

The study refers to a humanist approach whereby individuals have a desire to develop themselves through shaping their own learning experiences (Atkinson, 1993; Stevick, 1980). This approach emphasises the importance of active learning, autonomy and free will. It also asserts that students must have a motivation for learning that will lead to them achieving their goals. The humanist approach suggests that there must be intrinsic motivation, which is linked to the development of autonomous learners (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Namely, learners who want to achieve certain objectives will find ways to reach these goals and, thus, will not wait until the learning comes to them. Intrinsically motivated learners will actively seek opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills. From a research perspective that seeks to explore the desires and motivations of learners that may result in autonomy, this study has taken a qualitative approach to gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of autonomy in language learning.

Learner autonomy also owes much to constructivism, as learners focus on ways in which they can manage their own learning (Reinders, 2010). The general theory of constructivism suggests that the ways in which learners construct knowledge comes from giving meaning to their experiences. Tippins et al. (1993) explain that constructivist learning is “an active process in which learners construct knowledge in a way that makes personal sense. And it is a subjective process, as learners draw on their own background experiences to make sense” (p.223). This phenomenon indicates that knowledge must already be in place for constructivism to take place and that there is a need for the learning to be in context. New learning is interpreted in the light of past experiences. Therefore, any learning that occurs is influenced by the individual’s perceptions (von Glaserfeld, 1987). This view runs counter to positivism where knowledge is seen as fixed rather than constructed, and this knowledge is transmitted from an expert (the teacher) to passive learners. In this way, teachers become suppliers of knowledge and learners are expected to be “containers”, to be filled with the knowledge provided by their teachers; this positivist view is incompatible with constructivist learning and learner autonomy (Benson & Voller, 1997). Knowledge is not a transferable commodity, it is not a matter of memorisation and replication; knowledge is to be learned, constructed, and ‘built up’ by the learner (Candy, 1991).

Constructivism relates to autonomy as students should actively be encouraged to take the initiative in their own learning, but the new knowledge that they attain will be linked to what is already familiar to them. The constructivist approach involves a more active role for the learner to get them involved in constructing knowledge within a sociocultural context (Lamb, 2017). This is by encouraging learning new concepts through social interactions and collaborative learning, as well as learner initiative and learner reflection, which characterise ‘social constructivism’ and is closely linked to the concept of learner autonomy (Cirocki, 2016). The role of the teacher in this process is also fundamental in directing students towards active learning to help them become more engaged in knowledge construction and the construction of personal meaning within the social context in which learning takes place. It is important to acknowledge that the teacher has a role in producing the right kinds of materials for learners to be directed to the best learning methods. As learners all have individual ways of constructing knowledge, a variety of different approaches may be useful in presenting knowledge and encouraging active participation in learning. It is debatable whether a learner would be able to identify the optimal source of

learning materials or find the right sources for constructing knowledge without a teacher's intervention. This study is, therefore, underpinned by the theory that learner autonomy requires the preparation and guidance of a teacher.

The role of a teacher in encouraging autonomy is an area of dissent. Nonetheless, this area of research contributes to the theoretical framework in this study. A considerable amount of work has been written about individuals and their role in the learning process. These works have tended to focus on different learning preferences, and this variety has led to teachers introducing more than one approach into their teaching. Such studies have been underpinned by theories such as visual, auditory, reading, and kinaesthetic teaching approaches to suit individual learning styles (Fleming & Bauma, 2006). Honey and Mumford (1992) designed a learning styles questionnaire to determine preferred learning styles. Preferences were measured by the behaviour of learners, which included active, reflective, theoretic, and pragmatic tendencies. Critics, however, have concluded that the behaviours covered in the questionnaire do not accurately take into account the preferences of students in education contexts, as students are more disposed towards management (Duff & Duffy, 2002). The more accurate predictor of student performance, according to many studies (Lynch et al., 1998), has been Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory (Kolb, 1985). However, even Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory has had critics question its reliability and validity (Geiger, Boyle, & Pinto, 1992). This criticism indicates that learning styles may not have as much of an influence over the engagement of learners as some believe.

2.3 Defining Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is conceptualised in education in a specific way. The word 'autonomy' itself is derived from the Greek words 'auto' and 'nemo', which together mean "to live according to one's own rules/ laws, self-governing" (Oxford, 2003, p. 80). Autonomy is considered by many as a means of encouraging independent learning (Bakar, 2007; Hughes, 2001) and has become more popular with the rise in recent years of an interest in lifelong learning. Others believe that learner autonomy is a form of self-direction through which learners take charge of their own learning (Littlemore, 2001). This approach was particularly popular some years before the writing of this thesis, when the concept of learners being able to construct their own knowledge (rather than being taught by others) was proposed (Candy, 1991). These earlier definitions have now been refined through experience, but the basic concept of learner autonomy continues to place an emphasis on

the strategy of learning to learn. Thanasoulas (2000) suggests that learner autonomy is a process that learners work towards. Dickinson (1992) and Little (1991) both support the view that learners need to be trained to accept autonomy and that learner autonomy is not something that can happen without proper preparation. However, Benson (2011) argues that learner autonomy should now refer more to the personal attributes of the learner – not the process.

Nevertheless, the learning process also needs to be explained, as it reflects the factors that need to be in place before attributes of autonomy can be fully exploited. It is argued that learners construct their knowledge based on their personal experiences (Liu & Qi, 2017). However, as Benson (2001) states, “learners must be cognitively capable of performing actions that enable them to take control of their learning” (p. 40). The teacher plays a facilitating role that enables the learner to manage their own learning. Nonetheless, in order to achieve this self-management, there is a certain additional learning process which must be fulfilled. According to John (2003), there are four stages of this process. The first stage is that the learner must be willing and able to learn. The second stage is that there must be new knowledge and experiences for the learner to absorb. The third stage involves analysing the new knowledge and synthesising it with what is already known. The fourth and final stage is that the learner should be able to apply this knowledge to a wider range of situations. In many ways, the suggestion that learners must be able to learn matches Benson’s (2011) argument that personal attributes play a major role. Although learners may be willing to manage their own learning, they may not be capable of doing so. A number of reasons could be behind this limitation, but Benson (2001) believes that the main reason is related to cognitive processes.

Autonomy has become more important as the focus in education has changed from teacher-centred to student-centred education (Ciekanski, 2007; Little, 2007). Autonomous learners are believed to be more motivated, as they take more interest in their own learning (Little, 2007; Zhou, Ma, & Deci, 2009). However, scholars also recognise that not all learners develop autonomy in the same way (Benson, 2006; Nunan, 1997; Scharle & Szabo, 2000) Many learners may need much more support in controlling their own learning. Such support can come from teachers or from their own peers (Chan, 2003; Chang, 2007; Jing, 2006); Benson (2001) suggests this interdependence is a natural way of promoting autonomy. Much also depends on the amount of teacher control learners have become accustomed to receiving, which also determines how proactive learners can be in their

learning (Littlewood, 1999). However, Kelly (1955) argues that all human beings are more inclined towards proactive autonomy. Conversely, Blidi (2017) reflects that students simply need some help in utilising their potential to develop. This indicates that the ability to achieve learner autonomy is inherent, but it may take some extrinsic motivation before a learner is able to take control of their own learning. Blidi's proposal also questions the capability of a learner to achieve autonomy, as it suggests that all learners are indeed capable, but they may simply need more support.

The pedagogical principles underpinning learner autonomy are learner engagement and reflective practice (Little, 2007). Reflection requires learners to think critically about their learning and evaluate what they have learnt. It is a learning cycle whereby they evaluate, plan, and take action according to how they can improve. It has been argued that learner progress should be monitored from within the classroom, as learners need direction and guidance (Nunan, 1997; Yu, 2005). It is therefore clear that learner autonomy does not mean that learners should be working on their own. As Liu (2015) states, developing learner autonomy is a slow and long-term process. Although there may be many differences in trying to define learner autonomy, there is a general consensus that it involves students taking responsibility for their own learning (Horinek, 2007). This consensus indicates that teachers must provide opportunities for students to take on these responsibilities. Student-centred learning environments have been proposed as ways of facilitating such opportunities. Student-centred learning would indeed give teachers the chance to monitor the activities being carried out by learners in the classroom and facilitate decisions about the level of support needed by individual learners.

The concept of student-centred learning is widely accepted as one of the building blocks for learner autonomy, and teachers have been encouraged to become enablers of student activity by placing learners at the centre of any educational experience (Ejiwale, 2012). This trend has been purported to empower learners and motivate them to become responsible for their own learning (McManus, 2001). It is argued that learners will develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills by being engaged in the learning process (King, 1995). This argument has marked a paradigm shift from focusing on the teacher as a distributor of knowledge to focusing on the student as an active searcher for knowledge. O'Neill and McMahan (2005) place student-centred learning within the constructivist theory of learning, as student-centred learning is concerned with performing physical or kinaesthetic learning activities – particularly in collaboration with others. Carlile and

Jordan (2005) also support this assessment, stating that student-centred learning has a focus on activity. Nevertheless, they also include discovery and independent learning as components of the approach. Collaborative learning encourages participation, which may lead learners to more understanding as they have the opportunity to absorb knowledge from more than one perspective. The engagement with other learners may help students construct knowledge in a way that makes more sense to them.

However, there have been questions raised about the efficacy of student-centred learning. Garelick (2013) argues that student-centred learning may teach thinking skills, but it does not have the content to support it. Others suggest it teaches students how to think, not what to think (Tsui, 2002). Student-centred learning has also been seen as a Western approach that is perhaps not transferable to other countries where resources may be more limited or learning cultures may be different (O'Sullivan, 2003). Growing evidence suggests that student-centred learning is ineffective for about 30% of undergraduate learners (Honkimaki, Tynjala, & Valkonen, 2004; Hockings, 2009). Furthermore, Dear's (2016) study shows that deeper learning was improved after teacher instruction, rather through than student-centred learning. According to Dear (2016), there is a lack of evidence that student-centred models of learning are effective. There have also been suggestions that student-centred models are promoted, not on pedagogical principles, but as a marketing tool with economic undertones (Attard et al., 2010). Such promotion suggests that these learning models are supported to make learning appear more attractive to students and encourage more enrolments in courses. Students may be more interested in courses where interesting activities are promoted as part of the programme.

There is also concern that, although learner autonomy may result in improved thinking skills, no evidence suggests that it has an impact on achievements (EPPI-Centre, 2004). It is therefore difficult to ascertain whether learner autonomy can be defined as beneficial in educational terms. The relationship between the development of learner autonomy and language proficiency is also debatable. For example, some scholars argue that promoting learner autonomy is easier with more proficient learners than with beginning language learners. On the contrary, Kumaravadivelu (2003) rejects the idea that language proficiency level affects the development of autonomy. Namely, he states that the stages of autonomy development depend on the linguistic and communicative demands of particular tasks rather than the level of language proficiency the learners hold. He states "it would be a mistake to try to correlate the initial, intermediate, and advanced stages of autonomy . . .

with the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of language proficiency” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 144). Whether any possible relationship exists between language proficiency and learner autonomy is worth investigating. This research highlights any significant relationships between the two constructs.

In addition to pedagogical aspects, there must also be a consideration of political aspects. The political version of autonomy draws attention to the relationship between knowledge, ideology, and power in a society, emphasising the transformative role of autonomy. In other words, the development of autonomy should contribute to both the transformation of individuals and the social situation and structure in which they are participants (Benson, 1997). In addition, Pennycook (1997) notes that the concept of learner autonomy from the political perspective is driven from the concepts of ‘freedom’ and ‘power’ for the learner. Oxford (2003) argues that learners should have a choice and be free from oppressive forces in order to develop their autonomy. Benson (2013) also stresses the importance of empowering learners and encouraging them to be in control. However, as a result of certain socio-political conditions, gaining this type of power and control is not always easily achieved. The development of learner autonomy is sometimes constrained by particular situations, communities, societies, cultures, individual characteristics (Pennycook, 1997). The social structures of many Eastern societies, given their traditions of family conformity (such as in Arab societies), may hinder practices which encourage individual control.

In terms of this study, learner autonomy is broadly defined as “a recognition of the rights of learners within educational systems” (Benson, 2000). This study acknowledges the rights of the Saudi learner to be offered better language learning opportunities and experiences, and to be placed in a learning environment that promotes the development of autonomous learning habits and life-long skills. Furthermore, in the particular context of this study, learner autonomy is also defined as the attributes of a learner being able to progress and develop autonomy, more in line with Benson’s (2001, 2011) argument that learner autonomy is not a method of learning, but an attribute of the learner and the practical abilities involved in the learning process.

There is, therefore, great emphasis on the importance of the teacher’s role in promoting such attributes and abilities involved in language learning, and in engaging learners’ existing autonomy within classroom practice (Benson, 2001). Without these attributes,

learners may continue to hold the belief that it is the teacher's job to teach them everything they need to know. Learners need to be involved in the learning process in such a way that they want to discover more; they must be participants with a clear understanding of ways in which they can improve their knowledge. Teachers hold the key to facilitating this process by demonstrating their own passion for their subject, which will help in motivating learners, and by ensuring there is an inclusive learning environment that meets the needs of all the learners in the class.

2.4 Autonomy in Language Learning

Little (2004) indicates that the development of learner autonomy helps learners to both 'know' and to 'use' the target language. Autonomy facilitates target language performance with a greater level of confidence. Murray, Gao, & Lamb (2011) find learner autonomy to be one of the key elements in the dynamic system of second language acquisition. Benson (2013) illustrates that autonomous learning greatly contributes to the success and progression of language acquisition. It also improves the learner's strategies and enhances the language learning processes, allowing behavioural and emotional engagement and active involvement in education (Reeve et al., 2004). Thereby, learners are encouraged to understand their learning processes, get involved in language communication, and acquire various skills. Language learning is one of the areas in which advances have been made in teaching approaches, and learner autonomy has been seen as both practical and appropriate (Palfreyman & Smith, 2003). Autonomy may not always be the right approach in other subjects, as languages are communicative and require constant practice in order to improve and progress.

Language education has now become more focused on language learning processes. As Liu and Qi (2017) suggest, the learning process is regarded as the foundation for developing lifelong study skills. In other words, an autonomous learner who can reflect on what and how they need to learn will increase their own knowledge by understanding their unique learning needs. Najeeb (2013) believes that autonomy in language learning reflects the ability of learners to develop their language skills without the intervention of a teacher. She continues by calling autonomy a positive way to encourage students to become independent learners. In this way, students become responsible for their own learning. This responsibility may materialise through listening to native speakers in films, videos, or on

YouTube. In some cases, learners may have the opportunity to communicate directly with native speakers outside of the classroom.

It is becoming more important for Saudi language learners to find ways of working independently of a teacher. Finding ways to manifest independence is not an easy task, given the dependence on teachers in the education system. However, with more students seeking higher education, activities that can foster independence require attention so that students may be more successful in their postgraduate studies. Furthermore, the need for proficiency in English is now a prerequisite for many career paths and will continue to have a significant impact on the global economy in the near future. Thus, individuals need to develop skills that will enable them to work independently. By understanding and practising learner autonomy in the classroom, individuals can develop a skill that will provide access to lifelong learning opportunities.

On the other hand, Dam (1995) argues that learning a language requires interaction. It is a social process, requiring an individual to act both independently and in co-operation with others. This interdependence suggests that an autonomous learner should not be left to work on their own, and support should always be available when needed. Even in the case in which a language learner communicates with a native speaker, support may manifest in the form of non-verbal communication. This support may be body language, gestures, or other cues that aid in understanding. Learning a foreign language requires guidance, especially in grammatical structures. Although vocabulary can be memorised, learners need to be able to understand how to form sentences that can be understood. There may be occasions in the early stages of language learning when basic phrases can be memorised and beginners can produce some kind of communicative outputs. However, this is a short-term strategy to enable learners to gain confidence and become familiar with the language.

Long-term strategies for learning a language need to incorporate more understanding of syntax. It has been found that learner autonomy increases when learners are given guidance on how to analyse language (Huang, 2011). The ability to analyse language involves learners in actively looking for patterns in the language. Furthermore, this is enhanced when learners have the opportunity for reflection. The new information is then more easily integrated into existing knowledge (Chi et al., 1994). Thereby, learners are required to process new information sufficiently to reshape what they know, which may

often occur through interaction with peers or self-explanation (Donato, 2004; Huang, 2011; Swain, 2006). As mentioned above, opportunities for collaboration can often assist understanding, as this allows different perspectives to collaborate in processing new knowledge. Strategies for learning need to be adopted, and the most effective guidance comes from a teacher, who may have experimented with a number of different strategies in order to find those that are most effective.

2.5 Applications of Learner Autonomy

Little (1991) emphasised that learner autonomy can be developed and applied in various ways and situations, including the language classroom. The discussion of the application of learner autonomy promotes self-directed learning outside the classroom and other applications within the classroom. These two suggested contexts of application have a “hard-edge distinction” that is difficult to maintain (Benson, 2007, p.25). Benson (2007) also points out that in-class autonomy is a ‘usable’ construct for teachers who want to help their learners to develop autonomy, and that it could be accomplished without necessarily challenging constraints of classroom and curriculum organization to which they subject. Benson calls it the ‘weaker’ version of application, whereas the ‘stronger’ version is based on curriculum level application and stresses the importance of confronting constraints on autonomy in educational settings (ibid).

This study focuses on the various suggestions on the application of autonomy within the language classroom, and acknowledges the teacher’s role as key to facilitating and fostering autonomous learning. It also sheds light on the role of the teacher in ‘scaffolding’ or structuring learning, as well as the importance of the interrelationship between the teacher and the learner roles (Smith, 2003).

2.6 The Role of the Teacher

As Bakar (2007) and Hughes (2001) argue, learner autonomy involves independent learning, and this is also associated with student-centred learning. However, learners do not become independent learners by themselves. It is argued that the relationship between teacher and learner must be strong (Kesten, 1987; Bates & Wilson, 2002; Williams, 2003), and the learning environment must be compatible with encouraging learners to work

independently (MacBeath, 1993; Gorman, 1998; Williams, 2003). Therefore, the teacher's role is significant in encouraging learners towards more active learning.

Teachers need to be able to ensure that learners are actively involved in the learning process (Bolhuis & Voeten, 2001). This means that teachers should consider individual students rather than the entire class (Malone & Smith, 1996). Teachers should also show enthusiasm for their subject, as this energy will also enthuse their learners (Meyer, 2010). Teachers have a significant role in motivating learners to find things out for themselves. They have the influence to empower their students so they can realise that success is within their own control (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004). However, it has also been noted that teachers are sometimes reluctant to support learner autonomy, as they see it as a challenge to their authority and role as a teacher (Wood & Millichamp, 2000). There is, therefore, a need to reassure teachers of the importance of their role and ensure that they are supported by appropriate training (Meyer, 2010). If teachers can see that their role is not being subsumed by the introduction of learner autonomy, they are more likely to want to adopt such practices.

In many ways, learner autonomy requires more of a teacher, as their role expands into functions of facilitator, mentor, observer, counsellor and guide (Turloiu & Stefansdottir, 2011). Teachers must stimulate the learning process (Little, 1991), and therefore take a more conciliatory approach. Rather than being an authoritarian figure, the teacher takes on a more supportive role in helping the learner achieve their own learning objectives. This means that the teacher must understand their individual learners to be able to address their needs. It is most important to ensure that all learners are included and encouraged to progress at their own pace. Therefore, teachers need to show awareness of all learners in the group. In addition, they need to give awareness to their learners, as Dam (2000) records: "We can give our learners an awareness of how they think and how they learn – an awareness which hopefully will help them come to an understanding of themselves and thus increase their self-esteem" (p. 18).

Dam (2000) argues here that the teacher's role is not simply to impart knowledge, but it includes preparing learners with skills they can use throughout their life. This will also give them confidence that they can achieve their goals. At the same time, the teacher needs to consider that goals may be different for the learners in a group as they all have different

skills and abilities which affect the way they learn (Tomlinson, 2003). Skills are required, therefore, on the part of the teacher to be able to identify the needs of individual learners.

Teachers also play a key role in enhancing students' self-determination and intrinsic motivation so that they convey better performances and learning outcomes. Palfreyman and Smith (2003) and other scholars have tested whether teacher supportive behaviours can be enhanced through guided teacher training. They observed 20 teachers after providing them with guidance on how to support students' autonomy within the framework of the self-determination theory. They found that trained teachers in the experimental group displayed significantly more autonomy-supportive behaviour than did non-trained teachers in the controlled group. Such evidence suggests that it is useful to raise teachers' awareness and provide them with training on being more autonomy-supportive and possibly less controlling. It is also possible that the trained teachers had more confidence in their ability to support learners in this way.

One of the factors that may have a negative impact on the development of learner autonomy in educational settings is teacher-controlling behaviour. Control contradicts the key concept of 'freedom' in learner autonomy. However, recent discussions on the issues of control and freedom have presented much more realistic views. Absolute freedom for the individual learner is not really possible in most formal educational contexts. Nonetheless, learners can demonstrate 'conditional' freedom by making decisions which are acceptable in their socio-cultural contexts (Palfreyman, 2001, p. 53). Also, teacher control may have become less explicit, but this does not change the fact that it is "a part of an inevitable structure within which autonomy exists and is fostered" (Palfreyman, 2001, p. 52). Another important note on the issue of control is that it is perceived differently depending on the socio-cultural background of the learner. This means that it depends on learners' perceptions of whether teachers are controlling.

Zhou et al. (2012) conducted a study to examine students' interpretations of teacher controlling behaviour across cultures. They found that the same controlling teacher behaviour had different meanings for different cultural groups. Chinese students perceived the behaviour of their teacher as less controlling than American students. More surprisingly, the teacher controlling behaviour did not affect the Chinese students' level of motivation. On the contrary. Chinese students were more motivated in their class than American students. It was noted that the reason behind the high level of motivation could

have been that Chinese students normally feel that it is a moral obligation to respect their teachers in the same way they respect their own parents. Therefore, their feeling of being controlled is reduced. There is a gap in this theme that this current study can occupy, which is to explore how students may interpret teacher controlling behaviours and how this may affect their autonomy and motivation for learning. It is also likely that the Chinese students in the study may have felt more supported in their learning by having a teacher in control. However, there has been little other evidence on controlling behaviours and motivation. Therefore, it is not possible to conclude whether this is specific to the Chinese.

Furthermore, fostering autonomy in learners is said to satisfy a psychological need. If this need were well perceived, learners would be intrinsically motivated even in the absence of external rewards (Klassen, Perry, & Frenzel, 2012). They would attempt to find new challenges and opportunities to learn (Klassen et al., 2012). Learners would also demonstrate higher levels of self-determination (Deci, 1985). The self-determination theory presupposes that three psychological needs have to be met in order for individuals to flourish (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). These needs include autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Self-determination theory considers these needs to be innate and fundamental, and it states that the degree to which such needs can be met indicates the level of individual functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). An individual has a need to feel a sense of choice in carrying out a task, which represents autonomy. Competence is a sense of effectiveness in interactions, and relatedness is a sense of being part of a group (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Mouratidis et al. (2008) also found that there is a strong relationship between these needs being satisfied and optimal functioning. Also, there is evidence that, even if these needs are met, there must be autonomous motivation (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, & De Witte, 2008). In other words, individuals who feel pressured to carry out a task will not experience the intrinsic motivation required for autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Zhou et al. (2012) tested the role of students' social-emotional relatedness with teachers and internalisation in motivation. The study revealed cross-cultural similarities in matters of social-relatedness. In both cultural groups, students with high relatedness with their teacher were more willing to internalise teacher's guidance, values, and expectations, which in turn motivated them to work harder. The findings indicate that when learners feel that they are being cared for and they are connected with others, this can force internalisation and lead to a greater level of motivation. Thus, the learners' feelings and emotional connection with their teacher may facilitate motivation for learning, which is

considered a key factor to the development of learner autonomy. Similarly, emotional bonds between teachers and students could have an impact on the teacher's performance in the classroom. Reeve et al. (2004) argues that teachers' positive and negative emotions and their relationship with their students shape everything they do in class, including goals, perceptions, pedagogical choices, and methods. Emotions and social bonds seem to determine certain behaviours regarding learning and teaching. Unfortunately, these elements are not included in discourses on autonomy (Dunlop, 1986). For this reason, the present study aims to investigate the impact of the teacher/student relationship on the development of learner autonomy.

Wright and Candlin (1987) identify two types of teacher roles: the 'transmitter' and the 'interpreter'. The transmitter is characterised by transmitting teaching, in which the teacher takes an authoritative position, asserts control, and maintains a social distance from learners. In contrast, the latter is characterised by interpretation teaching, in which the teachers provide an autonomous learning environment and minimise the distance between themselves and their learners. The roles of the interpreter teacher are that of *a facilitator, counsellor, and resource*.

Voller (1997) explains that the teacher as a facilitator provides two types of support: technical and psycho-social. He illustrates some key features of technical support:

- helping learners to plan and carry out their independent language learning by means of needs analysis (both learning and language needs), objective setting (both short- and long-term), work planning, selecting materials, and organizing interactions;
- helping learners to evaluate themselves (assessing initial proficiency, monitoring progress, and peer- and self-assessment);
- helping learners to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to implement the above (by raising their awareness of language and learning, by providing learner training to help them to identify learning styles and appropriate learning strategies). (Voller, 1997, p. 102).

Psych-social teacher support features are as follows:

- the personal qualities of the facilitator (being caring, supportive, patient, tolerant, emphatic, open, and non-judgemental);
- a capacity for motivating learners (encouraging commitment, dispersing uncertainty, helping learners to overcome obstacles, being prepared to inter into a

dialogue with learners, avoiding manipulating, objectifying or interfering with – in other words, controlling – them);

- an ability to raise learners' awareness (to 'decondition' them from preconceptions about learner and teacher roles, to help them perceive the utility of autonomous learning). (Voller, 1997, p. 102).

Another important role of the teacher is that of a counsellor. Voller (1997) points out that the term 'counsellor' was first used to refer to the teacher's role in self-access learning contexts. These teachers counsel, advise, guide, give information, and answer learner-initiated questions about which resources to use and how to use them (Riley, 1997). However, the term 'counsellor' is now generally used to refer to the teacher's role in helping students to become managers of their own learning, not necessarily in self-access settings. An example of this is training learners to become capable of choosing and experimenting different learning strategies and offering them one-on-one counselling. This is very supportive, and learners like to feel they are supported. Therefore, teachers taking the role of counsellor may be beneficial to all learners. Lastly, Voller (1997) explains the role of the teacher as a resource. In this role, the teacher is considered an expert regarding the target language and materials available for students. This then indicates that the teacher is more in control. Therefore, it can be seen that the transmitter and interpreter forms of teacher roles are closely linked. A great difference between the two roles may not exist, as the transmitter also seeks that their students learn. The difference may ultimately lie in the amount of autonomous activity introduced into the classroom.

The above distinction of 'transmission' and 'interpretation' teaching draws attention to some teaching behaviours in terms of a continuum from controlling to autonomy-supportive practices. The teacher as a facilitator, counsellor, and resource are now identified as major roles for any teacher who aims to support autonomous learning. However, it is difficult to completely disregard the teacher as a source of knowledge. Likewise, teachers who are ready for the new challenges of being more engaged with their learners indicate autonomous characteristics themselves. They can thus be identified as 'autonomous teachers' (Voller, 1997, p. 20-21). Thavenius (1999) defines the autonomous teacher as one "who reflects on her teacher role and who can change it, who can help her learners become autonomous, and who is independent enough to *let* her learners become independent" (p.160). She argues that teachers need to become more aware of their own role in the process of developing learner autonomy, and this awareness requires training

and classroom practice as well as “a radical change of attitudes and a good insight into introspection” (ibid, p.161). Similarly, Palfreyman and Smith (2003) emphasise the importance of critical self-awareness on the part of the teacher, based on the fact that teachers’ “ideological baggage” can hinder student autonomy, and that “[teachers’] own preferred ways of knowing can have a negative impact on some learners” (p.258). The autonomous teachers then hold a professional capacity to control their own development as teachers (Benson, 2013, p.189). Furthermore, the teacher’s ‘well-being’ and willingness to confront constraints such as educational policy, institutional rules, and conceptions of language learning as an educational process and the struggle to create spaces within the working environment are crucial aspects of the teacher’s autonomy (Lamb, 2000). Barfield et al. (2002) argue that part of the teacher’s role involves “confronting constraints and transforming them into opportunities for change” (p.220). The non-autonomous teacher will simply accept decisions made by others and carry them out in the classroom (Benson, 2013). In many cases, ‘organisational cultures’ can limit teachers’ freedom to act and there seems to be a need for ‘teacher autonomy’ in this respect (Palfreyman and Smith, 2003, p.258).

The role of a teacher in developing learner autonomy has been discussed but there needs to be some acknowledgement of the need for a teacher to understand the concept of autonomy related to education. Little (1995) suggests that in the teaching profession most good teachers are imbued with a sense of autonomy as they take personal responsibility for the way they teach and reflect on how their teaching can be improved. Furthermore, in taking responsibility for updating their skills through professional development, teachers are developing their own teacher autonomy (Smith & Erdogan, 2008). There can, consequently, be seen that there are a number of similarities in the ways both teacher and learner autonomy are linked. The personal responsibility for teaching or learning is clear, but there is also the concept that reflection on one’s own performance is evaluated on the basis of aspects of social interaction: teachers, for example, determine the success of their lesson according to the dynamics of the class they have been teaching. On the other hand, in language classes learners evaluate their performance in comparison with peers or in feedback from their teacher.

For teachers an important element of professional development is ensuring they are aware of new strategies and approaches in language learning so they can use these in their own teaching practice. However, such development will normally take place outside the

classroom, thus emphasising the contexts in which learning can take place (Lamb, 2012). Nevertheless, it must also be noted that not all teachers are afforded the opportunities of reflecting on their professional development needs and finding ways of fulfilling these. There are often constraints placed upon them, sometimes due to lack of time, or to lack of resources, or simply to bureaucratic systems (Benson, 2010). Yet, teachers who take their own professional development seriously, and see it as part of their wider role in promoting the education of others, are more likely to understand the importance of developing autonomous skills in their learners.

The new roles of the teacher in autonomous settings involve key changes to encourage learner autonomy. However, autonomous learning can only take place if students are willing to contribute (Scharle & Szabo, 2004). If autonomous learning requires change on the part of the teacher, it also requires similar changes on the part of the learner.

2.7 The Role of the Learner

In an autonomous learning environment, learners can no longer act passively and wait for teachers to spoon-feed them knowledge and information. Students are required to get more involved and become more active and responsible in taking charge of their own learning. In order to do this, it is necessary for the learner to adopt autonomous characteristics and effective learning habits. Cotterall (1995) suggests that autonomous learners can make a link between what they need to learn, how to learn it, and what resources are available for them. This indicates that they are individuals who are aware of their own learning objectives and what they want to achieve. It may also be suggested that these are individuals who are not only able to take charge of their own learning, but they are also able to manage other areas in their lives.

There is debate on whether specific characteristics determine those who are more likely to succeed in self-development and self-directed learning. Such characteristics have been identified in language learners as being self-motivated and proactive in learning (Naiman et al., 1978). However, there is contention over the extent to which a learner can be self-motivated without teacher intervention (Reinders, 2011). A teacher who has passion for the subject is more likely to instil that interest in learners, and this helps to motivate learners. There are few learners who are likely to be self-motivated without encouragement or intervention from another source. In language learning, such extrinsic motivation is likely

to come from the rewards of passing an exam, a potential visit to the country concerned, or the teacher in the classroom.

There are other concerns around the concept of learner autonomy and the characteristics of successful learners. It has not been clarified, for example, whether a successful learner needs to be proactive, or whether they may be successful without being proactive (Reinders, 2011). Consequently, it may not be possible to correlate active learning with learner autonomy. Nevertheless, this study is predisposed to the theory that learner autonomy is characterised by proactive learners. It is sensible to suggest that learners take an active role in making decisions about managing their own learning to be able to achieve their own goals.

Motivation appears to be a desired characteristic in learners. If learners are not interested in gaining knowledge, there is thus no value in expecting them to investigate further on their own. Zimmermann (2002) concedes that motivation influences independent learning as it has an impact on whether learners plan their learning, whether they carry out any learning activities, and whether they reflect on what they have learnt. Motivation is one of the skills students need for independent learning, being an important affective skill. Cognitive and metacognitive skills are also vital to independent learning. Cognitive skills include memory, attention, and problem-solving (Carr, 1996; Malone & Smith, 1996). Learners need to be able to process information before they can learn independently (Meyer, 2010). In order to assess their learning, students need to have metacognitive skills, as these are associated with what learners do to discover new information, how they learn, and who helps them with their learning (Bransford et al., 2000; Bullock & Muschamp, 2006). There is some debate as to whether these skills are subject-specific or transferable, which has an impact on teaching learners to be independent (Meyer, 2010). However, as is discussed later in this chapter, teacher/learner relationships are important in promoting learner autonomy. Therefore, affective skills may play a role.

A number of other theorists have indicated that there are certain characteristics associated with autonomous learners. These characteristics have been identified as metacognitive skills such as reflection, decision-making, and independent action. These skills are needed to accept responsibility and discover ways of finding, synthesising, and evaluating information (Gao, 2007; Huang, 2006; Lam, 2007; Long & Agyekum, 2004). Learners must have the capacity to take control of their own learning process (Benson,

2001; Little, 1991). Nonetheless, it is not essential that this capacity be innate, as it can be developed (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). Perhaps the most important ability is learning how to develop reflective practice, as this provides the opportunity to sift out the important knowledge and discard the irrelevant. Effective decision making and action can then follow.

According to Dam (1995), learner autonomy is characterised by a 'readiness' to take charge of one's own learning. The notion of a learner's 'readiness for autonomy' can be tested through understanding the learners' beliefs and attitudes. Cotterall (1995) stresses the importance of determining a students' readiness for autonomy in order to confirm the appropriate level of support they need. In her study with adult learners in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course, Cotterall (1995a) used factor analysis and introduces six elements which could indicate students' beliefs and attitudes towards language learning and their possible relationship to student readiness for learner autonomy: (1) the role of the teacher (e.g. "I like the teacher to offer help to me"), (2) the role of feedback (e.g. "I find it helpful for the teacher to give me regular tests"), (3) learner autonomy (e.g. "I have a clear idea of what I need English for"), (4) learner confidence in study ability (e.g. "I know how to study English well"), (5) experience of language learning (e.g. "I have been successful in language learning in the past"), and (6) approach for studying (e.g. "I study English in the same way I study other subjects"). Nevertheless, it has been noticed that students from different cultural backgrounds may not demonstrate the same level of readiness for autonomy. For example, Ahmadi (2013) tested the readiness for autonomy in 133 law students attending EAP courses. He used a questionnaire adapted from Chan et al.'s (2001) Learner Autonomy Questionnaire and Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning. Ahmadi (2013) reports that an analysis of the results showed that the Iranian students were not ready for autonomy, and they surrendered most of the important decisions on their own learning to their teacher. There is, therefore, a need to explore learner characteristics in other cultural contexts, as this clearly has some bearing on whether students are at a stage in which learner autonomy can be developed.

The development of autonomous characteristics is often associated with reflection and evaluation. This indicates that active learning should take place, and they do not indicate that some form of instruction is missing (Fink, 2003; Machemer & Crawford, 2007). However, they imply that content must be available before these actions can be implemented. There is, therefore, reason to believe that learner autonomy is more important

once instruction has been given. In other words, learners need direction before they can become autonomous. As argued by Grolnick (2003), students need the resources to allow them to work independently. Without direction and resources, even the most agile learners may lose sight of what they are meant to be doing.

Furthermore, consideration needs to be given to the individual differences in learners, even within cultural contexts. Individual differences can be divided into innate variables (such as gender, age, language learning aptitude, personality, and learning styles) and acquired variables (such as motivation, affective state, and learning beliefs or preferences). The innate variables are believed to be biologically fixed and context-free, but their effects can be socially constructed and context sensitive. If we take gender as an example, gender itself may not be as significant as the distribution of male and female opportunities for language learning in a particular context. On the other hand, some acquired variables (such as motivation) are likely to change as a result of learning experiences, while other variables may vary according to the extent of the learner's control over them (Benson, 2013).

In addition, the influence of a teacher-student relationship in the classroom should not be underestimated, as this can determine how a student approaches their learning of a specific subject. It is important that teachers are there, as language learning is an interactive and communicative process, and the classroom becomes more like a community of learning (Coppieters, 2005).

2.8 Approaches to Developing Learner Autonomy

There have been a number of approaches to developing autonomy, which have been formulated to guide teachers in ways they can support autonomous learners. Benson (2013) suggests that these can be divided into six different areas of practice: resource-based, technology-based, learner-based, classroom-based, curriculum-based and teacher-based.

Resource-based approaches focus on the use of authentic materials in the process (Cirocki, 2016; Gilmore, 2007; Lee, 1995), as these present opportunities for learners to work independently through self-study (Nguyen & Gu, 2013), and may be seen as more relevant to the learners than their textbooks. These may also be linked to technology-based activities, as many authentic materials are now accessible on the internet. In addition, opportunities for technology-based activities may include more collaborative tasks such as interacting with native speakers (Brammerts, 2003), which may encourage learners to

engage with the language. Activities that may focus more on learner-based approaches place more emphasis on giving learners the skills and strategies to take up the opportunities for using and practising language (Nguyen & Gu, 2013). Ensuring that learners have the knowledge and skills to use any opportunities they may have for practising the language does not imply they need to be proficient in the language, although the strategies they use may eventually lead to proficiency; however it does promote self-confidence in learners (Oxford, 1990).

Classroom-based activities involve relationships in the classroom as teachers transfer more responsibility to their students for their own learning goals. These may include cooperative learning where small groups work together to achieve a goal, with each individual being allocated a specific part of a task that entails interaction with others in order to complete (Gillies, 2016). It has been shown that this is a successful approach to promoting socialisation (Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Roseth et al., 2008), which is an important factor in language learning. Curriculum-based approaches also involve relationships but this is more related to negotiation between teachers and learners as learners are encouraged to make decisions on their learning content and tasks (Nguyen & Gu, 2013). It may include project work, which encourages learners to determine what they are going to research (Cunningham & Carlton, 2003). This may also be part of a collaborative effort and similarities can be drawn between this and cooperative learning.

Teacher-based approaches move the focus from learner activities to teacher activities; these relate to teachers being prepared and trained to understand learner autonomy and develop approaches that will enhance this. Consequently, the focus here lies in professional development and updating teachers' skills and knowledge. In this way teachers will change their traditional or underlying beliefs on teaching approaches and find ways of encouraging practices that support learner autonomy in the classroom (Nguyen & Gu, 2013). This implies that, through understanding learner autonomy, they must also understand the concept of teacher autonomy (Benson, 2000; Little, 1995).

Elliott (2013) notes, "Benson has classified autonomy-fostering activity by focus, i.e. resource-based, technology-based, learner-based, classroom-based, curriculum-based, and teacher-based approaches"(p.273). Each of these approaches represents the way in which control is taken over the learning process (Nguyen & Gu, 2013). Thus, autonomy- fostering approaches are not limited to the classification mentioned above. Benson (2001) considers

this way of classification as most common approaches to developing learner autonomy, but he also acknowledges the importance of all other studies contributed to the development of learner autonomy in practice, including experience-based intuitive data.

Learner autonomy can be fostered in various ways and to different degrees “depending on each learner and learning context” (Lee, 2016, p.82). The next section presents autonomy-supportive practices with a specific focus for the purpose of this study and most relevant for the context under investigation.

2.9 Autonomy-supportive Classroom Activities and Practices

Autonomy-fostering classroom activities mostly rely on learner-centred approaches, and they focus on collaborative work, learner involvement and active learning. Unfortunately, the Saudi classroom has often been criticised for a teacher-led approach in which collaborative work is not encouraged. Recent studies on this issue have been made available through a number of investigations carried out by Saudi researchers (Albedaiwi, 2011; Melibari, 2015). These studies indicate that the practice of teachers transferring knowledge remains dominant in Saudi English language classrooms. Thus, understanding how other researchers and practitioners have helped their students in the development of learner autonomy is important for this study. This section focuses on the various suggestions on autonomy-supportive activities within the language classroom, and acknowledges the teacher’s role as key to introducing and implementing such activities.

However, before embarking on these activities, it is important to clarify how the term ‘activity’ is used in this study. Terms such as ‘activity’ and ‘task’ are understood and used differently depending on the context, and some believe they can be used interchangeably. Classroom activities can be seen as “goal-directed actions”, and those actions may involve a chain of lower-ranked actions such as tasks (Wells, 1993, p.5). The term autonomous activity is approached in this study in a more general sense, referring to any kind of purposeful classroom practice that involves students doing something that relates to the goal of developing autonomous learning. Some researchers choose to use the term activity rather than tasks because “ it is a term most readily used in formal settings” (Wells, 1993, p.5). It is also commonly used in contexts where the language classes do not follow a task-based syllabus, and therefore teachers and students in the field would most likely talk about the “activities” they do in the classroom (Barkhuizen, 1998, p.90).

The following sections give examples of activities and practices to foster learner autonomy in the language classroom, acknowledged by research studies.

2.9.1 Collaborative Learning

Ellis (2000) found that learning collaboratively helps language students construct knowledge as a joint activity, and this collaborative construction is considered an important source of language learning. Little (1996) argues that the development of learner autonomy in language learning depends on internalising a capacity to participate in social interactions fully and critically. The social interaction and social construction of knowledge embedded in collaborative learning also promotes active learning and learner initiative and therefore enhances autonomous learning. Learners will be encouraged to initiate and perform a new function with the assistance of the teacher or another member in the group, then this function is internalised and performed without help from others, a process that Ellis (2000) refers to as ‘scaffolding’ or structuring learning. Collaborative learning is therefore closely linked to the social constructivism epistemology (Oxford, 1997).

Collaborative Learning (CL) is an umbrella that covers broad approaches involving joint intellectual effort by students (Smith & MacGregor, 1992). In collaborative learning activities, students are working in groups mutually exploring and searching for understanding, solutions, or meanings. It is a shift from individual efforts and traditional learning to group work and interactive learning. Collaborative learning empowers students and enhances their sense of responsibility and control over their learning and develops language awareness (Macaro, 1997). Smith (2001) found that group-based activities enable students to maintain an appropriate working agenda and constantly evaluate learning outcomes. His work with undergraduate students in Japan showed that students became better controllers of their own learning, able to express positive satisfaction for their achievements. However, some learners encountered difficulties in adapting to a collaborative way of learning and needed more instruction, advice, and strategy training. Although some needed more advice and guidance for certain activities, most were very happy with their achievements. In many ways this can be related to the Saudi students, as it is often assumed that Japanese learners, like the Arab learners, are passive and wait for knowledge to be transferred from teachers (Maiko, 2003; Rundle, 2007).

Learning in collaboration becomes effective when there is a focus on the mutual exploration of a subject by means of social interaction with peers (Swain, 2000), as peer

collaboration enhances cognitive and affective strategies, critical thinking, self-esteem and liking for learning (Johnson et al., 1991). In collaborative activities, learners study in groups to achieve a learning goal, such as an essential problem or a project, and students construct their knowledge by sharing experiences and interacting actively (Zhang, 2012). Students can also participate in activities such as role-playing, group discussions, and task-based activities (Bosher & Smalkoski, 2002). The teacher can facilitate collaborative learning in the classroom by designing collaborative tasks and building collaborative structures (Watkins et al, 2007).

Collaborative tasks involve interaction with others; teachers need to ensure there are opportunities for learners to work with each other, either through projects or other group work. Within the domain of group work, individuals could also be encouraged to reflect on their contribution to the group. Such tasks have not been evidenced in studies carried out by Saudi researchers in English language teaching classrooms, despite suggestions that these tasks can lead to more autonomous activity. From the literature (Sarwar, 2011; Stoller, 2002), it can be seen that teachers need to be there to guide and support their learners to reduce any anxiety but this can be facilitated through learners being firstly involved in small group tasks, which then lead to individual projects. These are the tasks that enable steps forward in the process of becoming more autonomous.

2.9.2 Task Work

Most definitions found in the literature on task work agree that tasks are goal-oriented activities, accomplished by learners as a joint activity (Lantolf, 1996). Some differences in task description is that a task may serve various purposes, depending on what the teacher and her students wants to accomplish. For example, a classroom task might be phonological, lexical, grammatical or pragmatic (Bygate, 2016).

Tasks can be organised by the teacher to focus on meaning (ideas) and form (grammar), in order to raise students' language awareness (Lee, 2008). However, the effectiveness of form-focused instruction is controversial. Although some argue that tasks are most effective when there is a balance in focus between meaning and form, the strong emphasis nowadays is on meaning-based communicative tasks promoting meaningful language use and is socio-constructivist in nature (Van de Branden, 2006). In providing a task-based

lesson in a constructivist, autonomous classroom, teachers must design “holistic, complex and challenging learner autonomy tasks” (Cirocki, 2016, p.21). At the same time, learners are free to negotiate the task they are asked to perform. Negotiation is done by providing options for the learners; for example, the teacher may design a series of tasks and let her students decide which one to begin with. When the teachers is sensitive to students’ preferences, students take greater responsibility for the work they are performing and get more involved in the learning process (Shehadeh & Coombe, 2010).

The types of tasks leading to learner autonomy have different effects on learners in the ways they interact (Yilmaz, 2011); Lee (2016) found that more structured tasks allowed learners to work independently on content, whereas open-ended tasks encouraged social interaction which helped learners explore the topic. Although there may be many opportunities for learners to access information using technology, the resources to be found on the internet do not produce autonomous learners; learners need to be directed to sources that are relevant and the role of a teacher is in structuring tasks that lead to the selected material being appropriate for sharing information and interacting (Alm, 2006). The teacher must actively select tasks that encourage and motivate learners to find the information that will enable them to develop their skills. In language learning it has been found that effective tasks can encourage learners to participate and interact (Hampel, 2010), and communicative tasks ensure they can produce language and share information with others in a meaningful way (Ellis, 2003).

Similarly, Willis (1996) argues that tasks become effective when learners use the target language for communicative purposes, to achieve an outcome. Learners need to communicate and this is through social interaction with others, which Lewis (2014) and Murray (2014) suggest is being autonomous in relation to others. This indicates that peers and teachers are both important in supporting and developing autonomous learning. Task-based instruction, therefore, promotes authentic language use, active learning, engagement and learner autonomy. Task-based activities are based on a communicative, learner-centred approach that promotes learner autonomy. Learners can have a leading role and they are no longer passive recipients, and their teacher is there to facilitate, monitor, and provide relevant feedback.

2.9.3 Decision-making and Elements of Choice

At the heart of learner autonomy is the philosophy that learners have the right to make decisions about their own learning (Cotterall, 1995; Dias, 2000; Drennan et al., 2005; Nunan, 1988). Learner autonomy also incorporates the development of learners to know how to cope with situations that may not have come into their repertoire or programme of learning (Widdowson, 1996). It is clear that there are advantages for language learners to become autonomous learners, as they tend to gain confidence and are able to use their language skills in real situations. This development does not come easily to many learners, as they need to develop other skills in addition to language. One of these necessary skills is confidence in using the language. This is best developed in a classroom situation, where the support of both teacher and peers is available. Dam (1995) strongly believed that learner involvement in decision-making helps students develop autonomy in learning and in language use; the teacher has to be there to evaluate and challenge her students' decision when necessary.

Voller (2005), based on a study he conducted in Hong Kong, observed that project work, group work, reflective journals and extensive reading are found to be very effective activities that foster learner autonomy. They provide learners with various choices, offer them more opportunities for negotiation and interaction, increase their use of metalanguage, and raise their learning awareness and reflection. Porto (2007) describes how she introduced elements of autonomy into her classroom by giving learners options for selecting classroom activities. She found that this increased their responsibility in managing their own learning. However, she also allowed them to withdraw from any activity where they were not comfortable, provided they reflected on what made them withdraw. There should be enough freedom for students to make the choice not to interact, as Porto suggests. Being able to make their own choices indicates that learners are taking responsibility for managing their learning, as they are selecting activities that they feel comfortable with and they perceive are going to meet their needs.

A language classroom can contain learners of differing abilities and levels and it is expected that not all learners will progress at the same rate. Offering learners a choice between working collaboratively with others, or working individually, has been identified as key to promoting learner autonomy (Lewis, 2014). Individual activities are also important in enabling learners to control their own learning. In fact, a combination of both

collaborative and individual activities often work best in the classroom. In another study from Japan, Hart (2002) separated over ninety students into groups in which they were asked to choose a topic to study. Each member of the group then had to choose a sub-topic and investigate further. Group members then brought all their information together, gave group presentations, and presented posters. The individual members were then asked to give an oral presentation of their own contribution and reflect on the learning process. The results indicated that all of the activities had a positive impact on their attitude and strategic approach to language learning.

2.9.4 Projects

Projects are typically initiated by the teacher to give students opportunities to expand their language skills (Sarwar, 2000). Haines (1989) describes independent projects as being focused on themes rather than tasks. Thus, they can be defined as extensions of tasks which have perhaps been carried out in class. It can be argued that independent projects are student-centred, as they require individuals to work independently of the teacher. Nonetheless, as Stoller (2002) states, the teacher must be there to provide support; working on collaborative projects can be motivating and stimulating for learners, and should therefore be encouraged. There are a number of further benefits associated with project-based learning, including learners being engaged in authentic tasks, developing their interpersonal communication skills, and obtaining contextual learning (Nha, 2009). It is clear that collaboration is needed for project work, as working in groups may give the impetus for further learning.

In a study carried out in India by Imtiaz and Asif (2012), project-based learning was found to improve language skills develop students into more autonomous learners. The 52 participants in the study were aged 15 to 18 years old, were not independent learners, and had never completed a project previously. The main finding from this study was that learners increased in confidence and improved in self-image. The learners also felt they had gained skills to become independent learners and life skills such as time management, self-motivation, team work and self-regulation. Nevertheless, there were some issues highlighted, especially related to test anxiety, lack of time, and group dynamics. These were issues also raised in Sarwar's (2000) study of Pakistani college students. Time for working on projects outside of class may be a challenge for some learners, who are often committed to home duties. Anxiety may also be anticipated in learners who had not undertaken project

work before, as they have no benchmark with which to compare their work. Group dynamics are common stumbling blocks because it may take some time for learners to get to know each other's strengths and weaknesses. However, these are all challenges that can benefit from the reassurance and encouragement of the teacher in a mentoring role.

2.9.5 Learning Strategies

The use of learning strategies is considered important and effective for language learning (Oxford, 1990). Lee (2010) suggests that learning strategies is what learners must do if they want to retain information more successfully. Liu (2015) found that learners must take the initiative in their own learning if they wish to develop a greater level of autonomy. If students use strategies for improving their learning, it is found that they also engage more in learning activities (Liu, 2015). This was also significant in improving proficiency. Such strategies may lead to learners spending more time on practising the language, although guidance may be needed in order for them to select the right level of activity.

Rubin (1987) considers different types of strategies for approaching the language learning processes, and this in turn leads to learner autonomy. These to be grouped into three categories: learning strategies, communication strategies, and social strategies. Learning strategies depend on being taught ways to learn effectively (Schumaker & Deshler, 1992). This may include being taught how to use mnemonics (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1992) or how to paraphrase (Schumaker, Denton, & Deshler, 1984). Communication strategies are verbal or non-verbal techniques which help learners to get their message across, although their linguistic skills may not be at a very good level. A study conducted by Rababah and Seedhouse (2004) with Arabic learners seeks to discover how different levels of learners transmitted their message effectively. It was found that even low-level learners could transmit comprehensible messages by using communication strategies such as role play and picture story telling. This finding indicates the importance of teachers in directing learners to specific strategies that can help them transmit their message. Transmission of messages may be achieved through the use of gestures, pictures or other resources if the vocabulary is lacking. However, not all strategies appeal to all learners. Therefore, there is a need to adapt to each learner's needs.

The third type of learning strategy suggested by Rubin (1987) is the social strategy, and Japanese and Chinese students were found to avoid this type (Noguchi, 1991). Social strategies often include opportunities for actively using the language and interactions with

others. This may include seeking out the teacher, fellow learners in the classroom, and others outside of the classroom (Varisoglu, 2016). A student's willingness to use social strategies often requires a communicative teaching environment so that learners are confident in using their language skills, even if they are at a low level. It must be emphasised that language learning requires different strategies from those used with other fields of learning, and strategies can differ according to the cultural context. This means that some strategies that work well for particular nationalities may not work as effectively for others. There will also be variations at the individual level.

Learning strategies have also been divided into three categories by O'Malley and Chamot (1990). The first of these is a metacognitive strategy, in which learners have the awareness to monitor and manage their learning (Raofi et al., 2013). Being able to select and evaluate the most effective strategy for learning leads to success, and it is also a way of developing learner autonomy (Schraw et al., 2006). Cognitive strategies make up the second type, and they have been found to have a significant association with language proficiency (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995). Such cognitive strategies include memorisation, repetition, and recall. Such strategies tend to rely on the ability of the learner. In fact, they are often more efficient in older learners who already have experience using them (Strakova, 2013). The memorisation, repetition, and recall strategies categorised under cognitive strategies may well be associated with language proficiency. At the same time, these strategies are reminiscent of a teacher-centred approach. For language learning, there may be a significant overlap in the teaching approach and language proficiency. As mentioned above, many studies could find no evidence of a link between a student-centred approach and proficiency. This suggests that the cognitive skills required for language proficiency may depend more on an approach in which the teacher is the transmitter of knowledge. Social affective strategies are the third category, and these are related to managing emotions and are grounded in attitudes (Oxford, 1990).

It has been found that strategies are used by both successful and unsuccessful learners. The difference is that unsuccessful learners tend to use strategies that are not appropriate for the task (Vann & Abraham, 1990). This is one of the reasons why guidance in selecting strategies may benefit learners. There are many variables that can affect the use of particular learning strategies. Researchers have identified such variables as being aptitude, motivation, age, learning styles, and teacher expectations (Vann & Abraham, 1990; Chamot

& Kupper, 1989; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995). It has also been identified that learners from different cultural backgrounds tend to select different kinds of strategies (Bedell, 1993).

Developing study skills and learning strategies can also extend learning beyond the classroom. According to Mariani (1991), study skills aim to promote learner autonomy and enable individuals to adapt their learning to suit changing environments. Mariani (1991) stresses that the language learning strategies that will most benefit learners are those that they can choose for themselves and test to see if they work for them. Learners will be able to find the techniques that will establish effective learning habits that suit them through experimentation and evaluation.

Nevertheless, as has been mentioned, teachers are often the best source for introducing effective learning strategies, as they have more experience in knowing what works best for their students. Teachers can also support learners who wish to embark on their own learning journey and ensure that they are taking the right direction for their level and needs.

2.9.6 Reflective Practice

Autonomy can also be developed in the classroom when learners are guided in reflective practices. Scholars have suggested that it is important for learners to be able to gain insights into how they can improve their learning experience and reflect on their newly acquired knowledge (Hiemstra, 2001; Kaur, 2003). Writing down thoughts can become a habit that learners are taught, and is an activity that can lead to learner autonomy. This may take time to develop, but it is possible to build on this activity.

Reflective practice is an opportunity to have the time to reflect on what has been learnt and to allow new knowledge to be synthesised. This gives students the chance to consider areas where they can improve their learning. There have been a number of studies which advocate learning diaries, as these diaries can aid in reflection (Alterio, 2004; Simard, 2004). According to Zimmerman (2000), being able to regulate their own learning process through the use of reflection can help to clarify students' efforts to learn. Consequently, this aids in identifying strategies that enable students to attain certain tasks. It is more beneficial for learners to regulate their own learning through tools such as learning diaries than for teachers to keep records, as the processes and behaviours involved in learning are dynamic and cannot be captured by a teacher (Cleary, 2011; Schmitz, 2006). Learners are encouraged to write down their thoughts about aspects of language learning and to comment on their own learning experiences. It is more beneficial if learners write their

diaries in English, as this gives them more practice in writing skills. However, this depends on the level of the learners and the extent of their foreign language vocabulary. One important factor that emerged from Porto's (2007) study was that learners valued topics that were relevant to them and with which they could identify.

In a study carried out with 100 English language students in a Portuguese context, Costa et al. (2014) introduced a learning diary so they could make students aware of their learning activity. They also aimed to capture changes in students' reflections about their learning. Costa et al. (2014) found in their study that training students on how to use a diary was beneficial, as learners were not used to planning, monitoring and evaluating their work on a regular basis. These students were then more likely to report reflections and be more autonomous. These results were in line with other studies, which found that training in how to reflect on learning experiences led to increased levels of autonomy (Otto, 2007; Perels et al., 2007; Stoeger & Ziegler, 2010; Zimmerman, 2000). Learning diaries or journals have also been advocated as tasks which help learners in becoming more aware of areas where they need to improve their knowledge. Teachers need to be able to train and encourage learners to use such diaries, especially ensuring they are maintained on a regular basis, as this can also enhance motivation.

It is noteworthy that there has been increased discussion on the role of reflective practice in professional development among teachers in Saudi Arabia. This is because reflective strategies are a Western construct, and the interactions between genders and different hierarchal roles within an educational setting are contrary to Islamic thinking (Richardson, 2004). expresses concern that reflective strategies for teacher education in the United Arab Emirates were not suited to Arab-Islamic codes of behaviour (Richardson, 2004). In addition, and perhaps more pertinent, critical and practical reflective skills were found to be lacking in student teachers in Abu Dhabi (Hourani, 2013). Similarly, Sibahi (2015) concludes that there is no guidance for English language teachers on how to develop reflective ability. If they are unable to understand how to implement reflective practice for themselves, then they will not be able to develop such practices in their students. Melibari (2015) recommends reflective practice as part of a teacher training programme which encourages development, as she found in her study that there was a significant lack of evaluation of teaching. Almazrawi (2014) agrees, stating that her study found that Saudi teachers were highly satisfied with their performance in the classroom, and that reflective practice was not being used to reflect on ways to improve and develop.

As mentioned above, reflective practice plays an important role in learners understanding their strengths and weaknesses and shows them where they need to improve. This is also an important practice for teachers to be able to evaluate their own teaching to select areas for their own development. However, teachers will not be able to support their learners in giving them the time to reflect on their learning if these teachers cannot understand the value of the practice. Given that Arab teachers and students have no tradition of reflective practice, this may be a significant area to explore.

2.9.7 Portfolios

Portfolios provide opportunities for learners to reflect on the learning that has taken place. They are also regarded as direct evidence of competencies. Rao (2006) found that using portfolios with Chinese students encouraged evaluation of the learning process and motivated learners to improve their English. He concluded that portfolio building both facilitated learning processes and enhanced autonomous learning. This was because students had to organise their work and later evaluate it in order to check its suitability for inclusion in the portfolio. This process, therefore, displays evidence of metacognitive strategies.

Portfolios could be used for learners to monitor their own progress and check that they can meet certain criteria required for language learning. They could be used as a supplement to exams by including checklists and allowing learners to make their own decisions on where they still needed to develop their skills and knowledge. In this way, portfolios could also be used as a motivational tool. In English language learning, it is challenging to engage and motivate learners in contexts in which they have limited contact with native English speakers. One of the activities used in a Turkish context is related to the use of the European Language Portfolio (ELP). This is an evaluative tool created by the Council of Europe, and its purpose is to encourage reflection as learners make their own judgements on their level of language proficiency (Pawlak, 2009). The activity promotes learner autonomy by allowing them to assess their proficiency against specific criteria drawn up under the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which describes in detail what learners should be able to do at certain levels of their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. The ELP has been used in many countries and is found to be effective in encouraging learner autonomy. Little (2005) states that the ELP developed reflective

capacities, and Perclova (2006) reports that learners in the Czech Republic were very positive about being able to attain the tasks suggested in the ELP.

Encouraging learners to be positive about languages also plays a role in promoting learner autonomy. Therefore, any activities that can motivate and change attitudes toward learning are beneficial. Although some learners in a study in Turkey complained that it took too much time to maintain a portfolio, the majority stated that it was important to their learning process (Goksu, 2015). Using portfolios encourages learners to seek out independently opportunities which enable them to complete tasks and attain the level required. The use of portfolios inspiring Turkish student to take responsibility for their own learning was also seen in Koyuncu's (2005) study of younger language learners utilising the ELP.

Schuster (2012) looks at the range of instruments used to support autonomy in Australian schools. She found that learning plans were the most popular (32%), closely followed by computers (27%) and diaries (26%). Portfolios were used in only 11% of the cases. These findings align with theoretical literature on preferred instruments, which include learning plans or contracts (Beyer et al., 2008; Brown, 1992), computer assisted learning (Levy, 1997; Nadzrah, 2007), diaries (Thanasoulas, 2000) and portfolios (Little, 2009; Wolff, 2002). All of these instruments indicate a certain amount of flexibility in the way in which learners approach their attainment of knowledge. This indicates that learners are able to work at their own pace (Qamar, 2016). Learning at one's own pace may be instrumental in showing how learner autonomy can succeed in different contexts. Individuals approach their learning in different ways and are endowed with different abilities and capabilities. In recognition of this, learning plans can be most valuable when they do not place undue pressure on slow learners whilst encouraging fast learners to progress more rapidly.

2.9.8 Extension Learning

Working outside the classroom is one of the aims of successful autonomous learning as it encourages learners to develop their knowledge and skills in ways that contribute to taking control over their own learning. An activity used successfully in Chinese classrooms was that of extension learning achievement presentations. This was an activity designed to integrate classroom learning with out-of-classroom learning to develop learner autonomy. Liu and Qi (2017) explain that learners worked in small groups and designed and delivered

presentations based on their classroom work to share with their peers. In the classroom, the teachers had encouraged learners to solve certain problems or find interpretations for a language phenomenon. Learners in this study reported that they developed more awareness of resources and learning materials that were available outside of the classroom. Furthermore, the teachers noted that learner motivation rose and learners became more engaged in outside activities. Motivation is considered the key to success in foreign language learning. Masgoret and Gardner (2003), and Dornyei (2003) believes that activities can make a significant difference in motivating students.

The activities used must be attractive enough for learners to want to be engaged in them, otherwise they will not have the level of motivation needed. A study by Bintener (2010) involved students from Luxembourg being required to give a talk and presentation in English to their classroom peers. They were provided a list of optional topics from which to select one of interest, but the more confident students opted to make their own choice. Bintener (2010) found that learners were required to act autonomously and enjoyed the experience of becoming teachers and presenting new information to the class. This was an innovative experience for them, although it would not necessarily work for all groups. The most important aspect of the experiment was the enjoyment the students derived from being involved in the task. Without that level of interest, the activity may not have succeeded. Making presentations also requires confidence and practice, therefore it may be an activity that could be developed over a period of time.

Teachers may find other tasks that encourage learner participation, as much depends on the dynamics of the group, but it is clear that the teachers must be active in promoting classroom tasks and activities that interest all learners and which are, therefore, inclusive. This may be enabled through use of technology, although this may not always be possible in a classroom environment, and it is not always best suited to a Saudi cultural context, where teachers are regarded as being the providers of knowledge. Nevertheless, the use of technology must be regarded as a progressive step in learner autonomy activity, as it provides extra knowledge that a learner can access outside the classroom.

Technology has been significant in providing activities for learners to practise certain language structures and consequently provide the learning rote that is prevalent in Saudi schools. The existence of Apps, for example, has introduced a new dimension to language learning. Lyddon (2016) suggests, such media provide access to rich and multimodal

content. This is attractive to learners and opens up more possibilities to ensure that all learning preferences are met. In addition, mobile devices such as Smart phones are widely available for use for these purposes. Such an informal context may encourage learners to spend more time in extending their use of the language. Language learning relies on communicative strategies, and mobile devices are a way to utilise communication resources. The familiarity young learners have with technology may also help them to construct new knowledge in ways that were once never considered by previous generations.

It has been argued, however, that mobile technologies may not be accepted by all teachers, many of whom will not allow these devices to be used in the classroom. This may prevent learners from perceiving them as a beneficial part of the learning process, and they may not connect them to the language learning activities required to extend their skills and knowledge. Consequently, learners may not perceive mobile devices as a learning medium, and they may be reluctant to utilise their personal mobile phones for this purpose inside the classroom. Lyddon (2016) notes that language learning using mobile devices is not restricted to a classroom.

Indeed, one of the biggest changes in education has been the introduction of the internet and online access to learning. This has been instrumental in promoting autonomous learning. However, although online education may have progressed in Western educational circles, non-Western countries have been much slower to accept such forms of learning. This is partly explained by a traditional culture of oral communication, but there are other factors that have influenced the use of technology as a step towards creating autonomous learners. One of these factors is the propensity for Eastern cultures to enforce the concept of teachers being the sole provider of knowledge, especially when there is an educational culture that is examination oriented. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, Farooq and Javid (2012) found that language teachers are reluctant to utilise technological devices, and the majority of Saudi undergraduate students are not motivated to use technology in their language learning, although they have access to the internet and computers. It is possible that other activities (not so dependent on technology) within the non-Western classroom may be more effective in developing autonomy in learners. It is therefore important to ensure that teachers in non-Western contexts provide opportunities in the classroom itself for the learners to develop autonomy. Cross-cultural differences must be considered.

2.10 Cross-cultural Differences

Autonomy can be regarded as a characteristic of the decisions and choices people make, according to Varelius (2006). An autonomous individual is free to make their own decisions and take control of their own life. There are many qualities that are considered features of autonomous persons, but overall, autonomy is deemed to be a desirable quality for an individual to obtain (Dworkin, 1988). However, depending on the cultural context, there may be barriers to becoming an autonomous individual. In education, despite the motivation to be autonomous, culture may shape the way in which relevant tasks and activities may be carried out (Chirkov, 2009). In addition, autonomy is often regarded as a Western construct not suited to more collectivist or group-oriented societies (Markus & Kitayama, 2003). Nonetheless, evidence shows that autonomous motivation prevails across different cultures and societies; Sheldon et al. (2004) show that participants from China, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States all demonstrated similar results in which autonomous motivation always resulted in better subjective well-being. Autonomy is therefore seen as a humanist characteristic which may be *shaped* by culture but is not *inhibited* by culture.

Palfreyman and Smith (2003) state that “learner autonomy has been an influential concept in language education in a variety of contexts in recent years, and ‘culture’ has often been mentioned as a significant variable in connection with its appropriateness and/or practicality” (p. 254). Sinclair (1997) also notes that autonomy could have different interpretations in different contexts. In fact, autonomy can be less valid in a particular national culture. Acknowledging the different assumptions on cultural impacts is considered key to understanding how the concept of learner autonomy is conceptualised and valued in different parts of the world. This acknowledgement would also help in developing appropriate approaches for the development of autonomy in a particular culture.

A longitudinal study conducted in China found that teachers had to put extra effort into providing specific autonomy activities for students, but this was rewarding in the end. Liu and Qi (2017) reported that learners gave unanimous, positive evaluations of activities which promoted learner autonomy, but teachers needed to guide them in this style of learning. This indicates that the teacher’s role is crucial in directing learners on how to reflect on their own learning need. This may not be a concept that is familiar to Eastern

classrooms, but it is possible for learner autonomy to be successfully implemented in classrooms in which students have been used to teacher-centred education.

It has been found that learners respond better when lesson content is placed within a cultural context with which learners are familiar. However, a study carried out in Chile showed that learners gained intrinsic motivation when they were presented with a variety of different English language contexts when they were able to compare them with their own culture (Glas & Cardenas-Claros, 2013). Contexts were based on English-speaking countries such as Australia and New Zealand and showed how colonialism dealt with indigenous populations and how they had integrated. This could be compared with Chile's own post-colonial experiences. Glas and Cardenas-Claros (2013) argue that learners need to have a combination of both global and local contexts so that they understand the cultural contexts within which English is the *lingua franca*. This combination will also equip students to make sense of the language within their own cultural context. This then promotes critical reflection, which is a characteristic of learner autonomy.

On the other hand, a study of lecturers in Vietnamese higher education found that there were problems in understanding the concept of learner autonomy (Nguyen, Tangen & Beutel, 2014). Education in Vietnam is linked to a more traditional approach, as in many Asian countries, and the introduction of Western concepts into such contexts is often resisted (Yang, 2012). Due to the hierarchal system, it is usually not possible to make any pedagogical changes, and teachers are not happy about changing their roles (Pham, 2006). It is clear that there would be resistance to autonomous learning despite any potential motivation from learners or teachers. Nevertheless, there must be opportunities for encouraging a certain amount of autonomy within existing teaching structures without non-Western societies feeling that this is an imposition from the West. There are still occasions when elements of learner autonomy may be introduced, even in situation where teachers have the role of knowledge transmitters. This may be achieved simply through an activity in the classroom.

One of the key studies supporting independent learning was a study by Busaidi and Tuzlukova (2013), in which use of Moodle was examined in a group of Omani university students. The majority of students had little opportunity to practise their English outside the classroom and tended to have difficulties speaking, listening, and writing. This study focused on the materials provided by teachers on this learning platform. The learners

enjoyed being able to work on their own and access what they perceived as authentic materials on their computers. However, there was an issue with the level of these materials, as there was no control over the selection. This indicates that learner autonomy may be impeded when learners use the internet to work independently. This is because they may become demotivated if they do not understand the materials they are using to source their learning. It also indicates the importance of the role of a teacher in guiding students through the process and directing them to the right resources. This is especially important in fields such as English as a foreign language.

It is clear that students from different cultural backgrounds may not demonstrate the same level of readiness for autonomy. For example, Ahmadi (2013) tested the readiness for autonomy in 133 Iranian law major students attending ESP courses by using a questionnaire adapted from Chan, et al.'s (2000) Learner Autonomy Questionnaire and Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning. He reported that his analysis of the results showed that Iranian students were not ready for autonomy, as they surrendered most of their important decisions for their learning to their teacher. This current study seeks to explore whether Saudi students display readiness for learner autonomy through depicting their beliefs and attitudes related to the concept. In other words, it aims to investigate the perceptions Saudi students have towards learner autonomy.

A further study by Al-Sadi (2015) of 22 Omani University English language students revealed that the participants understood they needed to use additional resources above those provided by their teacher. However, the learners were still more focused on passing exams and learning only what was needed for that. Furthermore, their understanding of taking a more active role and responsibility for their own learning was that they were afforded the option to choose their own specialisation, the option to choose to attend certain lectures, and the ability to use resources other than a textbook. Al-Sadi (2015) concludes that, although students perceived elements of autonomy in their learning, the reality did not support this. It was clear that the teacher still had control over the teaching and learning, despite there being a readiness from some students to work on their own learning agenda. Other students, however, still saw the university teacher as being the sole provider of knowledge, as this was what they had known at school.

The above discussion suggests that the development of learner autonomy in practice is complex. However, when it is appropriately approached, it is by no means "a generally

established goal in practice” (Palfreyman & Smith, 2003, p.258). This suggests that appropriateness is a key element which should be considered when selecting autonomy-supportive approaches in a particular context.

2.11 The Saudi Context

The process of learner autonomy in the Saudi context has not been fully explored. Its importance should not be underestimated, as Saudi Arabia is aiming to become a knowledge economy. However, the Saudi education system has not been strong in preparing students for critical thinking, as it is still embedded in a teacher-centric approach.

One of the first studies to explore the extent of learner autonomy in English language classrooms in Saudi Arabia was conducted across four geographical regions of the country. A large study of 630 Saudi male and female students was carried out by Alrabai (2017) to investigate learners’ autonomy and its association with the academic achievement of EFL learners. This was a quantitative study using a questionnaire survey. It was found that both male and female Saudi learners were not autonomous learners and they were low language achievers.

Alrabai’s (2017) findings supported this learner dependency on an authoritative teacher. Alrabai concludes that the results identified the immense lack of awareness of learner autonomy in the Saudi EFL context, and both teachers and students need to be made aware of the importance of autonomy and its benefits. One of the areas that Alrabai suggested for further exploration was the possibility of low levels of autonomy being the reason for the learners’ low levels of English language achievement.

Such a study was provided by Al-Asmari (2013) also using surveys with 60 male and female English teachers at Taif University. This also found learner autonomy at a very low level. Students were not interested in decision making, and teachers were reluctant to introduce autonomy in case it made their students feel uncomfortable. Teachers were also afraid of losing control of their class. Furthermore, when teachers tried to introduce collaborative activities, they were presented with challenges, such as the low level of learners’ English language, poor teaching facilities, and a lack of responsibility on the part of the learners. Although the teachers were, in theory, in favour of learner autonomy, in practice they lacked proper training to develop this in their learners (Al-Asmari, 2013). This resonates with many studies which show a low level of learner autonomy in Saudi

contexts. It was recommended that learner training becomes integral part of the teaching process.

Similar results were found by Alzubi (2017), who carried out a quantitative study with 208 undergraduate male students at Najran University. Although students were surveyed, their low levels of learner autonomy brought a recommendation from Alzubi (2017) that teachers needed to be trained in using strategies to develop learner autonomy in their students. The emphasis appears to be on the teachers needing to be trained in the application of autonomy in the classroom. However, in some cases it may be that teachers are promoting learner autonomy and strategy use through their practices, but they may simply not be aware that they are doing so.

As for qualitative investigation to understand learner autonomy within the Saudi context, Alshehri (2012) carried out interviews with 6 English language teachers and 5 students in Saudi Arabia and found that perceptions about the motivational impact of tasks was significantly different. Whilst teachers believed tasks were a strong motivator for their learners and would encourage active learning, students were more passive and only did the tasks they were given. One of the teachers interviewed in the study revealed how she found her students uncooperative when she tried to introduce autonomous tasks, such as searching for information. Alshehri (2012) concluded that there was division in Saudi Arabia about the benefits of learner autonomy, relating how another teacher found her students were motivated by word searching. This indicates that there may be some confusion about autonomy in practice, and there is also a possibility that the information searching task was set at too high a level. There must be time for learners to understand what they are required to do, and instructions may not be clear enough. If students are only doing the tasks they are given, this is also an opportunity for ensuring that some elements of autonomy are included in that task. It is possible that the teachers interviewed in this particular study were not fully aware of the application of learner autonomy.

The focus was again on teachers in Albedaiwi's (2011) study involving interviews with 6 male Saudi EFL teachers and observations in the classroom. This found that teachers had very limited opportunities for introducing autonomous activities into the materials they were required to teach. They also did not have any input in the preparation of materials. Whilst teachers were positive about autonomy when they were interviewed, this was not supported by the reality when they were observed in the classroom. Albedaiwi (2011) again

recommends more training of teachers so that they could develop their own materials to support autonomy. However, it was recognised that many of the constraints to autonomy came from external sources, such as the political environment.

Saudi Arabia has invested much in the development of English language training. English is taught in schools, and many universities require undergraduates to spend twenty hours per week on learning English during their first year (Javid, 2011). Nevertheless, Saudi students continue to make slow progress. According to Almazrawi (2014), this is due to poor quality teacher training, the attitude of learners, and a lack of skills development. There is, therefore, more research required as to why this situation has occurred, and how it can be improved. Other Arab countries may not have had as much investment in education as Saudi Arabia, and there is no reason to suspect that Saudi learners differ from other Arab learners. Teaching approaches tend to be broadly teacher-centred across all Arabic countries, due to the prevalence of traditions rooted in Islamic culture. As mentioned above, these traditions tend to perceive the teacher as a provider of knowledge and rely on memorisation techniques. It is, therefore, difficult to understand why Saudi students should have lower levels of English proficiency compared with other Arab learners.

There is evidence that teacher-centred approaches in the Saudi education context create barriers to many modern teaching methods (Grami, 2012; Gray, 2000; Whitefield & Pollard, 1998). Pair or group work and collaborative learning do not lend themselves to a teacher-centred approach. Traditional methods of teaching such as audio-lingual and grammar-translation are still prevalent in Saudi schools, and they are still dominated by teacher control. The students are passive recipients of knowledge. Dam (2000) argues that the classroom should be a place where teachers and learners are both responsible for the learning process. Moss and Ross-Feldman (2003) support this by stating that learning occurs when there is a dynamic learning environment. This is what is lacking in many Saudi classes, as there is limited student participation. If students are engaged in relevant tasks, they will learn more than they would by simply listening to a teacher at the front of the class.

That is not to say that there cannot be opportunities for learner participation in classroom activities, and many of the studies appear to show there are elements of this already happening. The current changes may be gradual, but perhaps expectations of change do not take into consideration the efforts being made by the teachers.

2.12 Summary

There are a number of different definitions of learner autonomy, but they mostly agree that it is a concept whereby learners take the responsibility upon themselves for their own learning. The focus in most of the literature has been on learners and their autonomy. However, there is room to explore the perceptions of teachers and whether they are convinced of the pedagogical benefits of students taking responsibility for their own learning. If teachers have not had their own learning experiences involving constructs of autonomy, it may be more difficult for them to have full confidence in implementing them. There has also been limited research on activities and tasks which promote autonomy in the English language classroom, especially in non-Western contexts. It is therefore opportune for more research to be carried out on the classroom to support learner autonomy and encourage autonomous habits, and to ascertain the role of the teacher in promoting these activities.

This review has introduced the different approaches to develop learner autonomy within language educational context. It has also presented cross-cultural differences related to learner autonomy in Western and non-Western contexts. The literature has made it clear that there is a definitive role for the teacher when developing learner autonomy, and a facilitating role enhances autonomy. The teacher's role is important in ensuring that the kinds of activities presented in the classroom are conducive to learners being able to work independently. They may not have had sufficient training or experience to deal with the change from instruction-based learning to a role as a facilitator.

Whilst there is limited literature on learner autonomy within a Saudi context, this study takes the opportunity to explore this further. It has been identified, for example, that Saudi learners are not autonomous and they have low levels of English language achievement. However, no relationship has been established between the two characteristics. Within Saudi Arabia, it has been noted that learner progress in English language learning is much slower than anticipated. However, there have not been sufficient studies on the reasons why this may be so. There is also a gap in the literature for more qualitative studies of the phenomenon of learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia. There is consequently a need to explore learner autonomy within this context to ascertain whether a lack of learner autonomy may contribute to the slow progress displayed in English language proficiency. This slow progress has prevailed despite the financial investments being made in the educational field.

The following chapter describes the methods and methodology used to investigate the current study of learner autonomy within a Saudi Arabian English language teaching context.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses how the research has been executed and presents the methodology and methods used in this study. The chapter explains how data were collected and why particular approaches were selected. In addition, this chapter describes the sample selection and justifies this selection. The chapter then provides information on how the data were analysed and discusses data reliability, validity, and ethical considerations. The research questions that guided this study are also restated in this chapter.

3.2 Research Questions

As discussed in Chapter 2, gaps exist in the literature on learner autonomy in Saudi Arabian higher education. Many previous works have focused on Western contexts, and limited research has been conducted on the values and practices of autonomy in Saudi Arabia, where learning is based on a teacher-centred approach. In Saudi Arabia, teaching styles tend to be authoritative, and students absorb the knowledge provided; being responsible for one's own learning is a relatively new concept. Learner autonomy in Saudi university students is, therefore, an area that has not been comprehensively studied, and there is little understanding of how learner autonomy may be achieved. It is important for both teachers and students to have a clear understanding of how learner autonomy contributes to learning, and whether there is a relationship between language proficiency and learner autonomy.

Efforts are being made by the ministry of Education to establish more communicative techniques in the classroom and raise levels of English proficiency to meet global standards. Saudi Arabia is preparing to change from an economy based on oil revenues to one based on knowledge. To compete at international levels, it is important for levels of English proficiency to be raised, it is also important that learning and knowledge are valued across all sectors. The government scholarship programme has helped in this respect; through this programme, many Saudi citizens have benefited from education in other countries, from benchmarking their language skills, and from experiencing other cultures. Today's university students are the leaders of tomorrow, and encouraging autonomous learning practices contributes to changing attitudes and enhancing skills. Therefore, it is important to explore perceptions of autonomy to understand how learner autonomy can

most effectively be developed, and whether there are opportunities for autonomous practices in language learning in Saudi universities.

Thus, the research questions that have been formulated to reach a better understanding of the reality of learner autonomy from the perspective of Saudi university teachers and students, and are as follows:

1. What are their perceptions of learner autonomy?
2. What classroom activities do they perceive to be enhancing the development of learner autonomy?
3. What are the main characteristics of an autonomous learner?
4. What is the relationship between learner autonomy and language learning?
5. What are the major constraints to promoting learner autonomy in the Saudi university EFL context?

These questions provided the basis for the research design and guided how the research was conducted.

3.3 Research Approach

Research approaches involve philosophical assumptions, as well as the plans and procedures for conducting research (Creswell, 2014). The following five sub-sections present the approaches and methodological choices adopted in this research.

3.3.1 Method of Reasoning: Inductive Approach

There are two broad methods of reasoning: the deductive and inductive approaches. If a researcher selects the deductive approach, he or she is expected to start with a theory from which point he or she will collect evidence. When a researcher uses an inductive approach, he or she is expected to be more interpretive. Researchers using the inductive approach start with evidence and then build up a theory based on this evidence (Blackstone, 2014). Therefore, the inductive approach generates theories that follow the data; theories are not generated until after data have been gathered. Both deductive and inductive approach can be combined and used together to explore, refine, and substantiate research questions and aims. This study has combined both approaches but relies mainly on an inductive, interpretive approach for exploring learner autonomy in the Saudi EFL context.

3.3.2 Philosophical Assumptions: Positivism/ Interpretivism

There are two basic approaches to methods in social research: positivism (scientific quantitative method) and interpretivism (humanistic qualitative method). Morgan and Smircich (1980) suggest that if a researcher aims to collect data on social reality that has an objective ontological structure, the positivist paradigm is an ideal assumption for quantitative research. For this reason, this research project uses positivist principles because it aims to examine a social phenomenon using objective measurements (quantitative methods). However, to avoid some of the rigidity identified in positivist research, this research adapts an interpretivist epistemological position, because this paradigm allows more personal and flexible research structures, which are receptive to deciphering what is perceived as reality and capturing understanding of the meaning behind human interactions (Black, 2006).

This research uses positivism as a standpoint for collecting initial facts to understand to what extent autonomy is acknowledged by students and teachers and to allow the researcher to obtain leeway for generalisation. However, the research is largely dependent on interpretivism and qualitative methods. The epistemological aspect of this research aims to seek students' and teachers' perceptions of language learning and learner autonomy, based on interpretive, humanistic, and socio-cultural principles, with consideration of the possible complications of social, educational, managerial, and organisational agendas. Therefore, knowledge of a particular research issue can be gained through interpreting the views, opinions, and experiences of individuals in that research environment (Mack, 2010). The objective of this study is to explore the meaning and practices of learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia. To achieve this objective, the research takes the personal experiences of interviewees involved in the education system as the majority of the collected research information. Interpretivism allows the researcher to gain deeper knowledge because this approach is more explorative and flexible in nature and provides a framework for obtaining more in-depth findings through the study of students' and teachers' perceptions and attitudes.

Additionally, when conducting research, interpretivist researchers often enter the research field with prior knowledge of their research context. In this research, I gained prior knowledge from my experience as a language teacher at the university, from existing literature, and from the online questionnaire I used in a small-scale project during my

Master's in the UK to collect initial facts on interactions between participants and the studied phenomena. This collaborative approach to gaining prior knowledge is consistent with the interpretivist standpoint that social realities vary from one individual to another and that each person's view is worth taking into account. Therefore, drawing on this paradigm, the goal of an interpretivist researcher is to understand and interpret the meaning of individual views, beliefs, opinions, experiences, practices, and behaviour, as opposed to generalising and predicting cause and effect.

3.3.3 Research Choices: Mixed Methods Research

Bryman (2008) and Creswell (2009) argue that there is no need to carry out research using only a quantitative or qualitative approach and suggest using a mixed methods research approach, which is what this study has applied. Mixed methods is a widely used approach (Creswell, 2013), particularly in the social sciences, and is usually viewed in terms of one method informing the other (Hammersley, 1996). A mixed methods approach involves collecting data from more than one source, analysing it, and then integrating it into the research. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) argue that a mixed research approach may be a wise choice for researchers who examine complex phenomena in a complex context. A mixed methods approach allows the researcher to collect different types of data because the researcher can use both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. For this reason, Creswell (2013) defines the mixed-method approach as “research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in a single study or program of inquiry” (p. 4). Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) suggest that while both quantitative and qualitative research approaches have limitations that may weaken the research, a mixed research approach uses the strengths of both approaches. This combination is useful in controlling the weaknesses in each approach and in reducing the possibility of bias. Using a mixed research approach can enhance the quality of the research and the validity of the findings. Bryman (2012) agrees with Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2005) and adds that when a researcher uses the mixed methods approach to gather data, it can provide significant value to the research because the weaknesses of one method may be addressed by the strengths of another method.

3.3.4 Appropriateness of Mixing Methods for this Research

The most important aspect of selecting an approach is determining that it is the right one for the research being conducted. In addition to the benefits of mixing methods mentioned in Section 3.3.3, the use of a mixed methods approach was found to be the most suitable choice in addressing this study's research questions and accomplishing its aims. The mixed methods approach was also the most suitable approach when considering the complexity of the EFL context in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of teachers and students towards learner autonomy in the Saudi Arabian EFL context. Therefore, depending on a single method would not be sufficient for the desired investigation into learner autonomy. Using purely scientific methods would more likely provide the research with quantitative data, rather than insight into opinions and perspectives. Therefore, the research had to adopt more than one method to achieve the required depth. Thus, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used.

A quantitative method, specifically questionnaires, was seen as beneficial for gaining a broader perspective on learner autonomy in Saudi Arabian English learning. This method allowed both teachers and learners to provide information to answer research objectives related to extent and feasibility. However, the most effective way of collating perceptions was a qualitative method; interviewing individual teachers and students allowed me to collect a wide range of perspectives. I took a pragmatic approach in that I selected the most practical data collection methods necessary to answer research questions. To explore perceptions, a qualitative approach was required. Through the use of interviews, in-depth probing could be conducted to gain further understanding of the phenomenon. This in-depth probing also allowed more thematic exploration of the subject. For this study, both methods complemented one another and were the most appropriate choices. Thus, the mixed methods approach was chosen.

3.3.5 Research Strategy: Concurrent Mixed Methods

Creswell et al (2003) acknowledged two major strategies for a mixed methods design: sequential and concurrent. The strategy used in this research is the concurrent mixed methods procedure; the reason for this was that I already knew the questions I wanted to ask as these had previously been identified through the literature. In concurrent procedures, quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same stage, and the overall results are merged; in this study both qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time.

When selecting a concurrent approach, I needed to design the study so that the quantitative and qualitative data would address the same concepts. In other words, both questionnaires and interviews had to include questions covering the same themes, aiming to answer the primary research questions: namely, the general perception of learner autonomy, classroom activities fostering learner autonomy, and characteristics of autonomous learners, all of which had been identified in the literature as pertinent to this study. Furthermore, the interviews would allow more room to elicit/capture any additional cultural dimension of the topic under investigation. This design can be used to gain in-depth understanding of the topic by obtaining different but complementary data on the same topic (Morse, 1991).

Both types of data have equal value for understanding the research inquiry under investigation. The survey and interview questions were designed to complement one another and were conducted at the same stage of collection, being of equal importance. This strategy can be used to confirm, cross-validate or corroborate findings (Creswell, 2013). Another advantage of a concurrent strategy is that it is most useful when the researcher needs to collect both sets of data in one field visit. Due to the Saudi scholarship regulation, the researcher is sponsored for one data collection trip to the field of study, so this concurrent strategy was suitable. Although this design may be time efficient, it still requires substantial effort and organisation as the researcher needs to manage and collect two different types of data at the same time. For my part, I had to spend more time in the field and work for extra hours in order to manage the distribution and collection of paper questionnaires, as well as conduct interviews during one data collection trip.

Using a concurrent strategy, both data collection methods are kept separate (parallel) and the results from both datasets are brought together (converged) in the discussion (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Consequently, the two datasets from the survey and interview questions were analysed separately and the main results from each set of data were identified separately; the key results from both datasets were then brought together and triangulated in the final discussion, providing a complete picture to answer the research questions.

3.4 Sampling: Criteria for Selecting the Study Sample

A study sample also had to be carefully selected, as it had to include participants who would be able to contribute meaningfully to the study. Sample selection, as Kumar (2011) states,

depends on research objectives and what the researcher hopes to achieve. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009) add that a researcher should consider different issues before deciding which samples to employ; these issues include time limitations, finances, and accessibility to resources.

The sample selected in this study did not cover the entire population because this standard is extremely difficult to achieve for empirical reasons. The sample was not intended to generalise the population, but instead to focus on the perceptions of the teachers and students participating in English language courses at a specific university in Saudi Arabia. Sampling that does not cover the whole population is an appropriate alternative if the research population is large or if the cost or time associated with data collection is high (Bryman and Bell, 2003). This sampling method is also used when there is a specific case study being researched, as is the case in this research.

The target population of this study needed to include those involved in teaching and learning English as a foreign language in a Saudi Arabian public university. The sample of this research was selected from King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. Due to gender segregation, all participants were from the female section of the university, which also made it more convenient for me as a female researcher to conduct the study. It would have been more difficult to recruit and collect data from male teachers and students.

Based on data from the English Language Institute (ELI) administration office, at the time the study was being conducted, 117 Saudi and 114 non-Saudi teachers were in service, and 1,920 full-time Preparatory Year Program (PYP) students were enrolled in English courses. PYP students were the main focus of this study, as they were leaving the confines of a traditional teacher-centred school environment and entering an environment where they would need to make their own learning decisions. Moreover, intensive English language courses are specifically offered to PYP students. ELI teachers at the university were also selected because they were the most suitable for this study. Nevertheless, there were further considerations in determining the criteria for sample selection.

The criteria for selecting the study sample (teachers) were as follows:

1. To evaluate the current teaching and learning situation at the English Language Centre, only full-time, in-service teachers were included.
2. The sample excluded teachers on scholarships, as these teachers would not be able to adequately reflect on what is currently happening in the classroom.

3. Teachers would be purposively selected from teaching staff within the ELI.
4. Many non-Saudi teachers are working in the ELI who have worked in Saudi institutions long enough to share the same degree of commonality and place of work. In other words, these teachers are fully aware of the teaching and learning circumstances in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, non-Saudi teachers are included in the study. However, English native speakers were excluded from the study, since the objective was to explore learner autonomy from a non-Western perspective. This selection was based on participants' appropriateness for the study.
5. Due to gender segregation, all participants selected were female. This criterion also made it more convenient for the author, as a female researcher, to conduct the study. Including male students would have necessitated recruiting a male researcher to carry out data collection with male teachers and students.

The criteria for selecting the study sample (students) were as follows:

1. The students were randomly selected from the PYP group. This group had little experience of autonomous practices in prior education, given the teaching methods common in Saudi state schools.
2. The sample included only PYP full-time students enrolled in English courses. Part-time students are not obligated to attend English classes and therefore would not be able to properly consider the situation in language classrooms.
3. For the reason stated in Criterion 2, PYP students exempted from English and those who have completed their English courses were excluded.
4. The sample included students from all four levels, namely elementary (level 1), low intermediate (level 2), high intermediate (level 3), and advanced (level 4). This sample was beneficial for the study as it allowed a wider range of perspectives.

3.5 Research Questionnaire

3.5.1 Questionnaire as Data Collection Method

A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data in this study. According to Creswell (2012), questionnaires provide quantitative or numeric description of opinions, attitudes, or trends of a population by studying a sample of that population. Questionnaires are a widely used method with numerous advantages. Firstly, questionnaires are convenient for both the researcher and participants. Questionnaires are often self-completing, so the

researcher does not have to be present when the participants fill them out (Bryman, 2008). Furthermore, participants can complete the questionnaire in their own time and feel at ease responding. Moreover, questionnaires, as a research instrument, are time efficient as they make it possible for the researcher to get a large number of responses over a short time (Drever, 1995).

For the purpose of this study, the aim of the questionnaire was obtaining a view of the concept of learner autonomy and its practices as perceived by Saudi teachers and students. Questionnaires were used to explore participants' views on learning autonomy, the effectiveness of certain autonomy-supportive activities and practices in an EFL context, and the common characteristics of autonomous learners. Prior to the questionnaire design, I conducted a literature review to determine about the main issues raised in studies covering the phenomenon under investigation. The questionnaire design is explained in the following section.

3.5.2 Designing the Questionnaire

A literature review was conducted in order to create the questionnaire. Thus, a critical and analytical review of relevant literature was necessary to understand the theoretical and contextual sensitivity of the studied topic. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that research should use theoretical constructs to develop investigation using different secondary data collection techniques, such as interviews or questionnaires, after initial information points are identified. Considered this suggestion, a pilot questionnaire was conducted to ensure that its questions would elicit the information required to meet the objectives of this study.

From the literature review, different areas of learner autonomy were reviewed and examined such as views on learner autonomy and the practices of using autonomy to more effectively learn English. I discussed different research studies and articles relating to learner autonomy, but was unable to find many articles on the use of autonomy in language learning in general, and specifically language learning in Arabic countries. However, a number of postgraduate theses have been written about Saudi practices recently, which helped in providing on about the Arab context. Without these research studies, there would have been almost no information on English language learning in Saudi Arabia. From the literature review, it was clear that the development of learner autonomy must be monitored from within the classroom, as learners, particularly Arab learners, require direction and guidance. Conducting activities suited to a learner's needs and goals and values is an

effective way of promoting learner autonomy in a language classroom. Therefore, the decision was made to design a section in the questionnaire that includes classroom activities commonly used in language classrooms, emphasising the teacher's role in initiating and providing opportunities for encouraging autonomous activities. This section would ask participants for their opinions on the level of effectiveness of selected activities when applied in a particular context.

In addition, learners' personal attributes were discussed at length in learner autonomy literature. As Benson (2011) argued, personal attributes play a key role in the success of autonomy in learners. Horinek (2007) suggests that knowledge is a learner construct and must have relevance to the individual, and this suggestion supports the concept of autonomy as a personal construct. Autonomous learners have numerous distinguishing characteristics. For example, autonomous learners are able to establish links between what they must learn, how to do it, and what resources are available to them. Therefore, autonomous learners are individuals aware of their learning objectives and what they want to achieve. It may be assumed that autonomous learners are individuals who take charge not only of their own learning, but also of other areas of their life (Cotterall, 1995). The importance of investigating and promoting autonomous characteristics, and their positive impact on language learning, has been noted. This discovery led to the designing of the second section of the questionnaire to include an evaluation of important characteristics, enhancing learner autonomy, and language learning.

As soon as the literature review had been completed, and the issues with the research topic were extracted, ascertained constructs were connected and classified for the purpose of questionnaire creation. The issues under investigation would be used again when conducting the interviews to gain additional, in-depth perspectives. Finally, the main sections of the questionnaire were decided, and their corresponding items were selected from the literature. The questionnaire was designed as follows:

- Section One: Classroom activities and teaching practices to develop learner autonomy
- Section Two: Characteristics of autonomous learners
- Section Three: General views on learner autonomy
- Section Four: Personal information

3.5.2.1 Section One: Activities and teaching practices for developing learner autonomy in the classroom

Section One consists of 20 teacher-led activity items used in the language classroom for the purpose of fostering learner autonomy. The 20 items in Section One surveyed popular activities that language teachers use in the classroom to discover if these activities were effective in establishing learner autonomy. The learning strategies in this section are suggested to be teacher-led rather than being initiated by students, as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Autonomy-supportive classroom activities

1- Ask students to get involved in classroom activities
2- Assign tasks that support language learning and can be conducted outside the classroom
3- Select activities that are relevant to the students' needs, goals and values
4- Ask students to keep a written record of their learning
5- Ask students to translate from English
6- Ask students to summarise something in English
7- Ask students to analyse structures in order to make their own language rules
8- Ask students to observe natural communications in English.
9- Allow time for students to prepare before they speak or answer a question
10- Create seating arrangements that encourage students to initiate conversation
11- Ask students to use online resources
12- Ask students for their preferences while working on a task or activity
13- Explain to students why uninteresting language activities are worthwhile
14- Allow collaborative work in small groups
15- Train students to communicate in English via different social networking sites
16- Allow students to work independently in a self-access centre
17- Allow students to use reference books, including dictionaries, in class
18- Use a variety of authentic materials in class
19- Train students to compose emails in English
20- Use only the target language in class

Participants were asked to evaluate the level of effectiveness of the activities presented in the above table. A 6-point Likert scale was used, with points ranging from 'not effective at all' to 'very effective'.

3.5.2.2 Section Two: Characteristics of autonomous learners

This section aims to determine the attitudes and opinions of participants on the importance of developing autonomous characteristics, study skills, learning strategies, positive attitudes, and good learning habits, and the impact of this development on learner autonomy and language learning. Five characteristics of autonomous learners were selected as main themes of investigation as shown in Table 3.2:

Table 3.2: Five characteristics of autonomous learners

1- Taking charge of learning
2- Having positive attitudes towards learning
3- Learning cooperatively in the classroom
4- Identifying and developing study skills and learning strategies
5- Building positive relationships with their teachers

These areas were all described as characteristics of autonomous learners, or attributes that may lead to the development of learner autonomy, in the literature review.

Participants had to answer three questions for the corresponding five items within each characteristic:

- Do you want your students to develop this item?
- Does this item enhance learner autonomy?
- Does this item enhance language learning?

A total of 25 items were involved in this section (Table 3.3), which were then categorised based on their relevance to the five characteristics under investigation:

Table 3.3: Characteristics and sub-characteristics

Characteristics	Sub-characteristics
Take Charge of Learning	1- Evaluate their own learning
	2- Monitor their own progress
	3- Identify their own learning problems and means of addressing them
	4- Identify their own needs
	5- Set their own goals
Have Positive Attitude Towards	6- Demonstrate willingness to learn
	7- Demonstrate positivity towards learning English
	8- Motivate themselves to learn

Learning	9- Express their ideas and opinions freely
	10- Learn English because they enjoy it
Learn Cooperatively in the Classroom	11- Complete tasks with other learners
	12- Learn by taking part in classroom interactions and discussions
	13- Seek support from their peers
	14- Work in pairs, groups, or with the whole class
	15- Learn with and from others
Identify and Develop Study Skills	16- Identify and develop learning strategies
	17- Work with a variety of materials and resources to enhance learning
	18- Plan where they want to learn
	19- Develop the ability to study by themselves
	20- Develop individual daily/weekly learning plans
Build Positive Relationship With the Teacher	21- View teachers as parental figures
	22- Demonstrate independence from their teacher
	23- Respect the formality of the teacher-student relationship
	24- Perceive their teacher's controlling behaviour in a positive way
	25- Develop friendships with their teacher

3.5.2.3 Section Three: General views on learner autonomy

The third part of the questionnaire asked six questions to elicit views on learner autonomy. This section asked questions on learner autonomy in terms of its usefulness, whether it helped in language learning, whether it could be achieved without a teacher, and to what extent learner autonomy was desirable and feasible in Saudi Arabia. Participants were then asked an open question on what learner autonomy meant to them.

3.5.2.4 Section Four: Personal information

In the fourth section of the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide demographic information and if they would be interested in participating in an interview.

When the questionnaire design was completed (see Appendix 1), the first draft was sent to the academic supervisors for feedback and further development. The supervisors contributed their comments, the questionnaires were redesigned according to these comments, and a new version was approved. The final version of the questionnaires was translated into Arabic. It was necessary to translate questions into Arabic, as students may not have had a high enough level of English language to understand all items. However, an English version of the questionnaire was given to teachers, with the expectation that they would respond in English. However, translating the questionnaire for students was important, as it is key to facilitate the research process for participants, and it is easier for them to read in their own language.

There are two issues involved in translating questionnaires, the first of which is the validation of the language. Validation refers to the language constructs in both languages resulting in the same concepts. One way of addressing this issue is through recommended back translation, although some argue that this method does not guarantee quality of translation (Behr & Shishido, 2016). Furthermore, back translation is a time-consuming process, requiring experienced linguists (Ozolins, 2009). The second issue with translation is the cultural validation; although the linguistic sense is translated accurately, there may be cultural connotations that could be misinterpreted (Behling & Law, 2000). Back translation does not address cultural issues. Therefore, it is suggested that this method should not be used if the translation has cultural-specific aspects (Geisinger, 2003). This study, therefore, used a professional translation service, and the questionnaire was revised by the researcher to address cultural-specific aspects, before being sent to professionals for cross-checking. The final versions of both questionnaires were then ready for piloting.

3.5.3 Piloting the Questionnaire

The survey questions needed to be validated to ensure the responses they elicited were aligned with research objectives. The survey had to include enough questions to gain the information needed, but not so many questions that participants would lose interest. The importance of conducting a pilot study lies in its ability to provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses that may be inherent in the research instruments (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Piloting the questionnaire before conducting the study can minimise the risk of low validity and reliability in the main study. A pilot study can also reveal the feasibility in terms of structure, layout, length, as well as the effectiveness of questionnaire items in answering research questions. The pilot study is essentially a trial run in preparation for the main study (Polit et al., 2001). Thus, through evaluation of the pilot study, the success of the main study can be ensured; a pilot study does not posit a specific number of respondents (Leon et al., 2011). In this study, it was essential that the original and translated questionnaires were validated through a pilot study of a small group of Saudi teachers and students. The feedback of these students and teachers was used to refine the final version of the questionnaire.

3.5.3.1 Questionnaire Participants for Pilot Study

The pilot study involved 97 participants comprised of 80 students and 17 teachers. All participants were from King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, which is monitored by the

Saudi Higher Ministry of Education. As is common with all state universities, the university has a well-established ELI. ELI operates general English courses for PYP students. These courses are compulsory, and students will not pass their preparatory year unless they pass their English course, as the grades they obtain in English have an impact on their overall GPA. Consequently, getting good grades in English is essential, as a higher GPA allows students to enter a degree course of their choice upon completion of their foundation year. These demands place significant pressure on both English language students and teachers.

Students were randomly selected from the foundation year, as they were more likely to have had little experience of autonomy in their prior education, given the teaching methods prevalent in Saudi Arabian state schools. Teachers were purposively selected from teaching staff within the ELI.

3.5.3.2 Procedures for the Pilot Study

After the participants had agreed to take part, paper questionnaires were distributed and conducted in person at the university, where I had the opportunity to speak to all participants and give them information about the study. Participants were free to ask any questions. The university setting was a familiar environment for me, as I have worked as a lecturer in the ELI myself. There are both advantages and disadvantages to being an insider when carrying out research.

Insider research is defined as research being conducted within a community by a member of said community (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Many believe insider research is not objective enough and that there is too much emotional input on the part of the researcher (Alvesson, 2003; Anderson & Herr, 1999; Anderson et al., 1994). Insider knowledge is beneficial in that it allows access to communities that might otherwise be overlooked, and the researcher has a greater understanding of the culture being studied (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). However, problems associated with insider research include a lack of objectivity and a tendency for the researcher to make assumptions based on familiarity (DeLyser, 2001; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002).

Questionnaires were completed individually by participants and were collected upon completion. All data collected through the questionnaire were kept securely in a locked bag and then uploaded onto a password-secured laptop in the form of spreadsheets.

3.5.4 Improving the Questionnaire

The pilot study provided valuable insights for the data collection process. One insight was on the length of the questionnaires. Teachers gave feedback on the questionnaire and pointed out that the questionnaire was too long. The length of the questionnaire led to these teachers leaving most of the open-ended questions in section three unanswered. Neither teachers nor students provided answers to the questions presented in the final section. Participants understood that open-ended questions would take a long time to complete, since they require comprehensive answers. Upon reflection, I decided to make amendments to the open-ended questions. Five of the six questions in this section were changed, and choices were presented to be ticked. In other words, a Likert scale was chosen once more for the third section of the questionnaire. In addition, some of the concepts were contextually unfamiliar to both students and teachers, such as 'self-access centres'. These concepts were substituted with more appropriate concepts that the participants could relate to. If there was face-to-face interaction with participants, unfamiliar concepts could be explained, and examples could be provided, but this survey did not allow for face-to-face interaction. The use of unfamiliar concepts may lead to invalid responses from survey participants (Johnson & Diego-Rosell, 2015). Consequently, I decided that some statements needed to be supported by examples, so these statements were added to both main sections.

Some teachers argued that they were glad that it was paper questionnaire (not online) and that the questionnaire was not in black ink. These comments were also taken into consideration in the planning of the main study.

All improvements were then put into place before conducting the main study. These improvements did not impact the validity of the questionnaire, but they did reduce the risk of unanswered questions in the main study. The improvements therefore improved the quality of results (Pather & Uys, 2008), thereby increasing internal validity.

3.5.5 Main Study

3.5.5.1 Questionnaire participants for the main study

The sample came from the ELI at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. 44 completed questionnaires were collected from teachers. Lenth (2001) suggests that sample size should reflect the goals of the study, but sample size is not always the most important factor as

long as the chosen sample not too big or too small. The teachers were a mixture of Saudi and non-Saudi nationals, with a number of different experiences and backgrounds. Most of the teachers were colleagues.

The students presented 480 completed questionnaires. Although all students were in their first year, they studied English as a compulsory language at different levels. These levels ranged from beginners to advanced level. The students themselves were homogeneous, being all females of the same nationality, of a similar age, and from the same educational and cultural backgrounds. Homogeneity in a sample can be beneficial, as it eliminates the number of socio-demographic variables, such as ethnicity, which can improve the findings' accuracy and quality (Bornstein, Jager, & Putnick, 2013).

3.5.5.2 Procedures for the main study

Having been amended following the pilot study, the redesigned questionnaire was ready for distribution to potential respondents for the main study (see appendices 2 & 3). For the main study, paper questionnaires were used due to participant preference. Paper questionnaires are also a more efficient way of receiving a higher number of responses. Online responses are more likely to receive much lower response rates than paper-based questionnaires (Nulty, 2008), so paper questionnaires were selected to obtain a representative response from students and teachers.

Paper questionnaires were distributed to the teachers' offices at the ELI, giving them the flexibility to complete in their free time, and then I followed up in person to collect the questionnaire papers and to make arrangements with the teachers, who had agreed to further participate in an interview; I had to schedule a suitable time with them, based on their availability and preference.

As for the students, random English language classrooms at the university were selected, and paper questionnaires were distributed during morning class time. It was not possible to distribute to all classrooms because of the size of the ELI. In addition, some teachers did not like being disturbed during their teaching time to allow students to answer questionnaires. It was challenging convincing some teachers to cancel their sessions so that I could spend time with their students. Aside from encouraging participation, I also had to explain to students the study objectives and discuss confidentiality with them. I personally monitored the distribution and collection of surveys, and I also made arrangements with students who were willing to participate in an interview. As was the case in the pilot study,

completed paper-based questionnaires were collected and stored securely. Data from the questionnaires was then transferred to spreadsheets on my computer, which was password-protected.

3.5.6 Processing and Analysis of Quantitative Data

The collected data then needed to be analysed and interpreted. In quantitative data analysis, raw data collected through designed quantitative questionnaires should be turned into meaningful information by applying rational and critical statistical techniques (Paul, 2007). A variety of methods, including demographical analysis, descriptive statistics, one and two nonparametric sample tests, and correlation and regression analysis were used to analyse the quantitative data obtained from participants.

3.5.6.1 Analysing data using SPSS

Data from the questionnaires were uploaded to my computer to be analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The SPSS software offers a flexible statistical analysis and is popular for dealing with large amounts of quantitative data. The software also produces charts that make data solutions easier to visualise and provides a measurement scale (William, 2016).

3.5.6.2 Measurement scale

In designing quantitative questionnaires, the Likert scale (1932) has been used to measure individual perceptions of topics of interest (Stangor, 2011). The Likert scale is defined as a measure of attitude to allow respondents to rate constructed statements, ranging from very positive to very negative attitudes. The scale is based on a continuum with numbers assigned to indicate differences in the degree of characteristics from higher to lower order (Schütze & Jon, 2013). The Likert scale was suitable for this research, as the study's main purpose was to investigate and evaluate teachers' and students' attitudes towards issues of learning autonomy. The 6-point Likert scale was used in the first section of the questionnaire of with an *ordinal* scale of 0 = Very ineffective, 1 = Ineffective, 2 = Slightly ineffective, 3 = Slightly effective, 4 = Effective, and 5 = Very effective. In section two, three choices were provided to give participants further alternatives when selecting the most suitable option: 1 = No, 2 = Unsure, and 3 = Yes. To ensure the reliability of the ratings, I made a point of choosing statements where there was a link to specific points on

the scale; as such, there was a clear understanding of the meanings of each point on the Likert scale.

3.5.6.3 One and two independent sample tests

This study investigated teachers' and students' opinions and attitudes towards learning autonomy. It was crucial to determine whether their attitudes were positive or not. In addition, differences in attitudes between teachers and student provide opportunities for further discussion and recommendations.

Since attitudes towards learning autonomy were based on the Likert scale, an appropriate technique had to be applied. In statistics, when data is not numeric but is ordinal (such as the Likert scale), a non-parametric approach is used (Rovai, Baker, & Ponton, 2013). To test if there were positive attitudes towards learning autonomy, one sample Wilcoxon test was used (ibid). To examine any differences in attitudes between teachers and student, the Mann-Whitney test for two independent samples was used (Sahar & Azadeh, 2015).

3.5.6.4 Simple Correlation and Regression Analysis

When changes in language learning are related to changes in learner autonomy, the two variables are correlated. As a result, statistical correlation measuring the coefficient of the correlation can be used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables (learner autonomy and language learning). Cohen (1998) recommended the rule of thumb to define the strength of correlation: small ($r = .10$ to $.29$), medium ($r = .30$ to $.49$), and large ($r = .50$ to 1.0).

One of the aims of this research is to investigate what impact learner autonomy may have on language learning. The study hoped to determine if a positive attitude towards learner autonomy was accompanied (affected) by a positive attitude towards language learning. Regression analysis is a tool to examine the effects of the independent variable (learner autonomy) on the dependent variable (language learning) (Williams, 2016). To collect this information, these tests were used to analyse the data.

3.5.6.5 Internal consistency

Internal consistency is a fundamental phase in measurements. Internal consistency refers to the reliability or dependability of a measurement. Reliability is also a fundamental phase in measurements. Reliability contributes to the dependability or consistency of

measurement. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) stated that reliability is “the consistency with which a measuring instrument yields a certain result when the entity being measured hasn’t changed” (p. 29). Cronbach's alpha is the most widely used index in assessing internal consistency (Van Zyl, Neudecker, & Nel, 2000). The recommended level of Cronbach's alpha for exploratory research is between 0.70, and 0.60 (Hair et al., 2006). George & Mallery (2012) recommended a rule of thumb for Cronbach's alpha: $\alpha > 0.9$ – excellent; $\alpha > 0.8$ – good; $\alpha > 0.7$ – acceptable; $\alpha > 0.6$ – questionable; $\alpha > 0.5$ – poor; and $\alpha < 0.5$ – unacceptable. The alpha coefficient for this research questionnaire, which is provided in Table 3.4, was higher than .80, suggesting that the constructs of the questionnaire have high internal consistency.

Table 3.4: Cronbach’s alpha for constructs

Construct	Cronbach’s alpha
Activities to foster learner autonomy	.884
Importance of developing characteristics	.973
Learner autonomy enhancement	.830
Language learning enhancement	.828

3.6 Research Interviews

Interviews are a commonly used qualitative data collection method that enables the researcher to engage in conversations with respondents as to obtain information on a particular research issue (Debasish & Das, 2009). Interviews were used in this research to help gain in-depth insights into the quantitative results by exploring the phenomenon under investigation in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding. A more comprehensive understanding of the research cannot be achieved without addressing how each method was used, the process of the design, and the process of data analysis. An in-depth investigation was carried out to explore insights into how participants perceived learner autonomy and what were the differences, if any, between teachers and students in their perceptions. To achieve this aim, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection.

3.6.1 Semi-structured Interviews as Data Collection Method

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the data collection method in this study because they provide an opportunity to gather in-depth information. Within the research context, the term “in-depth” is often used to refer to thorough, detailed, or carefully examined data or information (Debasish & Das, 2009). Unlike other data collection methods, such as questionnaires, the use of semi-structured interviews enables the collection of more in-depth data because it provides a platform for the researcher to ask for clarifications on responses provided by participants, prompt opinions, ask for further explanations, and make comparisons. Semi-structured interviews also allow the researcher to elicit more accurate information, since the interviewer is in a position to ask for further explanation or clarification when a vague response is provided (Wood & Ross-Kerr, 2011). Although semi-structured interviews are guided by predetermined questions, they are flexible and allow the researcher to ask additional, supplementary questions to gain further clarity.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews complemented the exploratory side of this research because the interviews allowed the researcher to study an individual and ask for anecdotal responses. Interviews are particularly useful in studying individuals’ expectations and attitudes during the interview session. This use is relevant to this study, as one of the research questions is determining how individuals understand the concept of learner autonomy. Mack (2010) comments that semi-structured interviews help in gaining insight into organisational members’ embedded perceptions, while simultaneously offering a comprehensive view of the entire research phenomenon. This method allows for relatively systematic data collection and ensures that no significant information is left out. Although the questions were prepared in order to elicit responses that could meet the research objectives, there was room to probe further and deviate from the questions.

Another advantage of interviews is that they are characterised by synchronous communication, which enables the researcher to observe and obtain information from non-verbal cues, such as facial expression, intonation, and voice. This information can be recorded via note taking and voice/ video recording. This method is different to standard questionnaires, which have a rigid structure and tend to produce a breadth of data that is broadly applicable but not specific enough for this study. Semi-structured interviews are

more flexible and allow the researcher to make adjustments in order to gather relevant, specific, and accurate data (Debasish & Da, 2009; Wood & Ross-Kerr, 2011).

However, interviews are time consuming and often considered intrusive by participants. Scheduling face-to-face interviews and transcribing data collected from interviews, for example, can be extremely time consuming. Furthermore, participants may find interviews intrusive if the interviews explore issues more in depth and seek clarifications on more complex research issues.

The following sections provide further details on the semi-structured interviews used in this research, including the interview schedule and other procedures.

3.6.2 Interview Schedule

In this research, interview questions were developed for students and teachers to address the main concerns of the research, namely to what extent participants understood the meanings and the conceptions of learner autonomy, what practices and activities have been implemented, and to what extent they have been effective. The research also investigated the characteristics of autonomous learners. In addition, the cultural and contextual aspects of learner autonomy, including constraints and challenges, were included as part of the main questions. The interview schedule was formulated to re-emphasise the issues covered in the questionnaire, in addition to issues concerning the research questions and objectives (see Appendix 4).

An interview schedule is defined as a set of purposeful questions prepared and used as a guideline for the interviewer. The guidelines of an interview are as follows:

- At the beginning of each interview, the researcher gives each participant a clear idea of the research questions and a skeleton structure of the semi-structured interview (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).
- The first questions are general in order to encourage interviewees and develop rapport between them and the researcher. This step is important in enabling participants to feel confidence in providing responses. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2008) stress the importance of establishing an atmosphere where participants feel comfortable enough to discuss a topic openly. The questions were then able to probe more specifically as the interview progressed.

- While conducting the interviews, the researcher stresses that there is no right or wrong answer or perspective, as suggested by Glesne & Peshkin (1992). The participants are given freedom to elaborate on their opinions and perspectives without any restrictions or concerns about the interviewer's interest.
- The interview schedule is flexible in terms of question sequencing. According to Dornyei (2007), "the interviewer will ask the same questions of all the participants, although not necessarily in the same order or wording, and would supplement the main questions with various probes" (p. 136).

As with the questionnaires, interviews were conducted in English with teachers, but were in Arabic with students.

The interview schedule was finalised and approved by academic supervisors, and participants were selected for the pilot study. However, I had to decide to how to carry out these interviews: face to face, by Skype, or in focus groups. This issue was addressed in the pilot study.

3.6.3 Piloting the Interviews

As the questionnaire was piloted, the interviews were also piloted. Piloting the interviews was an opportunity to practice my interview skills and determine how long each interview was likely to last. The main aim of piloting interviews was to determine potential interview design weaknesses in terms of structure, flow, and clarity of language used in formulating questions. Piloting the interview allows the researcher to revisit interview questions, as the questions are seen by other parties (Kvale, 2007). I considered that some questions would need adjustments in the main study, particularly when receiving repetitive responses or responses that did not meet research objectives.

3.6.3.1 Interview Participants for Pilot Study

The interviews were conducted with four teachers. One of these interviews was carried out using Skype, while the rest were face to face. Three student participants were interviewed face to face. The interviewees were selected on a non-probability basis, relying on availability and convenience. The sample came from King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah.

3.6.3.2 Procedure for the Pilot Study

At the end of the questionnaire form containing teachers' personal information, participants were asked if they were willing to participate in a future interview, so that I could detect who would be available for interview. Of the 17 teachers, 4 volunteered to participate in an interview. Three interviews were conducted at the teachers' offices at the ELI. The final interview was via Skype, as the teacher did not have the time to be interviewed while I was at the university. Students were interviewed in their language classrooms during their break. Each interview took between 20 and 25 minutes and was audio recorded so that it could be transcribed for analysis. The transcribed documents from interviews were also transferred to the passport-secured laptop for security and confidentiality.

3.6.4 Improving Interview Schedule

The first step after conducting the pilot study was analysing the process and problems that may have occurred during interviews. Overall, the pilot interviews were successful. Teachers openly expressed their interest in a study on learner autonomy. However, teachers spent longer than anticipated on interviews, so I had to make provisions for longer interviews in the main study; allocation of time was then extended from 25 to 35 minutes, or up to 45 minutes per person if needed. Furthermore, I decided that all interviews in the main study would be face to face. Skype was a short-term solution for the pilot study. The one online interview had limitations in terms of technical issues, such as sound quality and internet connection. These limitations convinced me not to use online interviews in the main study. Minor changes were made to the interview questions. According to interviewees, all questions were interesting and clear. When the interviews had been amended, they were sent to the supervisor to be approved before conducting the main study (see Appendix 4,5).

3.6.5 Main Study

3.6.5.1 Interview participants for the main study

Prior to data collection, a sample of participants was selected. The sampling process for the main study involved selecting a sample of 16 teachers and 15 students from King Abdulaziz University.

As mentioned in section 3.4, selecting an accurate sample is essential important because, as Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) suggest, samples are the main source of information. All teachers and students were selected based on their willingness to respond and their availability (Silverman, 2001). This convenience sample may not be representative of the target population (Rovai, Baker, & Ponton, 2014). However, this issue was not of great concern, as the interviews were to elicit individual perceptions, but the risks of bypassing the target population were minimised by choosing teachers from the target university.

Moreover, purposely selected convenience sampling is commonly used in qualitative research (Gravetter & Forzano, 2015). Unlike random sampling methods that involve compiling a list of the overall population and randomly selecting participants regardless of their limited accessibility, convenience sampling is more systematic and concentrates on working with an available and accessible sample as to ensure efficient use of resources and time. Finally, interview participants were given randomly allocated pseudonyms, as will be seen in the interview results chapter.

3.6.5.2 Procedures for the main study

When the sample was purposely selected and the pilot study of the interviews completed, official approval from the sponsors was needed in order to conduct the study. Furthermore, as the research involved conducting interviews with teachers and students, I had to obtain permission from the Dean of the school by declaring the purpose of the research, the interview skeleton, and who would be involved. The Dean was supportive of the research and facilitated a venue to conduct interviews if needed.

All interviews were conducted face to face. Interviews lasted from 30 to 40 minutes with each teacher and from 20 to 30 minutes with students. Teachers' interviews were conducted in English, as all of the teachers were able to express their opinions and perceptions fluently and freely in English. In comparison, students' interviews were conducted in their first language. I chose to use a language that would make the participants feel comfortable and confident in communicating their ideas (Radnor, 2001). As in the pilot study, teachers were interviewed in their own offices at the ELI; some students volunteered to have the interviews during their break time, after they had filled out the questionnaire survey in the morning class, and were interviewed in their English classroom. Other students preferred to be interviewed at the end of the day, after their lectures were over,

thus I organised the interview appointments with the participants so that there was no conflict with timings. I was so grateful to all participants since they were committed and showed up to the interview appointments as planned.

As for the interview implementation stage, I had to make sure before each interview that the participant knew what this research project was about and the aims and purpose of conducting the interview. I had to address the terms of confidentiality, ask them if they had any questions, and make sure that the interviewee felt comfortable and in an atmosphere that encouraged them to take their time and speak freely. Establishing an appropriate atmosphere makes the interviewee feel at ease and able to talk freely (Richards, 2003). It was also important to make sure that respondents understood what the topic was about before I started the recorder. Learner autonomy was not familiar to everyone, especially the students, so I had to explain the concept in a way that did not affect their responses. Another important aspect that I took into consideration was the “power relation”, or the interrelated power within the interview (Barbour & Schostak, 2005). I also explained to the interviewees that I had taught English at the university for a few years and that I was currently a PhD researcher and I held no position or authority at the university. This created power balance in the relationship between myself and my participants, especially the students.

When conducting the interviews, an active listening strategy was most useful, trying to listen carefully to the interviewee’s answers and make sure that they provided the information I needed. As Dornyei (2007) pointed out, the researcher is there to listen, not to speak. Careful listening also helped me to follow-up on a certain point and probe where necessary to motivate participants to add rich details to their initial answers. I was familiar with common probing techniques from the literature, and was aware that I might need to probe deeper into any emerging topic that I had not anticipated. Interviews are interactive and I had to ensure the interview flowed naturally (Dornyei, 2007), so it was unpredictable what issues or interesting points each respondent might raise.

I learned from the pilot study that probing was important for me as an insider researcher, I share contextual and cultural knowledge with my participants, so I had to be prepared to use probing techniques in case any of my participants provided abbreviated answers, assuming that I knew the details of their responses. There were several probing techniques recommended by various researchers, which I found very effective during the

interview sessions. To start with, it was useful to use the repetition technique, or what is called the “echo” probe (Bernard, 2003), in which I repeated the entire answer or just the last phrase or word, followed by a pause. Echoing responses singled out that I was interested to hear more about the statement being made. Pauses, silent probing and head nods were effective and made the interviewees feel that I was paying attention to their answers and waiting for more details in their answers. Bernard (2003) found that the silent probe allows the interviewees to “muse aloud” and provide extra information while doing so. Additionally, McNamara (2009) suggested using occasional nods of the head and “uh huhs”. Using words such as “Uh-huh”, “Okay”, “I see”, “Yeah”, and “Great” all contributed to motivating my participant and indicating that their responses were interesting and of great value, and therefore encouraging them to elaborate.

At times, it was important to clarify my understanding of a statement by an immediate follow-up question such as “Are you saying...?”, “Do you mean...?” and paraphrasing what had been said. Checking answers by paraphrasing or using clarification questions help the researcher avoid misunderstanding statements (Kvale, 1996). Similarly, it was essential at times to paraphrase questions or ask the same question in two different ways, especially with participants who made it clear from the beginning that they were not very familiar with the concept of learner autonomy. This was another technique used to reduce misunderstandings and facilitate further probing, which Creswell (2007) identified as the “reconstructing” questions technique. When probing or paraphrasing, technical language was avoided; using simple words were found to be more effective and more relatable to both teachers and students. Using simple language encouraged my interviewees to feel free to express themselves and their views with confidence.

One interesting probing technique I came across in the literature was the “baiting” probe, where the interviewer pretends that he or she already knows something in order to encourage the participant to reveal more information. I personally felt that I was using something similar with my interviewees, but instead of pretending that I knew something I had to imply that I was ignorant about what was being said, even when I had some knowledge about it. Once again, this was very useful with interviewees who assumed that I had familiarity with the university context and tended to give abbreviated replies. (see Appendix 6)

It is recommended that interviewees be given a chance to bring up any comments or ask questions at the end of the interview (Talmy, 2010). I asked each of my participants “Do you have any final comments on the topic?” in case they wished to add their own input or had any queries. This final question was key to hearing the interviewees’ recommendations and reflections, and some of the replies were most surprising. For example, when I asked one student for her final comment on the topic, she responded in a protesting tone: “We Demand Autonomy!”

The experience of collecting qualitative data was valuable, and the participants and I enjoyed the dynamic face-to-face interview experience. Managing the interviews with thirty-one participants was challenging, but it was most enjoyable and memorable; as Hermanowicz (2002) points out, interviews are an enjoyable method of data collection but it is “deceptively difficult”. Interviewees explicitly expressed their appreciation for the space and freedom given to them to express their opinions.

Participants acknowledged that I had respected their right to withdraw and that they were informed on the structure and the purpose of the interviews. In terms of recording equipment, I used two devices at the same time to ensure that data was correctly and clearly recorded. Recording interviews is essential for a researcher because it will record equally the responses of both the researcher and participants (Dowling & Brown, 2010). When the interviews were completed, the audio recorded files were held in a safe and convenient place until the transcripts were put into Microsoft Word documents to start the analysis.

3.6.6 Processing and Analysis of Qualitative Data

After the data collection process, the data gathered were subjected to data analysis. Data analysis is the process of making sense of data. This process involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read; it is the process of making meaning. In a similar vein, Taylor and Bogdan (1998) argue that analysing data extracted for qualitative research is not a simple, technical process because it requires reasoning the connections between data; it is an inductive process.

A thematic approach was used in this study to analyse the qualitative data collected through interviews. This approach meant looking for patterns so that categories could be selected for organising data. From this starting point, I was then able to reorganise and reduce the categories from the interview transcripts, which is what Creswell (1998) recommends, as it allows data to be shaped into a narrative. The next step was to interpret

the data considering the research questions and the study's objectives. To interpret this data, I listened again to the audio recordings of the interviews to get an overview of what was said and take notes. This method was useful, as it is easy to miss important cues when themes were extracted. There are often layers of meaning in what people say, so it is essential to understand any points missed the first time, either mentioned or inferred. Although a thematic approach to analysis has been identified as the most common approach across a range of qualitative methods (Boyatzis, 1998; Ryan & Bernard, 2000), this approach is considered a qualitative research method in its own right (Willig, 2003).

3.6.7 Issues Concerning Qualitative Design

Although there are benefits associated with the use of a qualitative design, it is limited in the sense that it is subjective in nature and leaves room for bias. Since findings from qualitative research studies are generated by interpreting and analysing views, opinions, and experiences of participants, information gathered may incorporate bias from either the participants or the researcher (Mack & Woodsong, 2005). To minimise potential bias, this study used a mixed methods data collection (interviews and questionnaire). The use of alternative data collection approaches can help in verifying data collected. Moreover, objectivity can be maintained by discarding preconceived notions and personal values, instead basing the data analysis process on evidence from data collected. In addition to these aspects, the findings established must be verified before being presented (Mack & Woodsong, 2005).

3.7 Validity

Validity means that the findings and the methods used to carry out the research are based on the research objectives. This definition implies that validity can be influenced by a number of factors (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006), including the sample and context selection. To minimise as many risks as possible to the validity, measures must be put in place at various stages, namely research design, data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation for qualitative studies (Onwuegbuzie, 2003). This research considered all of these areas and assessed how to collect, analyse, and interpret data appropriate and relevant to the research aims.

In terms of quantitative research, validity is a statistical conclusion, an internal construct, and external validity (Shadish et al., 2001). This statement means the researcher

must ensure that the instruments used to collect data are able to measure what is required by the research objectives. I paid special attention to the questionnaire to ensure the questions were able to elicit the responses that would help achieve the research objectives. The data was then analysed using the SPSS software and subjected to Cronbach's alpha coefficient and correlations, all of which contributed to the reliability, consistency, and validity of the instrument. Consequently, they all contributed a statistical conclusion from an internally validated questionnaire, which was further validated by data analysis.

Furthermore, classroom observation was first considered, but this would not result in producing the in-depth knowledge needed to ascertain what participants felt about the subject. Instead, observation would simply present a narrative of whether the teachers were already contributing to learner autonomy, which would not have fully met the aims of my study. Thus, interviews were the most suitable approach for this study.

The validity of insider research has been debated, as some argue that the perspective of an insider cannot guarantee critical observation (Wolff, 1950), whilst others say that an insider can produce valuable insights (Lewis, 1973). However, I approached this study from a professional stance and was aware of the importance of professional responsibility, as well as any ethical considerations. Unluer (2012) suggests that the quality of professional relationships can overcome issues concerning valid insider research. This professionalism helped to minimise any bias that may have emerged from my knowledge of the ELI.

Internal validity refers to the extent of certainty that can come from findings that are the result of the research carried out, and not influenced by other undefined sources, which may cause bias. Internal validity determines that the research process has been carried out correctly. A literature review was conducted prior to selecting data collection methods and collecting data. The aim of the literature review was to examine previous studies, academic papers, and conference reports to become familiar with research conducted in the area of learner autonomy and learn how other researchers managed similar topics. To fulfil this research's requirements and increase the construct validity of the research, I used surveys and interviews with students and teachers to assure that the most appropriate, rich, and accurate data were gathered. The research instruments have been subject to a pilot study, and the principal supervisor of this research acted as arbitrator of the survey and semi-structured interview questions.

External validity refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to the real world or to which the results may be generalised. External validity, of course, has implications for recommendations made on the basis of the research conducted. It is believed that there must first be internal validity before external validity can be assured (Dekkers et al., 2010; Gartlehner et al., 2006). In this study, it was ensured that research was transparent so that any other researcher would be able to use the same instruments, conduct the study with a similar target population, and obtain similar results. This transparency included being open about insider research, as it was conducted in my own university. Participants were selected on the basis of their introduction to learner autonomy; female foundation level students are generally not encouraged to be autonomous. These students were selected only according to their enrolment in an English language foundation course. The teachers chosen all teach English as a foreign language at the same university. Despite being selected on a convenience basis, all participants were within the required target population.

3.8 Reliability

Reliability should be considered in assessing this research's quality. Generally, reliability refers to the researcher's ability to repeat the research and obtain the same results. These conditions are valid in positivist research, but not in interpretivist studies (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). However, this research was conducted in a non-controlled context. Hence, the decisions to select the correct methodological choices and adopt a specific design were key in ensuring reliability.

Data collection was conducted following the ethical guidelines to ensure that the researcher was ensuring confidentiality and protection of the participants, and that the process was transparent. During data analysis, a systematic search for patterns related to research objectives was carried out in order to control what needed to be achieved, and that the data collected was reliable, both in terms of collection method and analysis. Another researcher may replicate this study as the methodology has been discussed at length. This discussion of method means that other researchers may carry out a similar study where they are likely to obtain similar results.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The study was guided by the University of York's ethical principles, which are specific to dealing with human participants. Firstly, I had to gain permission from the university's ethical committee by detailing how the data would be collected. These methods also covered the key aims and objectives of the research, as well as the location of the field study. The anonymity of participants was paramount. Confidentiality was also outlined. All potential participants were given information about the research study before being asked to sign a consent form (Appendices 7-10). This form implied informed consent and required the sending of a separate form to participants for both questionnaires and interviews before participants could take part in the research.

To ensure that the study information was clear and unambiguous, the details were provided in both Arabic and English. Participants were told that they were volunteers and that they could withdraw their consent at any time before completing the questionnaire. However, their anonymity was assured, as the data from the questionnaires were kept on a password-protected computer to which only I had access. Data would be taken from the paper-based questionnaires and uploaded onto the computer in order for data analysis to be conducted using computer software. The completed paper-based questionnaires would be kept only for the duration of the research study and would then be destroyed.

The interviewees were offered the same level of protection to assure the confidentiality of the information provided. However, participants were informed they could withdraw their consent at any time during the interview and up to seven days after the interview had taken place. In this case, all of the participant's records would be destroyed. It was important to provide a time limit for consent withdrawal, as the data analysis depended on the scrutiny of all data, and it would be problematic to delete after analysis had taken place. Under the Data Protection Act, I had to ensure that all information would be used only for the purpose for which it was provided. I also had to protect information provided if it was going to be sent to a translator, but as I am fluent in both English and Arabic, outside translation was not necessary.

I also ensured that supervisors were aware of where the interviews would take place if carried out in the field. This information was shared so that contact would be maintained throughout the process and to protect the research from potential risks while it was ongoing. Although the field study was to be carried out at my own university, permission had to be granted by both the Saudi Ministry of Education and the governing body of the university.

The Saudi Cultural Bureau also had to be informed, and this organisation provided consent to conduct research on the university premises.

Various ethical issues can arise in terms of confidentiality, particularly when the researcher is an insider. Insiders have greater insight into the experiences of the participants, which can be seen as either a benefit or a limitation. As the author of this study, I had to take these limitations and ethical issues into consideration when handling the data collection. Some information revealed to a researcher, especially in interviews, might be deemed privileged information (Smyth & Holian, 2008), so it was necessary to respect the confidentiality of such disclosures. In addition, the research findings had to reflect collected data without compromising the integrity of the research or the confidentiality of the information provided.

3.10 Summary

This chapter has shown how data was collected in this study. The chapter has explained how the research was designed to utilise both quantitative and qualitative methods. It has also explained that questionnaires and interviews were selected as fit for the purpose of meeting research objectives. Pre-prepared questions were used in the pilot study as these were already validated, and small adaptations were made to ensure that the questions covered the topic and could elicit the information required. These questionnaires were found to be too long, and some questions towards the end of the questionnaire were left unanswered. The unanswered questions meant that the questionnaire needed to be reduced for the main study. The pilot study also revealed that the interview timeframe was too small, so timing allocation was expanded in the main study. However, the interview questions were effective in meeting research objectives. All interviews were carried out face to face to avoid the technical problems that had occurred during the pilot study's online interviews.

Throughout the data collection process, care was taken to ensure internal validation; this meant keeping in mind at all times the research objectives. Transparency was important to ensure external validation, which meant that other researchers would be able to conduct a similar study and produce similar results. All data were collected, analysed, and stored according to ethical principles. Both sets of data were subject to software analysis and were then interpreted to produce findings. The next chapter provides the findings of the study.

Chapter 4: Results from the Survey

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the survey carried out with 44 teachers and 480 students at the English Language Institute (ELI) at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. The survey questionnaire was designed to provide answers to the research questions related to learner autonomy in a Saudi Arabian EFL context. The questionnaires also elicited teachers' and students' perceptions on learner autonomy, which are presented in this chapter. In addition, the activities most likely to foster autonomy in the English classroom are discussed. It was key to determine the characteristics of an autonomous learner and their impact on the development of learner autonomy and language learning. Therefore, the survey presents perceived characteristics. Finally, a comparison is made between teachers and students' views.

The chapter is divided into two principal sections. Section One presents the findings from teacher questionnaires, and Section Two presents the findings from student questionnaires. Each section begins with visual displays and frequency counts related to participants' demographic information. The results from the questionnaire main sections are then presented, starting with general views on learner autonomy, followed by classroom activities that foster learner autonomy, and finally characteristics that enhance learner autonomy and language learning. An additional section following the main results for teachers and students is also presented in order to compare between students' views and those of the teachers. The chapter then ends with a summary of the survey findings.

4.2 Teachers' Results

4.2.1 Teachers' Demographic Information

Demographic information is important as it provides information on the sample and makes it more effective in understanding, given that findings can be influenced by sample demographics (Bryan & Venkati, 2001; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Demographics determine the participant characteristics and bring an understanding of their geographical and educational backgrounds. Moreover, analysing demographic information shows the researcher whether sample characteristics meet selection criteria.

Information obtained from teachers includes the number of years of experience, their highest qualification, their native language and nationality, plus the English level(s) taught.

4.2.1.1 Years of experience

Figure 4.1 shows that 41.86% of the teachers in this study have teaching experience of 0 to 4 years, whilst 41.86% have between 5 and 9 years of experience. The remaining 23.4% of teachers have over 10 years of teaching experience. Variance in amount of teaching experience allows for a diversity of views obtained from those new to teaching and those who may have more traditional views, gained from the number of years teaching.

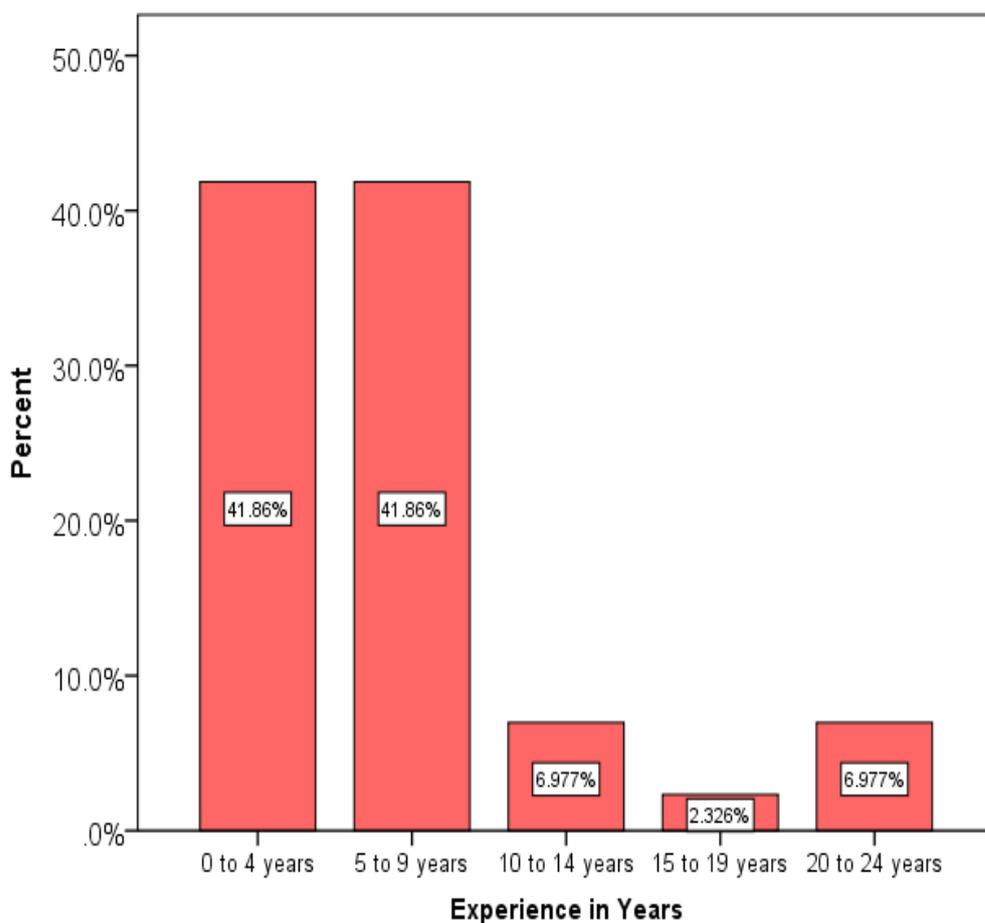


Figure 4.1: Teaching experience

4.2.1.2 Qualifications

In terms of subject knowledge, over half of the teachers (62.79%) have a Master's degree, which is their highest qualification. This qualification is then followed by a Bachelor's degree (27.91%), as shown in Figure 4.2. Only a small percentage (9.3%) of the teachers have a doctorate, which shows that most teachers have the degree qualifications expected from a university language teacher.

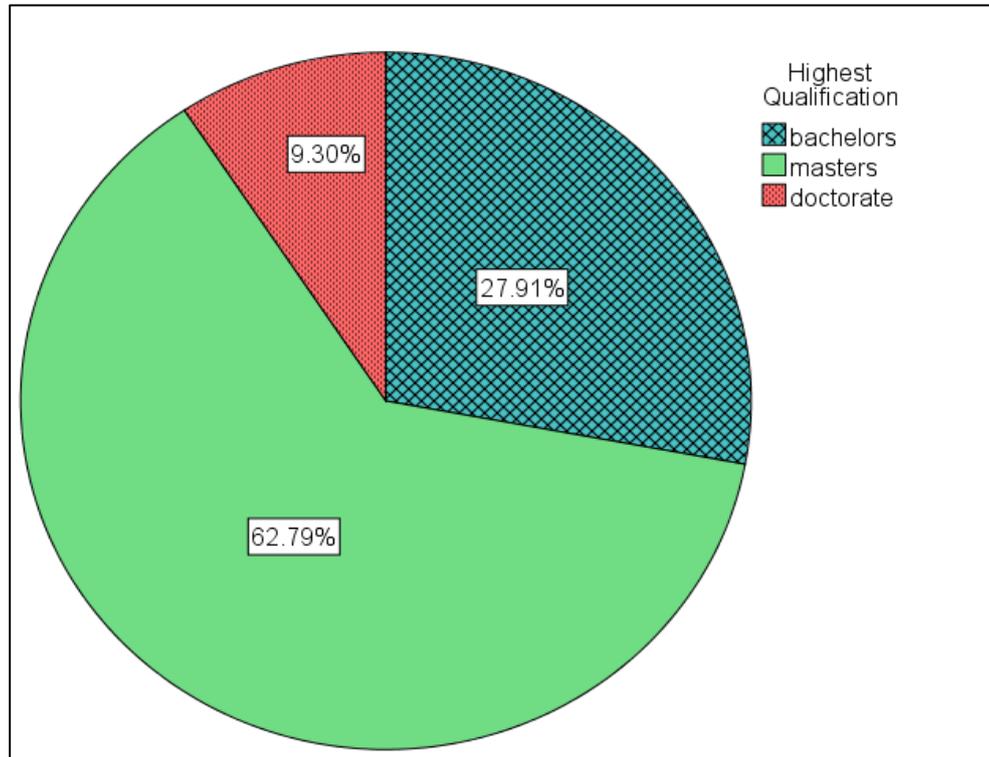


Figure 4.2: Highest qualification (Teachers)

4.2.1.3 Native language and nationalities

The native language of the majority of teachers in this study (74.4%) is Arabic (Figure 4.3), and over half of the teachers (60.47%) are Saudi (Figure 4.4). These teachers are therefore not native speakers of the language. Although a significant number of the teachers are not Saudi and come from different cultural backgrounds, they are not native English speakers. Based on responses to the questionnaire, the nationalities of the 44 teachers are specified as follows: 31 Saudi, 5 Pakistani, 4 Egyptian, 2 Indian, and 2 Jordanian. This finding indicates that teachers come from similar traditional educational backgrounds, in that they are all non-Western.

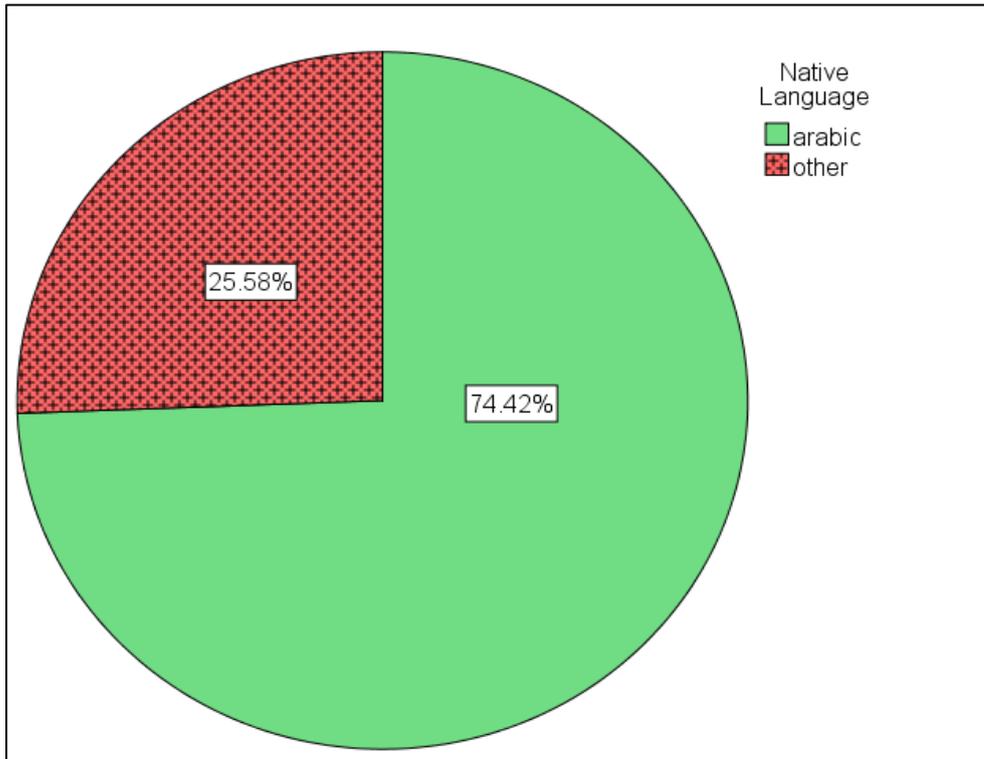


Figure 4.3: Distribution of native language (Teachers)

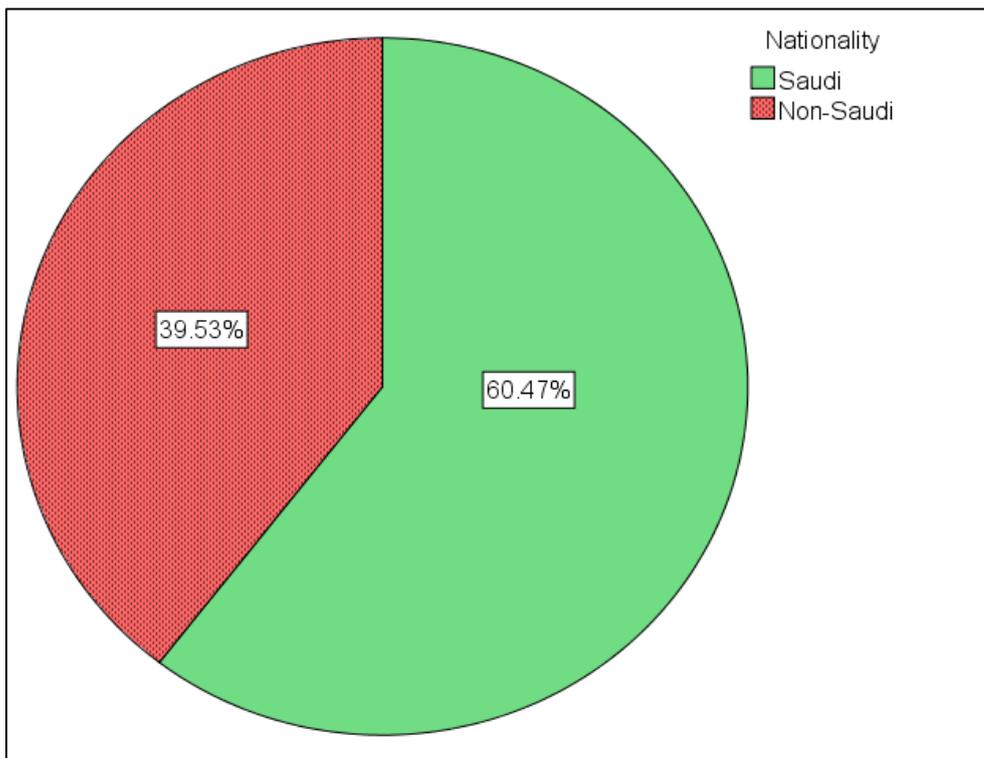


Figure 4.4: Distribution of nationality (Teachers)

4.2.1.4 English levels

In terms of the English level taught, over half of the teachers (54.76%) teach all levels of English language, as can be seen in Figure 4.5. Fewer than one quarter of the teachers (19.05%) teach only levels 3 and 4, whilst even smaller numbers teach only the other lower levels. This finding shows that teachers have worked with various groups of students, which may provide wider views on the teaching and learning at both lower and higher levels of English.

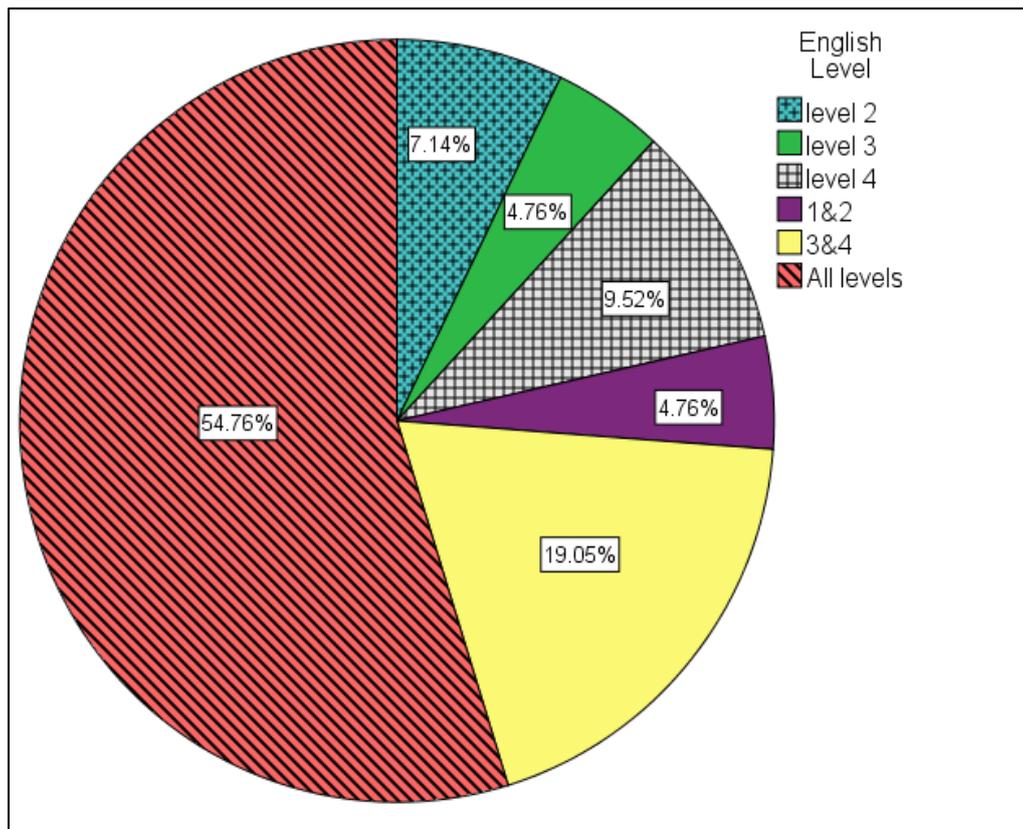


Figure 4.5: Distribution of English level (Teachers)

4.2.2 Results for General Views on Learner Autonomy

The questions presented in the 'General Views' section aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy (LA) in terms of its usefulness, whether it helped in language learning, whether it could be achieved without the help of a teacher, and to what extent learner autonomy was desirable and feasible in this study's context. In addition, an open-ended questions was introduced to determine how participants define learner autonomy from their own perspective.

4.2.2.1 LA overall usefulness and its role in helping language learning

The response to learner autonomy usefulness in this study’s context was defined as useful=1, unsure=2, and not useful=3. The results show that over two thirds of the teachers (77.27%) believe that LA is useful in their teaching context (Figure 4.6). Using mean and median, teachers’ attitudes favour LA usefulness. When associated with language learning, the majority of teachers (88.64%) find that learner autonomy helps language learning (Figure 4.7). As shown in Table 4.1, the Wilcoxon test confirms that LA usefulness is highly statistically significant (p-value = .002). This finding indicates that teachers believe in the usefulness and importance of LA in enhancing language learning in university-level teaching.

Table 4.1: Wilcoxon test for LA usefulness (Teachers)

Item	Mean	Median	SD	p-value
LA usefulness	1.36	1.00	.718	.002**

***=highly significant*

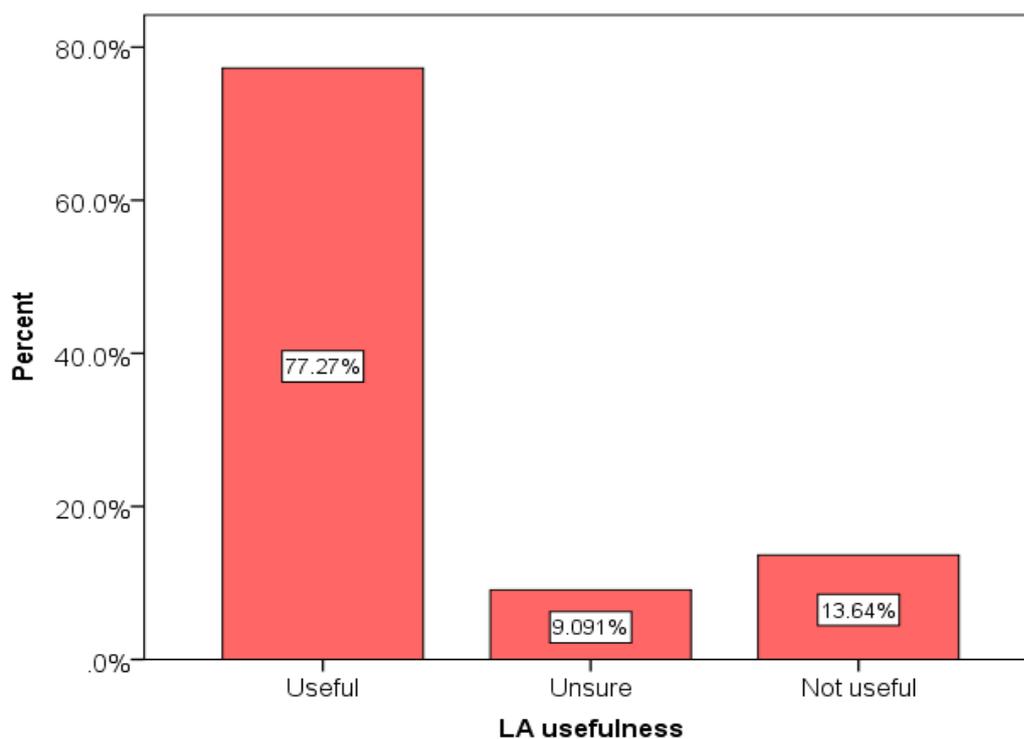


Figure 4.6: LA usefulness (Teachers)

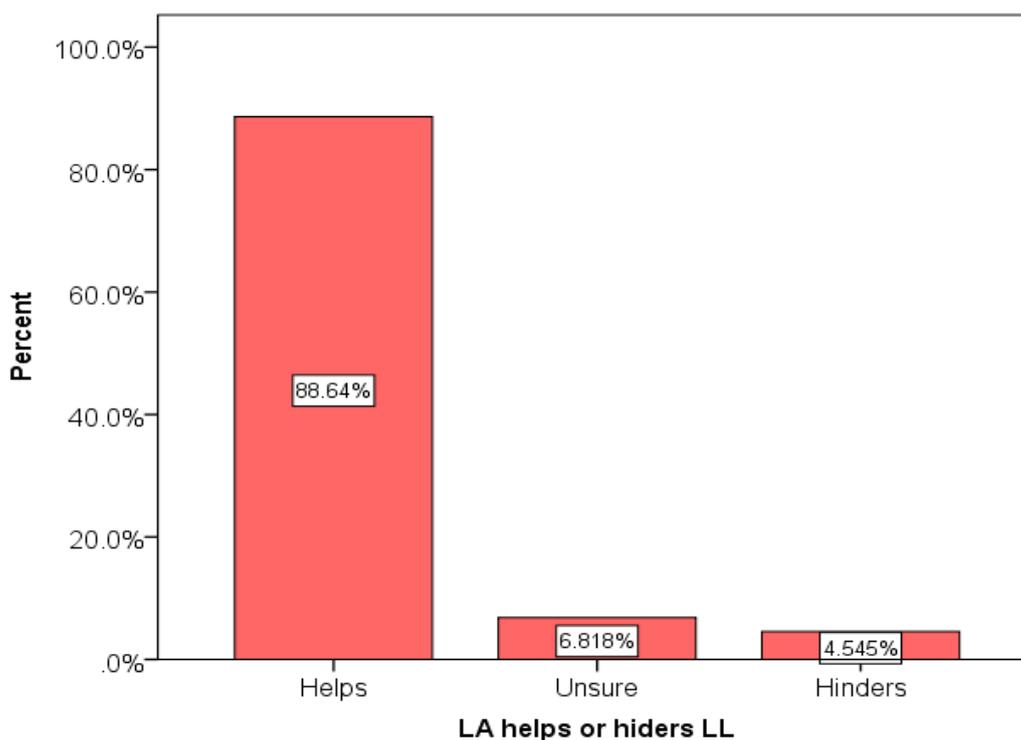


Figure 4.7: Does LA help or hinder language learning (Teachers)

4.2.2.2 LA without teacher’s support

Fewer than half of the teachers (40.91%) agree that LA could be achieved without help from the teacher, whereas 43.18% disagree (Figure 4.8). Using mean and median analyses, teachers are unsure about the need for the teacher’s help in terms of learner autonomy. This finding is confirmed by the results of the Wilcoxon test ($p\text{-value} = .146$), as shown in Table 4.2. It seems that some teachers believe that their students are capable of working independently. However, almost half of the participants believed that learner autonomy could not be achieved without the teacher’s support. These participants’ views may be based on the fact that learner autonomy does not mean total independence from teachers. Teachers play a key role in motivating and fostering autonomy. However, some teachers believe that learner autonomy is achieved only when students are able to take full responsibility for their learning by becoming fully independent from their teacher.

Table 4.2: Wilcoxon test for LA without teacher help (Teachers)

Item	Mean	Median	SD	p-value
LA without teachers' help	2.02	2.00	.927	.146

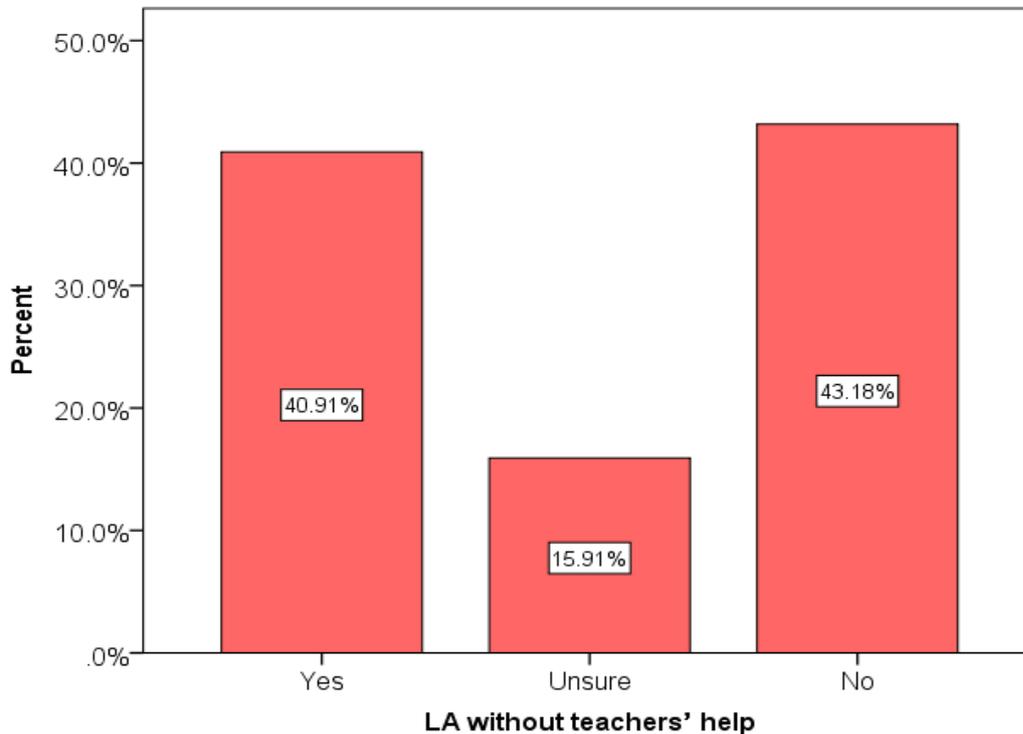


Figure 4.8: LA without teachers' help (Teachers)

4.2.2.3 LA desirability and feasibility

The desirability of LA ranged from highly undesirable=1 to highly desirable=5. Three quarters of the teachers (75%) confirm that LA is desirable in their teaching context (Figure 4.9). Using mean and median analyses, it was found that the teachers considered LA desirable (Table 4.3). This result is confirmed by the results of the Wilcoxon test (p-value < .001).

The feasibility of LA ranged from completely unfeasible=1 to completely feasible=5. As shown in Figure 4.10, slightly over half of the teachers (52.19%) agreed that LA was feasible. Also, using mean and median analyses, it was found that the teachers considered LA feasible (Table 4.3). This result is confirmed by the findings of Wilcoxon test (p-value < .001). It is clear that teachers are more positive in terms of desirability but are unsure

about the feasibility of learner autonomy in their classrooms. It is possible that teachers are interested in learner autonomy as a concept but are not certain of the practicality of implementing learner autonomy in their university language classrooms.

Table 4.3: Wilcoxon test for LA desirability and feasibility (Teachers)

Item	Mean	Median	SD	p-value
LA desirability	4.05	4.00	1.011	<.001***
LA feasibility	3.43	4.00	.900	<.001**

***= highly significant, ***=very highly significant*

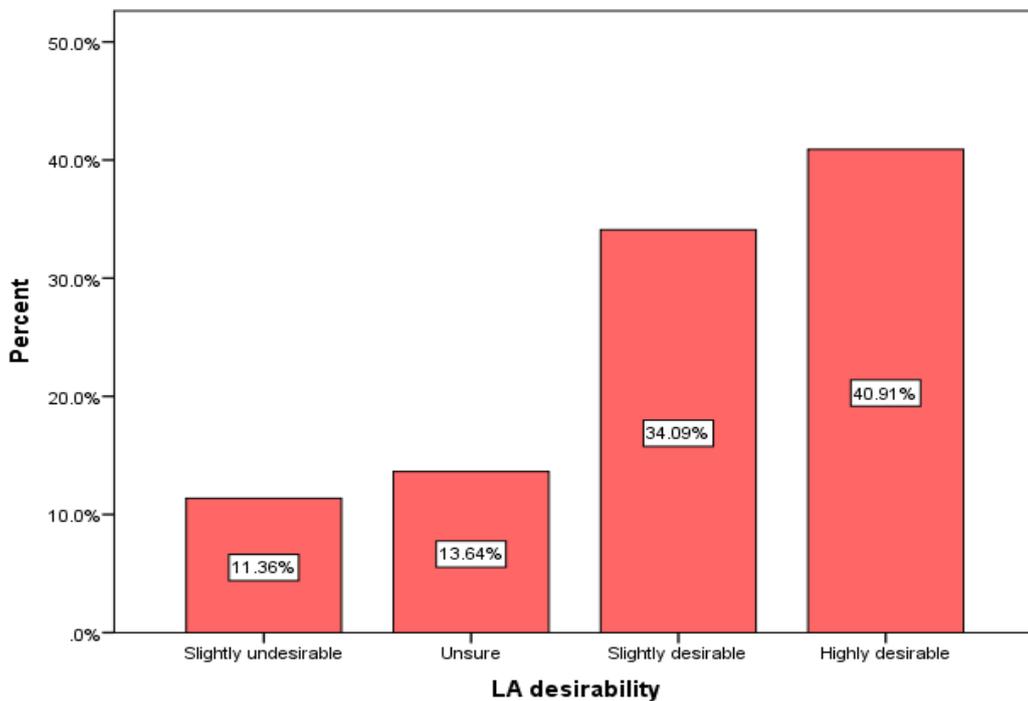


Figure 4.9: Distribution of LA desirability (Teachers)

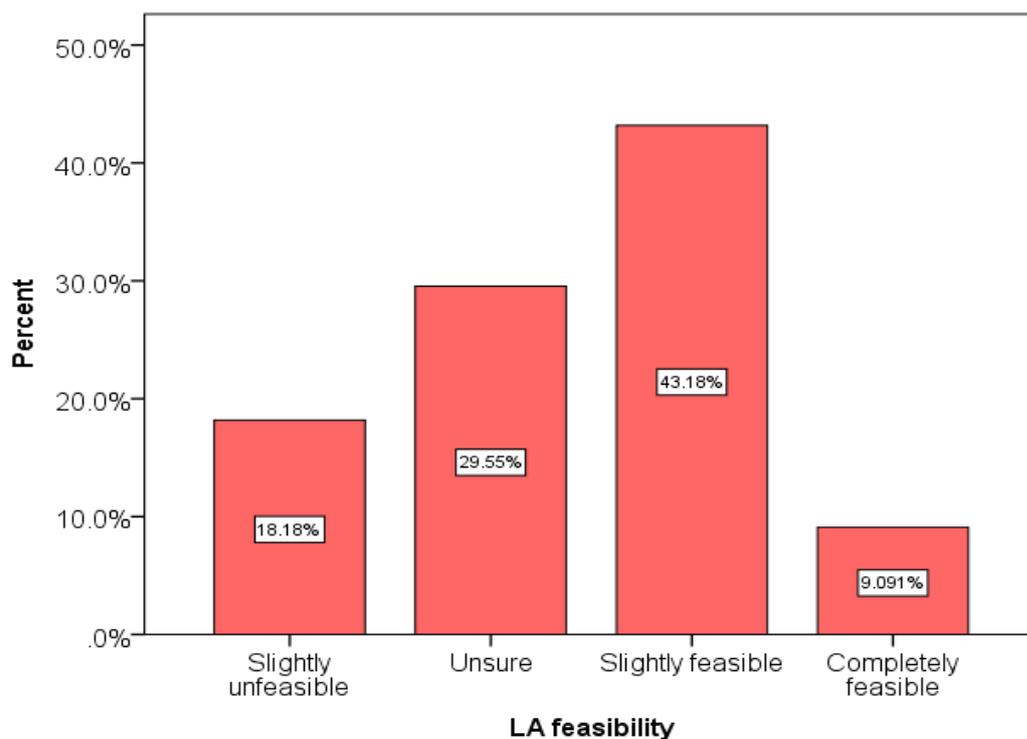


Figure 4.10: LA feasibility (Teachers)

4.2.2.4 *LA meaning*

Overall, most of the teachers viewed the concept of learner autonomy from a pedagogical aspect, defining it within the context of a formal educational setting. There was a tendency to associate learner autonomy with the ability to learn on one’s own; this is not surprising as the two terms of learner autonomy and independent learning were often used synonymously in earlier literature. Nevertheless, within the definition of independent learning there were a number of differences. One teacher said it was “*learning the language by yourself*”, whilst another believed it was “*practising the language on your own*”. There are clearly subtle differences between learning and practising, as the first implies that a learner is completely independent of a teacher, whereas practice implies it is in addition to what has already been taught. Therefore, in one teacher’s perspective, learner autonomy is a student making a decision to learn a language by means other than with a teacher’s help, yet the other teacher sees learner autonomy as a student being willing to take extra time to practise what they have learnt.

Another teacher clarifies her perception more by stating that learner autonomy is: “*the desire for students to learn on their own outside the classroom*”. Here it is clear that this

teacher believes the classroom is not the only place where learning takes place, and autonomous learners must have the desire or motivation to want to do more on their own initiative. Consequently, we can see that there are already three variations under independent learning: one is associated with a learner not needing a teacher, another is where a learner may be guided by a teacher to learn outside the classroom, and the third is where a teacher may need to enthuse or motivate a learner to want to learn outside the classroom.

There are then further differentiations in the way teachers place responsibility for developing learner autonomy. Some see it as centred on the learner: *“a kind of responsibility shift from teacher to learner”*, with a suggestion that *“the learner is responsible for setting objectives for him or herself to achieve language proficiency”*. It determines that the learner is capable of taking responsibility and, as one teacher comments: *“has the ability and motivation to learn on their own”*. This may occur at an advanced stage of language learning, but it is unlikely that early learners would have either the ability or motivation to progress on their own. One teacher goes further and states that: *“learners can depend on themselves to learn, find out what they need and know why they need to learn”*. In this case one may wonder why a teacher would be needed, if a learner had reached this level of independence.

On the other hand, there are some teachers who define the development of learner autonomy as being the teacher’s responsibility. The teacher must enthuse her students in such a way that they want to learn more, and are willing to take the time to find out more on their own. Whereas the teachers still have goals and objectives in mind, this time it is the teacher’s responsibility to provide language learners with the *“guidance of the teacher”* to achieve these targets. There is still a need for the teacher to be in control but to motivate and guide her learners to want to work on their own: as one teacher explained, *“being able to explore and learn without depending completely on the teacher”*.

There was also an indication from some teachers that learner autonomy was associated with specific characteristics and that a learner was *“investing in a second language”*. The learner may be motivated and excited but, at the same time, they had *“high aims to reach perfection in language learning”*. Such learners need to be able *“to set personal goals, monitor them, and find resources to meet these goals”*. This is more than taking responsibility as it indicates that there are some learners, who may be more successful in

achieving learner autonomy. Whereas some teachers had earlier suggested learners needed to have the ability and motivation to succeed, and some had suggested the teachers could guide them to autonomous learning, here there is a suggestion that only those with certain attributes were likely to become autonomous learners. One teacher describes this kind of learner as one who: “*can motivate herself to learn, is enthusiastic about learning, can identify her weaknesses and work on them, can take part in classroom interactions, and identify and develop different strategies of learning*”. This definitely points to a learner who has intrinsic qualities not always associated with all learners.

Consequently, it can be seen from the teachers’ responses that learner autonomy has different meanings for them: some perceive it as a learner’s responsibility to take control of their own learning, others see it as a teacher’s responsibility to guide their learners appropriately, and yet others see it as a personality trait that may be limited to specific learners.

Table 4.4: LA meaning (Teachers)

Q: From your personal point of view, what does learner autonomy mean?
<i>A process by which a learner takes responsibility for his/her own learning</i>
<i>Having the desire to learn</i>
<i>It means that the student is learning independently and learns the language by himself</i>
<i>To be responsible for his own education</i>
<i>It's moving the focus from teaching to learning. In other words, it is a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his learning</i>
<i>Being able to invest in learning the second language</i>
<i>It is a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all decisions concerned with his or her learning and the implementations of those decisions</i>
<i>A learner who's excited to learn and has high aims to reach perfection in language learning</i>
<i>It is the ability to take charge of one's own learning as a means to an end</i>
<i>To be independent</i>
<i>The independent relationship between the learner and the context to be learnt</i>
<i>Ability to set personal goals, monitor them, and find resources to meet these goals</i>
<i>An ability to learn</i>
<i>It takes place when students become responsible for their learning and does not rely on their teachers and textbooks. Also, the learner seeks different ways to improve their language, listen to, and read authentic materials</i>

<i>It's the ability to look for your own mistakes and try to correct them. However, it depends on their personalities. Some people can be really harsh on themselves, which might hold them back</i>
<i>The student's vision of the learning process</i>
<i>Aim at their own learning.</i>
<i>To be an independent learner and practice the language on your own</i>
<i>The learner is responsible for his/her learning. He/she is not always a passive receptive. She knows what, how, when to learn the language</i>
<i>To be able to identify concepts alone</i>
<i>Be in charge of learning inside and outside the classroom</i>
<i>It is encouraging the learners to be responsible for their own learning</i>
<i>The ability to take charge of their own learning</i>
<i>The ability for learners to be independent learners</i>
<i>Letting students take charge of their own learning</i>
<i>The learner's ability to enrich his or her language skills by depending mostly on themselves and partly on the teacher or guide</i>
<i>Students' learning strategies</i>
<i>Learner autonomy is like a journey where the learner decides where to go and how to travel. He/she needs a guide to explain and help. This guide is the teacher, who can help and encourage a learner to take charge of his/her own learning</i>
<i>Being able to explore and learn without depending completely on the teacher</i>
<i>Having the desire to learn on their own (not in the traditional way) outside the classroom</i>
<i>Means that the learner can motivate himself to learn, is enthusiastic about learning, can identify his weaknesses and work on them, can take a part in classroom interactions, and identify and develop different strategies of learning</i>
<i>The ability and willingness of a learner to be responsible for his/her learning</i>
<i>It's learner's independence, and a kind of responsibility shift from teacher to learner. It's a more learner-centred kind of learning</i>
<i>It means learner's independence. The language learner can set objectives him/herself to achieve language proficiency</i>
<i>Ability to learn on their own and self-motivation</i>
<i>It means learners can depend on themselves to learn, find what they need and know why they need to learn</i>
<i>It means to work independently to learn targeted language and set goals and means to achieve the target with the guidance of the teacher</i>
<i>Students should be interactive during class to ensure her involvement with the context</i>
<i>It's the teacher's ability to empower her students by creating an atmosphere that persuades them to learn independently</i>

4.2.3 Results for Section One: Classroom Activities for Fostering Learner Autonomy

This section of the teachers' questionnaire aimed to establish teachers' opinion on the effectiveness of a number of autonomy-supportive classroom activities based on their experiences in university-level English classes. Teachers were asked for their views on the level of effectiveness of twenty different teacher-led activities suggested to foster learner autonomy. The activities were based on a six-point Likert scale. The length of the six points (both low and high limits) was calculated to determine the maximum limit of the cells. To determine the length of each cell, the following calculation had to be made: the extension defined as very ineffective=0 to 5=very effective, and then 5 (result from the deduction) / 6 (length of points) = 0.83 . Therefore, the upper and lower limits of each cell could be determined by adding 0.83 , starting from 0 (very ineffective) onward, as shown in Table 4.5. Based on these cell lengths, participants' responses were defined by computing the mean, median, and standard deviation (SD). Also, the threshold of 2.51 was defined as the cut off between ineffective and effective responses (Table 4.5). The Wilcoxon test was used to test if the median response of each participant was higher than 2.51 (median > 2.51), using the level of significance of 0.05 .

Table 4.5: Activity points length

Response	Point	Length of points
Very ineffective	0	From 0 to 0.83
Ineffective	1	From 0.84 to 1.67
Slightly ineffective	2	From 1.68 to 2.51
Slightly effective	3	From 2.52 to 3.35
Effective	4	From 3.36 to 4.19
Very effective	5	From 4.20 to 5

The measures shown in Table 4.5 were used to classify activities based on their degree of effectiveness (i.e. very effective, effective, slightly effective, slightly ineffective, ineffective, very ineffective). The Wilcoxon test was used to confirm significant effectiveness for the activities, based on the opinions of teachers.

4.2.3.1 Overall effectiveness of classroom activities

By looking at the scores of all classroom activities, it was found that the twenty activity items were altogether ‘effective’ based on teacher’s responses. The proportion of items that were found ‘very effective’, ‘effective’, and ‘slightly effective’ was 93.19%. The percentage of items falling in the ineffective scales was only 6.81%, as shown in Table 4.6 and Figure 4.11. Also, the statistical test indicated that the overall score for the effectiveness of classroom activities was highly significant (p -value $< .001$). This finding demonstrated that teachers strongly believed in the usefulness of those activities in fostering learner autonomy in their classrooms.

Table 4.6: Overall effectiveness of classroom activities (Teachers)

Overall effectiveness	%					Median	Mean	SD	opinion	p-value (Wilcoxon test)	
	0 (very ineffective)	1 (ineffective)	2 (slightly ineffective)	3 (slightly effective)	4 (effective)						5 (very effective)
	-	-	6.81	25	38.64	29.55	4.00	3.90	.91	Effective	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

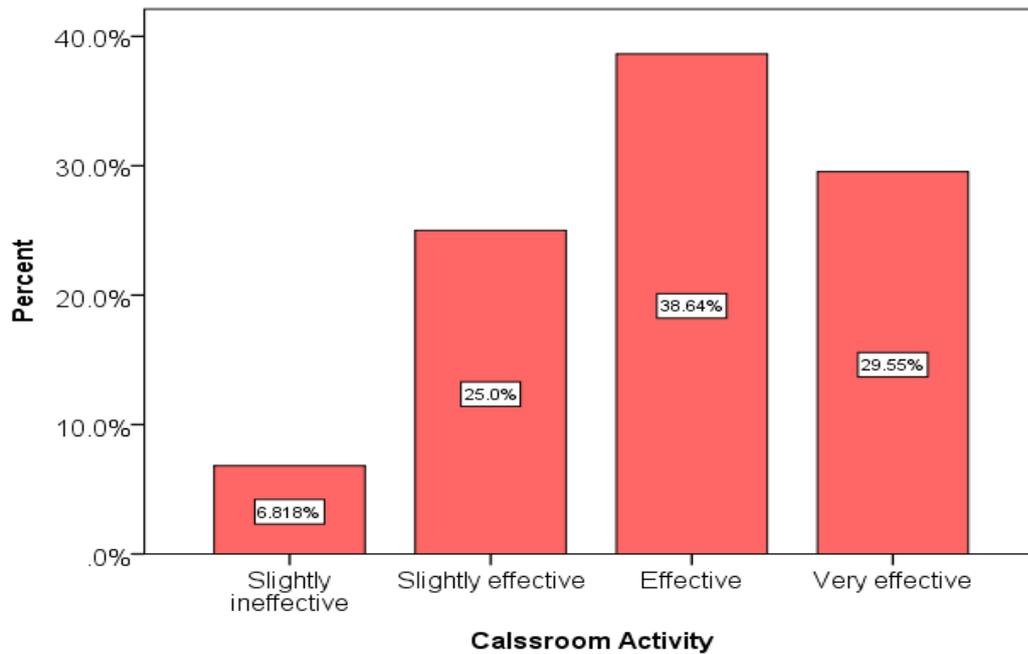


Figure 4.11: Distribution of the overall effectiveness of classroom activities (Teachers)

The following three sections present further detailed results on the level of effectiveness of each individual activity item.

4.2.3.2 ‘Very effective’ classroom activities

Table 4.7 shows the results of the classroom activities found to be ‘very effective’ in fostering learner autonomy. These activities are presented in descending order (from high to low), according to sample responses for teachers. Teachers believe that selecting activities relevant to students’ needs, goals, and values is most effective in fostering learner autonomy in the classroom, followed by allowing time to prepare and observe natural communications in English. Statistically, the effectiveness of all three items was highly significant ($p\text{-value} < .001$). The teachers’ top choice in terms of effectiveness show that they believe in the importance of a learner’s involvement in selecting activities and course materials to encourage autonomy. Also, activity selection, observing natural communication, and reducing students’ anxiety and fear of mistakes by allowing them time to prepare most likely make learning English more enjoyable for students and motivate them to be more active in the language classroom and more involved in language activities.

Table 4.7: ‘Very effective’ classroom activities (Teachers)

Activity items	%						Median	Mean	SD	Rank	p-value (Wilcoxon test)
	0 (very ineffective)	1 (ineffective)	2 (slightly ineffective)	3 (slightly effective)	4 (effective)	5 (very effective)					
Selecting activities relevant to students’ needs, goals, and values	-	-	2.3	18.2	18.2	61.4	5.00	4.39	.87	1	<.001***
Allowing time for students to prepare before they speak	-	-	2.3	15.9	25.0	56.8	5.00	4.36	.84	2	<.001***
Observing natural communications in English (e.g. watching English films or TV programmes)	-	-	4.5	20.5	25.0	50.0	4.50	4.20	.93	3	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

4.2.3.3 ‘Effective’ classroom activities

Teachers found fifteen items to be ‘effective’ in supporting learner autonomy in the classroom, as shown in Table 4.8. These items are presented in descending order, according to the sample responses for teachers. It is clear from the results that changing seating arrangements and using online resources are the top choices for teachers in terms of effectiveness, whereas working in a language lab and summarising in English are not considered important. It is clear that teachers believe that introducing non-traditional classroom activities encourages the development of learner autonomy. For example, class movement, collaborative work, and out-of-class tasks are recognised as effective. Also, the use of technology, such as online resources, emails, and social media, to learn English is rated as effective by teachers.

Table 4.8: ‘Effective’ classroom activities (Teachers)

Activity items	%						Median	Mean	SD	Rank	p-value (Wilcoxon test)
	0 (very ineffective)	1 (ineffective)	2 (slightly ineffective)	3 (slightly effective)	4 (effective)	5 (very effective)					
Creating seating arrangements that encourage students to initiate conversation	-	-	9.1	20.5	22.7	47.7	4.00	4.09	1.03	4	<.001***
Using online resources in the classroom (e.g. language websites and e-books)	-	2.3	4.5	27.3	22.7	43.2	4.00	4.00	1.06	5	<.001***
Allowing collaborative work in small groups	2.3	4.5	9.1	15.9	13.6	54.5	5.00	3.98	1.37	6	<.001***
Using a variety of authentic materials (e.g. newspapers, magazines, and online articles)	-	4.5	9.1	18.2	22.7	45.5	4.00	3.95	1.20	7	<.001***
Asking students for their preferences while working on a task or activity (e.g. Do they prefer to work in groups, pairs, or alone? Do they prefer to select their own group members?)	-	2.3	11.4	13.6	36.4	36.4	4.00	3.93	1.09	8	<.001***
Training students to compose emails in English	-	6.8	4.5	22.7	22.7	43.2	4.00	3.91	1.22	9	<.001***
Keeping written records of learning (e.g. lists of useful vocabularies or written texts they themselves composed).	2.3	2.3	6.8	25.0	27.3	36.4	4.00	3.82	1.21	10	<.001***

Using reference books in class, including dictionaries	-	4.5	11.4	18.2	34.1	31.8	4.00	3.77	1.16	11	<.001***
Explaining to students why some grammar exercises or language activities are worth their attention	-	4.5	11.4	27.3	25.0	31.8	4.00	3.68	1.18	12	<.001***
Training students to communicate in English via different social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and blogs)	-	2.3	18.2	18.2	31.8	29.5	4.00	3.68	1.16	13	<.001***
Analysing structures to formulate rules (e.g. certain grammar point or fixed spelling rule)	2.3	9.1	13.6	13.6	29.5	31.8	4.00	3.55	1.42	14	.002**
Assigning tasks supporting language learning that can be conducted outside the classroom (e.g. interviewing someone in English)	2.3	11.4	11.4	22.7	20.5	31.8	4.00	3.43	1.45	15	.002**
Asking students to become active and involved in classroom activities	6.8	6.8	11.4	25.0	11.4	38.6	3.50	3.43	1.59	16	.002**
Working independently in a language lab	2.3	6.8	13.6	29.5	18.2	29.5	3.00	3.43	1.35	17	.002**
Summarising in English (e.g. summarising an article or a short story)	4.5	4.5	20.5	11.4	34.1	25.0	4.00	3.41	1.42	18	.010*

=significant, **= highly significant and *=very highly significant*

4.2.3.4 'Slightly effective' activities

Based on teachers' responses, using the target language and translating from English are slightly effective in fostering learner autonomy, and the statistical test indicates that these two items are insignificant and, therefore, ineffective activities (Table 4.9). Using only English in the Saudi EFL classroom was determined to be ineffective, which may mean that teachers believe that using the student's first language (Arabic) in class does not interfere with learner autonomy. Translation is also found ineffective, confirming that teachers do not believe that using traditional activities enhances a student's autonomy.

Table 4.9: 'Slightly effective' classroom activities (Teachers)

Activity items	%						Median	Mean	SD	Rank	p-value (Wilcoxon test)
	0 (very ineffective)	1 (quite ineffective)	2 (slightly ineffective)	3 (slightly effective)	4 (quite effective)	5 (very effective)					
Use target language only in class	4.5	15.9	9.1	25.0	31.8	13.6	3.00	3.05	1.43	19	.148
Translation from English (e.g. translating an English article)	6.8	11.4	22.7	29.5	20.5	9.1	3.00	2.73	1.35	20	.291

4.2.4 Results for Section Two: Characteristics of Autonomous Learners

This section of the questionnaire aimed to investigate participants' viewpoints on the importance of developing autonomous characteristics and behaviours, and whether this development played a role in learner autonomy and enhancing language learning (or both). The 25 items presented in the questionnaire were divided into five sets, namely take charge of learning (5 items), have positive attitude towards learning (5 items), learn cooperatively in the classroom (5 items), identify and develop study skills (5 items), and build good relationship with the teacher (5 items). The three questions asked about each item were, 'Do you want your students to develop this item?', 'Does (the development of) this item enhance learner autonomy?', and 'Does (the development of) this item enhance language learning?'.

Moreover, the opinions of teachers towards the five characteristics and their corresponding items were ‘yes’, ‘unsure’, and ‘no’. The extension of responses was defined as Yes =1, Unsure =2, and No =3. These responses were then computed $2 / 3 = 0.67$, where 3 was the number of responses, to determine the length of each cell. Consequently, the upper and lower limit for each cell was found by adding 0.67 to 1 (yes). As a result, the threshold of 1.68 was used as a cut-off point between positive (yes) and other responses (unsure/no). The extent of the cells, which related to the opinions of the participants, was defined, as shown in Table 4.10. Using these measures, low and high responses to the constructs were observed by computing the mean and median of results. Furthermore, The Wilcoxon test was used to depict positive responses of less than 1.68. Table 4.10 shows the length of responses to characteristics, which were used in the analysis.

Table 4.10: Length of response to characteristics of autonomous learners

Response	point	Length of point
Yes	1	From 1 to 1.67
Unsure	2	From 1.68 to 2.35
No	3	From 2.36 to 3

4.2.4.1 Results for Question 1: Do teachers want their students to develop autonomous characteristics?

The first question, ‘Do you want your students to develop this (characteristic)?’ aimed to make an initial evaluation of the selected characteristics. This evaluation would provide an overview of the level of importance of developing each characteristic. As shown in Table 4.11, it was found that the overall attitude towards the importance of autonomous characteristics was very highly significant (p-value < .001). This result indicates that teachers believe it is important for their students to develop the characteristics presented in this section.

Table 4.11: Overall score for evaluating the importance of developing characteristics using the Wilcoxon test (Teachers)

Importance of characteristics overall score	Statistics			p-value (Wilcoxon test)
	Mean	Median	SD	
	1.20	1.16	.19	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

In addition, teachers' responses were used to rank the characteristics, according to their importance, using mean, median, and standard deviation, as shown in Table 4.12 and Figure 4.12. It was found that taking charge of learning and having positive attitude towards learning are considered the most important (97.7%), followed by learning cooperatively in the classroom (93.2%), then identifying and developing study skills (90.9%), and finally building a positive relationship with the teacher (81.8%). The statistical test indicates that all five characteristics are very highly significant in terms of importance (p-value < .001). These results indicate that teachers strongly believe the most distinguished characteristics of autonomous learners are the ability to take charge of learning and a positive mind set towards learning.

Table 4.12: Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon test for overall importance and ranking of 5 characteristics (Teachers)

Characteristic	Teachers' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Taking charge of learning	97.7	2.3	-	1.2	1.16	.19	1	<.001***
Positive attitude towards learning	97.7	2.3	-	1.23	1.18	.32	2	<.001***
Learning cooperatively in classroom	93.2	6.8	-	1.14	1.00	.26	3	<.001***
Developing study skills	90.9	9.1	-	1.24	1.00	.33	4	<.001***
Building positive relationship with the teacher	81.8	15.9	2.3	1.37	1.30	.39	5	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

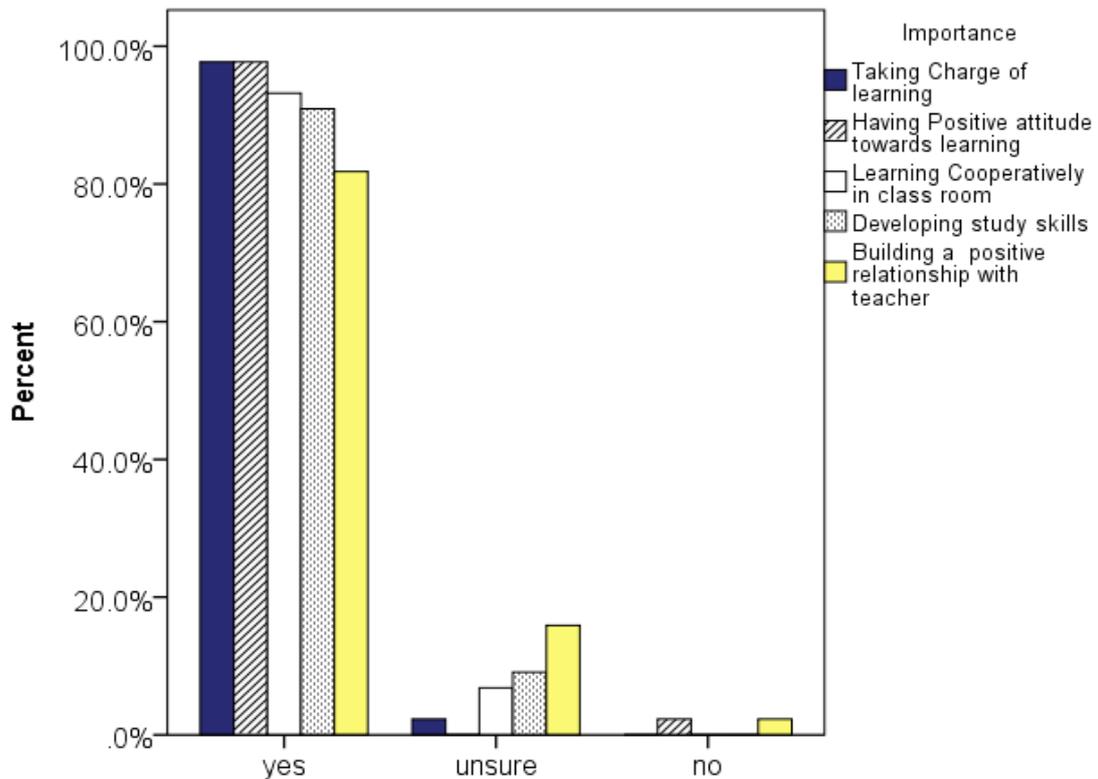


Figure 4.12: Distribution of percentage for evaluating the importance of characteristics (Teachers)

4.2.4.2 Results for Question2: Does the development of characteristics enhance Learner Autonomy (LA)?

The second question ‘Does this (characteristic) enhance learner autonomy?’ explored teachers’ opinions on the importance of developing characteristics enhancing learner autonomy. Teachers expressed positive opinions towards the role of the characteristics in enhancing learner autonomy (Table 4.13). The statistical test confirms that the attitudes of teachers are positive for LA enhancement through developing these characteristics, which is found to be very highly significant (p-value < .001).

Table 4.13: Overall score for LA enhancement using the Wilcoxon test (Teachers)

LA enhancement	Statistics			p-value
	Mean	Median	SD	
Overall score	1.28	1.23	.23	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

Figure 4.13 and Table 4.14 show that the most important characteristics in enhancing learner autonomy were taking charge of learning and demonstrating a positive attitude

towards learning, followed by identifying and developing study skills, learning cooperatively, and finally building a positive relationship with the teacher. The statistical test indicates that teachers demonstrate a positive attitude for LA enhancement by developing these characteristics, which is highly significant for building a positive relationship with the teacher (p-value = .003) and very highly significant for the other four characteristics (p-value < .001).

Table 4.14: Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon test for overall LA enhancement by developing 5 characteristics (Teachers)

Characteristic	Teachers' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Positive attitude towards learning	100	-		1.12	1.00	.15	1	<.001***
Taking charge of learning	100	-		1.14	1.00	.19	2	<.001***
Learning cooperatively in classroom	79.5	18.2	2.3	1.32	1.10	.42	3	<.001***
Identifying and developing study skills	88.6	11.4		1.23	1.2	.32	4	<.001***
Building positive relationship with the teacher	72.7	22.7	4.5	1.45	1.40	.42	5	.003**

= highly significant, *=very highly significant

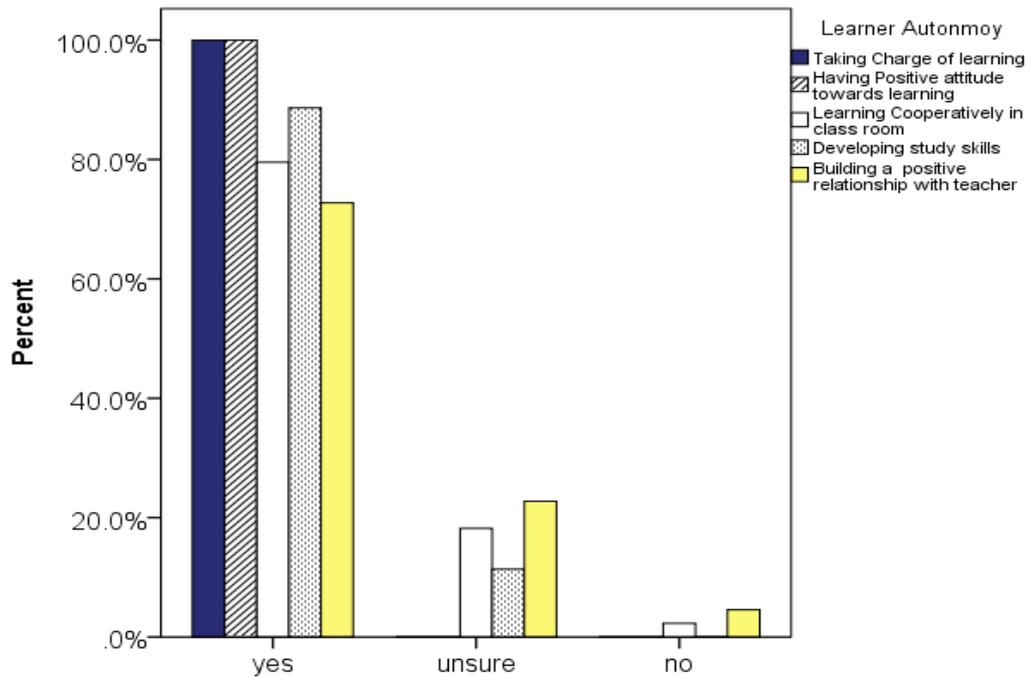


Figure 4.15: Distribution of percentage for overall LA enhancement by developing 5 characteristics (Teachers)

The next five sections present detailed results of teachers' views on learner autonomy enhancement by developing the sub-items within each characteristic.

1. LA enhancement by taking charge of learning

Teachers found that developing the sub-characteristics connected to taking charge could enhance learner autonomy, as shown in Table 4.14. To illustrate this finding, the item 'monitoring one's own progress' has the highest evaluation from teachers when asked about LA enhancement, as seen in Table 4.15 and Figure 4.14. The proportion of teachers in favour of these items was 97.7%. The second item was 'identifying one's own needs', where teachers believe that developing this item enhances learner autonomy. The third item was 'identifying one's own learning problems and having the means of addressing them'. The final two items were 'evaluating one's own learning' and 'setting one's own learning goals'. The proportion of teachers in favour of these items was 81.8%. All five sub-items of 'taking charge' were very highly significant across teachers (p-value < .001).

Table 4.15: Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon test for LA enhancement by taking

Taking charge of learning items	Teachers' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Monitoring one's own progress (e.g. identifying weaknesses and strengths and structuring their learning accordingly)	97.7	2.3	-	1.02	1.00	.23	1	<.001***
Identifying one's own learning problems and means of addressing them	88.6	11.4	-	1.11	1.00	.48	2	<.001***
Identifying one's own needs (e.g. why they want to learn English)	90.9	6.8	2.3	1.11	1.00	.58	3	<.001***
Evaluating one's own learning (e.g. evaluating to what extent they have achieved their goals)	81.8	15.9	2.3	1.20	1.00	.70	4	<.001***
Setting one's own goals (what do they want to learn) (e.g. communication in English, academic writing, or reading and comprehension)	81.8	13.6	4.5	1.25	1.00	.53	5	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

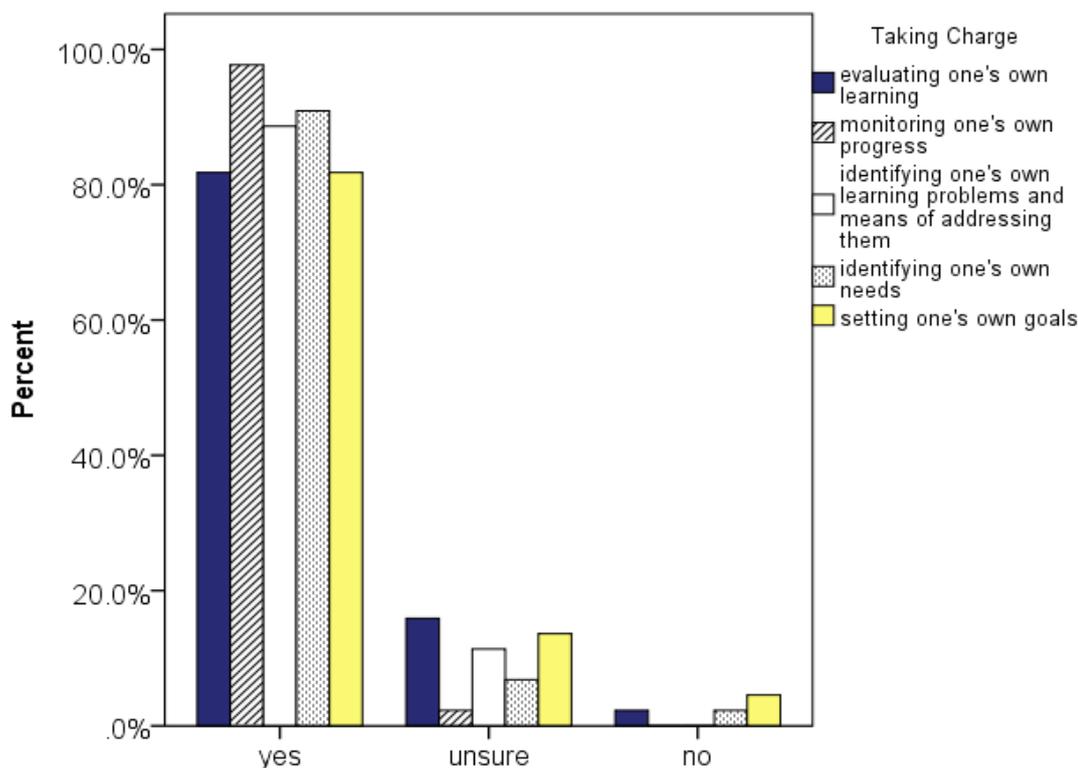


Figure 4.18: Distribution of LA enhancement by taking charge items (Teachers)

2. LA enhancement by having a positive attitude towards learning

Teachers agree that learner autonomy may be enhanced by developing the sub-characteristics, reflecting a positive attitude towards learning (Table 4.14). As seen in the summary results, shown in Table 4.16 and Figure 4.15, the most effective item in enhancing learner autonomy across this set of characteristics is ‘demonstrating willingness to learn’ (100%). The second most effective item is ‘demonstrating positivity towards learning English’, followed by ‘expressing ideas and opinions freely’, and ‘motivating oneself to learn’. The fifth item is ‘learning English because they enjoy it’, where the proportion of teachers in favour of this items was 75%. Statistically, all five aspects of a positive attitude towards learning were very highly significant (p-value < .001).

Table 4.16: Descriptive statistics for LA enhancement by having positive attitude items (Teachers)

Having positive attitude items	Teachers' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Demonstrating willingness to learn	100	-	-	1.00	1.00	.000	1	<.001***

Demonstrating positivity towards learning English	95.5	4.5	-	1.05	1.00	.211	2	<.001***
Motivating oneself to learn (without external rewards)	86.4	13.6	-	1.14	1.00	.347	4	<.001***
Expressing ideas and opinions freely	88.6	11.4	-	1.11	1.00	.321	3	<.001***
Learning English because of enjoyment	75.0	20.5	4.5	1.30	1.00	.553	5	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

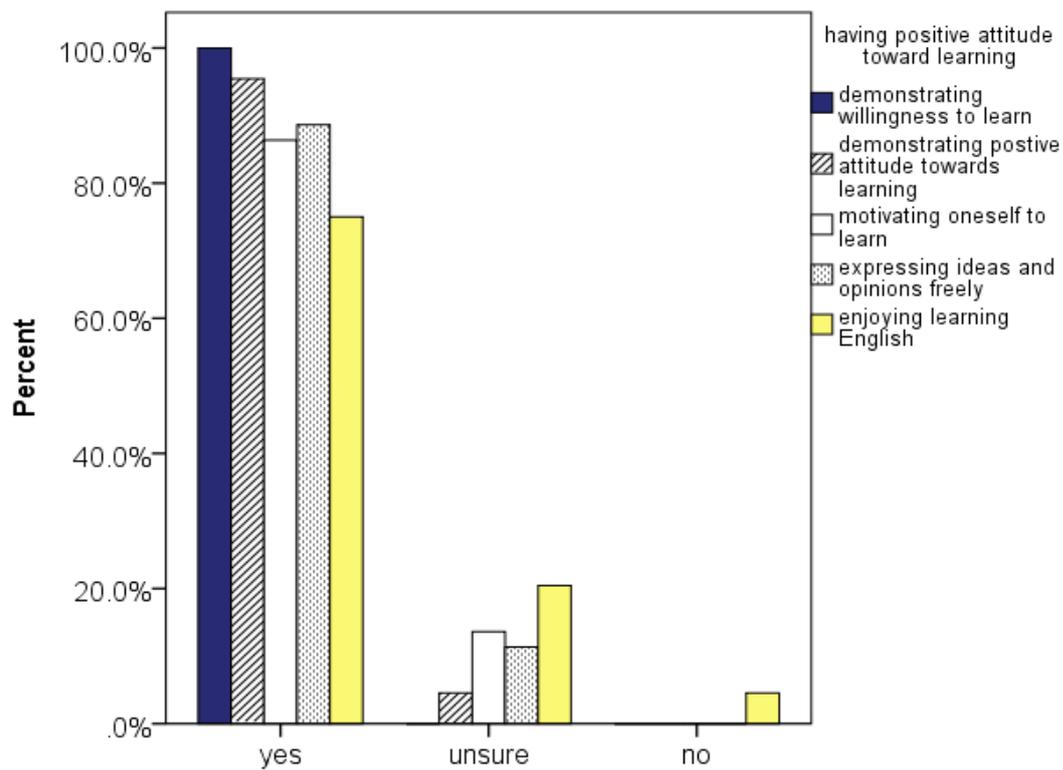


Figure 4.19: Distribution of LA enhancement by having positive attitude (Teachers)

3. LA enhancement by learning cooperatively in the classroom

For learning cooperatively in the classroom, teachers believe that the development of the overall learning cooperatively sub-items could improve learner autonomy (Table 4.14). As seen in Table 4.17 and Figure 4.16, most teachers believe that the development of ‘taking part in classroom interactions and discussions’ enhances learner autonomy. The proportion of teachers in favour of this item was 90.9%. The second item was ‘learning with, and from, others’, where teachers believe that developing this item enhances learner autonomy. The third item was ‘working in pairs, groups, with the whole class’, followed by ‘seeking help and support from peers’. Statistically, items ‘taking part in classroom interaction’, ‘learning with and from others’, and ‘working cooperatively’ were found to be very highly significant (p-value < .001). ‘Seeking help from peers’ was also determined to be highly significant (p-value = 006).

On the other hand, the proportion of teachers in favour of the item ‘completing a task with others rather than on one's own’ was considerably lower than the other items (59.1%). This item was statistically insignificant in enhancing learner autonomy (p = .088). The results suggest that teachers seem to believe in the importance of having peer and group support and discussions, but the final completion of tasks should be done individually in order to enhance learner autonomy.

Table 4.17: Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon test for LA enhancement by learning cooperatively items (Teachers)

Learning Cooperatively Items	Teachers' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Taking part in classroom interactions and discussions	90.9	9.1	-	1.09	1.00	.291	1	<.001***
Learning with, and from others	84.1	9.1	6.8	1.23	1.00	.565	2	<.001***
Working in pairs, groups, or with the whole class	77.3	15.9	6.8	1.30	1.00	.594	3	<.001***
Seeking help and support from peers	72.7	13.6	13.6	1.41	1.00	.726	4	.006**
Completing a task with others rather than alone	59.1	25.0	15.9	1.57	1.00	.759	5	.088

= highly significant, *=very highly significant

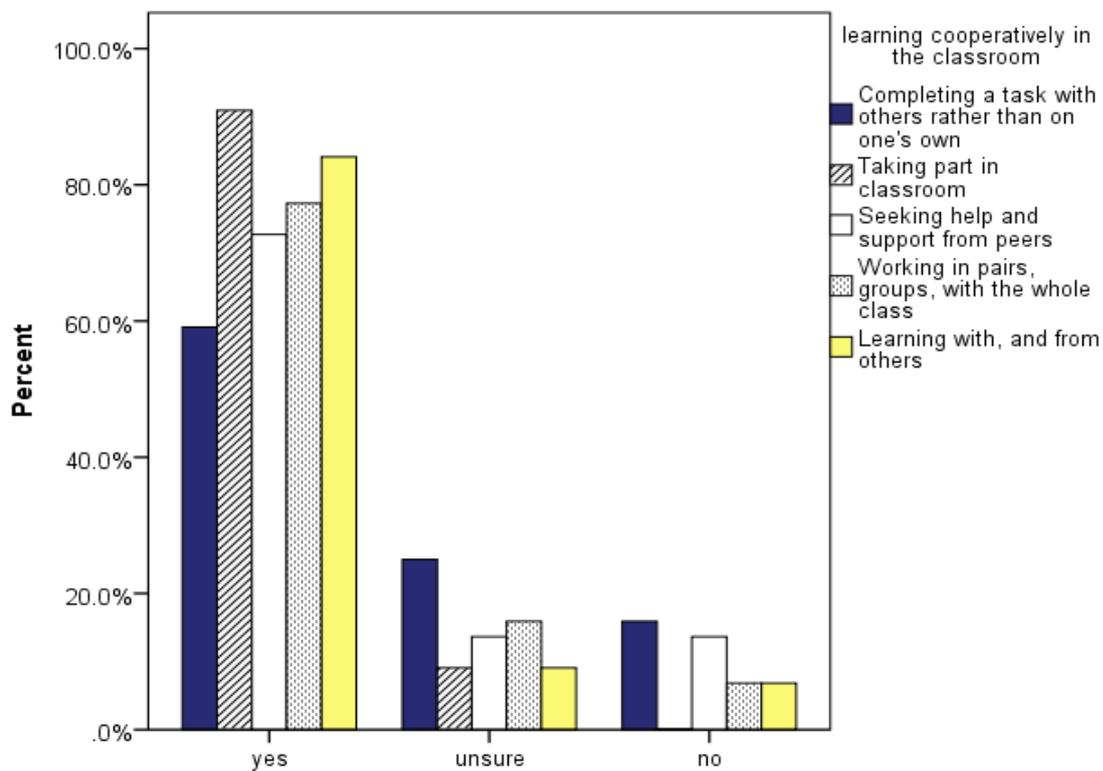


Figure 4.20: Distribution of LA enhancement by learning cooperatively in the classroom (Teachers)

4. LA enhancement by identifying and developing study skills

Teachers agree that identifying and developing the items in study skills could enhance learner autonomy (Table 4.14). In addition, as seen in Table 4.18 and Figure 4.17, it was clear that teachers found ‘working with a variety of materials and resources’ is the most important study skill (93.2%), followed by ‘developing the ability to study by oneself’. The third study skill was ‘developing individual daily/weekly plans’. The fourth study skill was ‘identifying and developing learning strategies’. The attitude of teachers appeared to be very highly significant ($p\text{-value} < .001$) across these four items. However, the statistical test revealed that ‘planning where to learn’ was not significant to learner autonomy enhancement ($p = .063$). The proportion of teachers in favour of the usefulness of this item was 56.8%.

Table 4.18: Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon test for LA enhancement by identifying and developing study skills items (Teachers)

Developing study skills Items	Teachers' evaluation %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Working with a variety of materials and resources to enhance learning (e.g. textbooks, films, newspapers, websites)	93.2	6.8	-	1.07	1.00	.255	1	<.001***
Developing the ability to study alone	88.6	11.4	-	1.11	1.00	.321	2	<.001***
Developing individual daily/weekly plans	84.1	13.6	2.3	1.18	1.00	.446	3	<.001***
Identifying and developing learning strategies (e.g. learning words by association, repeating words or sentences, organising a table of important grammar rules)	81.8	13.6	4.5	1.23	1.00	.522	4	<.001***
Planning where to learn (e.g. in the classroom, outside the classroom, at home, in the library)	56.8	29.5	13.6	1.57	1.00	.728	5	.063

***=*very highly significant*

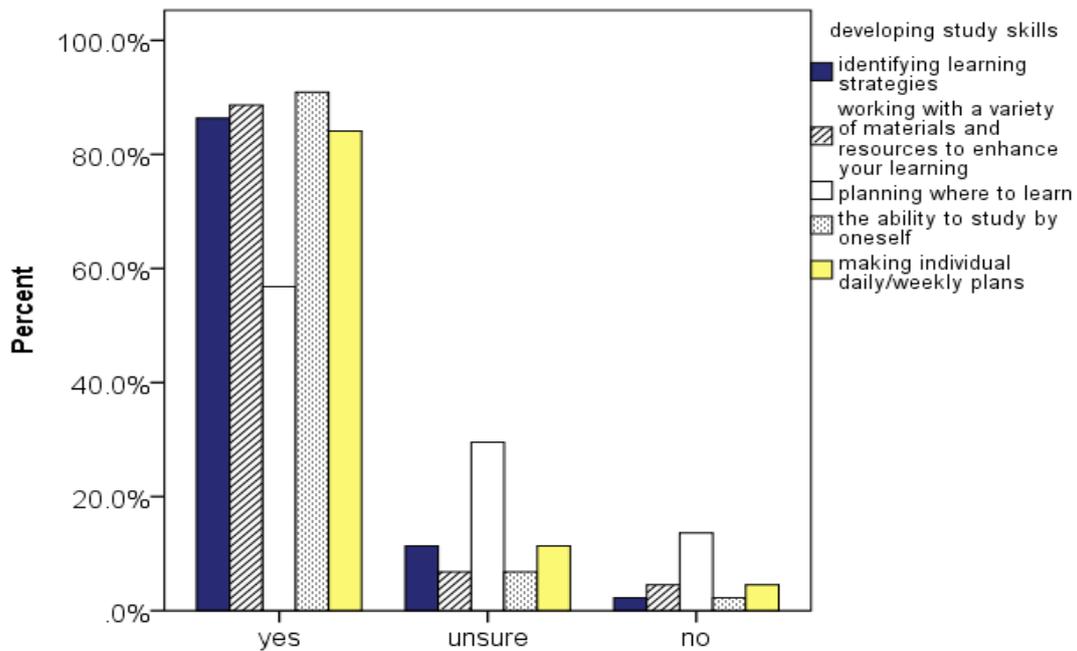


Figure 4.21: Distribution of LA enhancement by identifying and developing study skills (Teachers)

5. *LA enhancement by building a positive relationship with teacher*

It is shown that teachers have a positive attitude towards building effective teacher-student relationships in order to enhance learner autonomy, but it is considered less positive than the other characteristics.

As seen in Table 4.19 and Figure 4.18, the first item seen to enhance learner autonomy was ‘respecting the formality of teacher-student relationship’. The proportion of teachers in favour of this item was 75%. The second item was ‘demonstrating independence of the teacher’, then ‘perceiving teacher’s controlling behaviour positively’, and ‘developing a friendship with the teacher’. Finally, teachers were unsure about the usefulness of ‘viewing teachers as parental figures’ in enhancing learner autonomy. The proportion of teachers in favour of this item was 45.5%, which is low when compared to the ratings of other sub-characteristics. The statistical result determined the insignificance of this item in learner autonomy enhancement ($p\text{-value} = .589$). This result implies that teachers believe building a good teacher-student relationship is not of great importance in terms of learner autonomy development. In particular, becoming a parental figure to their students seems to be irrelevant to teachers. However, the statistical test indicates that the overall sub-

characteristics connected to having positive relationship with teachers is highly significant (Table 4.14).

Table 4.19: Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon test for LA enhancement by building a positive relationship with teacher items (Teachers)

Building a positive relationship with teacher items	Teachers' evaluation %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Respecting the formality of teacher-student relationship	70.5	22.7	6.8	1.36	1.00	.613	1	<.001**
Demonstrating independence from teacher	75.0	13.6	11.4	1.36	1.00	.685	2	<.001**
Perceiving teacher's controlling behaviour in a positive way	65.9	29.5	4.5	1.39	1.00	.579	3	<.001**
Developing friendship with the teacher	65.9	27.3	6.8	1.41	1.00	.622	4	<.001**
Viewing teachers as parental figures	45.5	34.1	20.5	1.75	2.00	.781	5	.589

**= highly significant

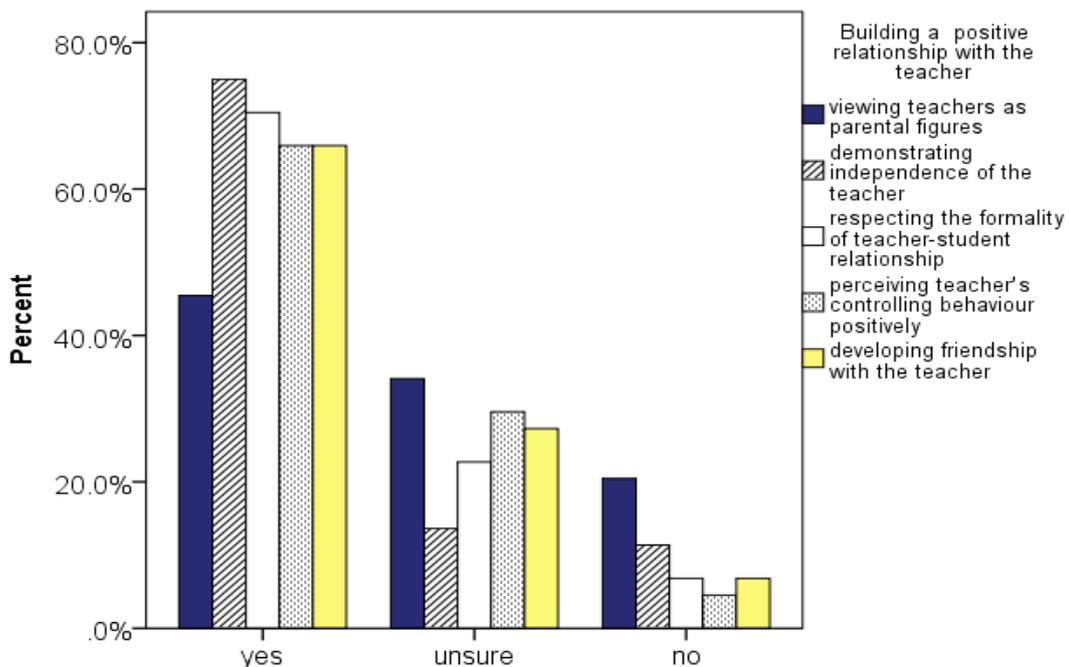


Figure 4.24: Distribution of LA enhancement by building a positive relationship with teacher items (Teachers)

4.2.4.3 Results for Question 3: Does the development of characteristics enhance language learning (LL)?

The third question ‘Does this (characteristics) enhance language learning?’ assesses teachers’ opinions of the role of the given characteristics in enhancing learner autonomy. This question was a follow-up question to determine if the development of these characteristics would enhance learner autonomy and language learning in the same way.

Looking at teachers’ responses to this question, it is clear that they believe that developing these five characteristics plays a role in enhancing learner autonomy. The statistical test determines this overall positive attitude for teachers, which is very highly significant (p-value < .001), as shown in Table 4.20.

Table 4.20: Overall score for LL enhancement using the Wilcoxon test (Teachers)

LL enhancement	Statistics			p-value
	Mean	Median	SD	
Overall score	1.20	1.18	.15	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

As shown in Table 4.21 and Figure 4.19, the most important characteristics in enhancing language learning, according to teachers, were taking charge of learning and demonstrating a positive attitude towards learning (100%), then learning cooperatively and developing study skills (93.2%). Building a positive relationship with the teacher was the least important characteristic (77.3%) in language learning enhancement. Statistically, teachers demonstrate a positive attitude towards language learning enhancement, which is very highly significant (p-value < .001) across the five characteristics. It is clear that teachers’ ranking of characteristics enhancing learner autonomy and language learning are the same. This finding could suggest a link between the development of LA and LA.

Table 4.21: Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon test for overall LL enhancement by developing 5 characteristics (Teachers)

Characteristic	Teachers’ response %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Taking charge	100	-	-	1.15	1.00	.21	1	<.001***
Demonstrating positive attitude	100	-	-	1.11	1.00	.16	1	<.001***

towards learning								
Learning cooperatively in classroom	93.2	6.8	-	1.15	1.00	.30	2	<.001***
Developing study skills	93.2	6.8	-	1.18	1.00	.24	2	<.001***
Building positive relationship with the teacher	77.3	20.5	2.3	1.40	1.40	.36	3	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

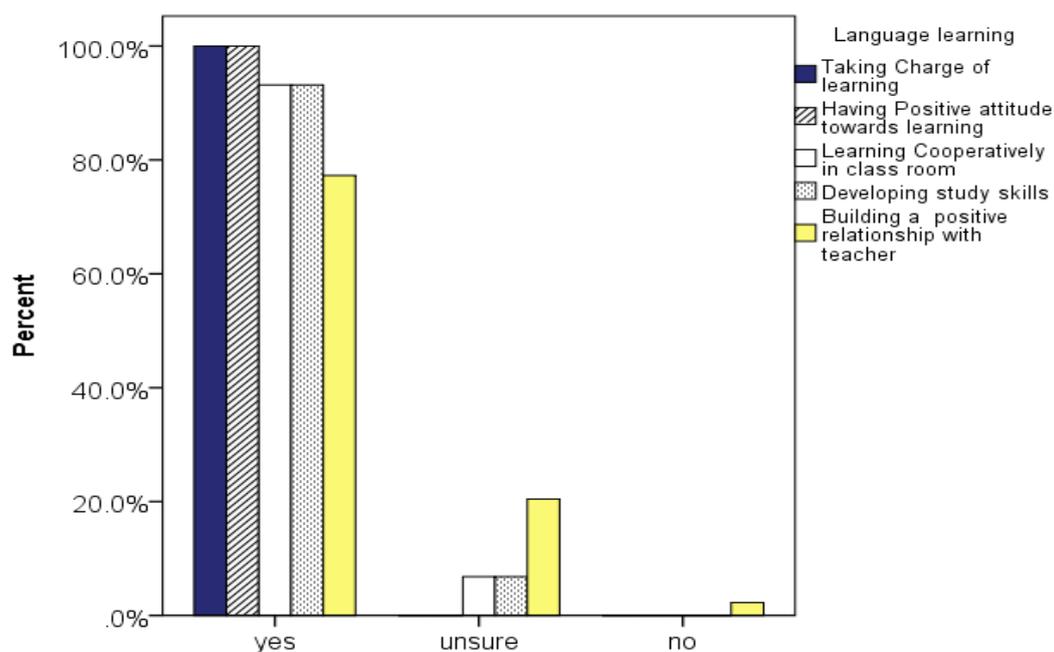


Figure 4.27: Distribution of percentage for LL enhancement by developing 5 characteristics (Teachers)

The next five sections present further detail on language learning (LL) enhancement through the development of the sub-items constituting each characteristic.

1. LL enhancement by taking charge of learning

Teachers believed language learning could be enhanced by developing the characteristics of taking charge of learning (Table 4.21).

Table 4.22 and Figure 4.20 show that teachers find ‘monitoring one's own progress’ the most important item in enhancing language learning, followed by ‘identifying one’s own learning needs’ (90.9%). These items are followed by ‘evaluating your one's own learning’ and ‘identifying one's own learning problems and means of addressing them’. The final item chosen by teachers was ‘setting one's own goals’, where they demonstrate that developing this item enhances language learning. The proportion of teachers in favour of the last item was 79.5%. The statistical test indicates that all of the ‘taking charge’ items were very highly significant in language learning enhancement (p-value < .001).

Table 4.22: Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon test for LL enhancement by taking charge items (Teachers)

Taking charge items	Teachers' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Monitoring one's own progress (e.g. identify their weaknesses and strengths and structure their learning accordingly)	90.9	9.1		1.09	1.00	.291	1	<.001***
Evaluating one's own learning (e.g. evaluate to what extent they have achieved their goals)	86.4	13.6		1.14	1.00	.347	2	<.001***
Identifying one's own learning problems and means of addressing them	86.4	13.6		1.14	1.00	.348	3	<.001***
Identifying one's own needs (e.g. why they want to learn English)	88.6	9.1	2.3	1.14	1.00	.409	4	<.001***
Setting one's own goals (what they want to learn) (e.g. communication in English, academic writing, reading, and comprehension)	79.5	15.9	4.5	1.25	1.00	.534	5	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

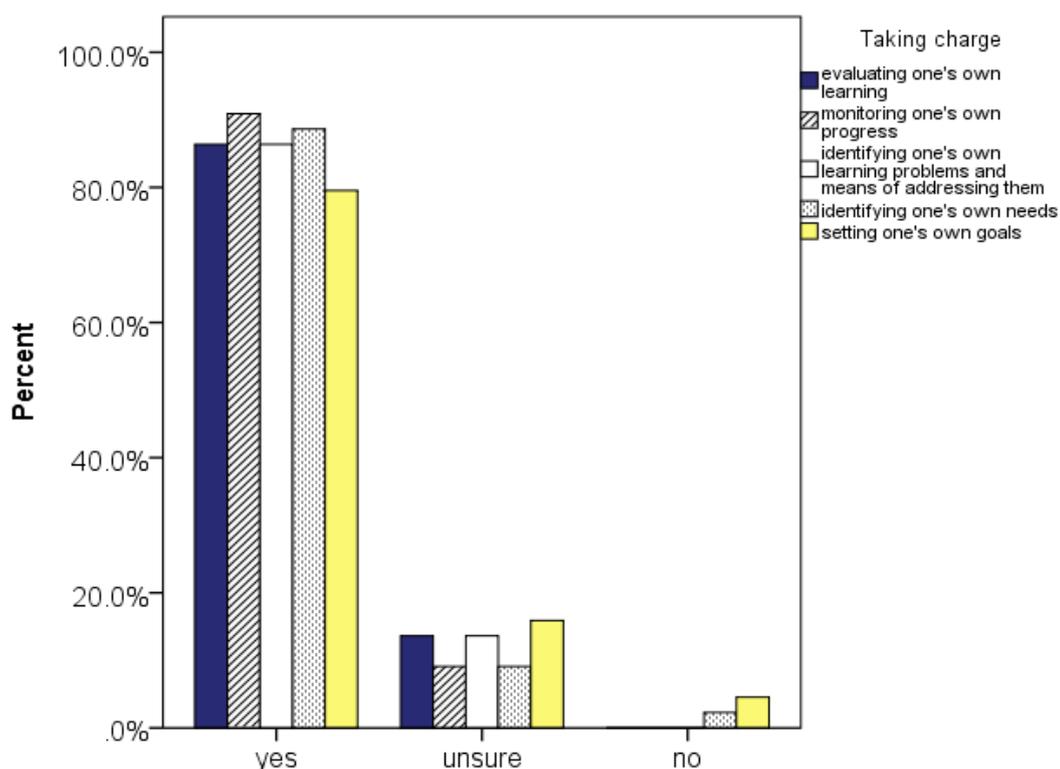


Figure 4.30: Distribution of LL enhancement by taking charge of learning items (Teachers)

2. LL enhancement by having a positive attitude towards learning

Teachers believe that language learning may be enhanced by having a positive learning attitude and motivation, as seen in Table 4.21.

Table 4.23 and Figure 4.21 show that the first item, ‘demonstrating willingness to learn’, significantly enhances language learning. The proportion of teachers in favour of this item was 100%. The second item was ‘demonstrating a positivity towards learning English’, then ‘expressing ideas and opinions freely’, where teachers demonstrate that developing these characteristics enhances language learning. Teachers believe that the fourth item, ‘motivating oneself to learn’, enhances the development of language learning. Teachers also believe the fifth item, ‘enjoying learning English’, enhances language learning. The proportion of teachers in favour of this item was 77.3%.

Table 4.23: Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon test for LL enhancement by having positive attitude towards learning items (Teachers)

Teachers' responses %	Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value

Having positive attitude towards learning items	Yes	Unsure	No					
Demonstrating willingness to learn	100	-	-	1.00	1.00	.000	1	<.001***
Demonstrate positivity towards learning English	97.7	2.3	-	1.02	1.00	.151	2	<.001***
Expressing ideas and opinions freely	90.9	9.1	-	1.09	1.00	.291	3	<.001***
Motivating oneself to learn (without external rewards)	84.1	13.6	2.3	1.18	1.00	.446	4	<.001***
Learning English because they enjoy it	77.3	18.2	4.5	1.27	1.00	.544	5	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

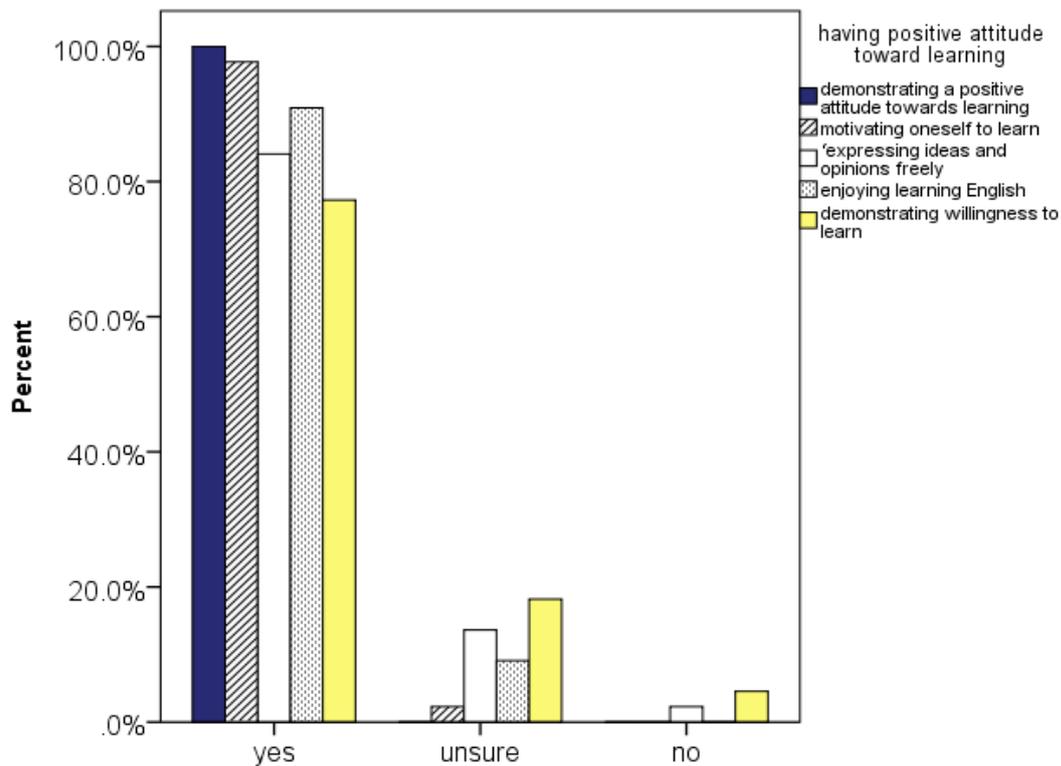


Figure 4.33: Distribution of LL enhancement by having positive attitude items (Teachers)

3. *L enhancement by working cooperatively in the classroom*

Teachers agree that language learning can be enhanced by developing learning cooperatively in the classroom (Table 4.21).

As shown in Table 4.24 and Figure 4.22, the first item in enhancing language learning is ‘taking part in classroom interactions and discussions’. The proportion of teachers in favour of this item was 97.7%. Teachers believe that developing the second item, ‘working in pairs, groups, with the whole class’, enhances language learning. Following the second item came ‘seeking help and support from peers’ and ‘learning with and from others’. Finally, ‘completing a task with others rather than on one's own’ was the final item, as teachers believe that developing this item enhances language learning. The proportion of teachers in favour of this item was 75%. Statistically, the attitude of teachers is very highly significant across the five items (p-value < .001).

Table 4.24: Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon test for LL enhancement by working cooperatively in the classroom items (Teachers)

Learning cooperatively items	Teachers' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Taking part in classroom interactions and discussions	97.7	2.3	-	1.02	1.00	.151	1	<.001***
Working in pairs, groups, and with the whole class	90.9	9.1	-	1.09	1.00	.291	2	<.001***
Seeking help and support from peers	88.6	9.1	2.3	1.14	1.00	.409	3	<.001***
Learning with, and from others	88.6	6.8	4.5	1.16	1.00	.479	4	<.001***
Completing a task with others rather than alone	75.0	15.9	9.1	1.34	1.00	.645	5	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

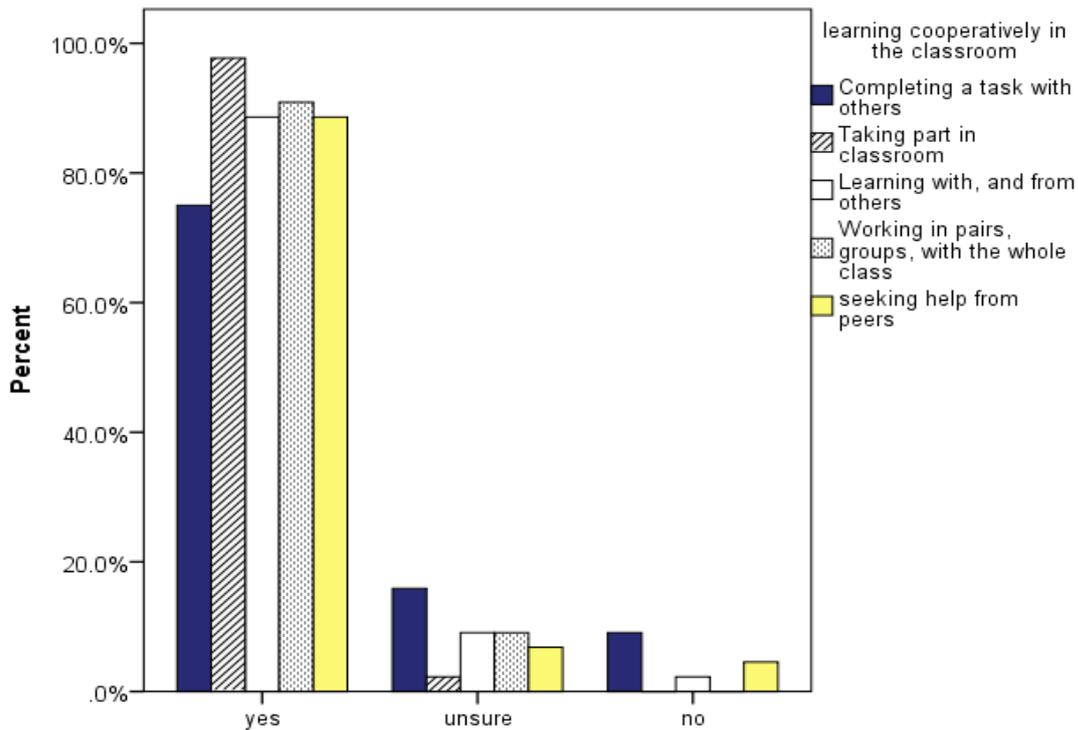


Figure 4.36: Distribution of LL enhancement by learning cooperatively items (Teachers)

4. LL enhancement by identifying and developing study skills

Teachers agree that identifying and developing study skills enhance language learning, as shown in Table 4.21. Furthermore, teachers indicate that the first of the five items of study skills in enhancing language learning is ‘working with a variety of materials and resources’ (Table 4.25 and Figure 4.23). The proportion of teachers in favour of this item was 95.5%. Teachers demonstrate that the second item in enhancing language learning is ‘identifying and developing learning strategy’. The third item is ‘developing the ability to study by oneself’, and the fourth is ‘developing individual daily/weekly plans’. Teachers demonstrate that the fifth item in enhancing language learning is ‘planning where to learn’. The proportion of teachers in favour of this item was 56.8%. Statistically, the attitude of teachers is very highly significant for each sub-characteristic of developing study skills (p-value < .001).

Table 4.25: Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon test for LL enhancement by identifying and developing study skills items (Teachers)

Identifying and developing study skills items	Teachers' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Working with a variety of materials and resources (e.g. textbooks, films, newspapers, websites)	95.5	4.5	-	1.05	1.00	.211	1	<.001***
Identifying and developing learning strategies (e.g. learning words by association, repeating words or sentences, organising grammar rules)	93.2	6.8	-	1.07	1.00	.255	2	<.001***
Developing the ability to study by oneself	90.9	9.1	-	1.09	1.00	.291	3	<.001***
Developing individual daily/weekly plans	84.1	13.6	2.3	1.18	1.00	.446	4	<.001***
Planning where to learn (in the classroom, outside the classroom, at home, in the library)	56.8	34.1	-	1.52	1.00	.664	5	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

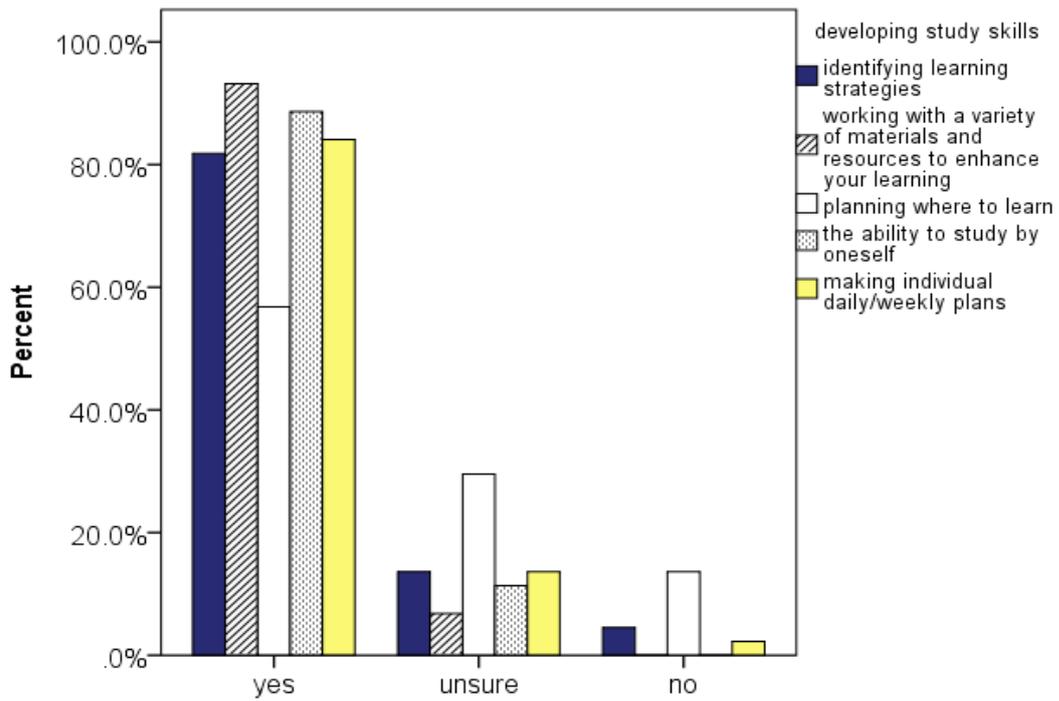


Figure 4.39 Distribution of LL enhancement by developing study skills items (Teachers)

5. LL enhancement by building a positive relationship with the teacher

Generally, teachers were slightly more positive towards the building good teacher-student relationships in enhancing language learning than enhancing learner autonomy (Table 4.21). This finding may mean that teachers believe that having a good relationship with the teacher is beneficial in the language classroom but not necessary in other subjects, where the classroom environment is more formal.

Looking at the sub-characteristics presented in Table 4.26 and Figure 4.24, ‘developing friendship with the teacher’ is ranked first in language learning enhancement, based on teachers’ responses (77.3%). Secondly, teachers demonstrate that developing ‘perceived teacher’s controlling behaviour positively’ and ‘demonstrating independence of the teacher’, enhances language learning. The next item is ‘respecting the formality of the teacher-student relationship’. Finally, teachers are unsure about the role of ‘viewing teachers as parental figures’ in enhancing language learning. The proportion of teachers in favour of this item was 52%, and the attitude of teachers towards this final item was insignificant (p -value = .219). The insignificance of viewing teachers as parental figures was found in the results for both LL and LA enhancement.

Table 4.26: Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon test for LL enhancement by building positive relationship with teacher items (Teachers)

Building a positive relationship with the teacher items	Teachers’ responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Developing friendship with the teacher	77.3	13.6	9.1	1.32	1.00	.639	1	<.001***
Demonstrating independence of the teacher	75.0	15.9	9.1	1.34	1.00	.645	2	<.001***
Perceiving teacher’s controlling behaviour positively	68.2	29.5	2.3	1.34	1.00	.526	2	<.001***
Respecting the formality of teacher-student relationship	68.2	25.0	6.8	1.39	1.00	.618	3	<.001***
Viewing teachers as parental figures	52.3	31.8	15.9	1.64	1.00	.750	4	.219

***=*very highly significant*

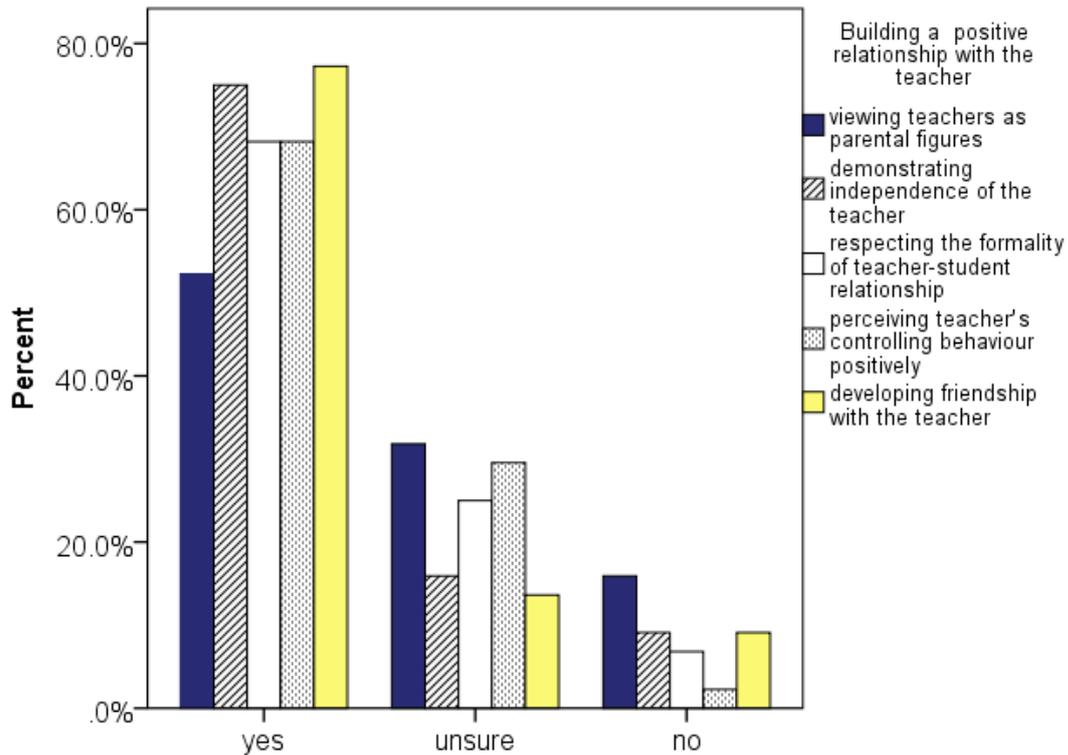


Figure 4.40: Distribution of LL enhancement by building a positive relationship with teacher items (Teachers)

4.2.5 Relationship between Learner Autonomy Enhancement and Language Learning Enhancement

Statistical simple correlation analysis was used to explore the strength (i.e. small, medium, large) and type of the relationship (i.e. positive, negative, no correlation) between learner autonomy enhancement and language learning enhancement. To determine the strength of the relationship, Cohen's (1988) guidelines for interpretation of correlation matrix values were followed, which are small ($r = .10$ to $.29$), medium ($r = .30$ to $.49$), and large ($r = .50$ to 1.0).

Regression was utilised to evaluate if LA enhancement (independent variable) made a statistically significant contribution to LL enhancement (dependent variable) and find out the total variance of LL enhancement as explained by LA enhancement. This variation was measured using the variation coefficient. Table 4.27 presents the results of the simple correlation, a regression effect estimate, and the total of variation. There was an overall

positive, large correlation between the two variables (above .5) which was very highly significant (p -value $< .001$), suggesting a strong relationship between LA enhancement and LL enhancement. Furthermore, respondents' scores for overall LA enhancement explain 56.2% of the total variation in LL enhancement scores. Regression also reveals that LA enhancement makes a statistically significant contribution to LL enhancement (1.296, p -value $< .001$).

There is a strong positive correlation between the development of LA by taking charge and the development of LL by taking charge ($r = .780$), which is very highly significant (p -value $< .001$). In addition, respondents' LA enhancement scores explain 60.8% of the total variation in LL enhancement scores. Regression also reveals that LA enhancement makes a statistically significant contribution to LL enhancement (0.886, p -value $< .001$).

In positive attitudes towards learning, the correlation between LA and LL was very strongly positive ($r = .910$) and very highly significant (p -value $< .001$). Furthermore, LA enhancement scores explain 82.8% of the total variation in LL enhancement scores. Regression also reveals that LA enhancement makes a statistically significant contribution to LL enhancement (1.02, p -value $< .001$).

In learning cooperatively in the classroom, LA enhancement and LL enhancement were positively correlated ($r = .418$), and this correlation was highly significant (p -value $< .005$). Also, LA enhancement scores explain 17.1% of the total variation in the scores on LL enhancement. Regression also reveals that LA enhancement makes a statistically significant contribution to LL enhancement (2.98, p -value $< .005$).

In identifying and developing study skills, the correlation between LA and LL was very strongly positive ($r = .869$) and very highly significant (p -value $< .001$). Also,

LA enhancement scores explain 75.4% of the total variation in the LL enhancement scores. Regression also reveals that LA enhancement makes a statistically significant contribution to LL enhancement (.661, p -value $< .001$).

In building a positive relationship with the teacher, the correlation between LA and LL was very strongly positive ($r = .881$) and very highly significant (p -value $< .001$). Also, LA enhancement scores explain 77.6% of the total variation in LL enhancement scores. Regression also reveals that LA enhancement makes a statistically significant contribution to LL enhancement (.797, p -value $< .001$).

Table 4.27: Results of simple correlation and linear regression between learner autonomy and language learning (Teachers)

Characteristic	Correlation	Regression estimate	Total of variation (%)
Taking charge of learning	0.780*** (p-value<.001)	0.886*** (p-value<.001)	60.8%
Having positive attitudes towards learning	.910*** (p-value<.001)	1.02*** (p-value<.001)	82.8%
Learning cooperatively in the classroom	.418** (p-value=.005)	.298** (p-value=.005)	17.1%
Developing study skills	.869*** (p-value<.001)	.661*** (p-value<.001)	75.4%
Building a positive relationship with teacher	0.881*** (p-value<.001)	.767*** (p-value<.001)	77.6%
Overall	.750*** (p-value<.001)	1.296*** (p-value<.001)	56.2%

4.2.6 Summary of Teachers' Results

Teachers' responses to the general views on learner autonomy indicate positivity towards the usefulness and benefits of learner autonomy. However, teachers are unsure about the feasibility of implementing autonomous learning in their own university classrooms, possibly due to institutional constraints. Moreover, teachers' interpretations of the concept of learner autonomy seemed to reflect a psychological perspective of autonomy, placing the responsibility on the learner, and his/her ability to take charge of all processes of learning. Only one teacher believes that learner autonomy refers to the teacher's responsibility to empower his or her students to learn independently.

In addition, teachers are also positive about autonomy-supportive classroom activities and practices. Most activities proposed to teachers are believed to be effective in encouraging the development of learner autonomy. Statistically, teachers' responses indicate that eighteen of the classroom activities are significantly effective. Choosing activities relevant to students' needs, allowing them students time to prepare before speaking and answering questions, and observing natural communications in English, such as watching films, are all perceived as highly effective classroom activities. Also, in their evaluations of the usefulness of the activities, teachers suggest using non-traditional activities to promote learner autonomy in the classroom. Using social media, e-mails, online resources, authentic materials, and homework activities are all evaluated by teachers as being effective. However, some teachers believe in the effectiveness of grammar exercises and memorising vocabulary. Furthermore, teachers believe that using target

language only may hinder learner autonomy. Translations from English to Arabic are also perceived to be ineffective; teachers may view it as a dated way of learning and developing learner autonomy.

Furthermore, teachers are in favour of the importance of developing autonomous characteristics, and this development is key in enhancing language learning. Developing the ability to take charge of learning and maintain a positive attitude towards learning are the most important autonomous characteristics to be developed, and therefore the most important in enhancing language learning. Teachers recognise the importance of developing good teacher-student relationships, but they did not believe it as important as improving other autonomous behaviours, such as learning cooperatively and developing study skills. However, some teachers believe that friendship with students could enhance language learning.

4.3 Students' Results

4.3.1 Students' Demographic Information

The demographic information elicited from students was age, level of English, and additional English courses or other language learning conducted outside the university environment.

4.3.1.1 Age and nationality

All student participants were Saudi, and their first language was Arabic. The age limit ranged between seventeen years to twenty-two years and above. The majority of respondents were nineteen years old (Figure 4.25), which was the average age of first year students in a Saudi Arabian university.

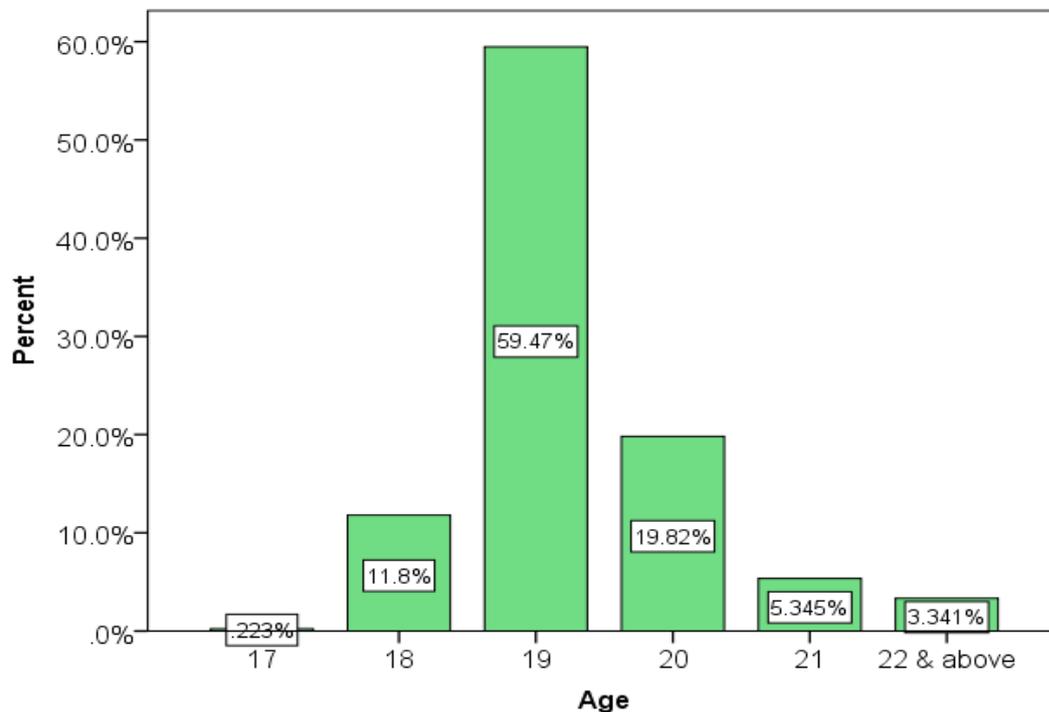


Figure 4.43: Distribution of age (Students)

4.3.1.2 English level and language learning experiences

The results show that over half of the students were taking level 4 English course (59.58%), followed by those at level 2 (26.46%). A minority of students were at levels 1 and 3 (6.25% and 7.70% respectively), as shown in Figure 4.26. The majority of students (78.22 %) did not attend any external language course or have other language learning experiences outside the university (Figure 4.27). This finding shows that students rely on formal

educational settings to learn English and may have high expectations of the English course at their university. Also, taking external or private English courses could be inconvenient for many students, due to cultural or financial constraints.

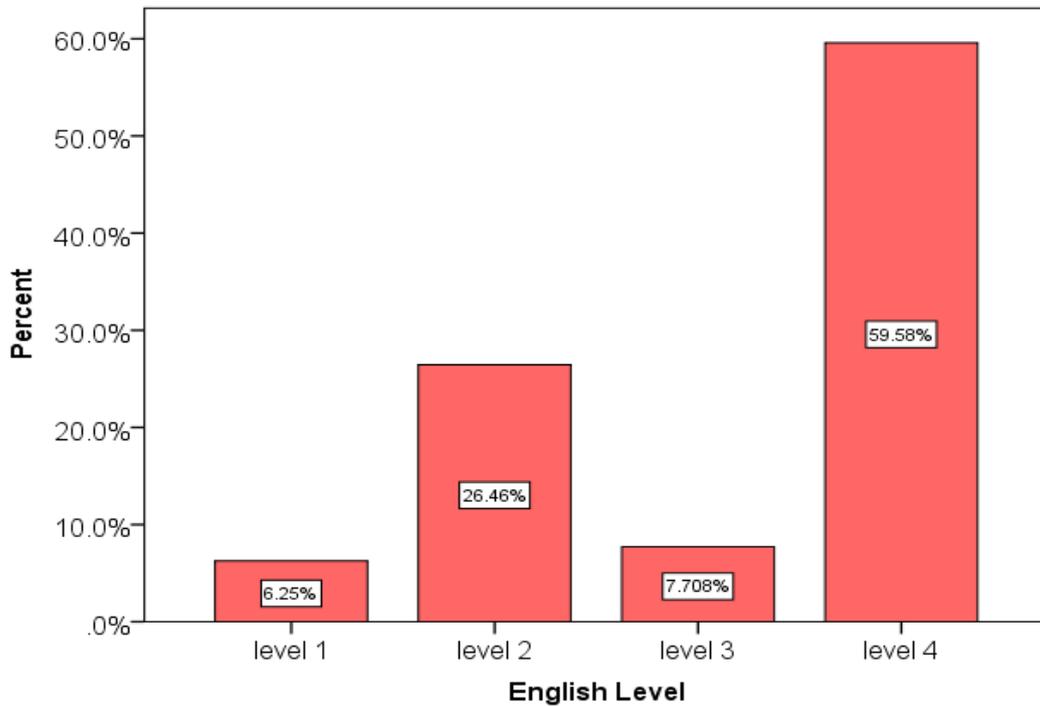


Figure 4.46: Distribution of English level (Students)

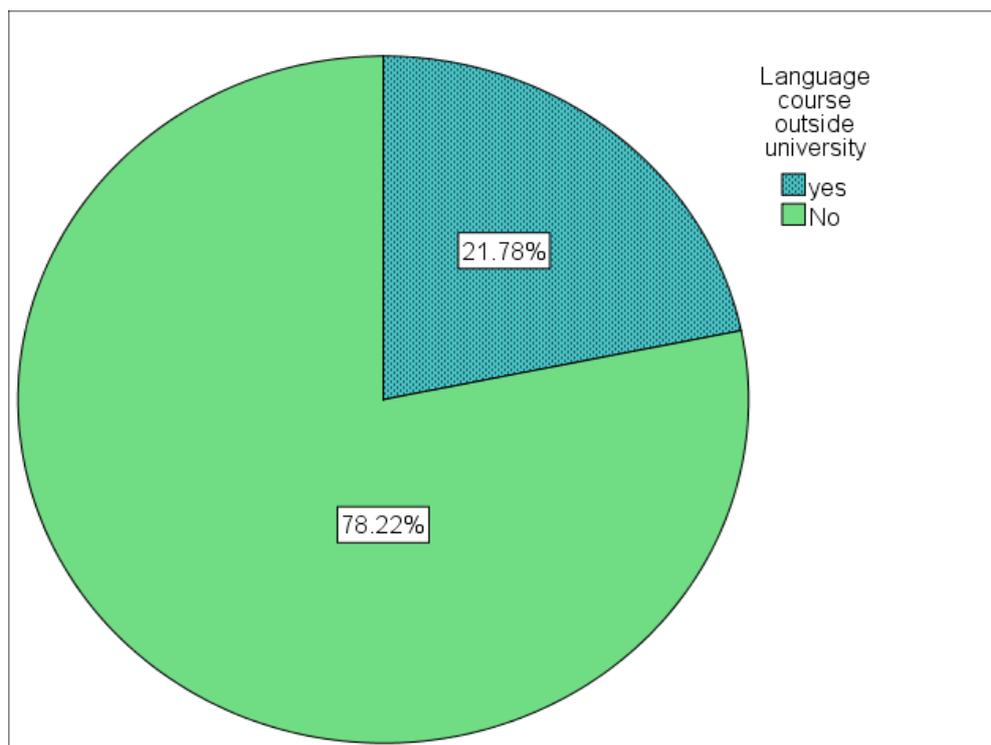


Figure 4.49: Distribution of Language course outside university (Students)

4.3.2 Results for General Views on Learner Autonomy

General views on learner autonomy (LA) as a concept were explored in terms of usefulness, help in language learning, achievement without the help of the teachers, desirability and feasibility.

4.3.2.1 LA overall usefulness and its role in helping language learning

Student responses to the general usefulness of learner autonomy were defined as useful=1, unsure=2, and not useful=3. 67.08 % of students view that learner autonomy is useful (Figure 4.28), and about two thirds of the students (65.42%) believe that learner autonomy helps language learning (Figure 4.29). Using mean and median analyses, the attitudes of students are positive towards LA usefulness, as shown in Table 4.28. This result is statistically confirmed by the Wilcoxon test (p -value $< .001$). This finding indicates that students tend believe in the general benefits of learner autonomy, and that learner autonomy plays a role in supporting language learning.

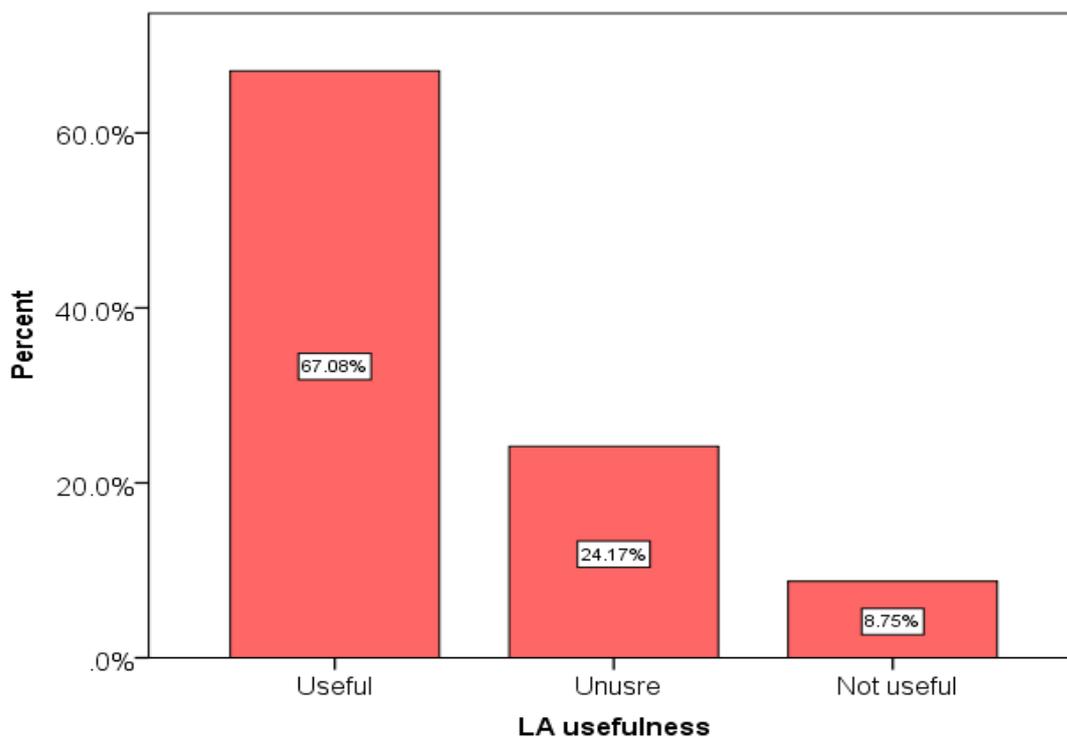


Figure 4.50: LA usefulness (Students)

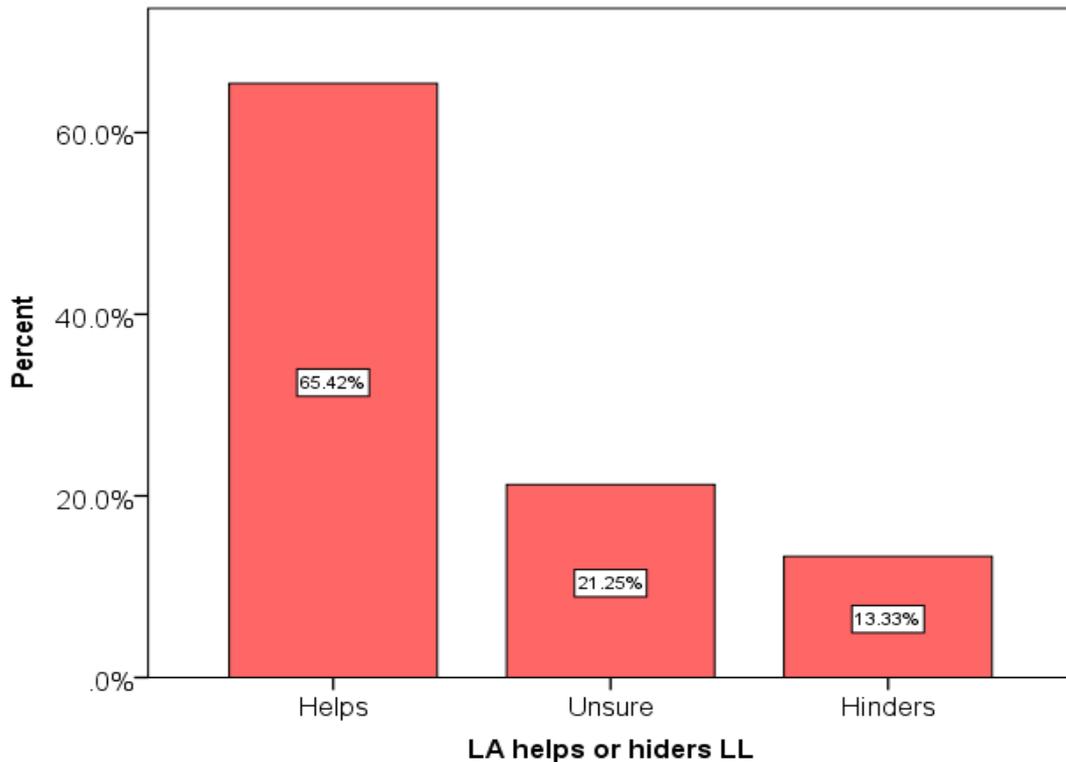


Figure 4.51: LA helps or hinders LL (Students)

4.3.2.2 LA without teacher's help

Fewer than half of the students (46.96%) disagree that LA can be achieved without help from the teacher, whereas 34.13% are unsure (Figure 4.30). Using mean and median analyses, students are unsure if they could achieve learner autonomy without their teacher's help, as shown in Table 4.28. This result is confirmed by the Wilcoxon test ($p\text{-value} = 1.00$). Only a small number of students believe they are capable of relying on themselves and could develop autonomy if they lacked support from the teacher (18.91%). Most students feel that achieving learner autonomy would be challenging with the absence of a teacher's support.

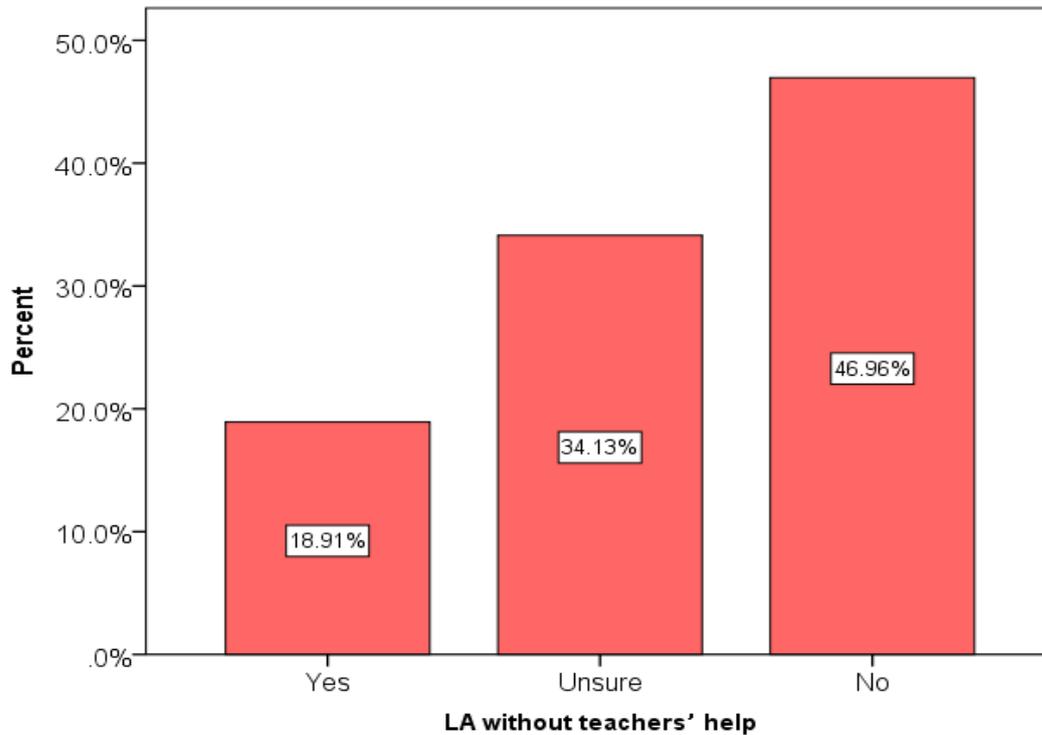


Figure 4.54: LA without teachers' help (Students)

4.3.2.3 LA desirability and feasibility

The LA desirability ranged from highly undesirable=1 to highly desirable=5. Approximately three quarters of students (68.12%) confirm that LA is desirable/highly desirable (Figure 4.31). Using mean and median analyses, students consider LA desirable (Table 4.28). This result is confirmed by the significant result of the Wilcoxon test (p-value < .001).

The feasibility of LA ranged from completely unfeasible=1 to completely feasible=5. Over half of students (59.8%) confirm that LA is feasible/completely feasible (Figure 4.32). Using mean and median analyses, students consider LA feasible. This result is confirmed by the significant results of the Wilcoxon test (p-value < .001). These results suggest that university students have a positive attitude towards learner autonomy and believe it is both ideal and achievable.

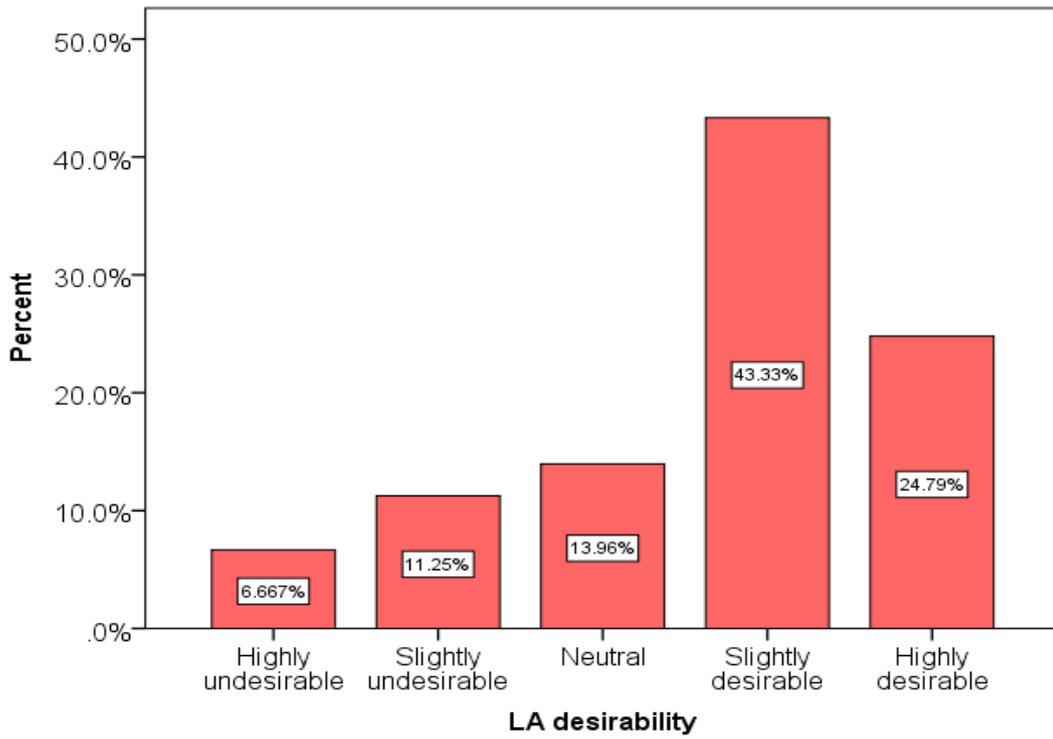


Figure 4.31: LA desirability (Students)

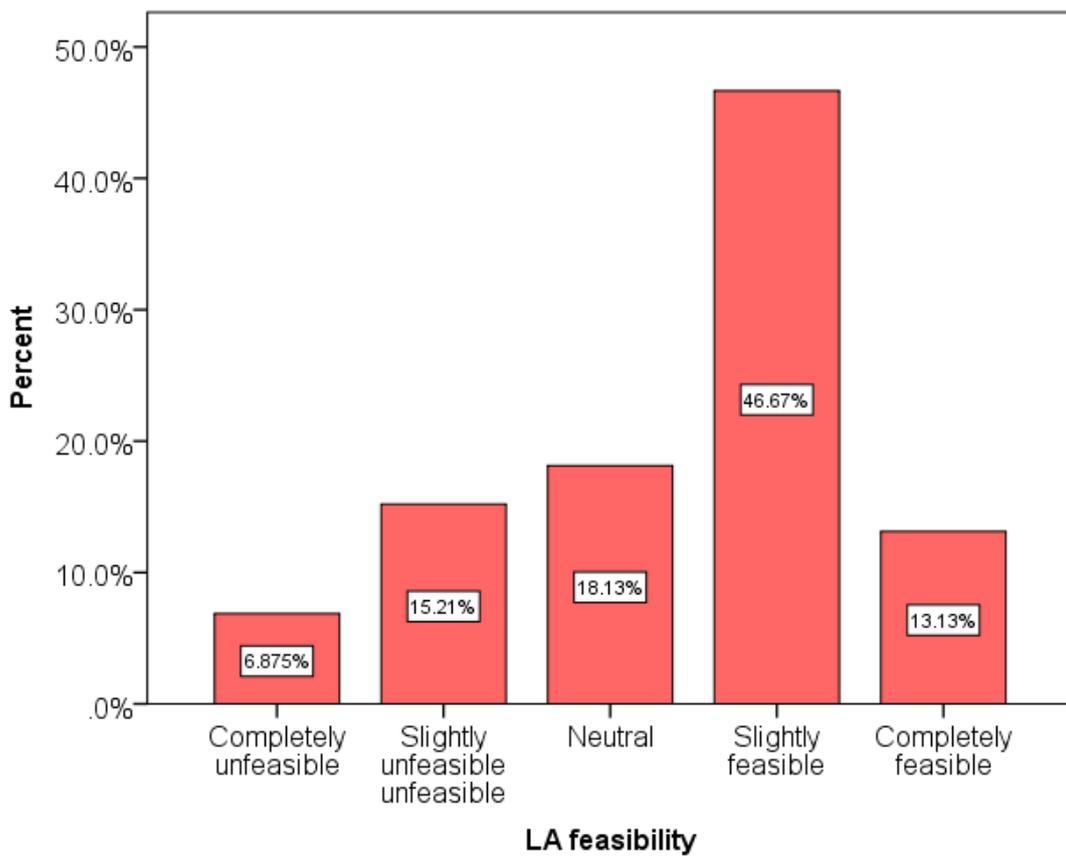


Figure 4.32: LA feasibility (Students)

Table 4.28: General views on learner autonomy using the Wilcoxon test (Students)

General views	Mean	Median	SD	p-value
LA usefulness	1.54	1.00	.656	<.001***
LA without teachers' help	2.28	2.00	.748	1.00
LA desirability	3.83	4.00	1.523	<.001***
LA feasibility	3.44	4.00	1.164	<.001***

4.3.2.4 LA meaning

It was noted that students had strong views on defining learner autonomy, though few related to the pedagogical aspect. There were a number of references to the rights of learners, with one student expressing that she believed it was '*knowing your rights*', which indicates a political or perhaps a feminist agenda. Others chose to associate it with the concept of freedom, proposing '*freedom of choice in choosing the teacher*' and '*freedom in choosing the learning environment*', thus defining learner autonomy within the educational context. However, another student referred to it as being '*freedom of choice to be independent or not independent*', which does not specify the context and could be linked to a more political aspect; one student said she believed it was having personal freedom, and again this could reflect a much wider perspective.

Freedom of thought was an extension of this concept of learner autonomy being freedom and this may indicate the learning context in Saudi Arabia. One student thought that learner autonomy was '*independence in thinking and learning*', and another suggested it was '*expressing opinions and thoughts freely*'. In a further insight into the learning context, one student stated that it was '*allowing university students to express their views and opinions*'. This indicates that university level students are not encouraged to give their points of view in class and must wait until they are given permission to say what is on their mind. Even then they may not be able to speak openly, as this comment implies that freedom of expression is not allowed.

The idea of learner autonomy being associated with personal characteristics was also reflected in some of the definitions. There were suggestions that learner autonomy was

showing self-reliance, taking responsibility and having the ability to make decisions; one student stated it was having '*self-determination to learn*' whilst another said it was '*having motivation to learn*'. It is clear that there is an understanding in these students that there must be intrinsic qualities embedded in the learner, although this does not define the concept of learner autonomy. Instead it tends to describe the type of characteristics that may be present in an autonomous learner.

Three learners believed learner autonomy meant being able to learn or work alone and another stated it was '*not waiting for someone to spoon-feed you information*', which is not far away from the overall concept, apart from not mentioning that some kind of guidance might be involved. Perhaps the most accurate student definition was '*Searching for information independently*'. Nevertheless, these comments may also indicate that students believe learner autonomy is simply a form of self-study, where no teacher is involved. With the advances in new technologies, students may view independent learning as relying on the internet instead of on a teacher.

There was one definition put forward by a student, which implied having a different relationship with the teacher. The student stated learner autonomy was '*establishing a formal relationship with the teacher*'. At first sight this seems to imply that the student believes it means working more closely with the teacher. However, on the other hand, this could also mean having a relationship where both teacher and learner knew what was expected of them. This could then indicate that the teacher would guide the student and the student would take that advice and work independently within the confines of the guidance.

However, the teacher is not the only one involved in learner autonomy, and this was realised in the definitions of some of the students. One said it was '*to participate*', thus moving away from the concept of working in isolation, and another stated it meant being able '*to consult one another to discover things*'. Being able to participate and work with others to learn more and make new discoveries shows a collaborative approach to learning that may be well suited to the Saudi learning context.

Table 4.29: LA meaning (Students)

Q: From your personal point of view, what does learner autonomy mean?
<i>Taking responsibility</i>
<i>Being able to learn alone</i>
<i>Freedom of choice (i.e. choosing teachers, classes, classmates)</i>
<i>Knowing your rights</i>
<i>Independence in thinking and learning</i>
<i>Self-reliance</i>
<i>To search for information independently</i>
<i>Expressing opinions and thoughts freely</i>
<i>The ability to take responsibility</i>
<i>The ability to work alone</i>
<i>Freedom in choosing the teacher</i>
<i>To be able to make decisions</i>
<i>Not waiting for someone to spoon feed you information</i>
<i>Allowing university students to express their views and opinions</i>
<i>To consult one another to discover things</i>
<i>Freedom of choice to be independent or not independent</i>
<i>To participate</i>
<i>Students' rights in learning</i>
<i>Personal freedom</i>
<i>Having motivation to learn</i>
<i>Self-study</i>
<i>The ability to make decisions</i>
<i>The ability to use the internet to search for information</i>
<i>Freedom in choosing learning environment</i>
<i>The ability to learn without teachers' help</i>
<i>To have self-determination to learn</i>
<i>Self-development</i>
<i>Establishing formal relationship with the teacher</i>
<i>Choosing how, where, and when to learn</i>
<i>The ability to work hard</i>

4.3.3 Results for Section One: Classroom Activities for Fostering Learner Autonomy

In the first section of the students' questionnaire, students were asked for their opinion on the level of effectiveness of the twenty autonomy-supportive classroom activities also

presented in the teachers' questionnaires. The measures, explained in Table 4.5 (section 5.2.3) were used again to classify activity items based on their degree of effectiveness (i.e. very effective, effective, slightly effective, slightly ineffective, ineffective, very ineffective).

4.3.3.1 Overall effectiveness of classroom activities

In analysing the total scores of classroom activities, the overall degree of effectiveness was 'slightly effective', according to students. To illustrate, the proportion of items found 'very effective', 'effective', or 'slightly effective' was 66.9%. On the other hand, 33.1% of items which were found 'slightly ineffective', 'ineffective', or 'very ineffective', as shown in Figure 4.33. The statistical test (Table 4.30) indicates that the overall effectiveness score of the classroom activities is highly significant (p -value $< .001$). This result implies that over half of the students believe in the usefulness of classroom activities in fostering their autonomy, which is considerably lower than the views of the teachers (93.19%).

Table 4.30: Overall effectiveness of classroom activities (Students)

Overall effectiveness	%					Median	Mean	SD	Opinion	p-value (Wilcoxon test)	
	0 (very ineffective)	1 (ineffective)	2 (slightly ineffective)	3 (slightly effective)	4 (effective)						5 (very effective)
	2.5	7.5	23.1	30	30.2	6.7	2.95	2.89	.93	Slightly effective	<.001***

***=very highly significant

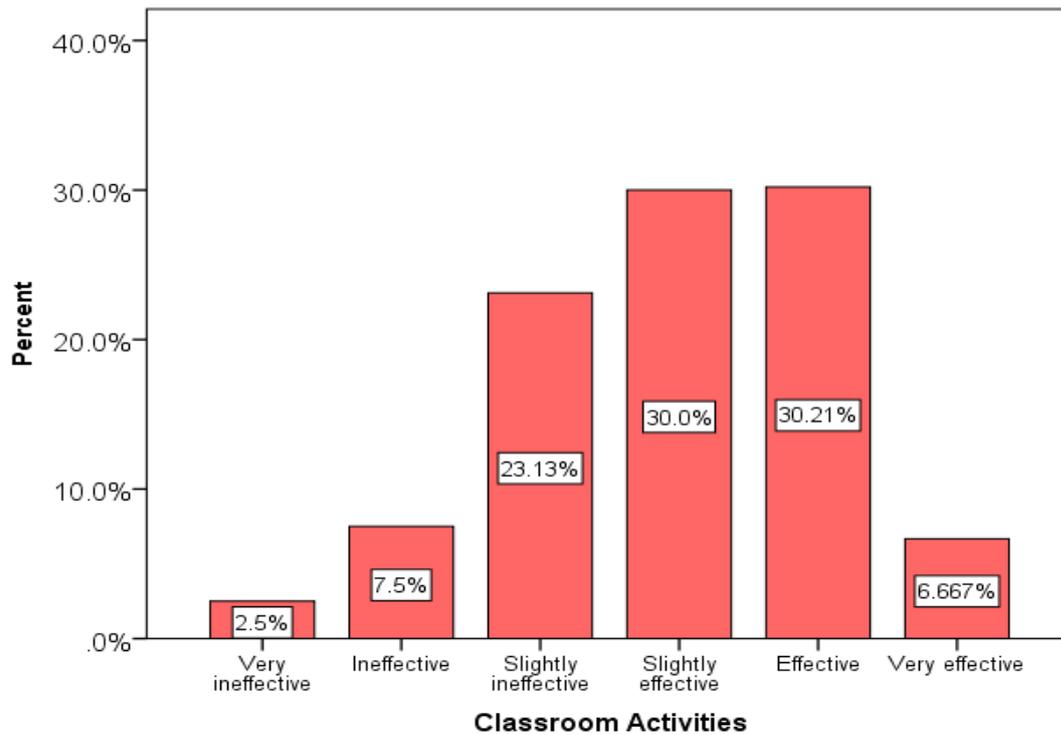


Figure 4.57: Distribution of the overall effectiveness of classroom activities (Students)

The following four sections present further detailed results on the level of effectiveness of each individual activity item.

4.3.3.2 ‘Very effective’ classroom activities

Students’ responses demonstrate that the one ‘very effective’ item is ‘having time to prepare before speaking or answering a question’. The statistical test indicates that this item is statistically very highly significant ($p\text{-value} < .001$), as shown in Table 4.31. Students most likely view having time to prepare as the most effective item because they are not proficient English speakers, and so they need to be given time before speaking. This time provided may give them more confidence and reduce their fear of making mistakes.

Table 4.31: ‘Very effective’ classroom activity (Students)

Activity item	%						Median	Mean	SD	Rank	p-value (Wilcoxon test)
	0 (very ineffective)	1 (ineffective)	2 (slightly ineffective)	3 (slightly effective)	4 (effective)	5 (very effective)					
Having time to prepare before speaking or answering a question	5.8	4.2	7.7	11.9	19.6	50.8	5.00	3.88	1.49	1	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

4.3.3.3 ‘Effective’ classroom activities

Based on students’ responses, seven items are believed to be effective classroom activities in fostering learner autonomy, as shown in Table 4.32. The statistical test indicates that these activities, in terms of effectiveness, are very highly significant (p-value < .001).

The results on the effective activities selected by students suggest that allowing use of dictionaries and references in the classroom is the most ‘effective’ item for students. This finding may indicate students do not want to be spoon-fed information but be given the opportunity to search for the information without their teacher’s help. The finding may also indicate that learners do not have confidence in their level of proficiency and need this type of support. Moreover, students point out that collaborative work, involvement in discussions, choosing activities, and stating their preferences in class work are all helpful in developing learner autonomy. This finding suggests that students believe in the importance of becoming active participants, engaging in their learning, and interacting with others. Students also show a positive attitude towards using non-traditional classroom activities, such as online resources and watching English films and TV programmes in the classroom.

Table 4.32: ‘Effective’ classroom activities (Students)

Activity item	%						Median	Mean	SD	Rank	p-value (Wilcoxon test)
	0 (very ineffective)	1 (ineffective)	2 (slightly ineffective)	3 (slightly effective)	4 (effective)	5 (very effective)					
Using reference books in class, including dictionaries	7.7	6.5	9.2	13.1	23.8	39.8	4	3.58	1.59	2	<.001***
Doing collaborative work in small groups	8.3	8.1	12.1	19.0	25.6	26.9	4	3.26	1.57	3	<.001***
Being active and getting involved in classroom activities and discussions	4.4	8.5	17.1	25.4	18.3	26.3	3	3.24	1.45	4	<.001***
Preferences while working on task or activity (e.g. Do they prefer to work in groups or alone? Do they prefer to select group members or should the teacher choose?)	12.3	8.5	11.7	16.7	18.5	32.3	4	3.18	1.74	5	<.001***
Selecting activities relevant to needs, goals, and values	10.8	9.8	11.5	16.0	22.9	29.0	4	3.17	1.69	6	<.001***
Using online resources in the classroom (e.g. language websites and e-books)	10.6	7.7	15.4	16.3	21.0	29.0	3.5	3.16	1.66	7	<.001***
Observing natural communications in English (e.g. watching an English film or TV programme).	14.2	9.4	10.6	14.6	19.2	32.1	4	3.11	1.80	8	<.001***

***=very highly significant

4.3.3.4 ‘Slightly effective’ classroom activities

Students found nine items to be ‘slightly ineffective’ activities in supporting learner autonomy. However, the statistical test reveals that some items are insignificant in terms of effectiveness, as shown in Table 4.33. Translating from English is found significantly

ineffective for students, possibly because students favour ‘fun’ activities over traditional English learning methods. Also, students may have some cultural concerns when communicating in English via social networking and completing homework tasks, so they are not rated highly by students. Finally, working independently in a language lab is also insignificant, based on students’ responses, indicating once again that learners favour learning with others rather than being isolated.

Table 4.33: ‘Slightly effective’ classroom activities (Students)

Activity item	%						Median	Mean	SD	Rank	p-value (Wilcoxon test)
	0 (very ineffective)	1 (ineffective)	2 (slightly ineffective)	3 (slightly effective)	4 (effective)	5 (very effective)					
Keeping written records of learning (portfolio) (e.g. lists of useful vocabulary items or written texts they composed)	14.8	11.3	11.7	19.2	14.2	29.0	3	2.94	1.79	9	<.001***
Learning composing emails in English	15.6	9.0	13.5	19.6	18.5	23.8	3	2.88	1.74	10	<.001***
Seating arrangements that encourage them to initiate conversation	13.5	14.0	12.5	18.5	17.3	24.2	3	2.85	1.74	11	<.001***
Using target language only in class	16.0	11.0	11.7	19.8	17.3	24.2	3	2.84	1.77	12	<.001***
Understanding why grammar exercises or language activities are worth attention	20.8	12.5	11.9	18.5	17.5	2.3	?	2.85	1.77	13	<.001***
Translating from English (e.g. translating an English article)	21.9	10.2	15.0	15.6	14.2	23.1	3	2.59	1.85	14	.108
Learning to communicate in English via different social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter or blogs)	27.5	7.9	11.5	16.3	12.3	24.6	3	2.52	1.95	15	.092
Working independently in a language lab	17.3	11.9	18.5	21.9	15.4	15.0	3	2.51	1.65	16	.163
Tasks supporting language learning and conducted outside the classroom (e.g. interviewing someone in English)	22.3	12.3	15.0	18.3	15.4	16.7	3	2.42	1.77	17	.445

***=*very highly significant*

4.3.3.5 ‘Slightly ineffective’ classroom activity

Students found three items to be ‘slightly ineffective’ activities in supporting learner autonomy in the classroom. The statistical test confirms that these items are also insignificantly effective. As seen in Table 4.34, students do not positively evaluate analysing grammatical structures and summarising English texts, possibly because they deem them as traditional classroom activities. Learners also find authentic materials not useful in enhancing autonomy. The results for ineffective activities suggest that university students want fun, modern activities to learn English and develop their autonomy. However, students do not want to stray from the textbook, in order to pass the English course.

Table 4.34: ‘Slightly ineffective’ classroom activities (Students)

Activity items	%						Median	Mean	SD	Rank	p-value (Wilcoxon test)
	0 (very ineffective)	1 (ineffective)	2 (slightly ineffective)	3 (slightly effective)	4 (effective)	5 (very effective)					
Using authentic materials (e.g. newspapers, magazines, or articles from the internet)	20.8	11.5	17.9	20.0	15.4	14.4	2.00	2.41	1.70	18	.554
Analysing structures and sentences to formulate rules (e.g. certain grammar point or fixed spelling rule)	19.2	13.1	21.5	17.9	13.3	15.0	2.00	2.38	1.68	19	.945
Summarising in English (e.g. summarise an article or short story)	24.4	14.0	22.1	16.5	12.1	11.0	2.00	2.11	1.66	20	1.00

4.3.4 Results for Section Two: Characteristics of Autonomous Learners

Similar to the teachers' questionnaire, students were asked if they would develop the sets of characteristics, to establish their opinion on the importance of each characteristic. Students were also asked whether these characteristics helped in enhancing learner autonomy and language learning. The same 25 characteristics presented in the teachers' questionnaire were introduced to students. The attitudes of students towards the characteristics and their items were defined as 'yes', 'unsure', and 'no'. The measures used in Table 4.10 (section 4.2.4) were used to determine the attitudes and opinions of students.

4.3.4.1 Results for Question1: Do students want to develop autonomous characteristics?

Students were first asked the question, 'Do you want to develop this (characteristic)?' to determine their opinion on the importance of developing characteristics and study skills to enhance learner autonomy. Students showed a positive attitude towards developing autonomous characteristics. Statistically, as shown in Table 4.35, the attitude towards the importance of autonomous characteristics was very highly significantly across students (p-value < .001)

Table 4.35: Overall score for evaluating the importance of developing characteristics using the Wilcoxon test (Students)

Importance of characteristics overall score	Statistics			p-value (Wilcoxon test)
	Mean	Median	SD	
	1.40	1.36	.26	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

Moreover, students considered each of the five characteristics important. As seen in Table 4.36 and Figure 4.34, taking charge of learning was deemed by students the most important characteristic to improve (91%), indicating that students are aware that being in charge of their learning is the most valuable characteristic of a good learner. Identifying and developing study skills (82.9%) was ranked second in terms of importance, followed by having a positive attitude towards learning (80.4%), and learning cooperatively (80.2%). Finally, building a positive relationship with the teacher was ranked last (61.3%). The

statistical test indicates that all five characteristics were very highly significant (p-value < .001).

Table 4.36: Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon test for overall importance by Characteristics (Students)

Characteristic	Students' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Taking charge of learning	91	8.3	.6	1.24	1.20	.30	1	<.001***
Developing study skills	82.9	16.3	.8	1.35	1.20	.35	2	<.001***
Positive attitude towards learning	80.4	17.5	2.1	1.39	1.40	.38	3	<.001***
Learning cooperatively	80.2	15.6	4.2	1.39	1.40	.42	4	<.001***
Building a positive relationship with the teacher	61.3	33.8	5.0	1.61	1.60	.40	5	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

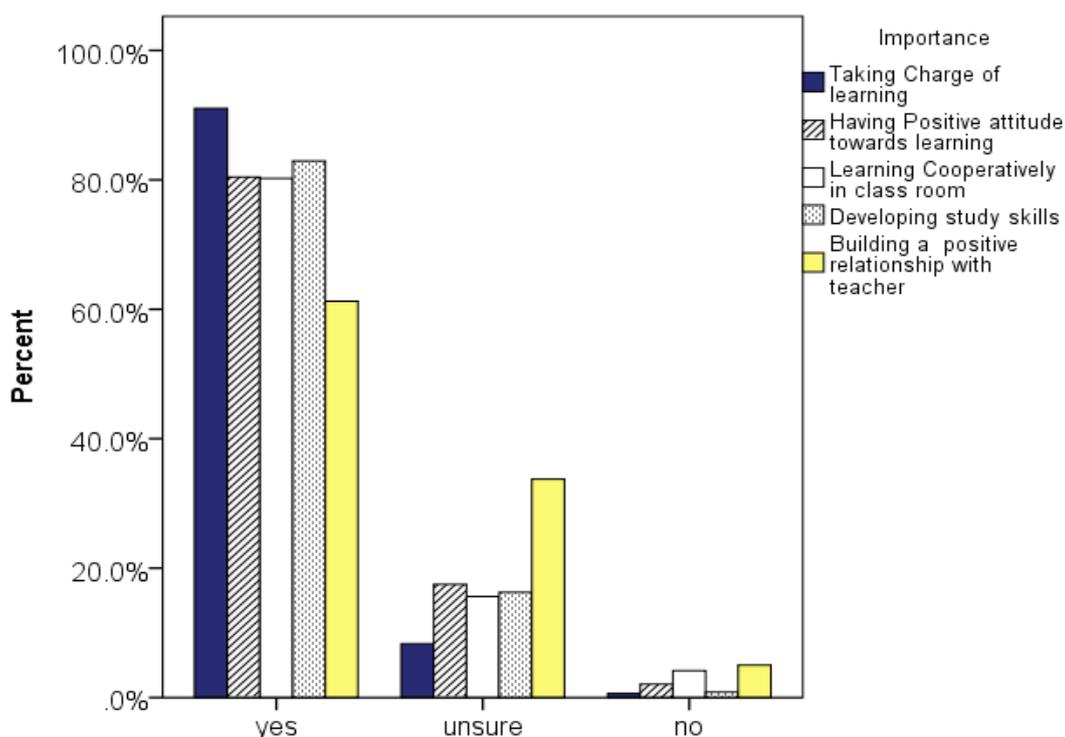


Figure 4.58: Distribution of percentage for evaluating the importance of characteristics (Students)

4.3.4.2 Results for Question 2: Does the development of characteristics enhance learner autonomy (LA)?

Looking at students' responses to the question, 'Does this (characteristic) enhance learner autonomy?' developing the 5 characteristics and their corresponding items could enhance learner autonomy. As seen in Table 4.37, the statistical test shows that the attitude of students is very highly significant (p-value < .001).

Table 4.37: Overall score for LA enhancement using the Wilcoxon test (Students)

LA enhancement	Statistics			p-value
	Mean	Median	SD	
Overall score	1.52	1.50	.31	<.001***

***=very highly significant

Overall, students demonstrated that developing each one of the characteristics enhanced learner autonomy, as shown in Figure 4.35 and Table 4.38. The most important characteristics that enhanced learner autonomy, based on student's responses, were taking charge of learning (85%) and developing study skills (77.7%), followed by demonstrating a positive attitude towards learning (74.2%), learning cooperatively (65.2%), and finally building a positive relationship with the teacher (56.9). The statistical test indicates that 'taking charge', 'having a positive attitude towards learning', 'learning cooperatively in the classroom', and 'identifying and developing study skills' are very highly significant (p-value = < .001). 'Building a positive relationship with the teacher' was deemed highly significant (p-value = .002). These results suggest that students believe the first step in becoming autonomous learners is developing the ability to take charge and improve study skills and learning strategies. Being positive and learning cooperatively seem to be developed characteristics in some students, which is why they are ranked second. Finally, their relationship with the teacher is perceived as less important in terms of learner autonomy enhancement. Students seem to want to preserve formalities with their teachers.

Table 4.38: Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon test for overall LA enhancement by developing 5 characteristics (Students)

Characteristic	Students' response %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Taking charge of learning	85	13.5	1.5	1.33	1.20	.37	1	<.001***
Identifying and developing study skills	77.7	19.4	2.9	1.41	1.40	.41	2	<.001***
Having positive attitude towards learning	74.2	22.5	3.3	1.44	1.40	.41	3	<.001***
Learning cooperatively	65.2	26.9	7.9	1.57	1.40	.48	4	<.001***
Building a positive relationship with the teacher	56.9	36.5	6.7	1.66	1.60	.40	5	.002**

= highly significant and *=very highly significant

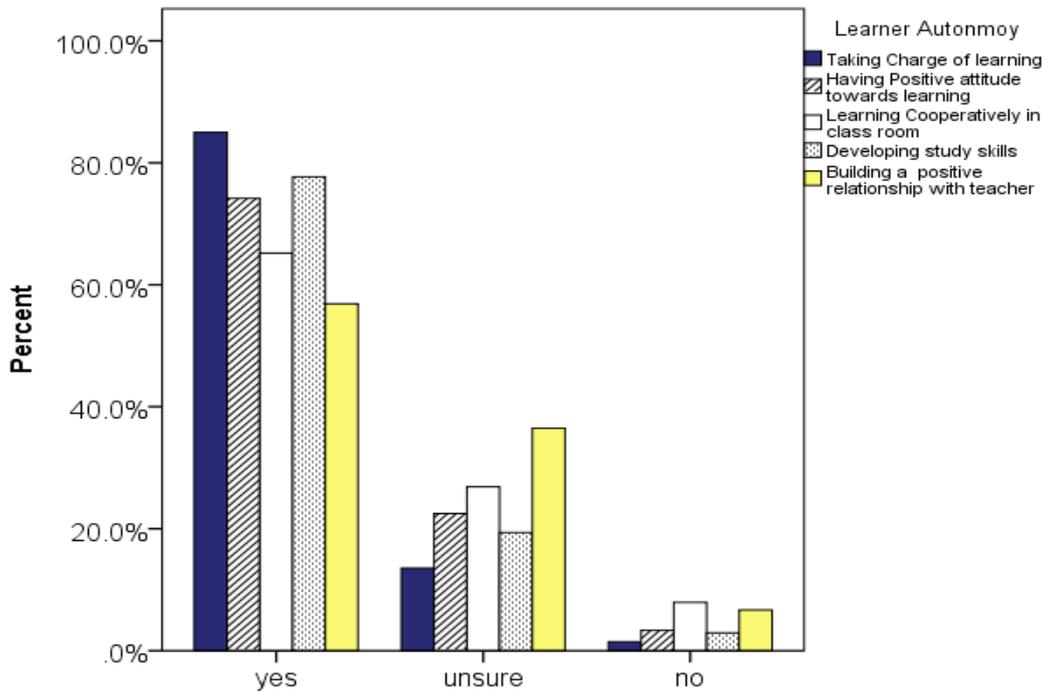


Figure 4.61: Distribution of percentage for overall LA enhancement by developing 5 characteristics (Students)

The next five sections present further details on students' views on learner autonomy enhancement by developing the characteristics included in each main characteristic.

1. LA enhancement by taking charge of learning

Students agree that learner autonomy can be enhanced by developing the overall five items of taking charge of learning, as seen in Table 4.38. The results in Table 4.39 and Figure 4.36 suggest that 'monitoring one's own progress' (75%) and 'setting one's own goals' (74.8%) are the top two characteristics chosen by students, so having a clear idea of what a student wants to learn and also paying attention to his/her weaknesses and strengths greatly improves learner autonomy. Also, according to students, identifying learning problems and evaluating learning are useful. Finally, identifying one's own needs is found to be useful, but it comes last, based on students' evaluations (68.3%). Statistically, the attitudes of students towards learner autonomy enhancement by each of the above five characteristics are very highly significant (p-value < .001).

Table 4.39: Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon test for LA enhancement by taking

Taking charge of learning items	Students' response %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Monitoring one's own progress (e.g. identify their weaknesses and strengths and structure their learning accordingly)	75.0	18.5	6.5	1.31	1.00	.027	1	<.001***
Setting one's own goals (what do they want to learn) (e.g. communication in English, academic writing, or reading and comprehension)	74.8	19.8	5.4	1.31	1.00	.026	2	<.001***
Identifying one's own learning problems and means of addressing them	74.0	18.5	7.5	1.34	1.00	.028	3	<.001***
Evaluating one's own learning (e.g. evaluate to what extent they have achieved their goals)	73.3	21.9	4.8	1.31	1.00	.025	4	<.001***
Identifying one's own needs (e.g. why they want to learn English)	68.3	23.1	8.5	1.40	1.00	.029	5	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

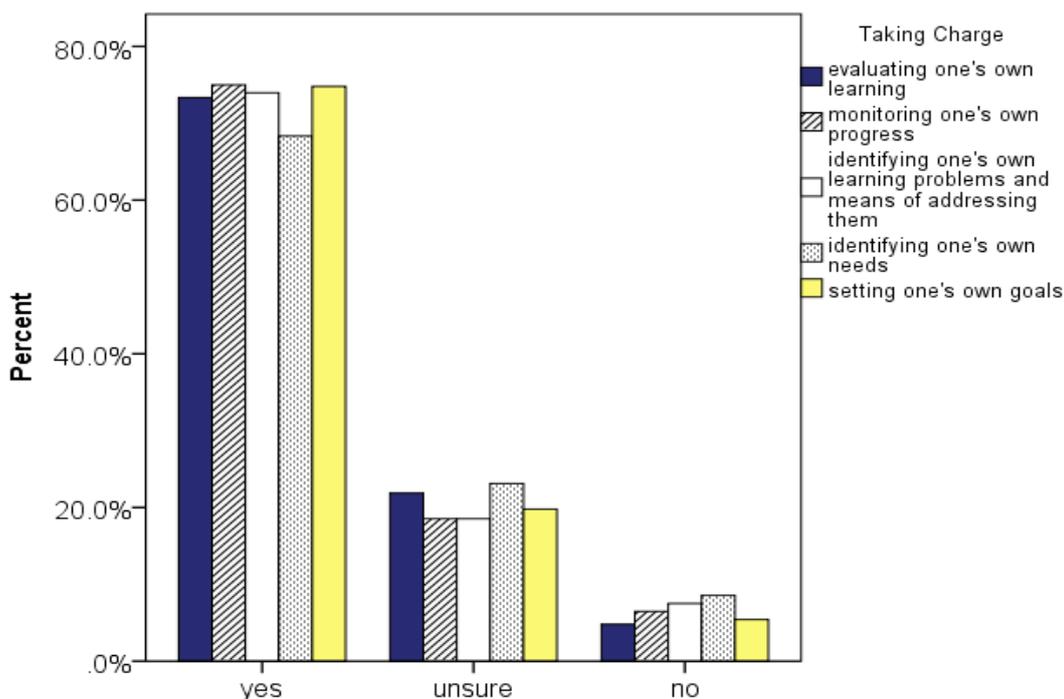


Figure 4.64: Distribution of LA enhancement by taking charge items (Students)

2. LA enhancement by having a positive attitude towards learning

As seen in Table 4.38, students believe that learner autonomy could be enhance by developing a positive learning attitude. The results in Table 4.40 and Figure 4.37 show that expressing ideas and opinions freely is the most useful characteristic in learner autonomy enhancement (73.1%), indicating that it is important for students to increase their self-confidence and eliminate negative thoughts and fears when expressing their opinions. After that item, demonstrating a willingness to learn and positivity towards learning English are the next choices for students, followed by ‘enjoying learning English’ (61.9%). Finally, ‘motivating oneself to learn’ is ranked last in terms of usefulness to LA enhancement (59.6%). Self-motivation may have the lowest evaluation because students need extrinsic motivation to develop autonomy. Statistically, students demonstrate a positive attitude towards the positive learning attitude items, which is very highly significant ($p\text{-value} < .001$) as shown in Table 4.40.

Table 4.40: Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon test for LA enhancement by having positive attitude items (Students)

Having positive attitude items	Students' response %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Expressing ideas and opinions freely	73.1	20.6	6.3	1.33	1.00	.589	1	<.001***
Demonstrating willingness to learn	69.0	24.6	6.5	1.37	1.00	.604	2	<.001***
Demonstrating positivity towards learning English	67.5	23.8	8.8	1.41	1.00	.647	3	<.001***
Learning English because they enjoy it	61.9	22.9	15.2	1.53	1.00	.744	4	<.001***
Motivating oneself to learn (without external rewards)	59.6	26.9	13.5	1.54	1.00	.721	5	<.001***

***=very highly significant

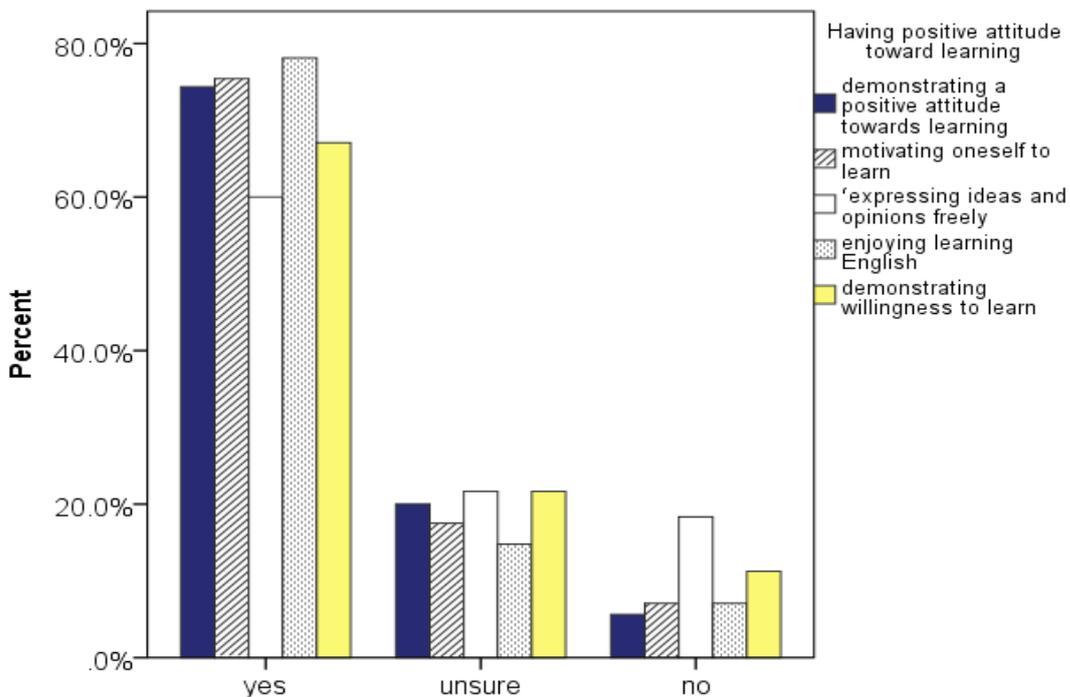


Figure 4.67: Distribution of LA enhancement by having positive attitude items (Students)

3. LA enhancement by learning cooperatively in the classroom

Students believe in learner autonomy enhancement by developing overall sub-characteristics of learning cooperatively (Table 4.38). In addition, as seen in Table 4.41 and Figure 4.38, the first item in learning cooperatively selected by students is ‘learning with and from others’. The proportion of students in favour of this item is 69.6%. The second item chosen is ‘taking part in classroom interactions and discussions’ (64.2%), followed by ‘working with pairs, groups, and whole class’ (57.9%), and ‘seeking help and support from peers’ (57.3%). However, students are unsure whether developing ‘completing a task with others rather than on one's own’ enhances learner autonomy. The proportion of students in favour of this item is 38.1%. The statistical test indicates that there is an unsure attitude towards the importance of this item, in terms of learner autonomy enhancement, and it is found not significant (p-value = 1.00). The statistical test indicates that there is a positive attitude towards the other four items, which are highly significant (p-value < .001). The results suggest that students want to learn from one another, but also need to do individual work and tasks in order to enhance their autonomy.

Table 4.41: Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon test for LA enhancement by learning cooperatively items (Students)

Learning Cooperatively Items	Students' response %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Learning with and from others	69.6	20.2	10.2	1.41	1.00	.668	1	<.001**
Taking part in classroom interactions and discussions	64.2	24.2	11.7	1.47	1.00	.695	2	<.001**
Work in pairs, groups, with the whole class	57.9	27.9	14.2	1.56	1.00	.728	3	<.001**
Seeking help and support from peers	57.3	26.3	16.5	1.59	1.00	.756	4	<.001**
Completing a task with others rather than alone	38.1	40.4	21.5	1.83	2.00	.754	5	1.000

**= highly significant

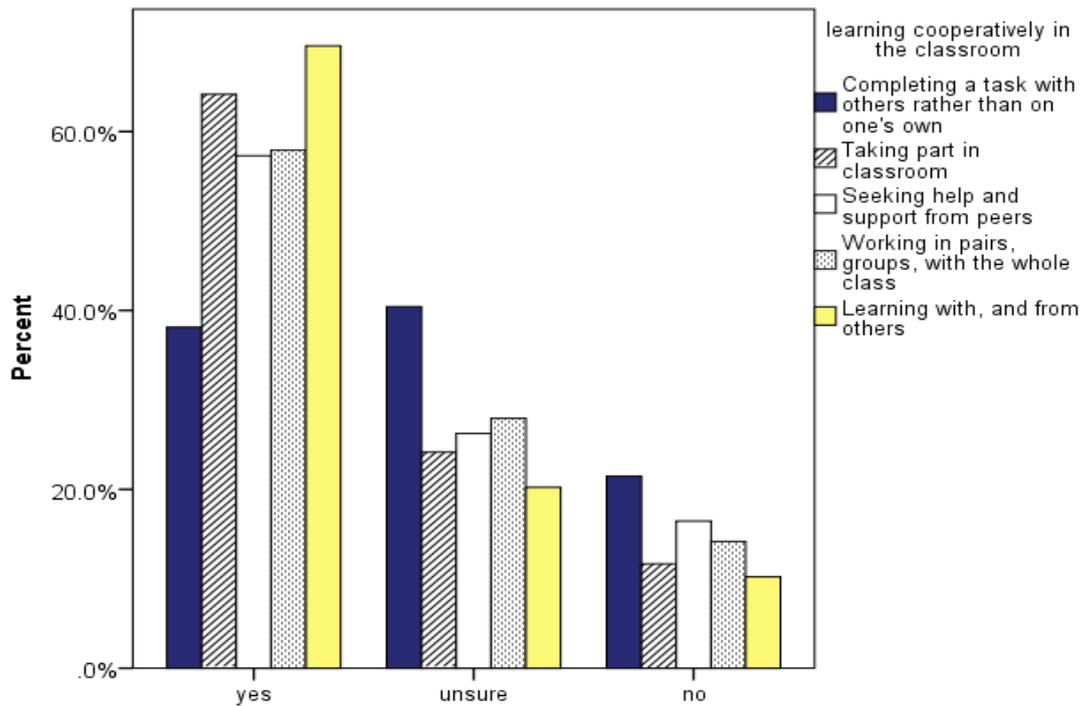


Figure 4.68: Distribution of LA enhancement by learning cooperatively in the classroom (Students)

4. LA enhancement by identifying and developing study skills

Students agreed that learner autonomy could be enhanced by developing study skills, as seen in Table 4.38. Furthermore, as shown in Table 4.42 and Figure 4.39, students believed that identifying and developing learning strategies was the most desired characteristic, suggesting that students believed in the role of establishing effective learning strategies in developing learner autonomy. The proportion of students in favour of this item is 71.3%. Developing the ability to study by oneself is also highly rated by students (70%). Following that item is ‘working with a variety of materials and resources’ and ‘developing individual daily/weekly plans’. The fifth item is ‘planning where to learn’, where the proportion of students in favour of this item is 65%. Statistically, the attitudes of students are very highly significantly for all sub-characteristics of study skills ($p\text{-value} < .001$).

Table 4.42: Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon test for LA enhancement by developing study skills items (Students)

Identifying and developing study skills items	Students' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Identifying and developing learning strategies (e.g. learning words by association, repeating words or sentences, organising a table of grammar rules)	71.3	21.3	7.5	1.36	1.00	.618	1	<.001***
Developing the ability to study by oneself	70.0	22.5	7.5	1.38	1.00	.621	2	<.001***
Working with a variety of materials and resources to enhance learning (e.g. textbooks, films, newspapers, websites)	65.2	28.5	6.3	1.41	1.00	.606	3	<.001***
Developing individual daily/weekly plans	65.8	24.0	10.2	1.44	1.00	.672	4	<.001***
Planning where to learn (e.g. in the classroom, outside the classroom, at home, in the library)	65.0	22.5	12.5	1.47	1.00	.707	5	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

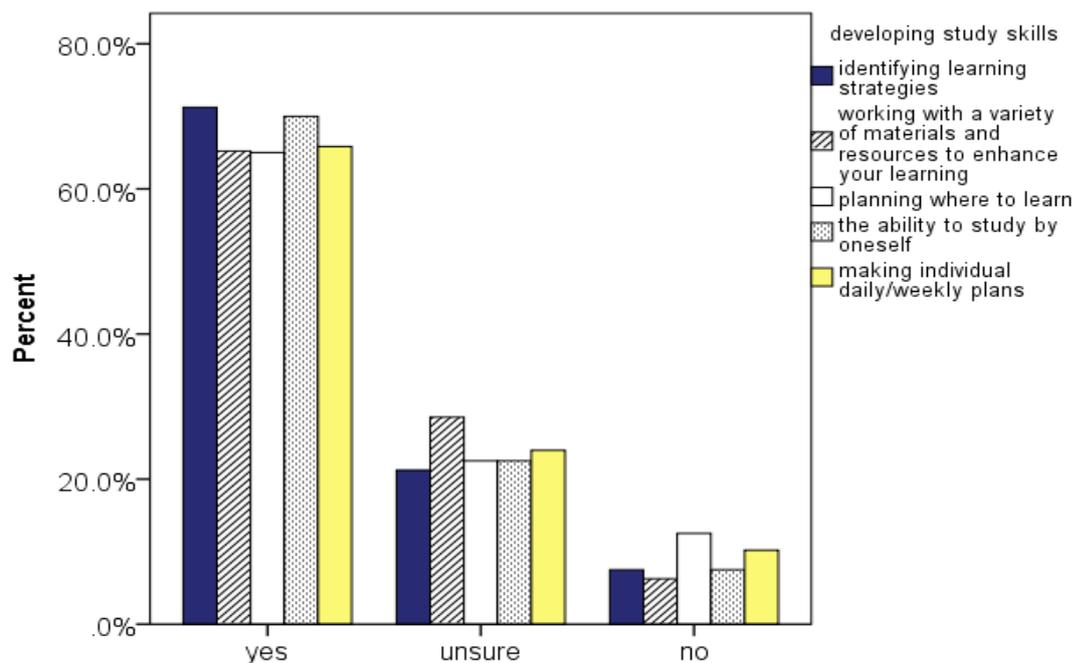


Figure 4.69: Distribution of LA enhancement by developing study skills (Students)

5. *LA enhancement by building a positive relationship with teacher*

The results show that developing the characteristics of a positive relationship with teachers could enhance learner autonomy (Table 4.38). The results presented in Table 4.43 and Figure 4.40 show that students feel that respecting the formality of the teacher-student relationship is useful in enhancing learner autonomy. Students believe that developing this item enhances learner autonomy. The proportion of students in favour of this item is 73.3%. Moreover, the two items, ‘perceived teacher’s controlling behaviour positively’ and ‘developing friendship with the teacher’ are also deemed useful in learner autonomy enhancement, but not as useful as respecting formalities. Statistically, the attitudes of students are highly significant across the above three sub-characteristics ($p\text{-value} = < .001$). However, students seem to disagree that being independence from the teacher enhances autonomy. The statistical test indicates that this item is insignificant ($p\text{-value} = 1.00$). Similarly, students are not in favour of viewing the teacher as a parental figure, and this item is found it to be statistically insignificant ($p\text{-value} = 1.00$). These results imply that students feel that autonomous learners are capable of maintaining a formal relationship with the teacher and accepting his/her controlling role. Students would also be able to develop a friendship with the teacher, but only to a certain extent. Having no support from the teacher

and being totally independent would not encourage the learner's autonomy, based on students' responses. Autonomous students willingly accept the support and the authority of the teacher, as long as the teacher does not play a parental role

Table 4.43: Descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon test for LA enhancement by building a positive relationship with teacher items (Students)

Building a positive relationship with teacher items	Students' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Respecting the formality of a teacher-student relationship	73.3	18.8	7.9	1.35	1.00	.621	1	<.001**
Perceiving teacher's controlling behaviour positively	59.0	30.2	10.8	1.52	1.00	.684	2	<.001**
Developing a friendship with the teacher	60.0	26.7	13.3	1.53	1.00	.719	3	<.001**
Demonstrating independence from the teacher	30.6	56.0	13.3	1.83	2.00	.641	4	1.00
Viewing teacher as a parental figure	24.4	44.6	31.0	2.07	2.00	.742	5	1.00

**= highly significant

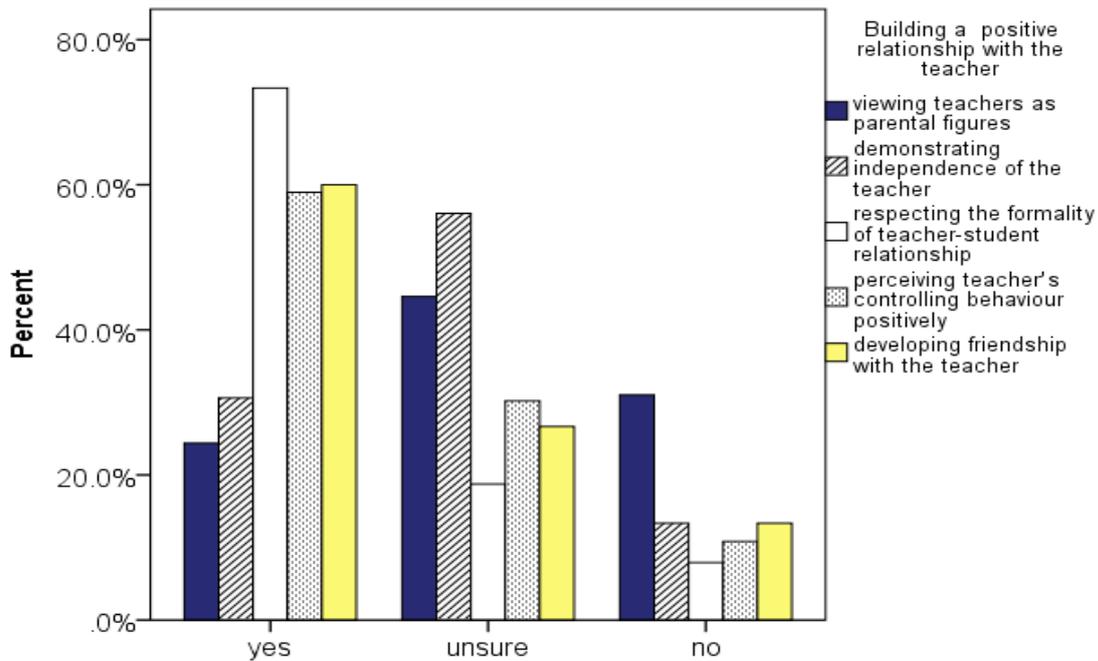


Figure 4.72: Distribution of LA enhancement by building a positive relationship with teacher items (Students)

4.3.4.3 Results for Question 3: Does the development of characteristics enhance language learning (LL)?

The third question, ‘Does this (characteristic) enhance language learning?’ prompted students’ opinion on developing characteristics in enhancing language learning. The findings reveal that students believe in language learning enhancement by developing characteristics, according to results shown in Table 4.44. Using the Wilcoxon test, the attitudes of students are positive and very highly significant (p-value < .001).

Table 4.44: Overall score for LL enhancement using the Wilcoxon test (Students)

LL enhancement	Statistics			p-value
	Mean	Median	SD	
Overall score	1.39	1.32	.27	<.001***

***=very highly significant

As shown in Table 4.45 and Figure 4.41, students' responses showed the most important characteristics in enhancing language learning are taking charge of learning (90.8%), followed by developing study skills (82.9%), and learning cooperatively (81.9%). Having a positive attitude towards learning was ranked next (79.2%), and building a positive relationship with the teacher was the final important characteristic in language learning enhancement (63.3%). This result for LL enhancement by the development of characteristics was the same as that of LA enhancement, suggesting a strong connection between the two.

Table 4.45: Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon test for overall LL enhancement by developing 5 characteristics (Students)

Characteristic	Teachers' response %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Taking charge	90.8	7.9	1.3	1.24	1.29	.31	1	<.001***
Developing study skills	82.9	15.8	1.3	1.35	1.20	.37	2	<.001***
Learning cooperatively in classroom	81.9	15.4	2.7	1.35	1.20	.40	2	<.001***
Demonstrating positive attitude towards learning	79.2	17.7	3.1	1.39	1.40	.41	3	<.001***
Building a positive relationship with the teacher	63.3	30.4	6.3	1.62	1.60	.40	4	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

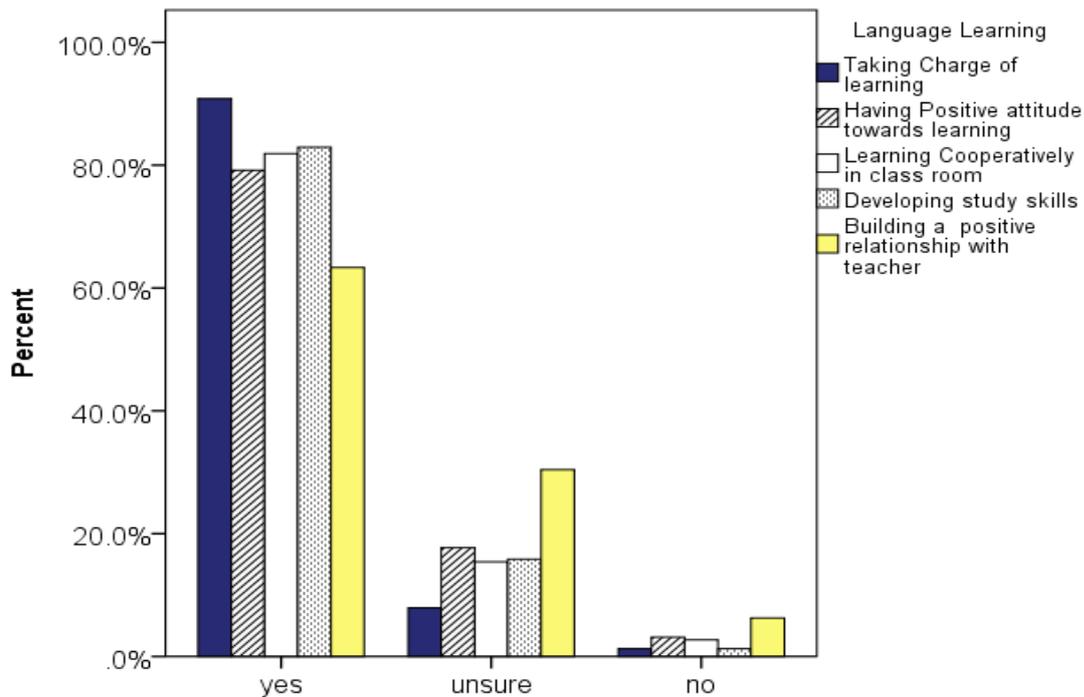


Figure 4.73: Distribution of percentage for LL enhancement by developing 5 Characteristics (Students)

1. LL enhancement by taking charge of learning

Students agree that language learning can be enhanced by taking charge of their own learning, as shown in Table 4.45. The results presented in Table 4.46 and Figure 4.42 show that students determined that the first item in enhancing language learning was ‘identifying one’s own learning problems and means of addressing them’. The proportion of students in favour of this item was 84.4%. This finding suggests that students believed that the ability to recognise their weaknesses and ways to overcome them helped them to improve their language learning. The second item was ‘evaluating one’s own learning’, which was the top choice for students when evaluating taking charge items in learner autonomy enhancement. The third item selected by students for language learning enhancement was ‘monitoring one’s own progress’ (81%), followed by ‘setting one’s own goals’, and ‘identifying one’s own needs’ (76.9%). Statistically, the attitudes of students were very highly significant across the five sub-characteristics of taking charge (p-value < .001).

Table 4.46: Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon test for LL enhancement by taking charge items (Students)

Taking charge items	Students' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Identifying one's learning problems and means of addressing them	84.4	12.5	3.1	1.19	1.00	.464	1	<.001***
Evaluating one's own learning (e.g. evaluate to what extent they have achieved their goals)	81.0	15.4	3.5	1.22	1.00	.496	2	<.001***
Monitoring one's own progress (e.g. identify their weaknesses and strengths and structure their learning accordingly)	82.3	12.5	5.2	1.23	1.00	.530	3	<.001***
Setting one's own goals (what do they want to learn) (e.g. communication in English, academic writing, or reading and comprehension)	77.5	17.3	5.2	1.28	1.00	.552	4	<.001***
Identifying one's own needs (e.g. why do they want to learn English)	76.9	16.3	6.9	1.30	1.00	.590	5	<.001***

***=very highly significant

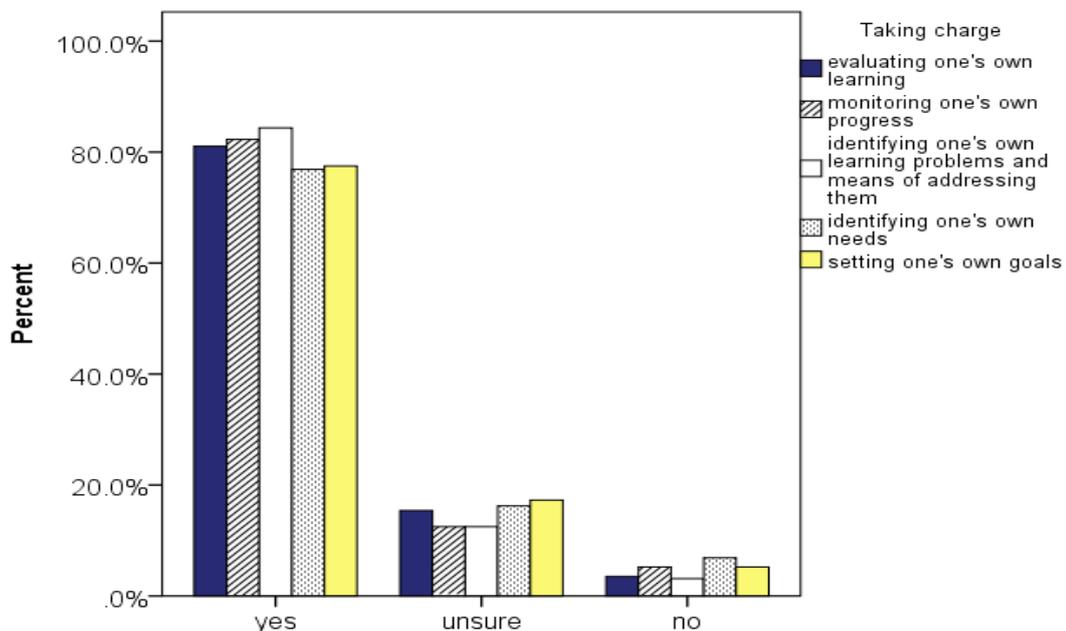


Figure 4.74: Distribution of LL enhancement by taking charge of learning items (Students)

2. LL enhancement by having a positive attitude towards learning

Students believed that developing positive attitudes towards learning in general enhanced language learning (Table 4.45). Moreover, students demonstrated that the most important characteristic in being positive towards learning English (75.6%), and demonstrating a willingness to learn (75%), as shown in Table 4.47 and Figure 4.43. Developing enthusiasm and willingness to learn greatly improves language learning, according to students' responses. Also, expressing ideas and opinions freely are found to be useful in language enhancement (71.7%), which came third in students' evaluations. The fourth item that enhanced language learning was 'enjoying learning English' (70%), and the fifth item is 'motivating oneself to learn' (60%). The statistical test indicated that the attitudes of students across all positive attitude items were very highly significant (p -value < .001). Similar to LA enhancement results, self-motivation was ranked last for the students' evaluation of LL enhancement, suggesting that extrinsic motivation, most likely from the teacher, is needed in the development of learner autonomy and language learning.

Table 4.47: Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon test for LL enhancement by having positive attitude items (Students)

Having positive attitude towards learning items	Students' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Demonstrating positivity towards learning English	75.6	17.7	6.7	1.31	1.00	.590	1	<.001***
Demonstrating willingness to learn	75.0	18.3	6.7	1.32	1.00	.592	2	<.001***
Expressing ideas and opinions freely	71.7	20.2	8.1	1.36	1.00	.628	3	<.001***
Learning English because they enjoy it	70.0	18.3	11.7	1.42	1.00	.691	4	<.001***
Motivating oneself to learn (without external rewards)	60.0	24.0	16.0	1.56	1.00	.754	5	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

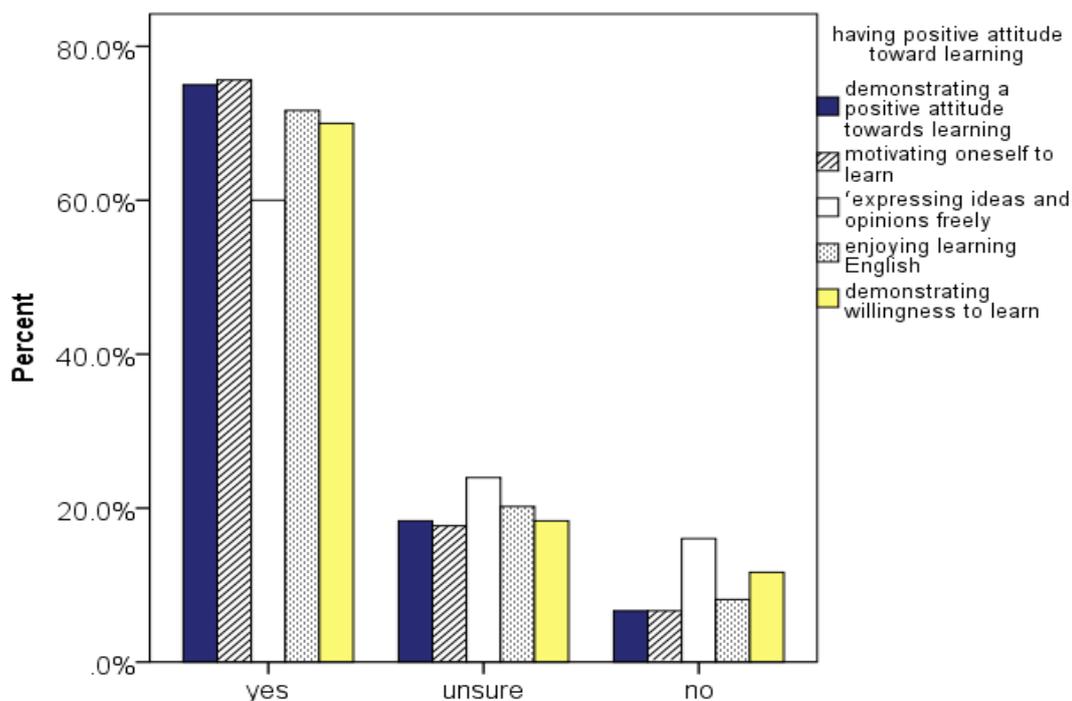


Figure 4.77: Distribution of LL enhancement by having positive attitude items (Students)

3. LL enhancement by working cooperatively in the classroom

In learning cooperatively in the classroom, students believed that enhancing language learning was achieved by developing the overall sub-characteristics, as seen in Table 4.45. In addition, the results presented in Table 4.48 and Figure 4.44 show that the first item selected by students for learning cooperatively group is 'learning with and from others', indicating that students felt that it is important to share knowledge and experiences with others in order to improve their language skills. The proportion of students in favour of this item was 81.3%. The second item chosen by students was 'seeking help and support from peers' (72.9%). The third item was 'working in pairs, groups, with the whole class' (74.6%), and the fourth 'taking part in classroom interactions and discussions' (73.8%). Statistically, the attitudes of students towards the above four sub-characteristics of learning cooperatively were very highly significant ($p\text{-value} < .001$). Finally, the last item 'completing a task with others rather than on one's own' was ranked fifth by students but

was still perceived as useful to language learning enhancement, which was different from LA results. Completing a task with others was deemed useful and very highly significant in LL enhancement (p-value < .001) but insignificant in LA enhancement (p-value = 1.00) (see Table 4.41).

Table 4.48: Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon test for LL enhancement by working cooperatively in the classroom items (Students)

Learning cooperatively items	Students' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Learning with and from others	81.3	15.0	3.8	1.22	1.00	.500	1	<.001***
Seeking help and support from peers	72.9	20.8	6.3	1.33	1.00	.590	2	<.001***
Working in pairs, groups, with the whole class	74.6	17.1	8.3	1.34	1.00	.625	3	<.001***
Taking part in classroom interactions	73.8	16.9	9.4	1.36	1.00	.646	4	<.001***
Completing a task with others rather than on one's own	62.7	24.8	12.5	1.50	1.00	.708	5	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

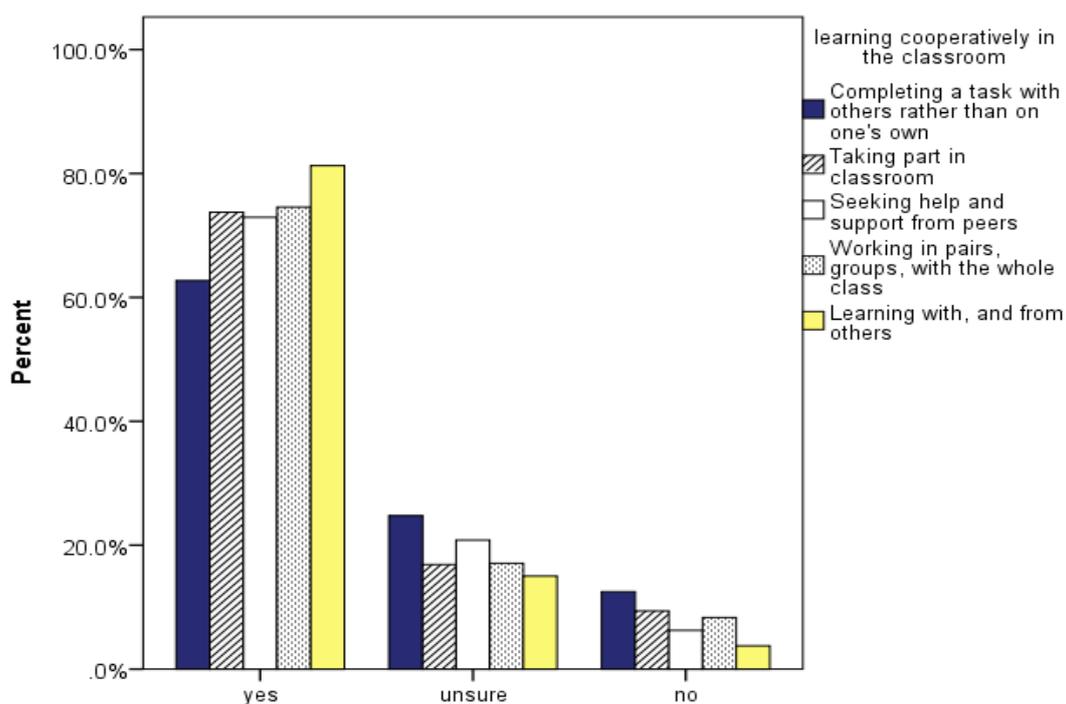


Figure 4.78: Distribution of LL enhancement by learning cooperatively items (Students)

4. LL enhancement by developing study skills

As shown in Table 4.45, students demonstrated that language learning could be enhanced by developing the study skills items. Furthermore, the results for study skills items (Table 4.49) suggest that students believed in the usefulness of identifying and developing learning strategies in improving their language learning. The proportion of students in favour of this item was 82.1%. Developing the ability to work with a variety of materials and resources was also deemed useful and came second. The proportion of students in favour of this item was 73.5%. Developing the ability to study by oneself, developing individual daily/weekly plans, and planning where to learn were also deemed useful study skills in language learning enhancement. Statistically, the attitudes of students were very highly significant across the five study skills sub-characteristics (p-value < .001).

Table 4.49: Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon test for LL enhancement by developing study skills items (Students)

Developing study skills items	Students' responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Identifying and developing learning strategies (e.g. learning words by association, repeating words or sentences, organising grammar rules)	82.1	14.0	4.0	1.22	1.00	.501	1	<.001***
Working with a variety of materials and resources to enhance learning (e.g. textbooks, films, newspapers, websites)	73.5	20.0	6.5	1.33	1.00	.592	2	<.001***
Developing the ability to study by oneself	70.2	21.5	8.3	1.38	1.00	.635	3	<.001***
Developing individual daily/weekly plans	68.5	22.9	8.5	1.40	1.00	.642	4	<.001***
Planning where to learn (e.g. in the classroom, outside the classroom, at home, in the library)	68.8	20.4	10.8	1.42	1.00	.679	5	<.001***

***=*very highly significant*

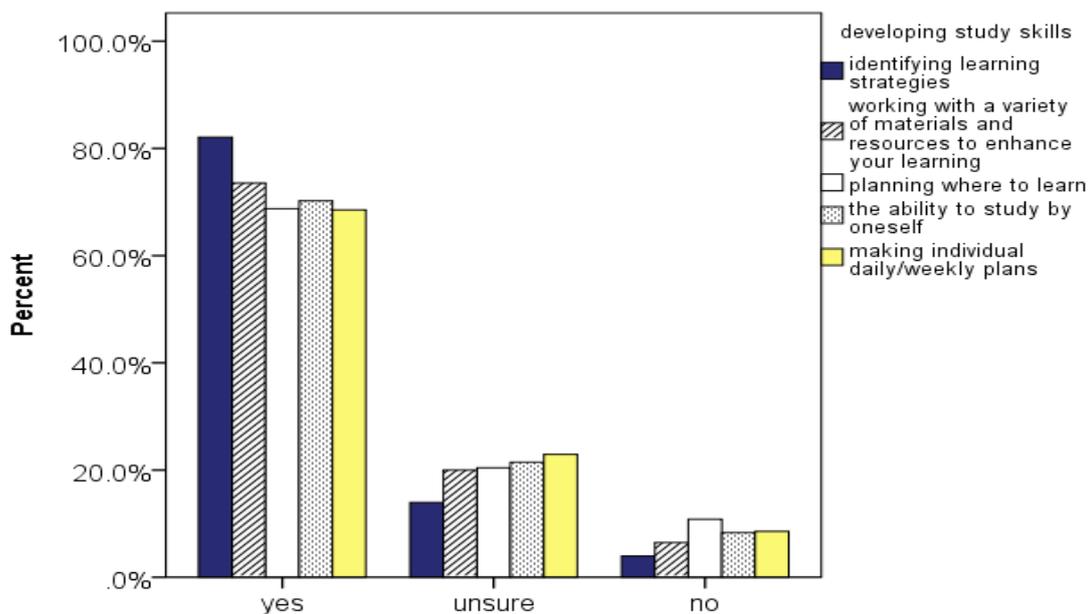


Figure 4.81: Distribution of LL enhancement by developing study skills items (Students)

5. LL enhancement by building a positive attitude with the teacher

Students agreed that language learning may be enhanced by the development of the overall sub-characteristics related to building positive relationships with the teacher, as shown in Table 4.45. The results presented in Table 4.50 and Figure 4.46 show that the formality of the teacher-student relationship was the first choice for students in enhancing language learning and having a positive attitude towards the teacher (70.8%). The second item was ‘perceiving a teacher’s controlling behaviour positively’ (64.2%). Students seem to believe that keeping their relationship with their teacher formal and not complaining about teachers’ controlling behaviour are distinguished autonomous characteristic. The third item was ‘developing a friendship with the teacher’ (68.5%). Students agreed that developing the above three items enhance language learning. These three items were statistically very highly significant ($p\text{-value} < .001$). However, students were unsure if demonstrating independence from the teacher enhances language learning, and it was statistically insignificant ($p\text{-value} = 1.000$). The proportion of students in favour of this item was 31%. Also, students were unsure about the role of ‘viewing teachers as parental figures’ in language learning. The proportion of students in favour of this item was 28.1%, and this item was statistically insignificant in language learning enhancement ($p\text{-value} = 1.000$), confirming that students wish to maintain a formal relationship with their teacher.

It was clear for the students' responses that they demonstrate a less positive attitude towards the role of the sub-characteristics of having a positive relationship with the teacher. The results for both LL enhancement and LA enhancement suggest that demonstrating independence from the teacher and perceiving them as a parental figure are insignificant for students, and they did not wish to develop them.

Table 4.50: Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon test for LL enhancement by establishing positive relationship with teacher items (Students)

Building a positive relationship with the teacher items	Students responses %			Mean	Median	SD	Rank	p-value
	Yes	Unsure	No					
Respecting the formality of teacher-student relationship	70.8	21.3	7.9	1.37	1.00	.618	1	<.001***
Perceiving teacher's controlling behaviour in a positive way	64.2	29.0	6.9	1.42	1.00	.526	2	<.001***
Developing a friendship with the teacher	68.5	19.4	12.1	1.43	1.00	.639	3	<.001***
Demonstrating independence from the teacher	31.0	53.5	15.4	1.84	2.00	.645	4	1.000
Viewing teachers as parental figures (in terms of authority)	28.1	41.9	30.0	2.01	2.00	.750	5	1.000

***=*very highly significant*

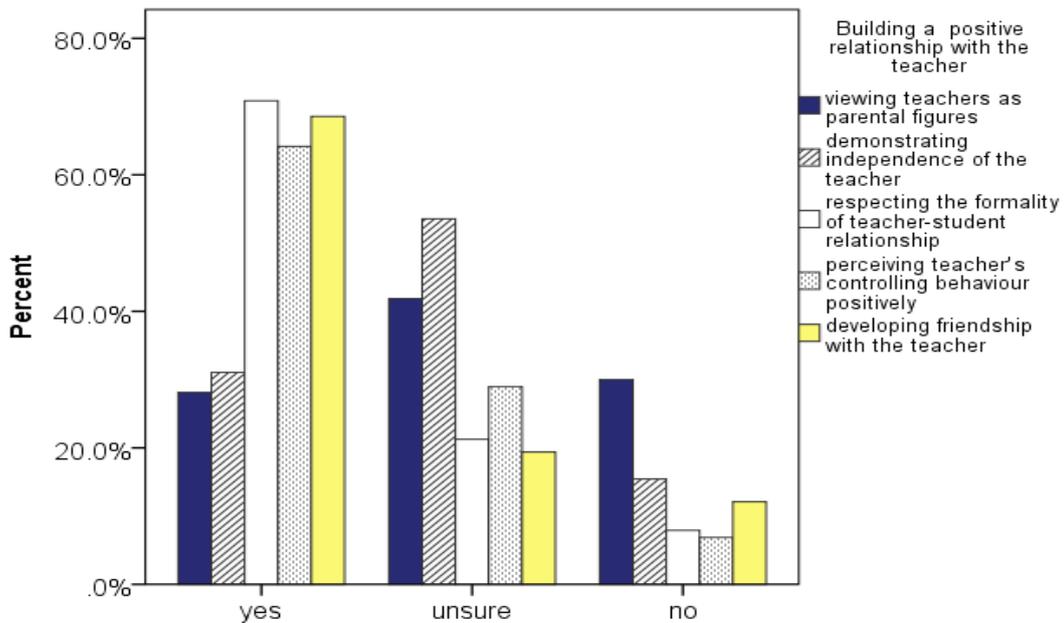


Figure 4.84: Distribution of LL enhancement by building a positive relationship with teacher items (Students)

4.3.5 Relationship between Learner Autonomy Enhancement and Language Learning Enhancement

The relationship between LA and LL enhancement was investigated using a statistical simple correlation and regression analysis. These tests were used to explore the strength (i.e. small, medium, large) and type of the relationship (i.e. positive, negative, no relation) between the two variables. To determine the strength of the relationship, Cohen's (1988) guidelines for the interpretation of correlation matrix values were followed, which are small ($r = .10$ to $.29$), medium ($r = .30$ to $.49$), and large ($r = .50$ to 1.0).

Table 4.51 presents the results of the simple correlation, a regression effect estimate, and the variation total. There was an overall positive, large correlation between the two variables (above $.5$) and a very high significance (p -value $< .001$), suggesting a strong relationship between LA and LL enhancement. Furthermore, LA enhancement scores explain 62.7% of the total variation in the LL enhancement scores. Regression also revealed that LA enhancement made a statistically significant contribution to LL enhancement ($.903$, p -value $< .001$).

There was a strong positive correlation between the development of LA by taking charge and the development of LL by taking charge ($r = .668$), which were both very highly significant ($p\text{-value} < .001$). In addition, LA enhancement explain 44.6% of the total variation in the LL enhancement scores. Regression also revealed that LA enhancement made a statistically significant contribution to LL enhancement (.538, $p\text{-value} < .001$).

In positive attitudes towards learning, the correlation between LA and LL enhancement was very strongly positive ($r = .729$) and very highly significant ($p\text{-value} < .001$). Also, LA enhancement scores explain 53.1% of the total variation in LL enhancement scores. Regression also revealed that LA enhancement made a statistically significant contribution to LL enhancement (.720, $p\text{-value} < .001$).

In learning cooperatively in the classroom, LA and LL enhancement were positively correlated ($r = .657$), and this correlation was very highly significant ($p\text{-value} < .001$). Also, LA enhancement scores explain 43.2% of the total variation in LL enhancement scores. Regression also revealed that LA enhancement made a statistically significant contribution to LL enhancement (.549, $p\text{-value} < .001$).

In identifying and developing study skills, the correlation between LA and LL enhancement was very strongly positive ($r = .733$) and very highly significant ($p\text{-value} < .001$). Also, LA enhancement scores explain 53.7% of the total variation in LL enhancement scores. Regression also revealed that LA enhancement made a statistically significant contribution to LL enhancement (.676, $p\text{-value} < .001$).

In building a positive relationship with the teacher, the correlation between LA and LL enhancement was very strongly positive ($r = .801$) and very highly significant ($p\text{-value} < .001$). Also, LA enhancement scores explain 64.1% of the total variation in LL enhancement scores. Regression also revealed that LA enhancement made a statistically significant contribution to LL enhancement (.816, $p\text{-value} < .001$).

Table 4.51: Results of simple correlation and linear regression for effect of learner autonomy on language learning (Students)

Characteristics	Correlation	Regression effect	Total of variation (%)
Taking charge of learning	0.668*** ($p\text{-value} < .001$)	0.538*** ($p\text{-value} < .001$)	44.6%
Having positive attitudes towards learning	0.729*** ($p\text{-value} < .001$)	0.720*** ($p\text{-value} < .001$)	53.1%

Learning cooperatively in the classroom	0.657*** (p-value<.001)	0.549*** (p-value<.001)	43.2%
Identifying and developing study skills	0.733*** (p-value<.001)	0.676*** (p-value<.001)	53.7%
Building a positive relationship with the teacher	0.801*** (p-value<.001)	0.816*** (p-value<.001)	64.1%
Overall	.792*** (p-value<.001)	.903*** (p-value<.001)	62.7%

4.3.6 Summary of Students' Results

Students' responses to the general views on learner autonomy showed a positive attitude towards the usefulness and benefits of learner autonomy. Many students implied that learner autonomy was both desirable and feasible. Moreover, students' interpretation of the concept reflected a socio-political perspective of autonomy. Learner autonomy was defined as independence and freedom of choice (in selecting learning environment, classes, teacher, peers, how/where/when to learn) by many students. One student defined the term as the right to be autonomous or not autonomous. Students also referred to learner autonomy as learner's rights and having a role in the society.

In addition, students demonstrated positivity towards autonomy-supportive activities, though not all activities were viewed as very effective in enhancing autonomy. Students' responses show that there were some ineffective activities in supporting learner autonomy development, such as using authentic materials, summarising in English and analysing grammatical structures. In addition, students were not in favour of activities promoting independent work such as individual tasks outside the class or in a language lab. However, students seemed to favour a number of the activities and believed in their usefulness in autonomy development. Using reference books and online resources, selecting activates relevant to them and being able to state their preferences while working, working in small groups, and observing natural communication in English, such as watching films, were evaluated positively by students. The most effective item selected by student was being allowed the time to prepare before speaking or answering a question.

Furthermore, students' responses indicate that they were in favour of the importance of developing autonomous characteristics, and this development would also be important in enhancing language learning. The ability to take charge of learning and developing study skills and learning strategies were deemed the most important autonomous characteristics

students wanted to improve, and therefore very important in enhancing language learning. Students also expressed the desirability of developing good teacher-student relationships, but this item was deemed less desirable than other autonomous behaviours, such as learning cooperatively and having a positive attitude towards learning. Students stated that respecting the formality of the teacher-student relationship and perceiving teachers' controlling behaviour in a positive way were indicators of autonomous behaviours.

4.4 Comparison between Students' and Teachers' Views

Based on the questionnaire results, teachers and students expressed a positive attitude towards learner autonomy both as a concept and in practice. However, teachers' responses were slightly more positive than students'. Detailed comparisons between the views of teachers and students on autonomy-supportive classroom activities and learner characteristics are presented in the following sections.

4.4.1 Comparing Teachers' and Students' Views on Learner Autonomy in General

Both teachers and students expressed positive opinions of the usefulness of learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia, and its help in terms of language learning. Also, both groups were unsure about the possibility of establishing learner autonomy without the help of a teacher. In addition, both teachers and students found learner autonomy to be desirable and feasible. However, both groups' opinions on desirability were more positive than those on feasibility. The attitude of teachers was slightly higher than that of students except in regards to the feasibility of LA, which was higher for students, as shown in Table 4.52. Teachers were unsure about LA feasibility, possibly because they were burdened by institutional constraints, unlike first year university students, who might be unfamiliar with such restrictions.

Table 4.52: General views for teachers and students

General views	Teachers	Students
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Usefulness	77.27% Useful	67.08% Useful
LA helps or hinders LL	88.64% Helps	65.42% Helps
LA without teacher help	40.91% 'Yes' without teacher's help	18.91% 'Yes' without teacher's help
Desirability	75% Desirable-Highly desirable	68.12% Desirable-Highly desirable
Feasibility	52.19% Feasible- Completely feasible	59.8% Feasible-Completely feasible

Teachers and students perceived the concept of learner autonomy differently in their responses to the open-ended question on the meaning of learning autonomy. Firstly, teachers provided scholarly definitions of learner autonomy, whereas students provided the meaning of learning autonomy in simpler terms. Thus, the main difference between teachers and students was how they interpreted learner autonomy. Teachers largely provided psychological views of learner autonomy, placing responsibility on the learner. Teachers stated that learner autonomy meant a student taking charge of and being entirely responsible for all matters concerned with his/her learning, including self-motivation and self-development (see Table 4.4). On the other hand, students' interpretations of learner autonomy were reflected socio-political issues. Learner autonomy was viewed by most students as the learner's need for independence, authority, and freedom (see Table 4.29).

4.4.2 Comparing Teachers' and Students' Views on Effectiveness of Classroom Activities

The results for autonomy-supportive classroom activities show that there was a lack of agreement between teachers and students in terms of the levels of effectiveness of the activities. Teachers expressed more positive views than students on the effectiveness of the classroom activities in developing learner autonomy. Teachers believed the majority of activities were effective, but students more often rated them as slightly effective, as shown in Table 4.53. Teachers perceived 18 items as very effective or effective, where students selected only 8. Furthermore, from the ranking of activities from most effective to least effective, descriptive statistics revealed a considerable difference between teachers and students in terms of activity preferences. Some activities were highly rated by teachers but were deemed insignificant in the students' results. For example, teachers expressed that using social media, working in a language lab, assigning tasks outside the class, using

authentic materials, analysing grammatical structures, and summarising in English were all significantly ‘effective’ classroom activities for fostering learner autonomy. However, students found these same items to be insignificant in terms of effectiveness.

This difference in ranking activities can be seen in Table 4.53. There are many items on which students and teachers do not agree. The use of reference books, including dictionaries in class, came very high on the student preference list (2nd), yet was 11th for teachers. Using authentic materials, analysing structure to formulate rules, and summarising in English were low on the students’ list (18th, 19th, 20th) and were rated as ‘slightly ineffective’, whereas teachers perceived them as effective classroom activities. Also, several items were evaluated as ‘slightly effective’ by students but as ‘effective’ by teachers, including keeping written records, composing e-mails in English, creating seating arrangements encouraging participation, using social media to communicate in English, working in a language lab, doing out-of-class tasks, and explaining the value of uninteresting grammar exercises.

Table 4.53: Ranking and opinions of classroom activity for teachers and students

Teachers			Students		
Activity item	Rank	Opinion	Statement	Rank	Opinion
Activity selection	1	Very effective	Being allowed time to prepare	1	Very effective
Being allowed time to prepare	2	Very Effective	Use of reference books in class	2	Effective
Observing natural communications in English	3	Very Effective	Collaborative work in small groups	3	Effective
Seating arrangements for better communication	4	Effective	Pressure to be active and involved	4	Effective
Using online resources	5	Effective	Asking students for their preferences in class	5	Effective
Collaborative work in small groups	6	Effective	Activity selection	6	Effective
Using authentic materials	7	Effective	Using online resources	7	Effective
Asking students for their preferences in class	8	Effective	Observing natural communications in English	8	Effective
Composing emails in English	9	Effective	Keep written record of learning	9	Slightly effective
Keep written record of learning	10	Effective	Composing emails in English	10	Slightly effective

Use of reference books in class	11	Effective	Seating arrangements for better communication	11	Slightly effective
Explaining importance of uninteresting exercises	12	Effective	Use target language only	12	Slightly effective
Communicating in English via social networks	13	Effective	Explaining importance of uninteresting exercises	13	Slightly effective
Analysing structures and sentences to formulate rules	14	Effective	Translation from English	14	Slightly Effective
Tasks to support language outside class	15	Effective	Communicating in English via social networks	15	Slightly effective
Pressure to be active and involved	16	Effective	Independent work in language labs	16	Slightly effective
Independent work in language lab	17	Effective	Tasks to support language outside class	17	Slightly effective
Summarising in English	18	Effective	Using authentic materials	18	Slightly ineffective
Using target language only	19	Slightly effective	Analysing structures and sentences to formulate rules	19	Slightly ineffective
Translation from English	20	Slightly effective	Summarising in English	20	Slightly ineffective

The Mann-Whitney test was used to confirm differences between the two groups and found that there was a statistically significant difference (p -value $< .05$) between the opinions of teachers and students across 15 items. Five items had no significant difference in the opinions, as shown in Table 4.54. The first item that was agreed upon by both teachers and students was being allowed time to prepare, suggesting that both groups believed in the importance of not pressuring students to produce instant oral or written answers, in order to reduce anxiety and fear of making mistakes. It can be deduced that fear of mistakes hinders learner autonomy, therefore being allowed time to prepare would reduce fear and increase students' self-confidence. Also, there was no statistical difference in 'using reference books including dictionaries' and 'pressure students to be active in the classroom'. These items were considered effective by both groups. Allowing the use of dictionaries and other reference materials was deemed effective in fostering learner autonomy, as well as expecting students to participate during English classes. This finding indicates that Saudi students view teachers' pressuring behaviour positively and effective in the development of their autonomy. Furthermore, there was no significant difference in opinions on translation from English and use of the target language, which were evaluated

as slightly effective by both groups. It is likely that translations were deemed ineffective because they are challenging and do not always match students' proficiency, though the technique could be perceived as an outdated classroom activity, which are not seen as beneficial in fostering autonomy. Moreover, both teachers and students agreed that using L2 only in class was slightly effective, suggesting that the use of the learners' native language was useful and would not hinder the development of learner autonomy.

Table 4.54: Summary statistics and tests for comparing classroom activities between teachers and students using the Mann-Whitney test

Activity items	Median		p-value (Mann-Whitney)
	Teachers	Students	
Allowing time to prepare	5.00	5.00	.134
Pressure to be active and involved	3.50	3.00	.284
Use target language only	3.00	3.00	.605
Translation from English	3.00	3.00	.764
Use of reference books	4.00	4.00	.995
Asking students for their preferences	4.00	4.00	.016*
Keep written record of learning	4.00	3.00	.003**
Using online resources	4.00	3.50	.002**
Explaining value of uninteresting exercises	4.00	3.00	.002**
Collaborative work in small groups	5.00	4.00	<.001***
Tasks to support language outside class	4.00	3.00	<.001***
Activity selection	5.00	4.00	<.001***
Seating arrangements for better communication	4.00	3.00	<.001***
Analysing structures and sentences to formulate rules	4.00	2.00	<.001***
Observing natural communications in English	4.50	4.00	<.001***
Summarising in English	4.00	2.00	<.001***
Communicating in English via social networks	4.00	3.00	<.001***
Independent work in lang. lab	3.00	3.00	<.001***

Using authentic materials	4.00	2.00	<.001***
Composing emails in English	4.00	3.00	<.001***
Overall activity	4.00	2.95	<.001***

=significant, **= highly significant and *=very highly significant*

4.4.3 Comparing Teachers' and Students' Views on the Usefulness of Developing Autonomous Characteristics

Teachers' and students' views were explored in terms of the five learner characteristics and their usefulness to the development of learner autonomy and language learning. These five characteristics included taking charge of learning, having a positive attitude towards learning, learning cooperatively in class, developing study skills, and building a positive relationship with the teacher. There was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of the rating of characteristics. Also, teachers expressed a slightly more positive attitude than students towards the importance of characteristics, LA enhancement, and LL enhancement.

4.4.3.1 Comparison between teachers' and students' evaluation for the importance of developing characteristics

Both teachers and students expressed positivity towards the importance of developing the five characteristics, but teachers' responses were slightly more positive than those of students. Furthermore, when teachers' and students' evaluations of the characteristics were compared, both groups agreed that taking charge of learning was the most desirable characteristic, whereas building good teacher-student relationships was the least desirable, as seen in Table 4.55. Teachers favoured the development of a positive attitude towards learning over study skills, unlike students who strongly believed in the importance of developing this characteristic and ranked it second in terms of importance. The two groups disagreed on the importance of developing the ability to learn cooperatively.

Table 4.55: Ranking of importance of characteristics for teachers and students

Characteristic	Rank	
	Teachers	Students
Taking charge	1	1
Positive attitude towards learning	2	3
Learning cooperatively	3	4
Developing study skills	4	2
Building a positive relationship with teacher	5	5

The Mann Whitney statistical test was used to confirm the differences in attitudes of between teachers and students towards the importance of the five characteristics. The results revealed a significant difference between the two groups across the five characteristics, and the overall difference was very highly significant (p-value < .001), as shown in Table 4.56.

Table 4.56: Comparison of importance of the five constructs of characteristics between teachers and students Using Mann Whitney test

Characteristic	Median		p-value
	Teachers	Students	
Taking charge	1.00	1.20	.003**
Positive attitude towards learning	1.00	1.40	<.001***
Learning cooperatively	1.00	1.40	<.001**
Developing study skills	1.00	1.20	.014*
Building a positive relationship with teacher	1.30	1.60	<.001***
Overall importance	1.16	1.36	<.001***

=significant, **= highly significant and *=very highly significant*

4.4.3.2 Comparison between teachers' and students' views on learner autonomy (LA) enhancement

Both teachers and students agreed on the usefulness of developing characteristics to enhance learner autonomy, but there was disagreement between teachers' and students' views on which characteristics were the most effective. Teachers ranked having a positive attitude towards learning highly, whereas students deemed this item less significant and favoured developing study skills and learning strategies for LA enhancement. In addition, some of the top choices for sub-characteristics differ between teachers and students. For example, when comparing teachers' and students' top choice for the sub-characteristics of a positive attitude and study skills, teachers chose demonstrated a willingness to learn and work with a variety of materials and resources. However, students selected expressing ideas freely and developing learning strategies as the most effective items for LA enhancement (see Table 4.57).

Table 4.57: Ranking characteristics and sub-characteristics for LA enhancement for teachers and students

Characteristics for enhancing Learner Autonomy (from most important)	
Teachers	Students
1. Take charge of learning (by developing the ability to monitor progress)	1. Take charge of learning (by developing the ability to monitor progress)
2. Have positive attitude towards learning (by demonstrate willingness to learn)	2. Identify and develop study skills (by identifying and developing learning strategies)
3. Learn cooperatively (by taking part in classroom interactions and discussions)	3. Have positive attitude towards learning (by expressing ideas and opinions freely)
4. Identify and develop study skills (by working with a variety of materials and resources)	4. Learn cooperatively (by learning with, and from others)
5. Build a positive relationship with the teacher (by respecting the formality of teacher-student relationship)	5. Build a positive relationship with the teacher (by respecting the formality of teacher-student relationship)

The Mann Whitney test found that the attitudes of teachers were more positive than those of students, which resulted in a very highly significant difference overall (p-value < .001), as shown in Table 4.58.

Table 4.58: Comparison of characteristics for enhancing learner autonomy between teachers and students using the Mann Whitney test

Characteristic	Median		p-value
	Teachers	Students	
Taking charge	1.00	1.20	<.001***
Positive attitude towards learning	1.00	1.40	<.001***
Learning cooperatively	1.10	1.40	<.001***
Developing study skills	1.20	1.40	.002**
Building a positive relationship with teacher	1.40	1.60	.001**
Overall learner autonomy enhancement	1.23	1.50	<.001***

=significant, **= highly significant and *=very highly significant*

Both teachers and students deemed three characteristics insignificant and irrelevant to the development of learner autonomy (Table 4.59). Both teachers and students agreed that completing a task with others rather than on their own was insignificant in LA enhancement, suggesting that individual tasks are more effective in the development of learner autonomy. Also, viewing the teacher as a parental figure was deemed insignificant by the two groups, confirming that respecting the formality of the teacher-student relationship is preferred by both groups. Being independent from the teacher was also not rated positively by students, which suggests that students need their teachers' support to develop autonomous behaviours.

Table 4.59: Insignificant characteristics for LA enhancement for teacher and students

Insignificant characteristics	
Teachers	Students
Completing a task with others rather than on one's own	Completing a task with others rather than on one's own
Planning where to learn	Demonstrating independence from the teacher
Viewing teachers as parental figure	Viewing teachers as parental figure

4.4.3.3 *Learners' characteristics enhancing language learning(LL)*

Teachers and students agreed that developing characteristics would enhance learner autonomy, but there was also disagreement between teachers' and students' responses. Similar to LA enhancement results, there were difference in the opinions on the importance of demonstrating a positive attitude towards learning and developing study skills, as seen in Table 4.60. In addition, the choices of sub-characteristics differ between teachers and students. Students favoured developing the ability to identify learning problems and the means of addressing them, as well as learning with and from others, which were not prioritised by teachers. Moreover, developing study skills and learning strategies were important to students in language learning enhancement, whereas teachers believed more in the importance of learning to work with a variety of materials and resources. Teachers also perceived their relationship with their students differently, as they expressed that friendship between the teacher and his/her students would enhance language learning. On the other hand, students seemed to favour a formal, respectful relationship with their teacher.

Table 4.60: Ranking characteristics and sub-characteristics for LL enhancement for teachers and students

Characteristics/sub-characteristics for enhancing Language Learning (from most important)	
Teachers	Students
Take charge of learning (by developing the ability to monitor progress)	Take charge of learning (by identifying learning problems and means of addressing them)
Have positive attitude towards learning (by demonstrate willingness to learn)	Identify and develop study skills (by identifying and developing learning strategies)
Learn cooperatively (by taking part in classroom interactions and discussions)	Learn cooperatively (by learning with, and from others)
Identify and develop study skills (by working with a variety of materials and resources)	Have positive attitude towards learning (by demonstration positive attitude towards learning English)
Build a positive relationship with the teacher (by developing friendship with the teacher)	Build a positive relationship with the teacher (by respecting the formality of teacher-student relationship)

To further investigate the difference in opinions between teachers and students, the Mann Whitney test was used. The results showed a significant difference in the opinion across all five characteristics, and the result was very highly significant (p-value < .001), as seen in Table 4.61.

Table 4.61: Comparison of characteristics for enhancing language learning between teachers and students

Characteristic	Median		p-value
	Teachers	Students	
Taking charge of learning	1.10	1.20	<.001***
Positive attitude towards learning	1.00	1.40	<.001***
Learning cooperatively	1.00	1.20	<.001***
Developing study skills	1.00	1.20	.002**
Building a positive relationship with teacher	1.40	1.60	.001**
Language learning enhancement	1.18	1.32	<.001***

=significant, **= highly significant and *=very highly significant*

In addition, two characteristics are found insignificant and therefore irrelevant to the development of language learning, as shown in Table 4.62. Teachers and students agree that viewing the teacher as a parental figure is not significant to LL enhancement. Also, students demonstrated that independence from the teacher is not helpful in language learning, reflecting the results for LA enhancement.

Table 4.62: Insignificant characteristics for LA enhancement for teacher and students

Insignificant characteristics	
Teachers	Students
Viewing teachers as parental figure	Viewing teachers as parental figure
	Demonstrating independence of the teacher

4.5 Summary of Survey Findings

This chapter has provided the results of the survey carried out to elicit teachers' and students' perceptions of learner autonomy and has compared the results from both groups. The chapter has shown that there is general agreement that learner autonomy is beneficial in a Saudi university. Both teachers and students indicated a positive attitude towards LA usefulness, and that it helped in language learning. Also, both groups were unsure about establishing LA without a teacher's help. LA seemed to be desirable and feasible based on teachers' and students' responses. However, their attitudes towards desirability was higher than feasibility.

Classroom activities were regarded as effective for fostering autonomy. However, some activities were considered more effective than others. For example, both teachers and students indicated that allowing the learner time to prepare before speaking was the most effective exercise in encouraging the development of autonomy. On the other hand, translations activities and using only English (target language) were viewed as ineffective in fostering students' autonomy.

In addition, findings indicate that there were a number of learner characteristics that both promote and enhance learner autonomy and language learning. This finding also explored how the characteristics were perceived, with certain characteristics being ranked higher in terms of importance. Taking charge of learning is perceived as an essential characteristic that students need to develop to enhance autonomous learning. Having a strong teacher-student relationship is not perceived as an important autonomous behaviour. Teachers' and students' responses show that a formal relationship with the teacher is best for learner autonomy enhancement, though some teachers demonstrated that developing a friendship with their students may enhance language learning. Characteristics associated with enhancing language learning and enhancing learner autonomy were also compared to determine the strength and type of the relationship between the two variables. Both participant groups found this correlation positive, indicating a strong relationship between LA and LL.

When comparisons between teachers and students were made, there were variations in their perceptions in terms of general views, classroom activities, and learner characteristics. There was a lack of agreement between the views of teachers and students on many aspects of learner autonomy.

The following chapter provides more findings, this time from the interviews, which have been designed to provide a more profound analysis of the survey findings

Chapter 5: Results from the Interviews

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the interviews carried out with teachers and students to explore their perceptions of learner autonomy in Saudi EFL context. Interviews were conducted with 16 female teachers at the English language Institute of King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. A further 15 interviews were carried out with foundation year Saudi female students, all of whom were studying English at different levels of competence.

The teacher results show how teachers perceive learner autonomy and their role in developing learner autonomy in the classroom; the teacher results also indicate the teachers' perception of the students, the influence of home on the students, and both cultural and institutional constraints. In this chapter, the teachers' suggestions for activities promoting learner autonomy are also presented.

The chapter also presents how students perceive learner autonomy and students' experiences of studying English at the university. The student results include the students' suggested required attributes for autonomy and their statements regarding the support they receive for autonomous activities as well as the constraints. In addition, the students' ideas for proposed autonomous activities are provided.

5.2 Teachers' Results

5.2.1 Interviewees

Table 5.1 shows the level of experience that the participants have in teaching English at the university level. As can be seen, they have a considerable amount of experience to validate their views. None of the teachers is a native speaker of English. The nationalities of the 16 teachers are specified as follows: 12 Saudi, 3 Egyptian, and 1 Pakistani.

Table 5.1: Teachers interviewed

Teacher	Qualification	Experience
Ayatt	BA	5 years
Ashwag	BA	6 years
Susan	MA	7 years
Manal	MA	7 years
Nadia	MA	7 years
Mai	MA	4 years
Shaymaa	MA	8 years
Lina	MA	16 years
Saja	MA	8 years
Wedd	BA	14 years
Lulua	BA	5 years
Fatima	MA	5 years
Zaina	MA	6 years
Yosra	MA	7 years
Asalah	MA	8 years
Rubaa	MA	2 years

The next section discusses the views of these teachers on their understanding of learner autonomy.

5.2.2 Understanding Autonomy

In the interviews, many teachers perceived learner autonomy as a positive development. One teacher strongly believed that it would encourage students and help to raise students' educational levels across all subjects, not just languages. Another teacher suggested that once students were convinced about the concept of autonomy and its importance, students would willingly accept it. However, as one interviewee argued, "*We're already doing things in the classroom that support students' autonomy, but we're doing it subconsciously. We need to take it to a different level.*" She also explained that her innate teaching practices make her want to include autonomous activities, but she nonetheless complies with what is expected of her in the classroom. She explained that to "*take it to a different level*" means that she wants to be more open about what she is doing; instead

of supporting learner autonomy being a subconscious effort, she wants to be able to introduce autonomous activities as part of the teaching process.

Despite the affirmation that they were aware of autonomy, it was clear that several teachers did not fully understand the concept. Some saw it as a staged process that had levels of development, and one teacher argued that teachers were limited by the level to which they could take learner autonomy with their students. Manal said, "*We can only take learner autonomy to a certain extent because of the limitation, but no one knows to what level we can take learner autonomy with our students*". Teachers felt that students could learn step by step to be autonomous, which indicated that the limitations might refer to student ability to accept autonomy; however, limitations were more likely to be indicative of the external constraints placed upon the teachers in terms of curriculum and time. This was further complicated by Manal confirming that "*Learner autonomy has levels of autonomy; we don't know what level we have in the classroom, but we're doing it already*." This claim indicates that the teachers themselves are uncertain of the exact nature of autonomy, but Manal explained further that if students were interested in learning the language, they would naturally develop autonomy, as they would not wait for someone else to tell them what to learn; they would learn by themselves.

This lack of awareness was demonstrated by Lulua, who referred to learner autonomy as "*a new method of teaching. It's totally new*". Another teacher, Shaymaa, referred to it as an approach used to enhance the syllabus and curriculum. There appeared to be some confusion over what was expected of teachers; many interviewees equated autonomy with a theoretical student-centred approach but wanted to know how they could apply autonomy in practice. Nevertheless, Ashwag believed that "*if teachers can tell and explain the benefits of autonomous learning, autonomous learning will add to students' experiences and skills*". It is a positive sign that the teachers expressed interest in the concept despite neither the application nor learner autonomy being well understood. Lulua has been teaching for five years since her graduation, but she considered autonomy to be a new method of teaching; this belief confirmed her lack of understanding. Shaymaa has been teaching for even longer, but she also believed that autonomy is a teaching method. Learner autonomy can be associated with a student-centred approach, so several participants had some comprehension of the concept, but they wanted to know how to apply it. Interest in the concept was present, but many teachers' skills have not yet been developed to allow them to introduce learner autonomy

into the classroom. Although Ashwag suggests that teachers can explain the benefits, there is no suggestion that they will be able to develop autonomy in their learners.

Susan suggested that the idea of learner autonomy was well known in Saudi Arabia, but the actual term was not commonly used. Similarly, when other teachers were asked about how familiar they were with the concept and the terminology, they were aware of the concept but unfamiliar with the term 'learner autonomy'. Teachers mentioned terms such as 'learner independence', 'independency', 'self-reliance', 'individuality in learning', 'learner strategy', 'student-centred teaching', and 'self-assessment'. Therefore, the teachers were aware of the concept to some extent, but there were conflicting views on their understanding of it.

Susan was one of the teachers who believed that the alternative term of self-assessment described learner autonomy. She stated that "*Learner autonomy means students have the ability to judge themselves as they know their mistakes.*" Asalah also suggested that learner autonomy was the responsibility of the learners themselves. This awareness of the concept, coupled with the lack of understanding in the practical application of autonomy, is by no means limited to these interviewees.

However, one teacher, Zaina, did proffer that learner autonomy could refer to learner independence. And another, Rubaa, admitted that the concept was not only new to students but also not very clear for many teachers. Ayatt stated that learner autonomy was learning independently and learning by oneself; she equated learner autonomy with self-study. Nevertheless, from the perceptions of these teachers, disagreement exists regarding the definition and understanding of learner autonomy. Whilst many may believe they know what learner autonomy is, in practical terms they are unsure of exactly what it implies. Therefore, they are not able to clearly foresee their role in the development of learner autonomy in the classroom, as can be seen in the next section.

5.2.3 Teachers' Roles

The role of the teacher in developing learner autonomy in the classroom was not clear to those interviewed. There was consensus that teachers were in a position to encourage students. Nadia argued that teachers want their students to succeed and get good grades. This assertion shows the emphasis in Saudi education on teachers helping students to pass their exams and get high grades. Susan also believed that students just want to pass

their exams, not learn. The focus is not on learning new knowledge and developing skills, which may have an impact on teachers' role in promoting autonomy. When students fail their course, or get low grades, management and parents question the teacher's performance. Teachers were possibly more concerned about their reputation at the university, as a result, they teach students to pass exams with good grades.

There are clearly limitations as to what can be done in the classroom. Nonetheless, Nadia suggested that autonomy could be part of the curriculum, as it could be taught. Another participant, Saja, agreed that students should be taught that knowledge is not only in textbooks; however, she added that what all teachers can realistically do is to ensure that their students "*understand the lesson and help them memorise it during class time*". This response shows the dependence that students have on memorising techniques to absorb the knowledge they need to pass exams. Teachers may find it very difficult to change students' habit of memorising information and write it up in the exam, as dependence on memorisation is deeply engrained in traditions.

One aspect in developing learner autonomy that was often mentioned by participants was the encouragement of students. Susan felt that the teacher's role was to encourage students, so they could become independent later. The relationship between teacher and students was an important factor in getting students to work. According to Yosra, the absence of an autonomous environment in the classroom might have something to do with the lack of good teacher/student relationships. Yosra also seemed to be unsure about why she sometimes failed to bond with her students, commenting that "*We want to create an autonomous environment, but we don't know how . . . there's no good relationship between teachers and students. Maybe the students are afraid, or maybe they do not like the English class; they do not enjoy learning English.*" Yosra's relations with students may not be positive, and there are clearly some issues in the language classroom. It is also of some concern that Yosra did not feel that she could motivate her learners to enjoy their English classes or even that she was in a position to ask her students why they did not like learning English.

In contrast to Yosra, Mai seemed to have a clearer idea about the reason behind this lack of teacher/student relationship; according to Mai, the reason is the course duration. It is very short and allows no time for developing autonomy and building a good relationship with students: "*The course time is very short, only seven weeks. This hinders language learning and our relationship with our students. If we have students for longer*

time we would be able to help them develop learner autonomy.” However, seven weeks should still be enough time to get to know students and develop a relationship with them. The poor teacher/student relationships may be due to the attitude of the teachers towards the students. Participants in this study generally agreed that having good teacher/student relationships was important. As Wedd explained,

The role of the teacher is extremely important. Either the teacher is encouraging or discouraging. When you find that she is helping you, you feel relaxed and you feel you want to work more at home so she will be proud of you.

However, as Wedd argued, authoritative teachers discourage their students, and authoritarianism is often the result of certain teachers lacking the knowledge or talent to be teachers in the first place. Wedd contended that the teacher influences every stage of a student’s life, and a bad teacher can ruin a student’s future. However, teachers’ approaches can be influenced by teachers’ own experiences, and these experiences may not always be positive. As Wedd stated, if a teacher encourages their students, those students will want to achieve more for that teacher. The teacher/student relationship is a two-way relationship that requires building trust between the two parties. If a teacher has had a bad experience with their own teachers or even with previous students, this can influence the way that teacher relates to students in the classroom. It is likely that the teachers have experienced a traditional background of being taught by a disciplinarian or authoritative teacher themselves, so the teachers now believe that this is the right way to teach.

The teachers felt that their role in developing learner autonomy was made more difficult because their students had no experience with working on an independent basis, and Ayatt believed the age at which a learner became independent was a significant factor. Ashwag supported Ayatt’s belief, further suggesting that starting autonomy at an early age would ensure that students were well trained and that the concept would not seem so strange to students when they entered university. The teachers generally agreed that students needed to be trained in using autonomous methods, and the view of the teacher as a guide was suggested by several interviewees. As Manal, for example, asserted, *“Students need to learn some learning strategies; books don’t give strategies, so the teacher needs to provide them.”* Yosra stated, *“First-year students are not familiar with learner autonomy because they are not used to it before. They do not know the techniques, they do not have critical thinking, getting information alone, not even the*

way to talk to teachers.” Ashwag added, “We can help them become autonomous by guiding them, teaching them some management tips.”

This view of the teacher as a guide was mainly because teachers felt that first-year university students simply did not know how or where to start being autonomous, and consequently they needed a teacher to help them find their way to autonomy. Students had become so used to being spoon-fed information at school, they did not know there was any other way of learning. Although Manal suggested that teachers give learning strategies to the learners, other teachers did not seem aware of strategies that could help their students. Yosra discussed the issues associated with students not knowing any learning strategies, but did not proffer any details on how she guides or advises her learners. Ashwag suggested that management tips may help students, but she did not mention that she has given any such tips to her own students.

Zaina suggested training teachers so that they would know how to prepare their students to become autonomous and more independent. In Zaina’s opinion, teachers have to work just as hard as their students to become autonomous, as shown in her comment below.

Maybe the teachers need to be trained, we want them [the teachers] to be fair, we want them to be prepared on how to make their students autonomous and more independent. It should be implemented into the system and taken forward to the teacher, who will try as hard as the students.

Yosra also admitted that she knows little about autonomy, and suggested lectures about learner autonomy so teachers could then know how to apply it. She added, *“We have to make an autonomous environment, but we don’t know how. We are not trained how to do it. We need lectures about autonomy so we can apply it.”* Ashwag agreed, *“It will be great to educate teachers about learner autonomy and show them how.”* It was clear that the teachers express a willingness to generate learner autonomy, but they were uncertain about how to implement autonomous activities and thereby develop learner autonomy. The fact that the teachers acknowledged their lack of knowledge shows they have an interest in helping their students become more independent and that the teachers need support in finding the right ways of doing so.

According to Asalah, this lack of knowledge extends further than the classroom. Many teachers did not know how to develop learner autonomy because they were not autonomous themselves. The feelings of these teachers towards their own autonomy were summed up by Asalah:

I'm a teacher and I cannot do anything except by approval from my coordinator. We do not have a part in any of the decision-making process. Certain people in the management are taking control of everything. It is not good to be strict like that. I am not independent. It's not university level. This is not higher education level. Students are not independent, and teachers are not independent. How can students become independent if we ourselves are not given a choice? We need to fight for this. We need to fight especially us as teachers.

However, Asalah's expectation that teachers will be able to develop learner autonomy and give guidance to their students is unrealistic if the teachers do not fully comprehend autonomous learning. The teachers have no experience in autonomous learning, as they have been educated themselves through traditional methods. Furthermore, as Asalah comments, the university management does not give teachers the opportunity to make any decisions about their teaching. This limitation may include the curriculum, as the curriculum is rigid in its focus on the final exam. Teachers do not have the freedom to make decisions about what is included in the curriculum.

Further evidence that the teacher's role is fairly restricted is seen in Asalah's contribution on how to develop learner autonomy in her students. Asalah considered being able to motivate students and foster autonomy as important, but she believed this should be done through using "nice words, intelligent words" with students. It is the teacher's role to motivate students to learn and to get the message across to them of the importance of learning; one way of motivating them may be to give them extra marks and bonuses, given that grades matter so much to Saudi students, as Rubaa pointed out. Ayatt thinks that this reward system could then be used to get them to work on their own for extra marks. However, these students are at university level, and this way of motivating seems more appropriate for schoolchildren. Others, like Lina, believe that many of the students just need a push in the right direction:

The teacher must be there to guide them, make sure they are going on the right track, kind of like a coach, you watch them and see if they are doing their job,

you just follow up and tell them. It really helps them by the end of the year, it really helps them to grow. They take charge of their learning, and they are happy to be developing. There are no hopeless cases as long as you give them a push . . . some students are just natural students, but some students they need the push; they do.

While Lina may indeed have experienced the need to push students, at the same time, there is the question of whether it is the role of the teacher to be pushing university students to this extent. The teachers' responses seem to indicate that, in many ways, the responsibility for these university students still lies primarily with the teachers, just as it does in the schools. The way in which teachers perceive their students' attitudes towards autonomy also has an impact on how teachers view their own role in promoting autonomy in the classroom. Much of this is related to the students themselves, as the teachers discuss their own perceptions of the characteristics of autonomous learners.

5.2.4 Teachers' Perceptions of Students

Generally, the teachers felt that while their students were willing to be independent learners, the students did not know how to break away from the dependence established in earlier stages of the education system. Age was again mentioned, and the importance of starting to develop learner independence at a very early age was emphasised. Zaina contended that it would be better to start at Grade 1 than to wait until students are young adults or until students are at an age where it is more difficult to change old learning habits and introduce new concepts. Nonetheless, Manal did not believe that age had anything to do with it, as she said, *"I'm 53 and I'm still learning"*. She argued that there is, therefore, no reason to believe that students cannot become autonomous if the concept is introduced as a natural outcome related to their quest for knowledge. Manal's suggestion that age is not an issue is a positive sign, however, because some of the other teachers indicated age as a barrier to learner autonomy, since students have not been introduced to the concept and application at an early age. Additionally, it is also an indication that there are still many opportunities for introducing learner autonomy at university level and that the development of learner autonomy in higher education students is a distinct possibility.

The character of the students was also something that led teachers to believe some of their students would be better suited to autonomy than others. Manal suggested that

learner autonomy was an instinct and not always a skill and that some students are autonomous by nature. However, most teachers had definite views on the kinds of attributes that learners needed to become autonomous (Table 5.2). Ashwag identified characteristics such as being learners who wanted to know more, who searched for information, and who had the intention and skills to discover new things. In addition, Ayatt stated that students who wanted to improve themselves would like the concept of learner autonomy, but lazy students were likely to resist it. Nevertheless, intelligence should not be a barrier; according to Ashwag, *“even for students who are not clever, the teachers can help them become autonomous.”* In many cases, however, the attributes identified by teachers as being the characteristics that lead to students better adapted to learner autonomy are the attributes that are present in proactive learners. Students who go searching for knowledge, as Ashwag stated, are always likely to do well as they have an interest in learning and will take up opportunities to acquire new knowledge. This proactivity is likely to be related to knowledge that interests students and may be associated with more attributes than just learners wanting to improve themselves.

According to Ashwag, teachers tend to mistakenly believe that autonomous learners are always the “good” students in the classroom. Ayatt, on the other hand, went on to describe autonomous learners as better learners and achievers in all subjects. An autonomous student thus tends to be described as the perfect student that all teachers would like to have in their classroom. This description is in direct contrast to Ashwag’s description, as she rejected the assumption that only the best students are likely to be autonomous. This trait is possibly related to human behaviour, as people tend to adapt to the situations surrounding them, and may not be due entirely to a relationship between autonomy and achievement. Nevertheless, Ayatt believes that an association exists between autonomy and achievement; this belief may be due to her own experiences. Ashwag, in contrast, thinks that learner autonomy is a universal skill, can be developed in less able students, and does not necessarily lead to achievement.

Table 5.2: Characteristics of autonomous learners (Teachers)

Willingness to learn, positive, creative, passion for learning
Hard-working
Observant
Self-motivating
Confident, motivated, strong personality
Free-thinking, critical thinkers

Independent students depending on themselves to find information
Knowledge seeking
Not dependent on books only
Not afraid to make mistakes
Social
Appreciate learning and value teachers' efforts
Have high IQ
Have teamwork spirit
Can manage their time
Can develop learning strategies

Table 5.2 shows some of the characteristics that teachers believed needed to be in place for autonomous learners. Susan suggested that the characteristics of being extroverted and unafraid of making mistakes also contribute to autonomy. Fear of making mistakes, and in particular the related fear of failure, likely results from the great importance placed on gaining good grades. From Susan's perspective, hard-working students, who were self-assessing and developing all the time, were most likely to be autonomous. According to Mai, these students are highly motivated, and motivation is linked to autonomy and even more strongly to self-motivation; as Lina added, self-motivated students want to learn, whatever the obstacles may be. As can be seen in the next section, there may be many obstacles to overcome.

5.2.5 Cultural Constraints

Some of these obstacles may be associated with cultural constraints, especially in the context of Saudi Arabia. Many consider learner autonomy to be a Western construct. This belief was echoed in Ayatt's perception that "*in Western society they begin to develop learner autonomy earlier than us.*" There is, therefore, already a subliminal belief that pedagogical approaches are different in other countries. This belief was also voiced by Mai, who said that the teaching system in Saudi Arabia did not support autonomy, like in the West, where the way of life and teaching system all contributed to autonomous learners. In Mai's perception, learning was not about textbooks in Western societies, and there was no right or wrong about ideas, as everything is accepted. However, interviewees regarded Saudi parents as being too strict, as children are not allowed to express their opinion freely, and this strictness was believed to be a cultural

barrier to autonomy, as it discouraged students from developing and expressing independent views.

In her 4 years of teaching experience, Mai admitted that she has never had an autonomous learner in her class. She believes that the way that Saudis are used to learning inhibits creativity. In addition, the emphasis on gaining high grades within the educational system means that students view English learning as a chore, rather than as something enjoyable. However, the assertion by Mai that she has never has an autonomous learner in her classes may be indicative of two things: firstly, Mai may not recognise an autonomous learner when confronted with one, and secondly Mai is not taking opportunities to introduce autonomous activities into her lessons.

It can be difficult for science-based students to learn a language, and some may get low marks in English despite having high grades in their maths and sciences. Some students eventually decide not to attend English classes. They view English as a subject in which they are not doing well. Shaymaa recognises that this poor performance makes students develop negative feelings towards English language learning, as failure to pass English courses may prevent students from being able to attend medical school, for example, for which they need to pass all subjects with high grades. Therefore, there is pressure on the teachers to teach the students for the test, not to learn English, as pointed out by Lina. The pressures on teachers to focus solely on passing exams come from both the students and the organisation, as the grades in English determine whether students can progress onto desired degree programmes. It is clearly at the forefront of teachers' concerns that their students should be prepared to pass exams and gain good grades. This goal appears more important than the acquisition of English language skills.

It was also suggested that Saudi society is a judgemental society and that this attitude is why students do not want to make an effort in their learning. The social aspect of learning is put into question, as Susan remarked:

In Saudi culture we judge ourselves and other people harshly. Learner autonomy is not going to be helpful in our education because people are judgemental in Saudi Arabia. They look for mistakes and the negative side of people, so students stop trying; they believe they cannot learn English, and they don't want to be judged or mocked.

This statement seems an unusual one to make about learning a language, but the idea is perhaps associated with cultural norms of viewing mistakes as an inappropriate behaviour. The teacher here seemed to be expressing her own fear of making mistakes and being judged by her students and colleagues. Increasing self-confidence and self-esteem might be an issue that needs to be addressed in order to improve the performances of both teachers and students inside and outside the classroom.

In Nadia's opinion, culture and religion are closely entwined in Saudi life, and Islam has strict principles about how life should be; this situation reflects the unique identity of the Saudi society and way of life. Nadia also notes that students do not view learning as a field for exploration, and consequently critical thinking is not encouraged. The students are not taught to ask questions, but rather to accept what the teacher tells them. She believes it would be hard to change this attitude towards learning. Because of this integration of culture and religion, teachers are forced to provide teacher-led classes. The teacher is the authoritative figure, and all knowledge emanates from the teacher, making the learners passive recipients. Despite classes being teacher-led, however, Nadia believed there is still room for students to become more active learners, especially when learning a language. She suggests that teachers should give a certain direction to students, who then are left to follow that direction; this approach could be used as a route towards teachers guiding or directing their students while introducing some autonomous activities into the classroom. There is no reason to believe that Saudi students cannot learn English, especially as these students have already attained a good level of education and are preparing for an academic course at university. Students may not have been encouraged to participate in class in ways that would develop their confidence with the language.

However, teachers are not the only authoritarian figures; authoritarianism can exist in the home as well. Saja stated, "Sometimes we have a controlling teacher in the class and a controlling Mum at home. Introducing learner autonomy is not going to be easy in this case." This aspect of control is significant, as students are so used to being told what to do that they may be unable to work independently. Yet, as Saja reflects, the development of learner autonomy, which results in students being able to work on their own, is something that can be applied throughout the rest of their lives. As technology continues to expand, online courses will become more popular for advancing professional development and for earning certificates for career progression. These online courses will require learners to be able to work independently. Therefore the lack

of autonomy may prevent students from obtaining the lifelong learning skills that they may need in the future. Yet parental and educational controls, as well as a general repudiation of autonomy, are likely to be a barrier to introducing the concept of autonomous learning. Thus a change in attitude towards learner autonomy may be key to implementing autonomy in the first place, as there seems to be rejection of the concept without understanding the implications. If a more positive connotation of learner autonomy were to be reinforced, there would likely be more acceptance.

However, in light of current sociocultural constraints, it is not surprising that teachers are finding it difficult to deviate from their traditional approaches. The constraints for teachers may also come from the institution.

5.2.6 Institutional Constraints

It is also clear that there are institutional constraints, mainly related to the programme syllabus. Teachers felt they did not have enough time to introduce new activities or to support learners to work on their own. It was felt that quantity overruled quality and, as Wedd said, *“Everything has to be done too quickly.”* These responses related to the limited period of the English course, namely seven weeks, on the Common European Framework Reference (CEFR).

The programme curriculum for teaching English was another constraint acknowledged by teachers. Ashwag suggested that the university curriculum did not offer opportunities for students to be autonomous as the modular system gave no time for learner autonomy. Susan said that as a result of this lack of time, the classes were becoming more teacher-centred instead of student-centred as teachers had to cover a whole book and teach the four skills of language learning. Most preparatory year students came from the same educational background, namely the state system, these students struggled to accept any level of autonomy as was noted by Manal, *“Students learn from each other, so it would be different if we had a mixture of cultures and backgrounds; it’s easier with international students.”* In addition, it was argued that learner autonomy is not available at the university because the university is in the government sector. This argument indicates the overall lack of understanding of exactly what learner autonomy involves and is a cause for some concern. If teachers believe that autonomy is somehow contravening government expectations, there is little likelihood of those teachers trying to introduce autonomous activities into their classrooms.

Resources provided by the university were also regarded as being a deterrent to autonomy. Manal described textbooks as dull and inauthentic, but decisions for using such materials were outside teachers' control. She confirms that the teaching curriculum and resources are dictated by university policymakers, and the teachers have no control over them. Teachers regarded the textbooks as boring, and Lina added that the textbooks are also unrealistic: *"They say the books include real-life situations, but these are unreal and just pretending to be real. They simply require memorisation and no creativity on the part of the student."* Both Manal and Lina are teaching from textbooks that they themselves do not find interesting or appropriate, which limits their enjoyment of their own teaching practice. There is little flexibility allowed outside the need to cover everything in the textbook.

In addition, Manal mentioned the time allocated for teaching English in the modular programmes. She felt that having a group for just seven weeks was simply not enough time to help them become autonomous and that it would be far better if they were able to keep the same group of students for a full year. Furthermore, the pressure on teachers to deliver the curriculum in such a limited amount of time means teachers feel that they *"are in a race to finish it"* (Nadia). Because of such short courses, it is difficult for teachers to form any relationship with their students, and all their focus is on completing the course in time. Within the allotted time, the teachers must ensure that all their students reach a specific level of competence, and this goal can only be achieved by covering the materials that the teachers are given, as these materials are the basis of what is used to assess students' achievement on the exams.

Furthermore, Lina contends that the students are given an overload of information as so much must be covered in such a short time. The educational system itself thus becomes a barrier to autonomy as the amount of information that students need to absorb leaves no room for extra activities. To help their students pass their test, many teachers find ways to make the course easier for them. Lina related that copying materials directly from the internet is often allowed by the teachers. Lina also expressed understanding of the difficulties that teachers have in providing extra materials that might be more useful and appropriate for their students as a result of time constraints and rigid curriculum; the teachers themselves could not thereby become autonomous.

Nevertheless, some teachers, like Ayatt, believed that there are *"No obstacles! Everything is there: facilities are there, the teacher, books, internet; what will stop or*

hinder learning is the student herself. It depends on the student's willingness; they have to be willing to learn." Ayatt placed the responsibility with the student, and she did not suggest any guidance to support learner autonomy in students. She argued that all the resources are in place for learning, and students should be able to avail themselves of these tools. Undoubtedly, students need to be willing to learn, but Ayatt did not indicate where this willingness comes from. This willingness relates to the way in which the student has been raised and the influence of their family on their development.

5.2.7 Influence of Home

Students' home environments were considered a significant factor in developing autonomy in students. Wedd felt that her own upbringing with "*understanding, intellectual, educated parents*" had made her life easier. She said that she tends to assume now that students whose language is good learned English from their parents. Family background can make a difference, especially in language learning. However, Ayatt noted that family background could also affect students in a negative way, claiming that "*Parent support is very important. Most parents don't speak English, so they can't help; if parents could speak English, the students would get support from them, and they would achieve more.*" Having educated and intellectual parents, such as Wedd's, may be supportive in guiding their children in specific directions, especially in terms of their future, but there is no evidence that having such parents will lead to learner autonomy. Wedd approaches learner autonomy from a different perspective, as she commented that when she comes across a student whose English language is good, she immediately assumes that the student comes from a more privileged background. Ayatt also agrees that English-speaking parents can enhance the achievement of their children. Such students may not necessarily be autonomous learners though; they may simply have a higher achievement level in English.

The overall influence of parents, however, is more significant nowadays as parents are highly educated, care about the education of their children, and can provide academic support, according to Manal. Nadia also acknowledged the influence of parents, because they are the ones who set the criteria and goals for their children; young people are in a parentally guided environment. The teachers clearly understood the impact that a Saudi family has on a young person. Mai said, "*They support, they give their children a choice and help them make their own decisions early in their lives*". Nevertheless, these decisions are likely to be in line with what the parents want; thus, if teachers want to

introduce more out-of-class activities and tasks for their students, the teachers need to ensure that parents understand exactly what needs to be done and why. In this way, teachers may gain the necessary support from parents so that students continue to follow the advice of their parents and feel that they can participate in such activities. Gaining the support of parents for autonomous activities may be crucial in any attempt to develop learner autonomy.

The dependence of students on their parents appears to be one of the major factors in creating a barrier to autonomy. Although decision-making should be part of growing up and becoming independent, Saudi parents like to keep control. Asalah confirmed that some parents would not allow students to make decisions; parents choose the major and the university for their child, thus making the student entirely dependent on the wishes of their parents. In many cases, it is the parents who complain about their children being given too much work to do at university, not the students, and such complaints obviously have a negative effect on the student.

Economic status was regarded as a factor in autonomy, as teachers made comparisons between students from state and private schools. Those students who could afford private schooling were more likely to be exposed to different influences. Lina spoke of the difference between state and private students, where private schooling led to more creative thinkers. This observation was also backed up by Wedd, who said that private international schools had adopted a strategy of making students work on their own rather than wait for the teacher to give them all the information. The private schools are not restricted by the same regulations as the state schools. Wedd's description of independent learning occurring in the private international schools suggests that some teachers at those schools have experience with learner autonomy, possibly because those teachers have come from more Western-based education systems.

The accessibility of technology in the home has the potential to enable autonomy, as parents are now buying laptops and iPads and encouraging their children to use the internet. Lulua observed that *"every child in Saudi Arabia has an iPad nowadays."* Ashwag contended that even older brothers and sisters can act as role models and help guide students in autonomous methods. However, such sibling guidance may not be possible in all home environments. Saja states that many mothers do not believe in the concept of learner autonomy as *"they think teaching should be spoon-fed"*. Zaina suggested that students were not independent because most parents do homework for

their children; although it is normal for parents to help their children, many parents overstep. Other teachers also spoke of how parents should refrain from doing everything for their child and should instead allow their children to access the internet so that students can find knowledge for themselves.

These comments indicate that parents lack an awareness of the benefits of autonomy in learning; parents simply want to ensure that their child has the best chance possible of doing well in school and gaining a high grade, which parents believe is the key to succeeding in life. This belief is a traditional way of thinking, namely that the best parents are parents who micromanage their children's education. Ashwag's suggestion that older siblings may help to guide their younger siblings towards autonomous learning is based on her thinking that there is a generation gap. However, older brothers and sisters have likely also been raised to accept parental control, and no evidence exists that older siblings would have any understanding of autonomous practices.

Despite the attitudes towards autonomy that were mainly influenced by cultural and institutional constraints, the teachers believed many acceptable activities could be used to promote autonomy, as can be seen in the next section.

5.2.8 Activities Promoting Autonomy

The teachers discussed various activities that, in their opinion, led to learners becoming autonomous. It was suggested that the influence of the media should be harnessed; for example, listening to English songs would help. In addition, watching movies could also benefit English language learners. Ayatt said that one activity that could be practised would be writing words and phrases from the songs and movies so that students were learning English from the world around them. Other teachers supported this suggestion, indicating that such activities would not only improve English but also give students an understanding of other cultures. A wide variety of activities were proposed (see Table 5.3) for initiating autonomy, although some of the suggested activities, such as grammar practice or translations, are normal classroom activities not directly associated with learner autonomy. This suggestion again questions the exact understanding that many teachers have of autonomy.

Table 5.3: Suggested activities for promoting autonomy (Teachers)

Tasks with rewards	Out of class activities
Presentations	Group work
Watch movies and listen to songs	Use of smart phones & modern technology
Reading	Use of authentic materials
Peer support/peer correction	Structured games
Projects relevant to students	Social media
Grammar practice	Translations
Videos	Language exchange partners
Keeping vocabulary notebook	Keeping portfolio of evidence
Creating WhatsApp group to use English only	Sending SMS texts in English
Use of a dictionary	Allowing iPads in class
Use of language labs for fun activities	Creating virtual English environments

One participant, Ashwag, described how she had told her students to create a presentation on their own choice of subject. She stated how they needed a little teacher help and support, but the students really enjoyed the interaction with their peers. She suggested that an autonomous activity could be having students read a story outside the classroom, produce a review, and discuss that review in class. There is, therefore, evidence that teachers like Ashwag are indeed finding opportunities within the system to introduce autonomous activities, despite other teachers saying that they did not have the time within the curriculum to do so.

Providing students with tasks relevant to their university work would motivate them to work outside the classroom, according to Manal, although such tasks sound more like homework as opposed to autonomous tasks. Furthermore, Nadia remarked that giving students projects outside the classroom is not helpful, as the English levels they may come across on the internet, for example, are very complex and can demotivate them. This impression may be more the perception of a teacher who has not yet tried to implement this activity, rather than a description of what has occurred. It is possible that Nadia would be surprised at how students could benefit from this kind of activity. However, such an activity would require some targeted guidance from the teacher, rather than allowing students to try to find their own way. Notably, Nadia also stated that “*some students do not accept the teacher’s help.*” Nadia has clearly had some problems with

her students and may not have a good relationship with those who reject her support, although much depends on the kind of help she was offering.

Although there may be several activities outside the classroom that could be used to promote autonomy, there are strict restrictions for the female students. Mai pointed out that most Saudi families do not allow their daughters to leave the house after school or to attend after-class activities. Female students do have access to technology and the internet, but it is not clear that parents will always condone accessing the internet, as there have been instances in which social media sites have been used unwisely. As a result, Saudi parents have every reason to be cautious and protective of their daughters. However, some of the teachers felt that parents were being over-protective in not wanting their children to mix with the community. This remains a contentious point, but many activities could still be interactive, enjoyable, and help promote autonomy in the Saudi context.

Not all activities need to be outside the classroom, though. Lina noted that some of the work she does with her students, such as letting students use their phones and Google information, makes full use of the technology that the students can understand. If students use this technology within the classroom, there is of course more chance that they will be able to use it in their own homes. By being guided through safe use of the internet, the students are less likely to be at risk when online. Lina also finds that group work is very effective as they can all work together on a project of their own choice. Having the freedom of choice to select their own project means that students can show creativity. This freedom gives them the feeling that they are in control of their own learning and provides what Lina refers to as a “*good learning experience*” by encouraging them to interact with others.

One teacher, Fatima, was able to contrast the activities she used when she taught in a private language institution with her experiences at the university. Fatima explained how her private students were very responsible and took charge of their learning, stating that “*They searched to find answers, searched for other resources on the web, did online activities, spoke with each other.*” Unfortunately, she found that university students were not willing to get involved in any such activities, as they were only interested in studying for the exam. She described how she tried to introduce extra materials apart from the textbook, but students always asked if those materials would be included in the exam, and if the materials would not be included, the students would not bother doing these

extra activities. The difference in attitudes between the private school students and the state school students seems significant, but this perceived difference could be due to teacher encouragement, institutional support, parent support, or indeed a combination of all three. The same Saudi homogenous groups of students attend both kinds of schools, yet the private schools seem to be offering an experience that is promoting active participation on the part of the students. If independent and active learning is occurring in private schools, then there would appear to be no reason it should not be happening in other educational establishments.

At the university it seems that there are more expectations of the teachers and fewer of the students. Any activities being introduced into the classroom need to come from the teacher, which may seem to students as an extra imposition. However, the teachers in this study were looking for ways in which they might introduce autonomous activities, despite the constraints. Simple activities were suggested as a way of building up the confidence to work on their own. Yosra proposed that students should sit with a friend and practise anything in English. They could talk, swap notes, watch a movie together, or do any other activities together to improve their English. Rubaa believed that fun activities could be done in class and suggested watching a movie, videos, or YouTube once a week. However, from the comments from many of the other teachers, the students may not appreciate the value of such activities as they are so focused on passing exams. Yet Yosra's proposal about pair work is actually a good way of encouraging learner autonomy and active learning; pair work could be incorporated into the curriculum, but the focus could remain on exams.

The next section presents the students' voices about their views on autonomy.

5.3 Students' Results

5.3.1 Interviewees

Table 5.4 shows the level of English of the participants. As can be seen, some students have language learning experiences from outside the university in private language institutes. All student participants are Saudi female students aged 18-20 years old.

Table 5.4: Students interviewed

Students	English level	Language courses obtained outside university	Age
Farah	4	1. English lessons at home (Private tutor) 2. English course at Canadian Language Centre, Jeddah	18
Sara	4	None	18
Ghada	3	English course in a private language institute	20
Dina	2	None	19
Lujain	3	English course in a private language institute	18
Huda	3	English course in Oxford Language Centre, Jeddah	18
Suha	4	None	19
Tahani	4	None	19
Abrar	2	None	19
Najla	1	None	20
Duha	2	None	19
Khadija	1	None	19
Ebtisam	3	None	19
Ahlam	2	None	18
Aisha	3	None	18

5.3.2 Student Perceptions of Autonomy

From the student perspective, it was found that most of the students had not heard of the term of learner autonomy. Indeed, the students noted that the term was strange, formal,

or technical. Others expressed awareness of the concept, but it was not clear whether they fully understood the meaning. Although just under half stated that the concept of learner autonomy was not new to them, and some did mention words such as ‘independent learning’, ‘self-study’, and ‘self-reliance’, others who believed the term referred to students’ rights in learning.

There appeared to be a lot of support for introducing autonomy, or what was perceived as autonomy. To Sara, learner autonomy meant having the right to do or say what she wanted; she equated it to freedom.

Most girls my age are very independent. They want to have freedom and autonomy. It's our right. People are demanding autonomy nowadays, especially students. Girls my age want to have autonomy, but it doesn't mean we want to be totally free or be wild. We are responsible, and we know our limits.

This response indicates a new way of thinking for young Saudis, showing that they are in many ways breaking away from some of the traditions maintained by their parents. This change represents an opportunity for learner autonomy to be introduced; the proclamation that girls are responsible is especially indicative of this opportunity. Demonstrating responsibility in their approach to their own learning would change how education is viewed and help develop a long-term strategy leading to lifelong learning, because individuals could take responsibility for their own search for knowledge. Students could become more active learners, instead of waiting for an authoritarian figure to provide them with facts and figures they should memorise. It would indeed be a significant change in the way knowledge is made available in Saudi Arabia.

Sara’s response is also interesting as it demonstrates a more feminist approach, not just to education, but to life in general. Sara did not quite understand the concept of learner autonomy, as she said that “*learner autonomy is different in the West because autonomy is supported by law, but in Saudi Arabia it's different, it's a new trend, we have just begun to demand it.*” However, she has a vision of freedom of choice. She is open to new ideas. This freedom was important to many of the young student participants. Ghada reported that things are imposed upon young students and that they are not allowed to make choices. Huda agreed that students do not have freedom of choice when it comes to learning. Indeed, the teacher’s comments previously indicated that most of the classes continue to be teacher centred.

A comparison with the West was made by Dina, who believed that people in Western countries had total freedom, but in Saudi Arabia those in authority dominated others. The education system was not conducive to autonomy in Saudi Arabia, according to Lujain, as it was not part of the culture. This observation was also made clear by Huda, who said, “*We only know one way of learning, the teacher talks and we listen.*” It was emphasised on several occasions that learner autonomy and independent learning were not encouraged in Saudi Arabia; instead, students felt that they depended on the teacher and were not supported by the education system. The students understood that pedagogical approaches are different in other countries, although Farah also acknowledged that learner autonomy “*depends on the personality of the teacher, and it doesn’t matter if we are in Saudi Arabia or another country*”.

It is interesting that Farah placed the responsibility for learner autonomy on the teachers, who previously had argued that it was the responsibility of the students. There is clearly a division between the two sides, each deferring responsibility to the other. Farah is in a position to make a judgement on the teaching as she has been privately tutored in English and also received instruction from a private language institute. She believed that the personality of the teacher has an influence on what goes on in the classroom; that belief indicates that the relationship between teachers and students is important, as a warm personality on the part of a teacher can motivate students to try to please the teacher. The relationship may be more important than a rigid focus on the impending exams, as the relationship will encourage students to try to improve their learning and, consequently, may have a positive impact on their grades.

The next section presents the students’ experiences, which were discussed in the context of the students’ perceptions of the development of learner autonomy at university.

5.3.3 Studying at University

The students acknowledged that approaches to learning differed between school and university, but much of this difference may have been referring to the amount of work that was expected of students at university level. Nevertheless, as has been seen earlier, some teachers continued to refer to the way in which students just want to receive information and pass exams, stating that they are not interested in learning. This response contrasted with the opinion of one student, Huda, who explained that at school they learnt

just grammar and grammatical rules in English class and consequently did not learn to speak English. However, she stated that it was completely different at university, where they mostly participated in discussions and speaking activities, which they really enjoyed. This contrast shows the differences that exist in approaches to English language teaching within the university. Huda has also experienced English teaching in a private institute, so she does have a point of reference.

In many ways, Huda's description of her learning at university was exactly what could be termed as autonomous learning. She explained how the teacher encouraged the class to search for information and how they used different materials and resources. This description even went further, as she detailed how, if the teacher advised them to do an out-of-class activity, the students would do it. Another student, Suha, described her English class as being fun; students were not afraid of the teacher and felt that they could talk about their personal lives and feel relaxed. Tahani also thought that the English class was so enjoyable that sometimes she forgot that she was in a lesson. Tahani really liked her English teacher because the teacher conversed with them and listened to their stories and dreams. Tahani said *"We speak freely about our personal lives with the teacher. It's nice when the teacher listens to us, hears our stories, it shows that she cares."* One participant related the teacher to a mother, saying that the teacher is like a second mother to some students. She explained why she feels this way, stating *"some girls do not have mothers to support them, so the teacher stands in her place"*; this participant was possibly referring to her own situation.

All of these comments indicate that many students are already experiencing autonomous learning and enjoying it. This result contrasts with the views of the teachers, who reported that they are unable to introduce autonomous activities into the classroom as they have insufficient time to work outside the materials in the textbooks. The descriptions from these students show that some teachers are developing learner autonomy and their students are benefitting from the experience.

Nonetheless, there are still indications of the teacher being an authoritarian figure, and students accepting it; as Huda commented, *"the teacher knows what is best for us, she knows better"*. This statement also shows that Huda has trust in her teacher. A similar comment was made by Ahlam: *"The teacher should encourage us to become autonomous, push us, or even force us if necessary. We won't take it personally, we are sure the teacher wants what's best for us"*. Students also referenced the teacher being in

control, as the teacher had control over the marks, so it was necessary to both obey and please the teacher, submitting to her authority, in order not to lose marks. This observation indicates that learner autonomy is possible in the classroom, and that activities can be fun, but there still must be good classroom discipline. The teacher's role is fundamental to the success of their students. This is especially so in language learning, where supportive teachers are considered motivational, and in turn as catalysts of better outcomes. Indeed, teacher help and support is needed in the classroom. *"We need a teacher to help us, we cannot develop learner autonomy alone"*, Najla stated.

Despite the descriptions of learner autonomy being developed in some classrooms, several students were critical of the teachers at university, saying that these teachers did not want to collaborate with the students or encourage learner autonomy, but just wanted to give a lecture and leave. Students did not like lectures in which the teacher talked and the students listened; the students wanted to be engaged in the class. It was also mentioned that the teacher's role in autonomy and motivation was very important in the classroom. For example, Abrar pointed out that students become demotivated in the classroom when the teacher keeps on talking, does not give the students a chance to speak, and makes them feel there is *"nothing left for us to say"*. Duha made it clear that the students are not asking the teacher to be their friend; students just wanted to be involved in the lesson. As she said, *"we do not want the teacher to become our friend, we are here to learn . . . we just need her to listen to us and involve us in the lesson"*. Moreover, there were some criticisms of teachers who relied solely on books and delivered boring lessons, which made the students dislike their English classes. One student also referenced teachers not paying individual attention to students and failing to recognise that some clever students are also shy. This may be because this student had personally experienced a lack of attention in the classroom, but she further stated that the teacher should ask students about their preferences.

Whereas a number of the students thought that they did not have support for becoming autonomous learners at university, Farah was adamant that they had plenty of freedom at university and had freedom to choose to be autonomous, which made her very happy. She also added that it is the students themselves at university level who have a greater role in autonomy than the teacher, because they are the ones who can make it happen. Even though some students may be academically excellent, they are not autonomous. Farah argues that such students will not do well in life as they will not

benefit from their course because they are simply memorising and not actually learning anything. Tahani noted that autonomous learning has a positive impact, particularly on language learning. According to Tahani, being autonomous leads to a high level of determination and passion to learn the language. She explained as follows: *“There is a strong connection between learner autonomy and language learning; if I’m an autonomous learner I would become more passionate and more determined to learn English.”* Similarly, Aisha believed that developing learner autonomy would greatly contribute to improving her English language. In Aisha’s opinion, learner autonomy helps in encouraging students not only to learn the language, but also to use it in real life situations:

Learner autonomy plays an important role in improving our language, it also helps us practise the language in real life, when we travel, when we talk to a native speaker, our language is improving because we are not only memorising . Memorisation is a good strategy to get high marks, but it’s not learning.

Aisha saw that there is a purpose to learning a language that transcends the need to pass exams and gain good grades.

Autonomous learning was thought to be applicable to both lower levels and higher levels of English. Students in lower levels would appreciate learning autonomously because they are willing to work hard and motivated to improve their English. Students in higher levels would also welcome autonomous learning as they are not shy and have confidence when it comes to using the language in the classroom. Yet there could be a negative aspect to this application of autonomous learning. If students were put under pressure to become autonomous and independent, they could become resistant and might even drop out of university, unable to handle the pressure of the first year at university. Dina therefore suggested that the introduction of autonomous learning should be very gradual as it is too much of a shock for first year students.

Students will not accept it, especially first year students. This year determines our future. We have to get good grades in all courses. Some students feel that they can’t complete this year, it is very tough. Learner autonomy should not start in the foundation year. Attending university is a shocking experience for many of us, we don’t want another shocking concept such as learner autonomy. This puts us under a lot of pressure. Many students quit their studies and stay at home

because they can't handle the pressure. Students will be shocked if you introduce the idea of learner autonomy all of a sudden. I personally was shocked when I came to the university and I had to take total responsibility for my study. Teachers were asking us to go work on our own and search for information, we were lost, we didn't know where to begin. Total independence hinders learning because students are under a lot of pressure, they need help.

Dina's observation indicates the challenges faced by students. Students are completely unprepared for university life and for studying on their own. It seems that the pressures are especially related to the English language classes, which are described as very tough, too intense, likely to overload students with information, and too heavy in content for students to memorise. Most of the students at university faced this problem with the English course. However, Dina did not seem to understand the concept of learner autonomy in the classroom and appeared to equate it with being told to go and work on her own. This confusion shows that teacher support is needed to develop learner autonomy, but also to introduce activities that make learning both more relevant to what students need and to ensure that such activities do not initially expect too much of students.

Students clearly stated that private education was decidedly better than the education at the university. According to Ghada, although the course at a private English language institution was very challenging, she really enjoyed it. Unfortunately, she was not enjoying the course at the university, where she found English classes unchallenging and boring. Students want to learn the language, but they do not want to learn it the way the courses are delivered at university. These feelings also applied to other courses at the university, not just English. Aisha reported that some teachers treated students with no respect and embarrassed them in front of the whole class. There is, therefore, some work to be done on building relationships between teachers and students to get the best from them.

The students themselves expressed certain expectations about the kinds of learners most likely to become autonomous; the next section presents some of these attributes.

5.3.4 Attributes for Autonomy

Students believed that certain characteristics were suited to autonomous learners. They identified a variety of different attributes (see Table 5.5), among which self-confidence

and being hard working were highly rated. Some of the characteristics selected are similar to those chosen by the teachers, but others reflect the different views of generations. The main characteristics that students described are set out in Table 5.6, but several other characteristics were mentioned by individuals, as is discussed. Younger people are known to be more idealistic, and this characteristic was shown by the participants' selection of attributes such as "*setting a good example for the following generation*" and "*wanting to make a difference in society*", as stated by Tahani. These attributes are not entirely relevant to learner autonomy, but the sentiment behind them can be recognised. Indeed, there is a feeling that these students see themselves as flag-bearers for the next generation and that they want to see a change in their society.

Table 5.5: Characteristics for autonomous learners (Students)

Ability to cooperate with others	Responsible
Good communication skills	Social
Creative	Strong personality
Self-confident	Quick learners
Have a role in society	Self-reliant
Bold	Determined
Goal oriented	Not dependent on teacher
Be a leader not a follower	Open minded
Respectful to other's opinions	Hard working

It is likely that external influences have had more impact on these young people than on previous generations. This increased influence may be attributed to the influence of social media. Several students mentioned that having an opinion was a characteristic of autonomy; this observation again reflects the changes that are occurring in Saudi society. Girls were not previously expected to have strong views and be unafraid to voice such opinions. Now, students like Sara feel able to make statements like "*Sometimes people don't take us seriously. They don't listen to our opinion. Our generation is autonomous. We have our own vision.*" Farah stated firmly that students do not like traditional ways of learning or old ideas; the students felt that teachers "*should keep pace with the times*". Saudi students are now able to watch what is going on in other communities and compare their own education. However, although Farah suggests new teaching approaches, she has not fully appreciated the pressures that the teachers are under to fulfil their responsibilities for completing a course within a very tight schedule. From the responses of the teachers, many would like the opportunity of being more flexible in their

approaches but need to ensure the students complete a course and cover the curriculum to pass exams and gain good grades.

Negativity was considered an enemy of learner autonomy, and several participants mentioned the need to be positive. This need for positivity may be in response to the fact that students feel that their opinions are not listened to, but it is also interesting that students continue to be positive about impending change. Students' desire to be listened to does not mean they are unwilling to comply, as they all note how important it is to respect the opinions of others. In many ways these students are very similar to young people across the world, as they believe that their elders do not listen to them. However, this feeling that nobody cares about their views is both frustrating and disappointing, according to Sara.

Many of the other suggestions were perhaps more appropriate to activities that could be used for autonomy and were not characteristics, and these suggestions are discussed later in this chapter. However, as one participant declared, learner autonomy was something that can be copied from others in the group and where there is an active class, there is more likelihood that students in the class would all develop learner autonomy. Using the internet to search for information was clearly indicative of an autonomous learner and so was looking for any online activities to improve language skills. Ghada contends that if the class was encouraged to be involved in such activities, all students would have characteristics of autonomy. However, such activities may not be welcomed by all students, as Abrar reported that others disliked autonomous learners because they had strong personalities and always wanted to be the centre of attention. Abrar seemed to associate autonomous learners with extroverted learners. In fact, autonomous learners are more likely active learners without wanting to be the centre of attention.

Although the characteristics may describe potential autonomous learners, there are other factors involved in promoting autonomy, as the following section shows.

5.3.5 Support and Constraints

Given their age and the fact that they are young girls growing up in a Saudi Arabian context, it is to be expected that both supports and constraints are associated with these students' autonomy. In both cases, these factors are likely to be protective factors in line with traditions. As Farah explains, *“Some families do not encourage their children to be autonomous and they grow up this way. They are dependent and rely on their parents.*

They do everything for them.” The family was also seen as a barrier by Sara, who commented that sometimes students lived in an environment that discouraged autonomy, and this discouragement was very challenging for these students. Dina recognises that, in contrast, some students are raised in homes where they are encouraged to be responsible, and Lujain said that if students are independent at home, they are also independent at the university. Khadija suggested that learner autonomy could be developed at home, as all the family could have daily discussions and read books together. In this way, family members could all learn from each other.

Families are very important for directing and supporting each other and, without their support, it becomes very difficult for students to carry out a plan of action. Some Saudi families seemed to reject or discourage their children from doing new things or learning new things. This attitude is indicative of families wanting to maintain traditional customs and behaviours. Tahani told of her own experiences with her family, as she explained that she had a passion for learning and developing personal skills, but this passion was something that generated no support from her family. This lack of support resulted in her having to give up, as her family did not provide her with the motivation to continue. Having family support is very important in Saudi culture, so persisting without family approval is very difficult. However, even within families, there can be differences in the way children are treated. The eldest child tends to be more independent and responsible, as the family trains him or her to take care of younger siblings. The younger children are usually more spoiled and very dependent on parents and older brothers or sisters, according to Ahlam.

Although some students did not perceive any obstacles to being autonomous, and felt that they could do anything, this feeling was not universally agreed upon. The cultural context was acknowledged as being a deterrent to many students because if students made a mistake, they would immediately be criticised or punished. Making mistakes is seen as an inappropriate behaviour, according to Huda, and this perception was why students were afraid of making mistakes at home or at school. Huda recalled her own experience of being made to stand at the back of the class for the whole lesson after she made a small mistake. Khadija reported how she did not like making mistakes in front of the whole class and consequently, when she does not know how to say something, she does not even try to speak. This fear reflects the need for teachers to build confidence in

their students and to ensure that all students are treated with respect; making mistakes should be encouraged as a way of learning.

Nonetheless, the teacher is important, and Suha explained that while it might be nice if students were able to take control of their learning and become independent, the teacher should still help. Learning is a joint effort, and students want the teacher to be there to guide them and give feedback. The support of the teacher was considered significant to developing autonomous learning. Tahani felt that this support is important for developing an interest in the topic, as “*the teacher can make students love or hate the subject she teaches.*” It was suggested that learner autonomy would create mutual respect between the teacher and student and that the teacher–student relationship was very important, but one participant, Abrar, believed that it was possible to achieve learner autonomy without the support of a teacher. Abrar felt that the availability of new technologies meant that, if teacher support was not available, it would not detract from learner autonomy. However, this would be not a preferred way of developing autonomy.

The student interviews showed that teachers were not always sympathetic or helpful towards their students. Some teachers criticised students for being dependent, and Aisha felt strongly that teachers should be there to help, not to be constantly critical. Some students had apparently been targets of personal criticism, being told they would never be able to improve. This criticism demotivates students and, in some cases, has resulted in students dropping out of the university.

The format of the English courses was criticised, as students felt that changing the group every seven weeks was very frustrating as it did not give enough time for making friends or building a relationship with the teacher. Students reported that the English course was very challenging and complicated, with students struggling to pass exams. Many complaints were issued about English, which was regarded as the biggest obstacle for those in their foundation year. The English programme is very important to students wanting to pursue a particular course of study at the university. Without good grades, students will not be able to progress onto their preferred degree and, consequently, there is a lot of pressure on the students to achieve good grades. It is understandable that students find the programme difficult and frustrating, especially when dealing with the other changes in their first year at university.

However, it was also interesting to note that some participants felt that the students themselves were obstacles to learner autonomy. Students do not want to be autonomous because they are so used to receiving everything without putting forth any effort. Additionally, Ebtisam said that some students do not like autonomous learning as they feel bored when they have to do something on their own, and some students also have a negative attitude towards the concept for no particular reason. This negativity may be linked to some girls being very shy and hesitant to speak freely, as they are simply not used to it. These students may fear expressing opinions that others may think are worthless.

Students offered some ideas for suitable activities that could be introduced to promote autonomy; these ideas are presented in the following section.

5.3.6 Proposed Autonomy-supportive Activities

Several different activities were suggested as being those most likely to lead to learner autonomy (see Table 5.6). One student believed that the simple task of choosing a topic was an example of an activity to support autonomy. By this suggestion, she was indicating that Saudi students are so used to having everything provided for them in class that they do not have to think for themselves. This claim was evident in the comments made by participants about teachers talking and students listening.

Table 5.6: Suggested activities for promoting autonomy (Students)

Speaking activities that offer opportunities to practice the English language	Freedom to choose the topic for writing tasks
Activities allowing movement in class and changing seats	Write a paragraph with a group
Watch movies and listen to songs	Use internet and electronic resources
Read stories	Creative tasks
Power point presentation	Group work
Working with a friend in class	Whole-class work/ discussions
Use pictures to enhance vocabulary learning	Search for a topic of our choice
Have casual conversations (about personal lives and dreams)	Translate English words

Writing about a topic of their own choice and discussing that topic in class was proposed as a way of promoting autonomy. It was clear that many enjoyed this engagement with

their peers, and there were suggestions that the teacher could maintain group work discussions, even when the discussions were not wholly relevant to the topic. Conversations and interactions in the classroom were viewed as more important in English language classes as such activities would improve speaking skills; in contrast, in scientific classes, such interactions were not designed to improve fluency. Most students suggested watching movies as they could see the benefits of visual learning, and most students also recognised that watching films was something they would be able to do at home. It was clear that the students understood the restrictions of their society and were not fighting against these restrictions, but were instead trying to find a balance between what would comply with societal requirements and their own desires for improving themselves through learning. The way in which films could be exploited included watching a simple dubbed version and then watching again without the translation available.

Speaking activities were regarded as very important for learning English; indeed speaking and conversation were considered as being more important than learning grammar. Huda viewed speaking activities as important because during these interactions the students could learn from each other and learn from each other's mistakes. Suha said participating and interacting in class involved practising the language, speaking, and pronouncing English words correctly. Khadija recognised that extra work was involved in learning English and students needed to learn new vocabulary to master the language, which was why autonomy was needed. Ahlam suggested ways of encouraging speaking in class, suggesting that teachers could bring a picture to class, and students could describe what they saw. These suggestions indicate that the students want to be interactive and do have some good ideas for bringing autonomous activities into the classroom.

However, students wanted the activities introduced into their English lessons to be fun activities. The complete reliance on textbooks was demotivating. The students suggested reading stories and generally making language learning more interesting. The students also suggested that teachers should interact with the class and be less serious in class. These suggestions obviously conflict with the teachers' need to cover a packed curriculum in a limited time, indicating the dilemma of balancing learning and teaching for exams. Some students also suggested that listening to songs could be an autonomous activity, as then students could be given the task of reading the lyrics. However, it was

also made clear that a teacher's guidance was needed to find the right materials. Nevertheless, with this guidance, students may be motivated to participate in these activities outside the classroom as the activities could be fun or even leisure. Activities outside the classroom could help in overcoming the resistance to doing extra work in English at home, given the long hours already being spent on English, sometimes at the expense of other subjects, as Ghada noted. If learners can engage in activities they enjoy, it is more likely they will want to participate willingly.

5.4 Summary of Interview Findings

Thus significant confusion surrounds learner autonomy. The understanding of the concept is somewhat vague, although some teachers and students suggested that the confusion arose because teachers know the concept by other names. However, the terminology that both teachers and students tended to use to identify the concept was not always describing learner autonomy. In addition, participants' theoretical understanding often conflicted with application.

The students presented a different perspective of autonomy in the classroom. This chapter has shown how students perceive learner autonomy and the views they have regarding its impact on learning in a university context. Students' opinions do not always coincide with those of the teachers. The students also contributed their perceptions on the characteristics that may be found in autonomous learners, as well as the support and constraints that come from teachers and parents. Finally, students provided their suggestions on the kinds of activities that they feel would benefit them and promote autonomy.

One of the discrepancies identified in this chapter was that despite the insistence that many constraints exist, such as not having enough time in the classroom, autonomous activities such as presentations on topics of students' own choices were already being used in the classroom. It seems that some of the teachers are using autonomous activities, whilst others tend to adhere rigidly to the textbook, and the presence of the textbook is one of the main contributors to more motivating activities not being introduced into the classroom. This chapter has shown that there appear to be instances of good practices relating to learner autonomy, but there does not seem to be any consistency in using autonomous approaches.

Learner autonomy is related closely to motivation and, in many cases, motivation is lacking on the part of both teachers and students. It was repeated by many of the teachers that the modular approach to English language learning did not give the opportunity to build relationships with their students, and these relationships were important when trying to encourage students to work independently. Some of the students also noticed this and noted that students were not even being given enough time to make friends in their group before the classes were changed over. Students also felt that the teacher–student relationship suffered from the seven-week modular courses. Such factors can easily lead to a loss of motivation.

Furthermore, both parents and teachers were generating constraints to learner autonomy. Teachers claimed that parents often tried to do everything for their children, including any homework. This behaviour encouraged students to become dependent rather than independent. Teachers further embedded this dependency, as teachers were forced by institutional constraints to teach to exams, thus spoon-feeding the students with material solely for passing those exams. Both teachers and students recognised the difficulties in trying to cover a full curriculum in a very short time, which encouraged memorisation. However, strategies such as memorisation may benefit students by allowing them to associate new information with what they already know. Instead of such a strategy being promoted in a positive way though, memorisation was regarded by both teachers and students as something negative and associated with a teacher-centred approach. Some of the constraints raised by some participants were not considered barriers to autonomy by other participants.

Students were clearly willing to try to do well and become autonomous learners, but many felt that they were not being helped to do so. It was nevertheless a surprise to find that so many of the students were positive about autonomy and that they really wanted their teachers and parents to support them in developing autonomous habits. This response was contrary to the teachers' perceptions, as the teachers were convinced that learner autonomy would not be accepted by their students. The next chapter discusses these findings in more detail.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the combined findings from the questionnaires and interviews conducted with teachers and students on their perceptions of learner autonomy. The questionnaire was completed by 44 teachers and 480 students from the English Language Institute at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. Interviews were conducted with 16 teachers and 15 students. The chapter is structured according to the research questions and discusses perceptions of learner autonomy, classroom activities that may support the development of autonomous learning, and characteristics of autonomous learners. It also discusses the relationship between teacher and learner and the various constraints to learner autonomy that emerge within a Saudi educational context. The next section discusses how teachers and students perceived learner autonomy.

6.2 Perceptions of learner autonomy

From the findings on how learners and teachers understand learner autonomy, it is clear that there are a number of variations. This correlates with the literature, where different theories have been put forward on the perceptions of learner autonomy.

6.2.1 Teachers' Perceptions

The teachers interviewed for this study were surprisingly receptive to the concept, although they readily acknowledged the constraints they had placed upon them by organisational procedures. Overall, teachers related learner autonomy to learners being motivated to working independently and being responsible for their own learning. However, it was interesting that they did not mention their role as a teacher in the process. This was in contrast to Dam's (1990, 1995) definition of learner autonomy being a collaborative event on the part of both teacher and learner. The division or sharing of responsibility means that there is a sense of working together in the classroom to achieve the academic goals of the teaching programme. Yet there was little teacher awareness of learner autonomy involving such collaboration, despite an understanding of the need to achieve language proficiency; what was lacking was a clear indication of the role of the teacher in directing learners on ways to become autonomous. However, one teacher did

define learner autonomy very well, declaring it was *'to work independently to learn targeted language and set goals and means to achieve the target with the guidance of the teacher'*.

Another teacher also gave a very good description of the way she perceived learner autonomy: *'Learner autonomy is like a journey where the learner decides where to go and how to travel. He/she needs a guide, like a map, to explain and help. This guide is the teacher who can help and encourage a learner to take charge of his/her own learning.'* Nevertheless, despite the accuracy of these perceptions of a teacher being there to guide their learners, none of the other teachers mentioned the participation of a teacher. Instead they placed the responsibility for learning on the learner, stating they needed to take charge of their own learning by being self-motivated.

By placing the responsibility more fully on the learner, rather than the teacher, it indicates that the teachers perceived learner autonomy from a humanist aspect. This humanist approach suggests that learners must have the desire to achieve their own learning goals (Atkinson, 1993) and will thus try and find ways of doing so, indicating that these learners must be intrinsically motivated (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). It places the onus on the learner to achieve, where the teacher is there to provide information and facilitate learning but the learner may, or may not, decide to put the effort into developing their potential. Although there may be motivation from learners to achieve their goals, there is a sense that the teachers believe their duty is to inform rather than guide. This may be a reflection of the way in which Saudi teachers and learners are conditioned to deliver learning in the classroom, especially using memorisation techniques; it does reflect a constructivism approach in that it passes responsibility for their learning to the learners themselves. However, the learning must be relevant to the learner's needs and the teacher is in the best position to understand this. As von Glaserfeld (1987) suggests, knowledge is not transferred from the teacher to the learners, it is constructed by learners, who are guided to the new knowledge they need. It is therefore important to place the teacher at the centre of this process.

It is, therefore, a concern that teachers in this study did not appear to understand their role in developing learner autonomy. One teacher, believed that learners could develop autonomy naturally, as long as they had an interest in learning a language. In the findings it was also clear that teachers felt their role was to teach students to pass exams, not necessarily to construct new knowledge unless such knowledge was required for the

exam. Teachers were very much of the belief that learners could go away and become autonomous, mainly because they were enthusiastic about learning. There was acknowledgement that the teachers did not know enough about learner autonomy, but they were willing to learn, suggesting they needed some training. This was a positive sign as there was clearly a lack of understanding of the concept and their role in promoting learner autonomy; one teacher thought it was a new teaching method and another believed it was a new learning technique.

There was general consensus from the teachers that learner autonomy was associated with students learning independently and this has been a notion entrenched in learning languages. The value of learning a language lies in the ability to use the language outside the classroom. This has led to the idea that language learning requires learners to be autonomous in seeking opportunities to practise the language in real situations, which reflects Rogers' (1983) definition that learner autonomy involves real tools, where the teacher is a facilitator. However, Rogers has a humanist approach to learning, suggesting the learner must be in control of their own learning, thereby putting the emphasis on the learner rather than the teacher.

By their very nature, languages require interaction as they are a means of communication. This would suggest that others need to be involved in the process of learner autonomy, especially when associated with language learning. As Lamb (2017) suggests, language learning takes place within a socio-cultural context and this implies that the teacher should be finding ways to encourage learners to interact with each other. One of the teachers had an understanding of this as she said learners should '*be interactive during class and involved with the context*'. Learner autonomy can be developed in the classroom but there must be interaction and communication with others, given that learners do not learn in isolation (Lamb, 2017).

6.2.2 Learners' Perceptions

From the learners' perspective, learner autonomy took on a number of different aspects. It was clear that many of the students perceived its association with a political stance, believing it related to freedom and their rights as students. Indeed the concept of autonomy was once grounded in the field of politics but was transferred to language learning following research in the 1970s (Holec, 1981) and further conceptualised as learner autonomy. This difference between autonomy and learner autonomy may not

have been fully understood by some of the Saudi learners. It must also be noted that this study has been conducted during a period of significant change in Saudi Arabia, especially related to women, and some of these young female interviewees may have been influenced by a more feminist agenda.

Many students appeared to associate autonomy with freedom and independence, instead of with the concept of learning independently; this was also noted in Hamad's (2018) study of learners in Kurdistan, where participants associated learner autonomy with having freedom. Furthermore, the perceptions of some students focused on learner autonomy as being freedom of choice. In effect, to them this meant the freedom to select how, where and when they would learn, as well as having options for choosing their teacher and their group. As one student summarised, it denoted having the freedom to choose their whole learning environment. In practical terms this would not be possible but the concept of having choice underpins learner autonomy. Although some may believe that a Western concept of an autonomous learner may not fit into non-Western contexts (Pennycook, 1997), others argue that the context in which learner autonomy is situated requires more careful consideration (Sinclair et al, 2005); the interpretation of learner autonomy is likely to be influenced by social, political, educational and cultural factors. As Althaqafi (2017) explains, the whole concept of learner autonomy is relatively new to Saudi teachers and learners, where the prevailing pedagogic model is for students to listen, rather than participate in class. Set against a background of social change, it can be seen that traditional educational systems may lead to some confusion amongst learners; their expectations may be set too high.

The students interviewed in this study also saw learner autonomy as having freedom of thought. Expressions such as '*expressing opinion and thoughts freely*' and '*independence in thinking and learning*' were used. This may not be happening in the classroom, as one student viewed learner autonomy as '*Allowing university students to express their views and opinions*'. This implies that university students are not being given the opportunity to state their views nor the freedom of expression that one would anticipate at university level. It is clear from this statement that there may be a form of censorship in the language classrooms; in other words, the learners are suppressed from expressing opinions that teachers or educational authorities may not consider appropriate.

Other students linked students' rights to their definition of learner autonomy. This may come from the concept of empowerment, which is strongly argued by Pennycook (1997) as a political perspective driven by concepts of freedom and power of the learner. It may be particularly relevant to female students as studies have shown that, despite female academics being educated to the same levels as male academics, they are still regarded as inferior (Al Ghamdi, 2016). The same concept of empowerment also gives the right to learners '*to be independent or not independent*', as one student suggests. It resonates with Little's (2007) argument that freedom of choice means making decisions that include taking charge of one's own learning in ways that suit the learner. Benson (1997) also argues that learners having the opportunity to accept or reject a certain way of learning, and consequently having control over the content and processes of learning, comes within the scope of political autonomy.

Being able to work independently may not suit every learner and it is likely to depend on the amount of support received from others, including the teacher and peers. However, the definition of learner autonomy presented by many of the students saw it as learning by oneself. Expressions such as '*self-reliance*', '*self-study*', and '*the ability to work alone*' were given. It was clear that students believed the teacher was not needed if learners were autonomous. Some comments were explicit: '*learning without a teacher's help*', whereas others were more implicit: '*not waiting for someone to spoon-feed you information*'. In some cases the students saw the internet as replacing the need for a teacher: '*the ability to use the internet to search for information*'.

In one case a student reported that learner autonomy meant '*consulting one another to discover things*', thus showing that learning in collaboration, rather than in isolation, was one of the key factors in the concept of autonomy (Little, 2000; Ushioda, 2003). This interdependence on others fits well with the social aspect of language learning, which is related to communication, and thereby participation. The other factor that this student has mentioned is one of discovery. Lamb (2013) found that learners in developing countries displayed autonomy because they wanted to find out more on their own; Tyers (2015) also agreed with this and found that motivated learners from these developing countries were taking advantage of advances in technology to make their own discoveries. They were taking responsibility for their own learning.

In their understanding of the concept of learner autonomy, many of the Saudi students did allude to being responsible for their own learning, by using such expressions

as '*having motivation to learn*', '*having self-determination to learn*' and linked with '*self-development*'. It can be seen that responsibility is associated with certain characteristics. This is further enhanced by learner autonomy being defined as having certain abilities: '*to work hard*', and '*to make decisions*'. It is clear that these students believed there were intrinsic motivations associated with learner autonomy; this relates to self-determination theory, which is regarded as being the motivating force that encourages learners to feel they are carrying out a task because they choose to do so (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The perceptions of learners are, therefore, not wholly unrelated to the concept of learner autonomy. It is seen that social and political factors may be having an influence on their thinking but many of their definitions are closely associated with autonomy theories.

6.3 Classroom Activities Enhancing the Development of Learner

Autonomy

It is important that the development of learner autonomy starts in the classroom, where learners can be guided by teachers. The following sections explain different activities that enhance the development of learner autonomy in the classroom. Such activities can encourage active participation on the part of the learners, ensuring that all learners are engaged and, as Petty (2014) explains, consequently promotes a more inclusive approach. Relevant activities also help to motivate learners to manage their own learning (Reinders, 2010) and achieve their learning goals as they construct knowledge through these activities. The activities enable learners to make sense of new knowledge as they draw upon their experiences and existing knowledge to construct new meanings (Tippins et al, 1993). New concepts are shared in a sociocultural context (Lamb, 2017) through participation in such activities, especially those involving social interactions and collaborative learning (Cirocki, 2016). Within a classroom environment, the learner can be guided and supported in these activities by their teacher.

6.3.1 Collaborative Group Work

Literature reflects the benefits of collaboration in activities that help to promote learner autonomy and several activities were suggested by teachers to encourage learners to interact with one another and gain confidence. Almost all teachers concurred that

participating in classroom interactions and discussions would enhance learning, although the students themselves were not so sure. Two thirds of students believed that interaction would help. Dam (1990) argued, these interactions reflect a social process that is especially beneficial in language learning. In addition, interaction means that learners are not working in isolation but are sharing their experiences and gaining support from others. Many students recognised that interactions were valuable, and a number of students enjoyed engaging with their peers and wanted to be involved in more participatory activities. These activities have previously been identified by Chan (2003), Chang (2007) and Jing (2006), as helping learners in controlling their learning. Therefore, it is positive that teachers see these activities as valuable in promoting autonomy. However, although a substantial number of students agreed that these interactions were beneficial, there is still work to be done in promoting awareness among students.

Furthermore, interviewing students affirms their desire for collaborative activities, indicating the social aspect of both language learning and learner autonomy. Support from others is very important in developing both communication skills and learning strategies needed to enhance autonomy. This method has also been suggested by previous researchers, such as Smith (2001, 2003), who found that collaborative group activities also enabled learners to monitor their learning progress. Many students recommended group work, not only in oral discussions but also in composing written texts. Little (2007) argues that asking learners to provide various kinds of written texts as the output of group work can help learners capture the process and progress of their learning.

6.3.2 Reducing Teacher Talk, Facilitating Student Talk

Students made it very clear that they would appreciate teachers, who encouraged them to take part in the English lessons: they disliked teachers who gave a lecture and left, not allowing students a chance to talk or participate. Indeed one student explained her experience in the English classroom and explained that her teacher talked and talked to the point that there was “*nothing left for us [students] to say*”. This puts the focus on teaching approaches and practices that differentiate between a traditional classroom and a classroom that develops autonomy. The amount of time taken by teachers’ talking is a barrier to promoting active student participation in classroom activities. It is important that the teacher talk time is minimised and learners are given more opportunities for interacting with each other. Reducing teacher talk time (TTT) is a requirement for active

learner interactions and communications (Dam, 2008). As the participant in this study has explained, if the teacher does all the talking, there is nothing left for learners to discuss. This consequently inhibits any collaborative activities.

Saudi students fear making mistakes, as has been pointed out by several researchers (Albirini, 2016; Mahdi, 2015). The reluctance to participate in class is in many ways attributed to anxiety of losing face in front of peers, according to Mahdi (2015), and can deter students from becoming active learners. The findings in this study indicate that learners' fear of making mistakes can be reduced by allowing students more time to prepare their answers, as the extra time gives them greater confidence in front of others in the class. Survey findings revealed that both teachers and students found that allowing students time to prepare was the most effective item in developing learner autonomy in the classroom. Students state that they feared criticism from the teacher when they made mistakes, and preparation time would possibly prevent this from happening. Similarly, Al-Khairi (2013) identified that peer pressure was a demotivating factor in language learning, as students do not want to look foolish in front of their peers should they make mistakes. Because of this fear, Saudi students may not accept autonomy as readily as students of other nationalities.

There appear to be instances of good practices relating to learner autonomy, but there does not seem to be any consistency in using autonomous approaches. Some students made references to classes being fun, but the majority of students spoke of teachers not being interested in their students, not interacting with them, and simply wanting to deliver a lesson and leave the classroom. However, most students expressed a desire to take control of their own learning and a willingness to learn and interact with others. This motivation for learning is a strong, affective skill that encourages a desire to learn, rather than the view that it is a need. Such motivation indicates that students want to improve their language skills instead of simply passing exams, and there is certainly space for introducing autonomy-supporting activities into the Saudi classroom.

6.3.3 Relevance and Choice

An important classroom practice teachers need to consider with an aim to developing learner autonomy was selecting activities relevant to students' needs and goals. The findings of this study showed that teachers believed that selecting activities relevant to students was the most effective way to introduce autonomous activities into the

classroom. Relevance appears to be missing in the way English was being taught, despite its contribution to motivation. There is consequently a mismatch between learner and teacher expectations and preferences, which indicates that teachers need to know more about their students' needs, interests and goals. As Horinek (2007) argues, to encourage motivation, all activities must be relevant to learners. Without relevance to an individual, learning is seen as being of little value. The curriculum in universities often has no relevance to the students' lives, which can be demotivating. Dornyei (2001) has long been warning of learning content that means nothing to learners, as it will not encourage them to want to learn more. In Saudi Arabia, Zaid (1993) has identified that the English language curriculum focuses on the content of the language, which is not relevant to learners. English is a living language, and the focus of the class should be on communication. If students are forced to see language as a content-based subject, they will continue to use memorisation strategies and lack interest in expanding their knowledge. There needs to be learner engagement and collaboration in a language classroom as language learning involves communication.

In addition to relevance, learners would be active and motivated when they are working on a task of their own choice. Benson (2003) believes that one of the main aspects promoting autonomy is giving learners opportunities to make their own choices and decisions about their learning. The investigation clearly shows that students wished to be given a choice in what they do in the classroom, and many believed having a choice in selecting what to learn was the best way to develop autonomy. This resonates with Littlejohn's (2013) study that found giving learners choice over the activities they wanted was an essential element in the autonomous classroom. This would involve learners more in the language programme as they would need to think about what they needed and, in addition, it would create a dynamic environment where learners would take more control over their learning. Students in this study seemed to favour learning English for communication. It was true that they wanted to do well in the exam, but they also wanted to improve their language and have fun while learning. Their suggestions and preferences for autonomy-supportive activities clearly indicated that they would benefit from less traditional, more engaging activities and tasks rather than learning grammatical structures and memorising exam materials from the coursebook. One teacher admitted she felt that the activities from the textbook were boring and not authentic, and another teacher stated that students seemed not to enjoy the English lessons. One teacher

contemplated and finally said: *'maybe we should start making students vote for the activities they like to practice'*. Therefore, it is positive that teachers see the importance in involving students when it comes to activity selection, as both teachers and students agreed that being active in class and engaging in activities is a significantly effective way to develop learner autonomy. Active learning and engagement were strongly suggested to encourage learners to develop autonomy. Despite the exam focus, most students found English classes that depended solely on a textbook demotivating. Students reported the language classroom needed to be fun, interactive, and provide opportunities to participate and practise the target language. Little (1991) notes that by contrast to traditional classroom, students in an autonomous classroom are interested, happy and engaged in the autonomous classroom.

6.3.4 More Engaging Activities

The majority of teachers suggested using non-traditional activities to promote learner autonomy in their evaluations of the usefulness of autonomy-supportive activities; they advocated using social media, e-mails, online resources, authentic materials, observing natural communications in English such as watching films and group presentations and projects, which were all perceived as highly effective classroom activities. However, some teachers still believed in the effectiveness of grammar exercises and memorising exam materials, which was not what their students wanted. Three teachers mentioned that grammar exercises would be a good classroom practice that would help students develop learner autonomy, as was revealed in the qualitative investigation. A teacher explained that identifying the right verb tense is an autonomous practice. It was also pointed out by another teacher that helping students memorise the lesson during class time is an effective way to promote learner autonomy. However, the students did not seem to agree on the effectiveness of such practices or approaches.

Another suggestion for encouraging learner autonomy was related to watching films, which teachers believed would help students understand foreign cultures as well as improving their language skills. Students viewed films favourably because they were visually stimulating and could be watched from home. This type of activity was important in the Saudi context, where girls are restricted in their participation in out-of-classroom activities, yet they can watch and enjoy films in a family environment. This type of engagement can also have benefits, as having family support allows learning to be enhanced by family, as students claimed that they needed family approval to motivate

them to continue with their learning. Some parents are over-protective and do not approve of their children working independently, which can hinder their development of learner autonomy. It also reflects language learning activities being regarded as fun, in addition to there being the element of choice involved. Any exposure to English language on a learner's own terms helps students to develop autonomous practices. Activities such as presentations on topics of students' own choices were already being used in the classroom. It seems that some of the teachers are using autonomous activities, whilst others tend to adhere rigidly to the textbook, and the presence of the textbook is one of the main contributors to more motivating activities not being introduced into the classroom

A further activity which was suggested by many teachers and students and could also be done at home involved reading a story then sharing the review in class. One of the teachers firmly believed in the benefits of encouraging students to make reading a habit: *'I always tell them to read. Reading will improve all language skills and expand their knowledge'*. Two other teachers believed that organising reading circles in the classroom would greatly contribute to enhancing language learning and autonomy. Similarly, a student explained that reading in general is an effective way to enhance learner autonomy; she gave an example of her own family tradition of reading a book and then discussing it together and how this family activity helped her become autonomous. Another student said that she enjoyed reading comic books and wished to have activities of this kind in the English classes. Reading self-selected books has been found to influence learners' engagement (Daniels & Steres, 2011) and this enhances learner autonomy as it supports the provision of choice and interest in the activity, which have been found to be autonomy-supportive (De Naeghel et al., 2014).

6.3.5 Vocabulary Learning and Oral Activities

Students stated in interviews that vocabulary learning was very important to them. They explained that building their English vocabulary would facilitate language use, as one student explained: *'I can't express myself in English and be active in class because I do not have enough vocabulary'*. Many students seemed to be uncomfortable to engage in speaking activities. Nevertheless, despite any discomfort there may be in participating in oral activities, students considered them more important than grammar. The findings indicate that teachers were not aware of students' needs. The English language exam does not place enough importance on oral assessment to justify speaking activities in the

classroom. Teachers may therefore be reluctant to introduce autonomous learning activities which may not benefit students' academic achievement. There may be creative ways of dealing with such speaking activities as long as teachers are aware of the relevance to their students' needs.

Students reported that they needed vocabulary for interaction and engagement in classroom discussions, and they gave several suggestions for vocabulary learning. One student suggested using pictures to describe what they saw to enhance vocabulary and encourage group speaking. Another student recommended keeping a written record of useful, everyday vocabulary in a notebook, or creating a vocabulary portfolio. However, the student survey findings show that creating a learning portfolio was not an effective autonomous practice. On the other hand, teachers seemed to favour creating a portfolio to keep written records of students' work and to check progress regularly, not only for vocabulary lists.

6.3.6 Minimising Individual Work

Few students wanted to work individually, stating it was not enjoyable to work on their own. This statement reflects the social context of Saudi culture and living in a more collectivist society. The focus of a collectivist society is on group responsibility, rather than the individual. It is therefore important that activities in the classroom represent the use of language in day-to-day activities. Language learning must be relevant to students, but it must also incorporate the social aspects of communication, so that students can improve their proficiency while also enjoying the practical application of the language. In many ways, this tendency is corroborated by the number of students suggesting group activities to develop autonomy. The quantitative investigation also shows that teachers agreed with students that working in small groups is an effective way for fostering learner autonomy in the classroom.

Working in isolation and activities that require the student to be totally independent, were found ineffective approaches to fostering autonomy. This may also be the reason why students rated language labs low on their list of preferred activities. Students believed that working independently in a language lab would not benefit them and would not lead to autonomy. This finding about the limited benefits of a language lab contrasts with that of Davies et al. (2005), who suggest that language labs allow learners to progress to autonomy. However, the reason for the disinterest in language labs may be

because the students prefer working collaboratively instead of independently. Language labs were not considered by teachers as promoters of learner autonomy, although they did suggest the use of language labs for fun activities. These activities could be incorporated into the classroom, if they were presented as useful, relevant, and motivational. These views may indicate that classroom activities are not currently being presented in a way that makes them both beneficial and enjoyable for students, whilst also allowing teachers to fulfil their obligations in progressing through the curriculum. Dwaik's (2015) study shows that language labs are useful in vocabulary building and can improve language proficiency. As students in this study recognised the need for vocabulary learning, language labs could be a relevant activity for them. Furthermore, as some students indicated, autonomy-promoting approaches depend on the individual teacher. To experiment with new ideas and introduce fun activities is more likely to take place if the teacher is willing to put extra effort into making the learning experience enjoyable. Teachers may therefore need to change how they introduce activities to effectively engage with their students. Several students noted that it was not enjoyable working alone, and so they would prefer group work to help one another. Teachers, therefore, must think about how they relate to their students to help them excel.

6.3.7 Online dictionaries, mobile technology and authentic texts

The use of an online dictionary to look up new words and phrases was suggested as a way of promoting autonomy in the language classroom. One student explained that an online dictionary allows students to identify their mistakes and correct them themselves. Sharma and Barrett (2007) suggest using online dictionaries to increase motivation and argue that they develop a new learning style that involves learner autonomy. They would also be able to say the word or the phrase correctly next time. Nevertheless, Dwaik (2015) advises that all activities require teacher's guidance. Dictionaries may be useful for enhancing autonomy without students or teachers being under pressure. Teachers agreed that the use of a dictionary was a way of promoting autonomy, but it seems that effective use is not being made of activities that consolidate learning that must take place for students to pass their exams.

Some teachers described activities successfully introduced into the classroom involved the use of mobile technology. Technology allows teachers to engage with young students, who are familiar with smart phone and iPads, and can Google information easily using such modern technologies. This more accurately reflects the interests of a

younger generation and such technology is familiar, portable and accessible. This use of technology may also serve to counteract some resistance described by other teachers, who spoke of learners only wanting to know if the activity was going to be included in their exam, otherwise it was of no benefit to them. If learners were encouraged to believe that the activities would help them pass exams, they would willingly participate. Several of the teachers tried to encourage their students by prompting them to read outside the classroom and expand their knowledge by visiting the library. However, young students are more accustomed to using technology, which has such a strong influence on education. One student suggested that teachers were not necessary to provide support, as new technologies were available.

It was interesting to find that students were not interested in making use of social media and authentic texts to improve their English. These activities were found statistically effective for teachers but the use of online authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, and articles were found to be ineffective by students. This was explained by one teacher in an interview who said that the language found on the internet is complex, and it might demotivate students to assign them tasks that involved using materials from the internet, such as articles in English. It was possible that the same thing applied to social media, or it may be that these young girls wanted to keep their personal accounts private. However, it is more likely that it is challenging for students, especially the lower levels, to communicate in English using their social media accounts as the teacher pointed out. This is further supported by the use of Arabic in the classroom. Both teachers and students were against the sole use of the target language in the classroom and this might be another sign that low language proficiency is still an obstacle in regards to communicating in English for Saudi learners. This method was regarded as the least effective for teachers and ineffective for students in developing autonomy, along with translation from English to Arabic. In many ways, this aversion to the sole use of English is clearly due to the low language proficiency of Saudi students, who still think in Arabic. However, it goes against the suggestion by Dam (1995, 2008) that it is important for teachers to use the target language from the beginning.

6.4 Characteristics of Autonomous Learners

This study aimed to investigate essential autonomous characteristics which learners need to develop so that they could adopt life-long learning habits. Several existing studies

(Benson, 2011; Pennycook, 1997) indicate that certain characteristics are indicative of autonomous learners. The following sections highlight the main characteristics of autonomous learners from the participants' point of view.

6.4.1 Taking Charge of Learning

One of the distinguishing attributes highlighted in the literature has been the quality to take charge of, or be responsible for, all aspects and processes of their own learning. Holec (1981) comments that taking charge entails the ability to monitor progress by identifying their successes as well as learning problems and plan their learning accordingly. This was also found to be true from the perspectives of both teachers and students in this study. The survey findings revealed that monitoring progress through identifying strengths and weaknesses was believed to be one of the most important characteristics of an autonomous learner. Additionally, the findings showed that students considered it desirable to be able to identify their own learning problems and the means to address them. As Cotterall (1995) argues, autonomous learners need to be able to identify their learning needs, how to learn, as well as the resources available.

There is no doubt that the ability in an individual to make decisions about one's own learning contributes to autonomous behaviour. This is desirable in a learner, as they have more focus on achieving their learning objectives (Little, 2003). On a wider scale, it is beneficial as such behaviour has implications for daily life outside the classroom (Lamb, 2003; Little, 1991). In other words, an autonomous learner is more likely to use the same inherent attributes in their everyday life; as Liu et al. (2014) argue, the building of autonomous habits is essential for developing creative and independent thinkers for the future. The findings revealed that both teachers and students agreed that developing the ability to take charge of learning is the most important autonomous characteristic to be acquired, and therefore the most important in enhancing language learning. For teachers specifically, taking charge of learning was emphasised in their perceptions of autonomy and autonomous learner characteristics.

6.4.2 Demonstrating Willingness to Learn

Dam (2008) points out, developing the capability to take charge of all aspects of learning is not enough to make students autonomous learners, they must also be willing

to do so. From her experience of teaching Danish to adult female refugees, Dam (2008) notes that learners would not be willing to learn a language if it were not of interest to them, or if they did not see the need for it. The quantitative investigation revealed that all teacher participants (100%) believed in the importance of demonstrating willingness to learn. Students too felt that willingness was key, as one student commented: *“Learner autonomy depends on the person’s willingness to learn. If a student does not want to learn she would not be autonomous”* (S6.). Similarly, Littlewood (1996) agrees that this capacity for autonomy depends on two main components: ability and willingness. This means that, on the one hand, a person may have the ability to make independent choices but no willingness to do so. On the other hand, a person may be willing to make independent choices but not have the ability to do so. Ability and willingness can further be divided into two components: ability depends on possessing knowledge about the alternatives from which choices have to be made and skills for carrying out whatever choices seem most appropriate. However, willingness depends on having both the motivation and the confidence to take responsibility for the choices required. To be successful in acting autonomously, all of these components need to be present. Willingness is related to motivation, and is aligned with the desire to be involved. Personal involvement, together with the social dimension of learning, seems to motivate students to want to learn a new language (Dam, 2008). Keeping students motivated to learn a foreign language is indeed a challenging task for teachers, including the teachers in this study.

6.4.3 Having Self-Motivation and Positive Attitude Towards Learning

The participating teachers acknowledged that students had to be self-motivated to learn, and the majority suggested that if students approached learning English with a more positive attitude they would be able to develop autonomous characteristics. In fact, demonstrating a positive attitude towards learning came second in terms of importance based on the survey findings for teachers. This characteristic seemed to be emphasised by most teachers but not students. Overall, teachers seemed to view their students as being negative and not appreciating the English lessons.

The interviews provided more detail, with one teacher describing autonomous learners as students who *“appreciate learning and value the teacher’s effort.”* However, teachers may have low expectations and perceptions of their students based on past

experiences. Their expectations may be shaped by their perceptions of students and, consequently, the way they treat such students becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Workman, 2012). Students, on the other hand, may believe they are already positive about learning and that this specific characteristic exists and is already developed. The interviews revealed that students are actually positive about learning and they demonstrated high desirability for improving their English language and developing autonomous habits.

6.4.4 Developing Effective Learning Strategies and Study Skills

The quantitative investigation confirms this; it was found that the second most significant characteristic of an autonomous learner (after taking charge), according to students, is the ability to developing study skills and learning strategies. Developing study skills aims at promoting learner autonomy (Mariani, 1991), and the use of learning strategies is considered important and effective for language learning (Oxford, 1990). Lee (2010) suggests that learning strategies are what learners must have, if they want to retain information more successfully. Poor study skills and poor time management have been identified as characteristics found in unsuccessful language learners (Lopez, 2018). However, developing strategies is not solely the teacher's responsibility, it is something within the learner's control. In support of this, Dickenson (1995) argues that "...learning success and enhanced motivation is conditional on learners taking responsibility for their own learning, being able to control their own learning and perceiving that their learning successes or failures are to be attributed to their own efforts and strategies rather than to factors outside their control."

6.4.5 Being Diligent or a High Achiever

Benson (2011) argues that personal attributes have an impact on autonomy. However, it seemed that from the perspective of teachers, such attributes were of ideal students instead of those who were likely to become autonomous learners. Intrinsic motivation was a key indicator, perhaps with teachers believing these kinds of good students were more likely succeed. Given the characteristics the teachers proposed as leading to autonomous learners, they seemed to perceive success as a benchmark for autonomy. This was noted by Little (1995: 175), who comments: "In formal educational contexts, genuinely successful learners have always been autonomous." Similarly,

Benson (2001) reported that “Findings indicate that autonomous learners have greater success in the progress of language acquisition”. However, as Lopez (2018) argues, it is difficult to identify the exact configuration of qualities that make individuals into successful learners. One of the students made the connection between autonomous learners and high achievement, commenting that “*autonomous learners are always better than non-autonomous learners; they get better marks*”. Some teachers linked the level of a learner’s intelligence, aligned to their IQ, as an indicator of an autonomous learner. They believed that autonomous learners are students with a high IQ, and that they are high achievers in all subjects, not only in the language classroom.

Some participants identified personal effort or hard work, not academic achievement, as attributes describing autonomous learners. One student replied, when asked for the most distinguishing trait of an autonomous learner, ‘*hard-working, obviously!*’ Personal effort is within the learner’s control; Dickenson (1995) calls it “internal cause”, being the opposite to that which is not within the control of the learner. Therefore, in order to achieve successful language learning, autonomous students tend to put personal effort into developing lifelong learning strategies and evaluating their current strategy use (Oxford, 1990).

6.4.6 Having Self-Confidence and Strong Personality

Teachers at all stages of the education system have the tools necessary to help students develop autonomous habits, though more emphasis is placed on the concept at university level. One of the areas where students wanted the help and support of their teachers was in building their self-confidence. A significant attribute of autonomous learners identified by both teachers and students was self-confidence. In fact, self-confidence was the most frequent characteristic mentioned in the students’ interviews. Lopez (2018) points out that lack of confidence and fear of taking risks with the target language are characteristics leading to unsuccessful language learning. Many students reported having a fear of making mistakes and being made to look foolish in front of others. This fear prevented students from relaxing in the classroom and enjoying English classes. Students also reported that being bold and having a strong personality were key elements of autonomous learners, and those characteristics could be associated with self-confidence, as they seemed to be contrary to a lack of confidence.

However, one student suggested that such manners may be odd, and they could cause dislike in others because of demonstrating a strong and leading personality. This comment may indicate that it is still uncommon for young girls to speak up and ask for their rights and act independently. Girls demanding autonomy is against the traditional values of Arab culture. Traditional Arab women are more likely to take a more conciliatory and less challenging approach to learning (Miller-Rosser, Chapman, & Francis, 2006). Similarly, Bond and Smith (1996) point out that Eastern cultures value interdependency, harmony and hierarchical relationships. In the Chinese culture for example, “the support of autonomy, self-direction, and personal freedom appear to be a less common socialization practice in Chinese people” (Chao & Tseng, 2002, cited in Zhou, Lam & Chan, 2012, p.1164).

6.4.7 Being Socially Skilful and Socially Responsible

Some of the characteristics given by students could be linked not only with the social aspect of learning, but also with the wider aspect of societal life. Students perceived autonomous learners as those who are *‘social’*, *‘can initiate conversations’*, *‘have good communication skills’*, *‘respect the opinions of others’* and *‘have team work spirit’*. Other students believed that autonomous learners would also want to *‘make a difference in society’* and *‘set a good example for the following generation’*. Many descriptions given show students have a sense of social responsibility and they want to make a contribution. The socio-political tone was heard once again when students were asked to describe features of an autonomous learner; some of them believed that autonomous learners are *‘leaders not followers’*, *‘independent at home and at the university’*, *‘not obedient’*, *‘can debate and defend’*, and *‘not afraid to stand up for their rights’*.

Indeed, this was one of the unexpected outcomes of this study, determining how much the attitudes of young people are changing in Saudi Arabia. It was quite surprising to find remarks such as *‘We can do anything we want if we have determination and self-confidence. If we are determined, nothing will stop us, not even our own families’*. This statement is a reflection of how young Saudi females are changing their attitudes and viewing the world differently from their parents. Students are also aware that they have different aspirations, and that their teachers do not always take the same approach as them. Nevertheless, it was clear that the level of desirability to develop autonomy and independence is not at the same level for all students. It seems that the personality of the individual learner greatly contributes to the development of autonomous behaviour and

characteristic. It must be acknowledged that the world is changing, mainly due to the advent of technology, and traditional approaches to learning are also changing. As Betts et al. (2016) suggest, learner autonomy is becoming more significant in today's world as it prepares individuals for the shifting demands in society.

6.5 Relationship Between Learner Autonomy and Language Learning

One of this study's aims was to look at the relationship between the development of learner autonomy and language learning improvement in a Saudi context. In addition, there were other issues concerning the link between the two constructs which were worth exploring from the Saudi participants' point of view. For example, it was interesting to find out if the development of learner autonomy would lead to improving language learning, and if there was any connection between levels of language proficiency and levels of autonomy. It was also interesting to ask whether learner autonomy in language learning was different than in other subjects like maths or sciences.

6.5.1 Impact of Learner Autonomy on Language Learning

In terms of English language learning, the main impact of learner autonomy is that it enables students to become more proficient English users, as they would thus benefit from exposure to the language and improve their skills (Little, 2002). This has long been regarded as an important factor in encouraging learner autonomy, in its implication that there is an association between autonomy and language proficiency (Defai, 2007). As Little (1995) explained: "in the case of language learning, the whole point of developing learner autonomy is to enable learners to become autonomous users of their target language" (p.176). Indeed, a number of studies have found that there is a significant relationship between learner autonomy and academic performance, and these studies have been carried out in various contexts, such as China (Defai, 2007), Japan (Apple, 2009), Malaysia (Ng et al., 2011) and Iran (Hashemiam & Soureshjani, 2011).

Participants were asked whether language learning would improve, if students became more autonomous. The quantitative investigation confirmed that teachers and students were positive that there is a strong correlation between enhancement of autonomous characteristics and language learning enhancement. Both teachers and students agreed that developing autonomous characteristics, such as the ability to take

charge of learning, utilising study skills and learning strategies, recognising weaknesses and ways to overcome them, working cooperatively and learning from each other, and having a positive attitude towards learning, would all improve language learning. Teachers also suggested that developing a friendship with their students might enhance language learning, and students felt that respecting their teachers could help them improve their language learning. Moreover, general views on the concept show that learner autonomy helps the development of language learning (88.64% teachers and 65% students reported that LA helps).

Teachers who reported that learner autonomy hinders language learning or were unsure about its usefulness totalled 11.35%, whereas it was 34.58% for students; the percentage of students was higher than teachers, probably because they linked the concept of learner autonomy with total independence of the teacher, which was found to be hindering language learning based on students' responses. One student noted that much depended on the learning environment, which relates to Al-Khawlani's (2018) study of Polish and Yemeni learners: this found that Polish learners were significantly more autonomous than Yemeni learners as they had more freedom in the learning process. This may also relate to opportunities for using the language outside the classroom, given that the Polish learners are in a European context and the Yemeni learners are in an Arab context; indeed it was noted in Al-Khawlani's (2018) study that the Yemeni learners showed more autonomous tendencies within the classroom.

Nevertheless, the teachers had generally positive views about the relationship between learner autonomy and language learning. Some teachers explained that learner autonomy would lead to better language learning and outcomes because it leads to discovery and expanded students' knowledge beyond textbooks and teachers. Furthermore, students would then be curious to find new language learning methods and develop strategies, become active in the classroom and they would be self-motivated to learn rather than being forced or instructed by their teachers. The study findings also suggest that language learning would be improved by developing a positive attitude and motivation towards learning English. As one teacher remarked, a lot depended on the passion the student had for the language as this would result in them trying to find different ways and methods for learning, thus becoming autonomous.

6.5.2 Learner Autonomy and Levels of Proficiency

Much has been said about levels of proficiency in language and its direct effect on learner autonomy. Previous studies conducted in Saudi educational contexts found that students are not proficient in English, as Alrabai's (2017) work shows, when investigating learners' autonomy and its association with the academic achievement of EFL learners. Alrabai (2017) used a questionnaire survey and found that Saudi learners were not autonomous learners and they were low language achievers. Many teacher participants in this current study did believe that there was a connection between proficiency and learner autonomy. This view was in contrast to the students' views, as they believed that the level of English was irrelevant, but this response may be because not all of the students relate learner autonomy to educational settings. The teachers argued that students at higher levels were more efficient learners and achievers and more likely to be autonomous across all subjects. These students were independent and wanted to learn, as opposed to lower level students, who believed English was a difficult subject. As one teacher stated, lower level students tend to be less autonomous simply because they were scared to be left on their own and needed a teacher's guidance and encouragement.

However, not all of the teachers believed that proficient students were more predisposed towards autonomy. One teacher stated that lower level students were more autonomous than those with high language proficiency, which was attributed to the fact that these students were keen to learn English, noted their mistakes, and were prepared to work harder. Learners with higher language proficiency have further opportunities to be involved in working on activities, although another teacher stated that the higher level students did not want to be guided, as they felt they were capable of working on their own. Additionally, another teacher expressed how lower level students were excited about learning English and often asked how they could improve their language.

Furthermore, a few teachers stated that learner autonomy was unrelated to the level of English. Instead, they believed that English was related to the teaching and learning skills and the context of the classroom. One teacher stated that she could not see how fluency and independence were related. Kumaravadivelu (2003) is against the notion that language proficiency level affects the development of autonomy. He argues: "it would be a mistake to try to correlate the initial, intermediary, and advanced stages of autonomy ... with the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of language proficiency"

(p.144). He believes that the levels of autonomy development depend on the linguistic and communicative demands of particular tasks rather than the learner's level of proficiency.

Also, some linked learner autonomy to the student's personality and an interesting observation from one student was that: *'The English level has nothing to do with being independent. Some students are naturally independent, they have strong personalities and can state their opinion freely in any language. If they can't speak good English, they will say their opinion in Arabic or whatever language, it won't stop them'*. She is implying that some students are autonomous by nature, while others are not and that is the key factor: the student's natural ability to act autonomously is more significant than the language level of the learner. Autonomous learners will not struggle if their English language is weak, they will find a way to practise their freedom of speech, and still manage to communicate their opinions. This matches some previous studies that have found proficiency is not directly related to learner autonomy (Ablard & Lipschultz, 1998; Benson, 2001) and Ezzi's (2018) finding that learner autonomy and English proficiency are not correlated.

It may not be an easy task to get any students, regardless of their level of proficiency, working independently. As one teacher explained, her students are so used to waiting for the teacher to give them information that they sometimes expect the teacher to give them the answers to their homework. Factors such as this one have the most impact on autonomy and proficiency, rather than Alrabai's (2017) suggestion that low levels of autonomy are the cause of the low levels of language achievement across Saudi students. This relationship cannot be fully explored until autonomy is more accepted in English language classrooms in Saudi Arabia. It is encouraging that developments towards acceptance of new concepts are apparent in how attitudes are changing.

6.5.3 Autonomy in Language Learning and Other Subjects

Participants were asked whether learner autonomy in language learning differs from other subjects. The majority of teachers and students seemed to recognise the uniqueness of learner autonomy in learning a language. Students explained this was because extra work was needed to learn new vocabulary and master the language. Some teachers felt that learner autonomy in English language learning would be more interesting than in other subjects because language learning in itself was interesting. As

one teacher argued, if students show interest in learning a foreign language and enjoy it, their interest can lead to autonomous learning differently from in other subjects. Whereas other subjects are learned from textbooks and require more passive learning, English learning lends itself to discoveries and experiences outside the classroom. It was noted that it could be more challenging to ask students to become autonomous when learning a foreign language, because language learning was more demanding and required students to do extra work on their own in order to learn.

A few teachers commented that learner autonomy was the same for all subjects and it was *'a skill that can be developed and applied for all subjects equally'*. However, it was also acknowledged that although it may be needed in all subjects, learner autonomy was needed more in language learning in order to acquire the language. Teachers appeared to equate learner autonomy with learner ability in many cases, suggesting that good students would do well in all subjects, as one stated: *'Students who are poor in English are poor in other subjects'*.

6.6 Constraints Regarding Promoting Learner Autonomy in the Saudi Educational Context

There have been particular constraints in promoting learner autonomy within a Saudi educational context and the following sections discuss these constraints.

6.6.1 Schooling System and Learning Habits

The teachers believed that one of the main challenges to fostering autonomy was students' inability to work independently and to take responsibility for their own learning, since they were so used to being spoon-fed information during their schooling years. It was reported that the first year at the university is a drastic change for many students; they had just arrived at the university, coming from a schooling system in which they depended totally on their teachers. Encouraging students to accept responsibility for their learning and providing them with the necessary tools as well as opportunities to develop autonomy seemed to be a big challenge for language teachers at the university.

Age was also seen as a factor in demonstrating autonomous behaviour. Some teachers believed that children may pick up autonomous habits faster than first year university students. Teachers explained that at the university level, students have reached a point where their old learning habits are deeply rooted and it is almost impossible to

change them. Most teachers believed that autonomy should start at a very early age, so that learners would be well-versed in the concept when starting university. Some students felt the same, and one student gave an interesting observation, commenting: “*learner autonomy should’ve been implemented from an early age. In Japan learner autonomy starts from childhood for example*”. The reason for citing Japan as an example may indicate that these young Saudi female students are more interested in the outside world and are beginning to compare themselves with other nationalities. There was only one teacher who strongly believed that autonomy should not be limited by age saying that she is 53 years old and she is still learning to learn, and this finding is supported by Dam (2011), who believes that autonomy is not age-restricted and is related to the willingness and capabilities of the learner. Little (1995) also argues that autonomous learners are ‘disciplinary experts’; they are individuals of any age and they are able to master concepts and skills of a discipline and to apply these in new situations.

Some teachers argued that students at this stage were so accustomed to certain learning habits from their early years in school that they found it hard to replace them with new, effective learning habits. Autonomy can be developed at any stage, as Dam (2011) notes, but it is a slow, lengthy process (Reinders, 2010; Liu, 2015) and needs to be implemented gradually. Sinclair (2000) also believes that even learners coming from a traditional teaching background are able to achieve a higher degree of autonomy when they are placed in an autonomy-supportive environment. Students in the interviews expressed desire for an informal, friendly environment in the classroom and lecture-style teaching and formal classrooms hinder the development of autonomy in language learning. Students said they would be willing to develop autonomy and improve their English language if the teacher provided opportunities and allowed them to engage rather than just giving a lecture with no interaction. This is a common teaching practice: English teachers in Saudi Arabia spend most of the lesson lecturing, and the students absorb the knowledge (Fareh, 2010).

6.6.2 Teaching to Exams

As the English language classes focus on students passing exams, there is little motivation to move away from textbooks that provide the information students need to pass exams. Teachers described these textbooks as dull and unimaginative, not expecting students to show creativity. A study by Topbas and Yucel Toy (2013) showed that more than half the university students surveyed believed that a focus on teaching to exams

encouraged rote learning. This may be influenced by the teaching methods selected by the classroom teachers. Syed (2003) also established this barrier to autonomy and argued that it was due to the Saudi education system requiring memorisation. In terms of language learning, Saudi students could earn high grades in English language but not be able to properly use the language (Alrabai, 2016). Nevertheless, the findings indicated that memorisation techniques were actually useful when it comes to vocabulary learning. One of the teachers felt that it was part of her responsibility to teach students some techniques to help them memorise new words during class time, and one student reported that she was able to develop learner autonomy by keeping a notebook of all the new words she learned from the English lesson and memorising them when she went home. It has been reported that memorisation is considered an effective strategy for learning foreign language vocabulary (Oanh & Hien, 2006). Memorisation has also been shown to provide a link between new knowledge and what is already known (O'Malley & Charnot, 1990) but it can prevent students from natural communication with others and from becoming competent language users (Oanh & Hien, 2006).

Many students in this study felt that they want to learn language for communication, and that they would be able to communicate in English if they had built up enough vocabulary knowledge. Some students in the lower levels struggled to express themselves and become more active in the classroom because they could not find the right words in English. That explains why students believed that using only the target language in the classroom hindered autonomy development, although using the target language at all times is a highly recommended practice to foster autonomy and improve language use (Dam, 1995; Little, 1995, 2004).

This presents a problem for teachers as it is clear that these students do not feel they are benefiting from their English classes. Although the focus may be on passing exams, the students want more and appear to be motivated towards learning language for communicate. Their belief that they were being overloaded with information is of concern; Suhaimi and Hussin (2017) advise that information overload can have an impact on academic performance and Blom (2011) associates information overload with anxiety and disinterest, which may account for learners not being engaged in classroom learning. Furthermore, Blom (2011) suggests that too much information is difficult to transform

into knowledge. It therefore has implications for the knowledge retention of learners and the value of the strategies being used in the English language classroom.

Furthermore, teachers are aware that they are under time constraints to cover a packed curriculum; this may lead to information overload and absence of autonomy-supportive practices.

6.6.3 Curriculum

The curriculum provided by universities is seen as another barrier to learner autonomy as it often has no relevance to the students' lives, which can be demotivating. Dornyei (2001) has long been warning of learning content that means nothing to learners, as it will not encourage them to want to learn more. In Saudi Arabia, Zaid (1993) has identified that the English language curriculum focuses on the content of the language, which is not relevant to learners. English is a living language, and the focus of class should be on communications. This strict curriculum did not allow students to enjoy learning the language as a communication tool that could be beneficial to them in the future. Their aims for learning English were short-term and limited to passing the exam. If students are forced to see language as a content-based subject, they will continue to use memorisation strategies and lack interest in expanding their knowledge. English becomes another subject students need to pass with high grades, therefore language learning becomes less enjoyable and more of a chore.

Whilst many teachers thought that autonomous activities were a good idea, they were concerned that they would distract from syllabus progression. Teachers' responses to the general views on learner autonomy indicate positivity towards the usefulness and benefits of learner autonomy. This finding coincides with other studies, which have also found learner autonomy to be useful for language learners from any background (Zhe, 2009). However, survey findings revealed that almost half the teachers agreed that despite being useful, learner autonomy was not feasible in their teaching context. Teachers were unsure about the feasibility of implementing autonomous learning in their own university classrooms possibly due to institutional constraints, which made learner autonomy realistically unachievable at the university; as the findings from the interviews show, teachers who wanted to encourage their students to be autonomous reported that the system was still against them.

Although the concept of student-centred learning and a communicative curriculum has been encouraged to enhance students' language skills, and the teachers are generally in favour of this approach, it has not been practised effectively. Consequently, university teachers must deliver a curriculum in a very short time that may be completely irrelevant to their students. These restrictions do not leave much space to introduce new activities outside the provided curriculum. Modern language teaching tends to focus on communicative approaches, where the aim is for learners to develop skills that enable them to use the language. However, this aim seemed to conflict with the institution's objectives, which mainly focuses on facilitating the students' progression and securing a place at the university by passing the English language programme during the foundation year.

6.6.4 Strategy Training

Oxford (1990) and Lee (2010) have both argued, using strategies for language learning can be effective in improving proficiency. Learner autonomy can increase the chances of students developing a long-term interest in language learning. However, teachers in this study indicated that students are not interested to learn and they just want to pass exams and get good grades. Teachers mistakenly thought that students did not have the motivation for autonomy and, therefore, did not appreciate the value of autonomous activities in improving their language learning skills. On the other hand, students strongly desired to improve learning strategies and reported that developing strategies and skills would enhance learner autonomy and language learning. Some academics, such as Almazrawi (2014), have attributed this low proficiency to a lack of skills development. Alrabai (2016) studied the low achievement of Saudi language students and found that students relied on memorising what the teacher had said to pass exams, and this study seems to affirm this result. The findings of this study suggest that that developing learning strategies and language skills, which would potentially help students develop autonomous habits and language learning, are not being addressed by teachers as the focus is on getting good grades. Consequently, these students did not gain competence or effective learning skills.

6.6.5 Lack of Teacher Training

As this study has shown, teachers are not knowledgeable enough themselves to direct students to becoming proactive learners. Several teachers acknowledged that they

did not know enough about learner autonomy in practice to offer worthwhile guidance to their students, commenting: “*teachers need to be trained on how to make their students more independent*”. This was highlighted in Alrabai’s (2014, 2016) studies, showing that teachers have not considered autonomy as a motivational tool because they did not have sufficient knowledge. Although teachers may not have much time available in their teaching programme, they may find their students more responsive if they were themselves properly trained in autonomous approaches. Previous research has found that teacher training is required to enable teachers to become more autonomy-supportive (Palfreyman & Smith, 2003). Indeed, several participants stressed that teachers needed to be educated in learner autonomy and how it could be applied. For example, Al-Saraj (2014) found that most Saudi students had never worked in groups or given presentations, which could be attributed to a lack of teacher training. Furthermore, Alrabai (2014) reported that learner autonomy was the least used technique in motivating students. Often, teachers lacked awareness of learner autonomy and its value in motivation and learning (Alrabai, 2016). Without any autonomy-oriented training, language teachers will naturally experience difficulties in creating an environment where autonomy is fostered (Harmandaoğlu Baz et al., 2018).

Nga (2014) found that teachers were often reluctant to change their approaches, especially when used to a teacher-centred approach. Indeed, Nga (2014) argued that teachers themselves were often the main obstacle to the development of learner autonomy, as they were not prepared to make changes, such as negotiating with and supporting their students. There is no reason why English language classes should not include autonomous activities as part of preparation for exam success. Students reported that they needed conversations and interactions to improve their English; they found English classes boring and not challenging, in contrast to the classes at private English centres, which were perceived as much more enjoyable. Students stated that they wanted to learn the language, but not in the way it was currently being taught. Students felt they were being overloaded with information.

Teachers were more predisposed to suggest that the modular system of English language classes was the problem, rather than their own classroom strategies. The teachers felt that the university’s modular system prevented them from extending activities and motivating their students to work independently. Teachers stated that time was so limited because of the modular courses that they had little time to cover the

syllabus, let alone introduce any new activities. It was described by one teacher as being in a race to the finish. However, one teacher had an opposing opinion, admitting that eighteen hours per week is plenty of time to practise autonomy in the classroom.

This finding suggests that teachers are not utilising the time in the classroom to try out new approaches that keeps the students interested in learning. Some teachers complained that it was hard to maintain student attendance, and one specifically was very frustrated as she explained how this lack of motivation on the part of her students had a significant impact on her own motivation. Once again, this indicates a lack of experience on how to make the language classroom interesting and enjoyable. It seems that not only is students' willingness an important factor, but also willingness on the part of the teacher: willingness to foster autonomy in students and willingness to foster their own autonomy. A comment from one teacher: *"It will be great to educate teacher about learner autonomy and show them how"* might indicate that teachers too are waiting for their institution to feed them information rather than being autonomous teachers. Teachers may need to put extra effort into pursuing their own autonomy and taking charge of their own professional development.

6.6.6 Institutional Constraints and Absence of Teacher Input

A number of the teachers surveyed wanted to create opportunities for their learners to take responsibility for their own learning, but institutional barriers often impede them. Although the concept of student-centred learning has been encouraged, and the teachers are generally in favour of this approach, they are not trained in using it effectively. Furthermore, teachers are under pressure to complete English language courses within a very short time. Currently, teachers are transmitters of knowledge, which is accepted in hierarchal systems such as Saudi Arabia (Pham, 2006). It is therefore difficult to change the educational system without having good reason to do so.

The lack of opportunity for developing learner autonomy was also attributed to the lack of teacher input into materials, and it was suggested that teachers should have more training to enable them to prepare their own materials. However, this does not fully address the issue, as Albedaiwi's (2011) study found that there were very limited opportunities for introducing autonomy-encouraging activities in a Saudi classroom. Time appeared to be the most significant factor in introducing such activities, as it was argued that English classes are presented at such a rapid rate students do not have time

to reflect on what they are doing. Teachers also rated this factor highly, showing that they also feel under pressure in the classes. Al-Asmari (2013) noted that such pressure was a negative force in the classroom, particularly if both students and teachers were under pressure. Al Asmari (2013) observed that no pressure should be placed on students, and having ample time to prepare would reduce any pressure.

One teacher spoke of her experience of teaching English in another department at the university and how interesting it was as a teacher. In contrast to teaching at the English Language Institution, this teacher was responsible for her course materials and there was no set curriculum to follow. In addition to developing the course materials, this teacher also devised the exam questions based on the students' levels of proficiency. The students taught by this teacher had very good achievement rates. Students like English classes when they are not totally reliant on a textbook, and learner autonomy could play a major role in capturing the interest of students. Another teacher discussed her experience at a private language centre where students were responsible and took charge of their own learning. This teacher explained how her students searched the web and other resources for answers, did online activities, and interacted with one another. Such interactions elicit positive emotions, which play a vital role in learning a foreign language (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014). These interactions also provide motivation and interest in the language, which promotes learner autonomy. Teachers are more likely to be happy when they are given professional freedom in their own working environment (Benson, 2008), and their students are more likely to be happy as a result.

Some teachers suggested that university students are not motivated to study as they lack interest in the English course and, as they are already spending eighteen hours a week in English classes, they do not see the point in doing extra work. However, one of the teachers noted that her students were under a lot of pressure and working like 'machines', and for this reason the concept of autonomy was not suitable for foundation year students as they had no time for it. This clearly shows a limited understanding on the part of this teacher about the concept of learner autonomy and the activities that could enhance it. The constraints are not necessarily the time allocated for English classes, but the strategies that teachers apply to classroom learning.

On the other hand, another teacher had a different opinion, as she believed that handling pressure was a skill that first year students must develop in order to deal with future situations and careers; consequently, she did not agree that pressures of time

should be regarded as a barrier to learning. This is in agreement with Widdowson (1996), who argues that it is important that learners are taught to develop strategies that allow them to cope with unfamiliar situations. This teacher believed that students are capable of developing autonomy, they just need to be willing to develop autonomous habits. However, it may not be easy to introduce such habits as it was reported by some teachers and also students that students' reluctance to take charge of their own learning is a barrier.

It was very clear that the teacher role is vital in encouraging active learning and social engagement in the classroom and creating opportunities to learners to practice autonomy. Part of the teacher's responsibility is to face constraints and try to make the best out of the situation. In other words, there is always room for teachers to exercise their discretion on what is being taught, in spite of their busy schedules. Barfield et al. (2002) argue that part of the teacher role involves "confronting constraints and transforming them into opportunities for change" (p.220). Furthermore, Benson (2000) recognised that almost all teachers worked within educational and institutional constraints but it was essential that teachers find ways to overcome these, if they wished to develop learner autonomy.

6.6.7 Relationships

With the focus on covering the textbook materials, teachers were unable to develop relationships with their students. It was also repeated by many of the teachers that the modular approach to English language learning did not give the opportunity to build relationships with their students, and these relationships were important when trying to encourage students to work independently. Teachers are often respected as a parent figures in many Eastern contexts, and there is a lot invested in the social-emotional relatedness between teacher and student. As Zhou, Lam, and Chan (2012) argue, emotional relatedness with the teacher increases the level of learner motivation. In addition, if a high level of social-emotional relatedness is developed between students and teachers, students perceive teachers' behaviours as less controlling. There is a critical need for building relationships in the teaching and learning of languages, as languages have a strong association with social-emotional relatedness.

The finding does not reflect an open, easy relationship between teacher and students, where students are encouraged to develop autonomy. These opposing views on dependency indicate that teachers may need to be more positive and have faith in their

students' abilities and recognise their potential for autonomy. Students expressed that they wanted to be consulted and asked their opinion, but teachers were often not aware of this. Instead, teachers tended to believe that they had to provide everything for students. There is a gap between the expectations of teachers and students, and the relationship between the two groups is not strong enough to bridge that gap in many cases. The mismatch between teachers' and students' opinions, found in the quantitative investigation regarding classroom activities and autonomous characteristics, stresses the point that the teacher-student relationship is not well established and this could hinder both learner autonomy and language learning enhancement. Understanding students' needs and preferences in terms of activities and learning styles are key to encouraging student autonomy and motivation.

Furthermore, students wanted the teacher to be less strict and less critical. Many students spoke of their fear of making a mistake and how it created an obstacle in developing autonomy and improving their language communication. However, this fear may be lessened if they have confidence in their peers, as well as in their teacher. A lack of time to develop relationships may be detrimental to the cohesion of the group and to the possibility of gaining the confidence to work independently. As time is limited in English language classes, there may be opportunities for students to work with each other in class and develop relationships with one another. Some of the students noted that they were not even being given enough time to make friends in their group before the classes were changed over. Such factors can easily hinder the development of learner autonomy.

Language depends on communication, but students must have confidence to communicate in a foreign language. These interactions are important, as Al-Khairiy (2013) argues, because peer pressure can lead to language students being demotivated. Working in groups and feeling that they are in a learning environment among friends may improve students' attitudes towards language learning. Teachers must find ways to building better relationships with their students, but they must also allow students to develop relationships with one another, so that that they can learn to trust their peers. This trust is important in building confidence in students to communicate and engage in group activities. Peer support may then help students in developing learner autonomy.

6.6.8 Culture and Tradition

Learner autonomy is a relatively new way of learning in Saudi Arabia, and therefore it is unreasonable to expect young people to be able to develop autonomous practices without guidance. Much has been written about traditional practices in Saudi Arabia, and how it is difficult to get support for more learner-centric approaches (Alyami, 2016; Fatany, 2009), yet responses from students indicate they would welcome the opportunity to become more involved in their own learning. This finding is in contrast to Alrabai's (2017) study, which found that Saudi learners were not interested in such approaches. Alrabai (2017) only conducted a quantitative study, and this study demonstrated that neither teachers nor students fully recognised the concept of learner autonomy. Consequently, when further qualitative information was elicited from students, their perceptions were much more positive towards autonomous practices. Some participants in this study believed that the Saudi culture had nothing to do with autonomy; rather than society taking the blame, one student said: "*it is our education system that is different*"; another believed that the student's family background made a difference to the level of autonomy development rather than the nationality of the student. There were a number of other references to family influence encouraging or discouraging learner autonomy.

The influence of families was also highlighted by teachers, who acknowledged the support that could come from parents who spoke English; in addition, many parents took control of their children's lives and made decisions for them, thus limiting their opportunities to become independent in any way. This was also reflected in their education choices. On the other hand, some teachers still felt that there was a cultural angle to the concept of learner autonomy, and that the Saudi culture and identity was unique, given its combination of religion and culture. This is possibly linked to the notion that learner autonomy has been considered a Western approach (O'Sullivan, 2003), and it is better suited to certain educational cultures. This construct may not yet be fully accepted in Saudi education, but the way in which learner autonomy has been received by the students is an indication of a willingness to embrace new approaches.

It is interesting to note this divide between the different generations represented by teachers and students. Despite learner autonomy's connotations of Western educational practices and its unsuitability for collectivist societies (Markus & Kitayama, 2003), students were open to new approaches introduced through the concept. Al-Saraj (2014) reported that Saudi Arabian culture is conservative and resistant to change, but this

current study found that Saudi Arabian culture is actually *welcoming* change. Findings suggest that Saudi university students, who are used to teacher-directed learning and memorisation are now open to new approaches. This finding may come from the influence of social media on the student generation. Saudi Arabia was previously a more closed society, but now it forms part of a wider global community. In addition, Saudi Arabia is attempting to become a knowledge economy and has been proactive in providing scholarships to citizens who want to study in Western countries. This progress indicates that there has been a change in the way education is perceived, although the country may be in the beginning stages of change. The students spoke of teachers not keeping pace with the times, of being too traditional in their approaches, and not listening to their students. It was noted by one teacher that the new generation of students were different, and they had no excuse for not learning independently since they lived in the age of new technologies; she added: “*Every child in Saudi Arabia has an iPad nowadays*”, although Bakar’s (2007) study of Malaysian students in a computer-based learning environment found that students’ independency was often too low for them to be able to take responsibility for their own learning, even when technology was available.

Perceptions of some of the teachers found that the younger generation of students was much more dependent than they themselves had been. Those teachers spoke of their generation being independent and used to making their own decisions. This view was the opposite of what the students felt about their teachers. In Saudi Arabia, previous generations of women were not as independent as girls are today and this can be seen in the changes that are happening in the country. The ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia, for example, was tangible evidence that women were dependent on men to conduct activities outside the home. Now that the ban has been reversed, and women are permitted to drive, the current generation of young girls will become much more independent and autonomous than their mothers and grandmothers had been. The Saudi Vision 2030 is encouraging more participation from women in society and it may be that many of the constraints highlighted by this study will slowly dissipate.

Despite all the constraints, concerns and doubts in regards to the practicalities of implementing autonomous learning into the Saudi classroom, there were high hopes and positive vibes from both language teachers and university students, including the ones who questioned the feasibility of learner autonomy in the Saudi context. As one student

said, *“I think the time is right for learner autonomy”*. Students are aware of the social and political changes happening in their country and they are open to becoming more autonomous learners.

6.7 Summary

This chapter has discussed the perceptions of teachers and students regarding learner autonomy, activities in the classroom that can help develop autonomy and the characteristics of autonomous students. The importance of positive classroom relationships between teachers and students has also been highlighted. In addition, there has also been discussion on the constraints to learner autonomy that arise within a Saudi educational context. Time constraints appear to be a major barrier and appear to be caused by pressure teachers are under to deliver a curriculum in a very limited time; the teachers believe this leaves little opportunity for introducing autonomous activities, although it seems that many teachers are unaware of exactly what such autonomous activities are.

Overall, the chapter has shown there was consensus on learner autonomy being beneficial. However, the opinions expressed by students and teachers differed. Some teachers were using autonomous approaches, such as presentation of topics of students' own choice. Some of the students agreed that group presentations were a way of being directed by the teacher but working alone was not favoured. Although students were willing to become autonomous learners, teachers tended to believe they were only interested in exams and did not try and introduce extra activities. Teachers were adamant that their students would not want to be autonomous, as they were used to being 'spoon-fed'. However, students themselves criticised teachers for working from textbooks constantly. Students wanted support from their teachers in directing them towards autonomous habits, but teachers appeared to be unaware of this desire. Consequently, teachers' and students' views on learner autonomy in language classes contradicted one another. The relationship between teachers and students in English classes may need further development, so that teachers fully understand the needs of their students.

The chapter also presented the challenges faced by teachers in trying to introduce approaches that appear to conflict with the aims of the institution. In addition, the chapter discussed how the aims of the institution, teachers, and students may not be aligned; nor did teachers and students agree in terms of the characteristics of an autonomous learner.

Activities that may be useful for fostering autonomy in the classroom were discussed in this chapter, and it was evident that there are differences between teachers and students on activities considered relevant and useful to them. The significance of involving learners in relevant classroom activities should not be disregarded as such activities help learners construct knowledge in ways that make sense to them. Active learning involves participation and therefore makes the construction of new knowledge a social event as learners interact with each other.

The changing attitudes of young people in Saudi Arabia have also been highlighted, which was one of the surprising outcomes discussed in this chapter. Learner autonomy may be a desirable factor, especially for languages, yet developing autonomy has many challenges. Despite the willingness of learners to adopt autonomous practices, it is clear that the teachers need to understand how they can support their learners in developing autonomy. The teachers are the key to promoting learner autonomy by encouraging and motivating their learners, and by being fully aware of their learners' needs. With young people showing interest in active learning and control over their own learning, it seems that this may be an ideal time for teachers to introduce activities that can develop learner autonomy. However, it may mean that the teachers themselves need guidance on how to become autonomous and develop their own professional autonomy so that they can learn how to support their learners. The final chapter in this thesis concludes the study.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion to this study by looking at the key findings and how they meet the research objectives. It then considers how this research has contributed to knowledge on the phenomenon of learner autonomy in a Saudi university EFL context. The chapter then makes recommendations based on the study findings and suggests studies that could take this research further, especially in changing attitudes about autonomous learning in Saudi Arabia. Finally, the chapter ends with the researcher final remarks and a brief conclusion to the study.

7.2 Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings revealed that teachers and students had positive views, when asked about the usefulness of learner autonomy in their context. When an in-depth investigation was carried out through interviews, students demonstrated a very high level of motivation and desirability to develop learner autonomy and wanted to engage in activities and discussions in the classroom, and teachers seemed to be willing to encourage autonomous practices but lacked the knowledge and experience on learner autonomy in actual classroom application.

A key finding was the mismatch of teachers' and students' perceptions on learner autonomy. Teachers seemed to be familiar with learner autonomy as a concept, and they tended to define it from a scholarly and pedagogical point of view, whereas students viewed the concept differently, viewing it from a broader perspective, not necessarily linked to educational settings. Teachers acknowledged the psychological dimension of autonomy and perceived it as the ability to take charge and responsibility of all aspects and processes of learning, reflecting Holec's (1991) definitions of autonomy. Students, on the other hand, associated learner autonomy with student rights for independence and freedom of act and speech, and having a choice not only in formal educational settings, but also in everyday life activities. They also conceptualised learner autonomy as the ability to have a role in society and be role models for the following generation. Students' views tended to reflect a more political (Benson, 1997) and social (Oxford, 2003) version of autonomy, linking interdependence to autonomy at times, similar to Dam's (1995) definition of the construct.

The findings in this study indicated that there were some signs of autonomous practices in the English classrooms at the university, but what seemed to be missing was dialogue between teachers and their students. When comparisons between teachers and students were made, there were variations and mismatches regarding the effectiveness of classroom activities fostering autonomy. This mismatch of opinions concerning classroom practices stressed the point that the teacher-student relationship was not well established and this could hinder both learner autonomy and language learning. Understanding students' needs and preferences in terms of activities and learning styles are key to encouraging students' autonomy and motivation. Students recognised that they could not become active in the classroom unless they had more opportunities to practise the language and improve their communicative language skills. On the other hand, some teachers failed to recognise that students were actually welcoming autonomous practices, and they seemed to believe that students were only interested in passing their exams. Teachers argued that university students were not interested in the English classes, as they were already spending eighteen hours a week in the English classroom. However, when interviewed, students who had participated in interesting activities in the classroom appeared much happier with their classes and commented that they enjoyed learning.

Students reported that collaborative work and classroom interactions and discussions were effective classroom activities to fostering learner autonomy. On the contrary, working independently or in isolation was said to be hindering autonomy. For example, working independently in a language lab and completing tasks alone were insignificant for students, who preferred to work in small groups even when completing a writing task. This was justified by participants during interviews, stating that teacher support and peer support were believed to foster autonomy. Poor language skills and fear of making mistakes and being judged were holding back students from becoming autonomous and active in the classroom, and support from class mates when working in groups would reduce students' anxieties. The survey also revealed that both teachers and students believed that allowing learners time to prepare before speaking or answering a question was key to encouraging learner autonomy in the classroom, and another effective way of reducing students' anxiety and fear of making mistakes.

Moreover, translating from English and using the target language at all times were perceived as ineffective ways of fostering learner autonomy. The reason seemed to be the low level of language proficiency for first year students. The ineffectiveness of

using the target language only, tasks requiring translations from English, and the use of authentic materials, such as articles from magazines and online materials, were other signs of low language proficiency and poor language skills, as they were seen to be hindering the development of learners' autonomy, based on students' responses. A teacher explained that the English language found in authentic materials and articles from the internet might be difficult for Saudi students to comprehend, and therefore such tasks could be unsuitable and too advanced for the students' level of English. Suitability and relevance of activity selection was found to be key to motivating students to be active and interested in learning English.

Some of the activities, which seemed to be of interest to students, were group presentations, watching English films, listening to lyrics from songs, and reading stories. Such activities were found to be effective classroom practices that can encourage open discussion and improve vocabulary learning and natural language use. They also introduced a less formal, friendlier and enjoyable environment to the classroom, something which seemed to be missing in most English classes at the university. Both teachers and students tended to have similar views on the language classroom environment: they both seemed to desire less traditional, more engaging activities and tasks but the focus on passing exams and time constraints made it challenging for teachers to promote such autonomy-supported practices, as teachers in this study reported.

Another mismatch was teachers' and students' opinions on characteristics of autonomous learners. Findings showed that teachers believed that having a positive attitude towards learning and self-motivation to learn the language were indicators of autonomous students. Positivity and motivation to learn English were most desired by teachers, but they were not highly rated by students, based on the survey findings. Students believed that autonomous learners were able to develop effective study skills and learning strategies. This finding was confirmed when participants were interviewed; students seemed to be willing to improve their language learning skills and to develop autonomous learning habits. In addition, they felt that they were capable of taking charge and becoming independent. However, teachers seemed to view students differently; they implied that students are used to being spoon-fed information and were not very motivated to learn English, therefore they felt that their students needed to demonstrate more positive behaviour towards learning in order to develop autonomy.

However, both students and teachers agreed that the ability to take charge of learning was the most important attribute of an autonomous learner, specifically the ability to monitor progress and identify strengths and weaknesses and the means to address them. The ability to work cooperatively with others was also seen as an indicator of an autonomous learner. Students seemed to acknowledge the quality of being sociable and linked it to the quality of an autonomous student. They also believed that autonomous learners had a strong personality, tended to be bold, were not afraid to state their opinion freely, were highly confident, and they would be future leaders not followers. On the other hand, teachers pictured autonomous learner as being the best students in the classroom and the best academic achievers; those learners were said to be intelligent (high IQs) and do well in all subjects, not only in the English courses. The different descriptions of an autonomous learner given by teachers and students highlighted once again how the two groups perceived the concept of learner autonomy differently.

One of the study aims was to explore if there was a link between learner autonomy development and language learning improvement. The quantitative investigation indicated that there was a positive and strong correlation between autonomous characteristics enhancement and language learning enhancement. For example, training students to develop the ability to take charge of learning, establishing good study skills and learning strategies, as well as having a positive attitude to learning English were all seen as autonomous habits, which could help learners improve their language skills. In addition, interviewees demonstrated a strong belief that fostering learner autonomy would lead to better language learning, and that autonomous learners and good language learners were active learners and possessed similar qualities, such as self-motivation and hardworking attributes.

The learner's level of proficiency was also seen as a factor in either hindering or motivating the development of learner autonomy. It was found that there were mixed opinions in regards to the English level of a student and her ability to develop autonomy. Some believed that students in lower English levels were more autonomous because they were keen to improve their language skills and they were always searching for ways to learn the language inside and outside the classroom, whereas others felt that students in lower levels were afraid to make mistakes and lacked the vocabulary knowledge allowing them to participate and be active in the classroom. Those less proficient students were more dependent on the teacher and were not ready for autonomy.

On the other hand, students in higher, advanced levels were seen as more autonomous as they did not have a language barrier, therefore they were more active and more confident in the classroom. Some teachers admitted that working with advanced students made their job easier, since they demonstrated independence and they responded well to autonomous activities. This opinion was rejected by some participants, who felt that when the student's English language was well developed, she would lack the interest in developing autonomous habits enhancing language learning, and therefore would be less interested in participating in the classroom. Higher level students would be interested in the English courses only as a university requirement, not as beneficial language learning courses.

It was reported that having a personal interest and motivation was the key factor to the development of autonomy, and that the level of English was irrelevant. Learning a foreign language could lead to autonomous behaviours different from other subjects, such as maths and sciences. Some participants in this study believed that learner autonomy in foreign language learning was unique, because it required extra effort and skills on the part of the learner to learn a new language.

The findings also revealed some constraints to fostering learner autonomy in the university. To start with, the teacher-student relationship seemed to be in conflict, causing a barrier to autonomy development. It was very clear that there was confusion about the type of this relationship. Generally speaking, teachers indicated that developing a friendship with their students was an effective way to enhance students' autonomy in the language classroom, but some teachers in the interviews were not sure why students seemed reluctant to build a good relationship with them; some declared that the modular system with its seven-week course duration could be the reason behind this. On the other hand, many students believed that having a formal relationship with the teacher and respecting the teacher's controlling behaviour helped them become autonomous learners. It was clear that students had a great respect for the teacher and did not object to her control and authority.

The lack of agreement between teachers' and students' preferences in regards to autonomous classroom practices and autonomous learning habits tended to be one of the main constraints in the language classroom at the university. Teachers seemed to lack understanding of their students' needs and interests, and students seemed to struggle to take charge and responsibility for their learning in this transactional stage in their

education without proper guidance. First-year university students needed training to cope with the new system of university life, which was different from their previous school years when their teachers were transmitters of knowledge.

Lack of teacher autonomy and the teachers' freedom to have their own input on what was being done in the classroom was another major barrier to autonomy. Teachers in this study reported that the system was against them and the strict curriculum and tight teaching timeline restricted their freedom and made the implementation of autonomous practices realistically unachievable. It was true that teachers showed a high desirability and positivity towards the effectiveness of introducing learner autonomy to their students, however they seemed to know little about how to promote autonomy in practice and to work around institutional constraints. There was a clear lack of experience and training, as some teachers pointed out, and teachers who were already encouraging autonomous practices in their classroom declared that they were doing it subconsciously. They only realised that they were promoting autonomy when they were interviewed and took some time to reflect on their own teaching practices. This also may suggest that reflection was not a common practice for language teachers at the university.

The Saudi cultural values and social norms were highlighted by some participants as factors hindering autonomy. It was reported by one teacher that Saudi Arabia tended to be stricter than other neighbouring countries due to strong religious beliefs, and this might create a constraint to the development of learner autonomy. Some other participants argued that girls in non-Western societies are usually not independent, because they were brought up this way since childhood. Families tended to be more protective over daughters than over their sons, and they set certain rules on activities and behaviours that they saw as culturally appropriate. Some teachers and students believed a Western context may be more supportive of autonomous practices, in formal and non-formal settings, than the Saudi context, and one student stated that Western people were more autonomous because autonomy was supported by law.

However, it was interesting to find that not all participants agreed that the socio-cultural factor was a constraint to the development of learner autonomy. Some teachers and students believed that Saudi culture was not hindering the development of learner autonomy, and that autonomy was more of a universal concept. They stated that there were other factors to blame, such as teacher-centred approaches in the educational systems, the personal attributes of the learner, and the language classroom environment.

Teachers reported that all facilities and technologies were available to students nowadays, students needed to be willing to utilise such facilities and learn how to be more independent. Students also acknowledged that their generation was different and they lived in the age of new technologies. They believed that they could become autonomous individuals and become future leaders, but first they would need support and encouragement from their teachers at the university and their families at home in order to establish their full potential and desire for autonomy.

7.3 Limitations

Given that this study has been carried out in the context of the English Institute of one university, it may not represent the perceptions of participants from other universities; only female teachers and students were interviewed in this research. Students were all from the foundation level of the English language programme in a state university. Different results may emerge if female students at private English centres are studied, or if different levels are taken into account. In addition, a study on male students may also produce different findings.

7.4 Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to the literature by presenting an understanding of the perceptions towards learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia. Limited literature is available on this subject, yet learner autonomy is an important issue given the current educational, social, and political changes in Saudi Arabia.

Little research has been carried out on learner autonomy in the context of Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, where traditions of teacher-centred learning predominate. This study is therefore a significant step towards providing research focusing on the reality of learner autonomy within Saudi Higher Education language classrooms, as there is a lack of research in this field.

This study is also important for the methodology used, as this research marks the first time that both surveys and interviews have been employed to gauge in-depth the perspectives of learner autonomy of both teachers and students in a Saudi public university context. Such views and opinions have been absent from other studies, where

the phenomenon has been studied purely from the perspective of either teachers or students.

The study also provides insights into effective classroom activities and practices based on the views of teachers and first-year students in a Saudi Arabian university. As well as offering new insights into actual classroom application, references to traits and characteristics of an autonomous learner in the Saudi context are presented in this study. The findings may help to explain some of the challenges that Saudi language learners face when confronted with autonomous practices, as they highlight the institutional and socio-cultural barriers that both teachers and students need to overcome.

The results from this study can be used to make comparisons between Western and non-Western contexts, or between Saudi Arabia and other neighbouring countries. In other words, the findings in this study add to the literature concerning learner autonomy across cultures, as well as highlighting both culturally specific and universal aspects of learner autonomy. The study is specifically useful for contexts such as foreign language learning in non-Western areas.

Furthermore, this study challenges the belief that young Saudi students are not interested in becoming autonomous learners. Female university students in this study wanted to be active individuals and wanted to practise autonomy in formal and non-formal settings. One of the main contributions of this study is the insight given to the changes occurring in Saudi society and the generational gap between young female students and the older generation. These findings were unexpected and indicate the social changes in Saudi Arabia, as the country is developing into a knowledge economy and becoming part of a global community.

7.5 Recommendations

One of the findings in this study was the confusion about learner autonomy and its benefits to English language learning. It is recommended that awareness be raised about the benefits of learner autonomy to long-term interest in the language and to skills development. Strategy-based instruction focusing on language strategy training is a recommended approach to foster autonomous learning, as this was highly desired by the Saudi language learner.

The focus on exams has been seen as detrimental to learner autonomy in English language classes. It is recommended that more focus should be given to actual language learning through development of autonomous habits and effective lifelong skills and strategies, in order to improve the language learning situation in the education system.

Institutional constraints prevented teachers from exercising autonomy. This lack of teacher autonomy seemed to lead to the lack of learner autonomy. It is recommended that teachers are given more freedom and more professional responsibility in planning their courses to reach effective outcomes. This new planning may entail not working through a textbook and instead introducing more engaging activities in the classroom.

Teachers in this study reported that there was no teacher training or workshops on learning autonomy. It is recommended that Language Institutes organise workshops and training sessions on both teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. Teachers can also meet regularly and share their ideas on practices promoting learner autonomy, based on their actual teaching experiences in the classroom.

Many of the students found English classes boring, and some of the teachers agreed with this assessment. Teachers are encouraged to try out and experiment modern approaches suited to the new generation of learners. It is recommended that teachers use films and music and storytelling to build vocabulary and introduce naturalistic language use.

Students reported that they were afraid of making mistakes and being criticised by teachers. It is recommended that students are encouraged to participate and make mistakes, as this will improve their self-confidence. Students will thus learn from each other's mistakes. An informal, friendly classroom environment is also recommended to reduce students' anxieties and fear of mistakes and facilitate active learning, as opposed to the lecture style classes which were found to be hindering autonomy.

It is recommended that teachers develop better relationships with their students so that they understand students' needs. Teachers should not be led into believing that their students have no interest in learning English. Teachers had little understanding of their students' interests and believed that students wanted to attend English classes solely to gain access to university courses by passing with good grades. This perception was contradicted by the students, who wanted to learn the language and be able to use it in everyday life situations and future careers.

It is recommended that more dialogues and negotiations between teachers and students should be practised in the language classroom. Students wanted to be involved in selecting activities and tasks and be allowed to make decisions and monitor their progress. Classroom negotiations are another way of understanding students' needs and learning styles and also help students develop autonomy.

It is also recommended that teachers offer counselling sessions to first year university students, providing guidance on how to develop learner autonomy.

Resource-based approaches promoting the development of learner autonomy through self-access and individual work in language labs were not suitable for the Saudi language learners. Self-study and learning in isolation were found ineffective to fostering learner autonomy and language learning in the Saudi EFL context. It is recommended that learner autonomy should be developed through approaches encouraging collaborative work and interdependence.

Finally, it is recommended that the implementation of learner autonomy in language education in contexts such as Saudi Arabia should be gradual and systematic, as the implantation of autonomous learning can be a long and slow process, and it may take several steps to be fully achieved in certain educational contexts.

7.6 Directions for Further Research

This study has provided insights into learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia, but, as noted, a number of other areas are yet to be explored within this topic. Qualitative investigations are very focused but limited and therefore encouraged to provide a wider scope and understanding.

This study has focused on learner autonomy in the context of female students in Saudi Arabia. To build on this study, more studies can be conducted on learner autonomy in Saudi male university contexts. Differences may be present between the genders, as young men may have more opportunities to be involved in autonomous activities outside the classroom environment. In addition, the fear that young female learners have about making errors may not be the same for young male learners.

The teacher-student relationship was found to be an important factor in motivating/demotivating autonomy in learners. No studies have focused on the relationships between teachers and students in the Middle Eastern context and how these relationships affects

social-emotional relatedness and its impact on autonomy and motivation; relationships may not have the same impact on male students as they do on the female students.

Exploring the aspect of learner autonomy at higher levels of English language proficiency is another area that would benefit from more research. This exploration would give more insight into the attributes of learners who have succeeded in overcoming many of the barriers identified in this study. Some participants spoke of private English language institutions, where it appears that learner autonomy may be developing; this is also worth further investigation.

Thus further research studies should capture evolving changes in attitudes of the new generation of Saudi language learners. These changes can be especially pertinent in terms of teachers and university students, as these groups represent the future of Saudi Arabia.

7.7 Reflections

I started this research project strongly believing that learner autonomy has potential benefits, not only in formal education but also in the impact it has on personal growth and professional development. Experiencing myself an autonomous way of learning in the UK has made me think that Saudi students deserve to be given the same learning opportunities in their home country.

The notion of learner autonomy as an ability to work independently and to take charge of one's learning was the initial building blocks of this research project. However, as the project progressed, the concept of learner autonomy to me became more complex as there were many interpretations and philosophical ideas underpinning it. Now, at the end of this investigation, I view learner autonomy as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, having both universal and cultural-specific attributes. I have also learned that the term autonomy is not synonymous with independent learning or any forms of learning in isolation. Rather, it is a social construct involving active, collaborative, student-centred learning, and is developed within a constructivist learning environment. Knowledge is not something to be transferred from teacher to students in a spoon-feeding manner. The teacher's role is fundamental in directing students' learning through the collaborative construction of knowledge.

Spoon-feeding and traditional teacher-centred approaches which are commonly used in the Saudi language classroom would no longer be effective with the new generation

of students. If we keep on teaching in the same traditional way, it is only natural that we would end up having the same unsatisfying language learning outcomes. Successful language learning will not take place if we keep on teaching in the same manner. It is very likely that nothing will improve unless a change takes place. Educators need to start adopting new approaches to engage better and motivate students to learn. In other words, promoting and adopting an autonomous way of learning is key not only to improving the quality of learning in Saudi Arabia but also to equip the new generation with lifelong skills that go beyond educational settings.

Furthermore, conducting this research in a Saudi higher education EFL context has taught me that the development of learner autonomy relies on the development of habits. Both educators and students need to build and develop autonomous habits in order to take charge of their learning/teaching and become responsible individuals. With the significant social and political changes in Saudi Arabia, educators are urged to acknowledge young people's desire for autonomy. We need to support and guide learners to develop autonomous habits and lifelong skills so that they can adapt to the shifting demands of education and careers, both locally and globally. The frequency of the words 'freedom' and 'choice' found in the students' interviews raises awareness of the importance of empowering the new generation of female learners and providing them with more opportunities to develop autonomy and take control of their learning. Girls at the university were protesting, saying: "We Demand Autonomy!". Moreover, it is now time that their voices were heard. We, as educators, have the duty to address our students' needs and demands and grant them their right to autonomous learning.

7.8 Conclusion of the Thesis

This thesis has explored the concept of learner autonomy in a Saudi Arabian higher education EFL context and fulfilled the objective of investigating the reality of learner autonomy from the perspectives of both teachers and learners. It has been encouraging to note that learners are interested in autonomous practices, although they feel constricted by the need to pass exams and believe that more engaging activities in the classroom may deter them from covering the exam syllabus. Equally, the teachers are positive about developing learner autonomy; they may have the challenge of teaching a packed curriculum in a limited time period but they would like to know more about encouraging student participation.

The recommendations based on the findings of this study may serve to improve the learning environment for both teachers and students and thus enhance the development of autonomous practices in Saudi EFL classrooms.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for pilot study



Exploring Learner Autonomy in a Saudi Arabian EFL Context

About the Project

This questionnaire is part of a PhD research project being conducted by **Noha Halabi** (nsh512@york.ac.uk) at the University of York in the UK. The general aim of the study is to investigate perceptions regarding the concept of learner autonomy in an English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) context in Saudi Arabia.

This particular questionnaire aims to explore participants' opinions on the effectiveness of certain autonomy-supportive activities and practices in their EFL context. It also endeavours to determine the study participants' viewpoints regarding the common characteristics of autonomous learners.

What Does Learner Autonomy Mean?

Generally speaking, the various definitions of learner autonomy relate to the learners' ability to take charge/control of their own learning, their ability to take responsibility for their learning, their readiness to make their own decisions, and their willingness to act both independently and in cooperation with others.

Questionnaire

Section 1: Suggested Activities and Teaching Practices for Fostering Learner Autonomy

The following activities and teaching practices are sometimes suggested for developing learner autonomy in English language lessons. To what extent do you think these activities are effective in developing learner autonomy in you EFL context in Saudi Arabia? Please rate each item by placing a tick (✓) in the corresponding box where 0=not effective at all and 5=very effective.

Suggested activity/practice	Efficacy in developing learner autonomy in practice					
	0 (not effective at all)	1	2	3	4	5 (very effective)
1- Ask students to become active and get involved in classroom activities.						
2- Assign tasks that support language learning and can be conducted outside the classroom.						
3- Select activities that are relevant to the students' needs, goals and values.						
4- Ask students to keep a written record of their learning.						
5- Ask students to translate from English.						
6- Ask students to summarize something in English .						
7- Ask students to analyse structures and sentences in order to formulate a language rule themselves.						
8- Ask students to observe natural communications in English.						
9- Allow time for students to prepare before they speak or answer a question.						
10- Create seating arrangements that encourage students to initiate conversation in class						
11- Ask students to use online resources.						
12- Ask students for their preferences while working on a task or activity.						
13- Explain to students why some uninteresting grammar exercises or language activities are worth their attention.						

Suggested activity/practice	Efficacy in developing learner autonomy in practice					
	0 (not effective at all)	1	2	3	4	5 (very effective)
14- Allow collaborative work in small groups						
15- Train students to communicate in English via different social networking sites.						
16- Allow students to work independently in a self-access centre.						
17- Allow students to use reference books, including dictionaries, in class.						
18- Use a variety of authentic materials in class.						
19- Train students to compose emails in English.						
20- Use nothing but the target language in class.						

Section 2: Learners' Characteristics

Please tick (✓) ONE answer for each question.

Please answer each of the three questions for each item so that there are three answers in each row.

Characteristic	Q1. Do you want your students to develop this?			Q2. Does this enhance learner autonomy?			Q3. Does this enhance language learning?		
	Yes	Unsure	No	Yes	Unsure	No	Yes	Unsure	No
1- Evaluate their own learning.									
2- Monitor their own progress.									
3- Identify their own learning problems and means of addressing them									
4- Identify their own needs.									
5- Set their own goals.									

Characteristics	Q1. Do you want your students to develop this?			Q2. Does this enhance learner autonomy?			Q3. Does this enhance language learning?		
	Yes	Unsure	No	Yes	Unsure	No	Yes	Unsure	No
6- Demonstrate a willingness to learn.									
7- Demonstrate a positive attitude towards learning.									
8- Motivate themselves to learn.									
9- Express their ideas and opinions freely.									
10- Learn English because they enjoy it.									
11- Complete a task with others rather than on their own.									
12- Learn by taking part in classroom interactions and discussions.									
13- Seek help and support from their peers.									
14- Work cooperatively.									
15- Learn with, and from others.									
16- Identify and develop strategies for learning.									
17- Work with a variety of materials and resources to enhance learning.									
18- Plan where they want to learn.									
19- Develop the ability to study by themselves.									
20- Develop individual daily/weekly learning plans.									
21- View teachers as parental figure.									
22- Demonstrate independence from their teacher.									
23- Respect the formality of the teacher-student relationship.									
24- Perceive their teacher's controlling behaviour in a positive way.									
25- Develop friendships with their teacher.									

Section 3: General Views

After you have completed the above two sections, please answer the following questions:

1. In your view, how useful is learner autonomy in your teaching context?

2. Do you think Learner Autonomy helps or hinders language learning?

3. Do you think learner autonomy can be achieved without the help of a teacher?

4. To what extent do you think promoting learner autonomy is desirable (i.e. ideal) in your teaching context?

5. To what extent do you think promoting learner autonomy is feasible (i.e. realistically achievable) in your teaching context?

6. From your personal point of view, what does learner autonomy mean?

Section 4: Personal information

Please tick **ONE** answer.

1. Number of years of experience as an English language teacher at the university:

0 – 4 5 – 9 10 – 14 15 – 19 20 – 24 25 or more

2. Highest qualification:

Certificate Diploma Bachelor's Master's Doctorate Other (please specify) _____

3. English Levels you teach most:

Level: 1 2 3 4 1 & 2 3 & 4 All levels Other (please specify) _____

4- Your first/ native Language:

Arabic English Other (please specify) _____

5- Nationality: _____

6. Would you be interested in participating further in this study (i.e. via an interview)?

Yes No

If you answered YES to Question 6, please provide your contact information:

Email: _____

Other means of contact (e.g. landline or mobile number): _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for main study (Teachers)



Exploring Learner Autonomy in a Saudi Arabian EFL Context

About the Project

This questionnaire is part of a PhD research project being conducted by **Noha Halabi** (nsh512@york.ac.uk) at the University of York in the UK. The general aim of the study is to investigate perceptions regarding the concept of learner autonomy in the English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) context in Saudi Arabia.

This particular questionnaire aims to explore participants' opinions on the effectiveness of certain autonomy-supportive activities and practices in their EFL classroom. It also endeavours to determine the study participants' viewpoints regarding the common characteristics of autonomous learners.

What Does Learner Autonomy Mean?

Generally speaking, the various definitions of learner autonomy relate to the learners' ability to take charge/control of their own learning, their ability to take responsibility for their learning, their readiness to make their own decisions, and their willingness to act both independently and in cooperation with others.

Questionnaire

Section 1: Suggested Activities and Teaching Practices for Developing Learner Autonomy

The following teacher-led activities and practices are sometimes suggested for encouraging the development of learner autonomy in the English language classroom. To what extent do you think these activities are effective in developing learner autonomy in you EFL context in Saudi Arabia? Please rate each item by placing a tick (✓) in the corresponding box where 0=not effective at all and 5=very effective.

Activity/practice	Efficacy in developing learner autonomy					
	0 (not effective at all)	1	2	3	4	5 (very effective)
1- Ask students to become active and get involved in classroom activities.						
2- Assign tasks that support language learning and can be conducted outside the classroom (e.g. interviewing someone in English).						
3- Select activities that are relevant to the students' needs, goals and values.						
4- Ask students to keep a written record of their learning (e.g. lists of useful vocabulary items or written texts they themselves produced).						
5- Ask students to translate from English (e.g. translate an English article).						
6- Ask students to summarize something in English (e.g. an article or a short story).						
7- Ask students to analyse structures and sentences in order to formulate a language rule themselves (e.g. a certain grammar point or fixed spelling rule).						
8- Ask students to observe natural communications in English (e.g. watching an English film or TV programme).						
9- Allow time for students to prepare before they speak or answer a question.						
10- Create seating arrangements that encourage students to initiate conversation in class.						
11- Ask students to use online resources (e.g. language learning websites or e-books).						
12- Ask students for their preferences while working on a task or activity (e.g. do they prefer to work in groups, pairs or work alone? Do they prefer to select their group members?).						
13- Explain to students why some uninteresting grammar exercises or language activities are worth their attention.						

Activity/practice	Efficacy in developing learner autonomy					
	0 (not effective at all)	1	2	3	4	5 (very effective)
14- Allow collaborative work in small groups.						
15- Train students to communicate in English via different social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter or blogs).						
16- Allow students to work independently in a language lab.						
17- Allow students to use reference books in class, including dictionaries.						
18- Use a variety of authentic materials in class (e.g. newspapers or articles from the internet).						
19- Train students to compose emails in English.						
20- Use nothing but the target language (English) in class.						

Section 2: Learners' Characteristics

The following are characteristics that may be useful in developing students' autonomy.

Please tick (✓) ONE answer for the three questions provided for each item.

Learners' characteristics	Q1. Do you want your students to develop this?			Q2. Does this item enhance learner autonomy?			Q3. Does this item enhance language learning?		
	Yes	Unsu re	No	Yes	Unsu re	No	Yes	Unsu re	No
1- Evaluate their own learning (e.g. evaluate to what extent they have achieved their goals).									
2- Monitor their own progress (e.g. identify their weaknesses and strengths and structure their learning accordingly).									
3- Identify their own learning problems and means of addressing them.									
4- Identify their own needs (e.g. why do they want to learn English).									
5- Set their own goals (what they want to learn) (e.g. communication in English, academic writing, or reading and comprehension).									

Learners' characteristics	Q1. Do you think this item is useful?			Q2. Does this enhance learner autonomy?			Q3. Does this enhance language learning?		
	Yes	Unsure	No	Yes	Unsure	No	Yes	Unsure	No
6- Demonstrate a willingness to learn.									
7- Demonstrate positivity towards learning English.									
8- Motivate themselves to learn (without external rewards).									
9- Express their ideas and opinions freely.									
10- Learn English because they enjoy it.									
11- Complete a task with others rather than on their own.									
12- Learn by taking part in classroom interactions and discussions.									
13- Seek help and support from their peers.									
14- Work cooperatively in pairs, in groups, or with the whole class.									
15- Learn with, and from others.									
16- Identify and develop strategies for learning (e.g. learning words by association, repeating words or sentences or organizing a table of important grammar rules).									
17- Work with a variety of materials and resources to enhance learning (e.g. textbooks, films, newspapers and websites).									
18- Plan where they want to learn (e.g. in the classroom, outside the classroom, at home or in the library).									
19- Develop the ability to study by themselves.									
20- Develop individual daily/weekly learning plans.									
21- View teachers as parental figures.									
22- Demonstrate independence from their teacher.									
23- Respect the formality of the teacher-student relationship.									
24- Perceive their teacher's controlling behaviour in a positive way.									
25- Develop friendships with their teacher.									

Section 3: General Views

After you have completed the above two sections, please answer the following questions.

1. In your view, how useful is learner autonomy in your teaching context?

- Useful Unsure Not Useful

2. Do you think Learner Autonomy helps or hinders language learning?

- Helps Unsure Hinders

3. Do you think learner autonomy can be achieved without the help of a teacher?

- Yes Unsure No

4. To what extent do you think promoting learner autonomy is desirable (i.e. ideal) in your teaching context?

- Highly Undesirable Slightly Undesirable Unsure Slightly Desirable Highly Desirable

5. To what extent do you think promoting learner autonomy is feasible (i.e. realistically achievable) in your teaching context?

- Completely Unfeasible Slightly Unfeasible Unsure Slightly Feasible Completely Feasible

6. From your personal point of view, what does learner autonomy mean?

Learner Autonomy:

Section 4: Personal information

Please tick **ONE** answer.

1. Number of years of experience as an English language teacher at the university:

0 – 4 5 – 9 10 – 14 15 – 19 20 – 24 25 or more

2. Highest qualification:

Certificate Diploma Bachelor's Master's Doctorate Other (please specify)_____

3. English Levels you teach most:

Level: 1 2 3 4 1 & 2 3 & 4 All levels Other (please specify)_____

4- Your first/ native Language:

Arabic English Other (please specify)_____

5- Nationality: _____

6. Would you be interested in participating further in this study (i.e. via an interview)?

Yes No

If you answered YES to Question 6, please provide your contact information:

Email: _____

Other means of contact (e.g. landline or mobile number): _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Appendix 3: Questionnaire for main study (Students)

جامعة يورك

التحري عن فكرة 'استقلالية المتعلم' في سياق تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بالمملكة العربية السعودية

جامعة يورك

حول المشروع

يعد هذا الاستبيان جزء من مشروع بحث رسالة الدكتوراه التي تجريها الأستاذة نهى حليبي (nsh512@york.ac.uk)

بجامعة يورك في المملكة المتحدة. يعتبر الهدف العام للدراسة هو استطلاع الآراء المختلفة حول مفهوم استقلالية التعليم بالمملكة العربية السعودية.

يهدف هذا الاستبيان على وجه الخصوص إلى استكشاف الآراء حول مدى فعالية بعض الأنشطة التعليمية الداعمة لاستقلالية التعليم في الصفوف الدراسية ضمن إطار تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. كما يهدف أيضاً إلى استكشاف الخصائص السائدة التي يتميز بها الطلاب الذين يتمتعون بهذه الخاصية.

ما الذي يعنيه مصطلح "استقلالية المتعلم"؟

تدور التعريفات المتنوعة لاستقلالية المتعلم (استقلالية الطالب) بوجه عام حول قدرة الطلاب المتفردة على التحكم في زمام أمورهم التعليمية, وكذلك قدرتهم على تحمل المسؤولية واستعدادهم لصنع القرارات بما يخص دراستهم, و مدى رغبتهم بالتصرف بشكل استقلالي أو رغبتهم بالتعاون مع الآخرين.

استبانة

القسم الأول: أنشطة وممارسات مقترحة لتطوير ودعم استقلالية المتعلم
 الأنشطة والممارسات التالية يتم اقتراحها في بعض الاحيان لتطوير استقلالية الطلبة في الصف. إلى أي مدى تعتقد أن هذه الممارسات والأنشطة فعالة في دعم التعلم المستقل في صف اللغة الانجليزية؟ قم باختيار اجابة لكل بند بوضع علامة (√) في المربع بحيث يتدرج التقييم من الرقم صفر = غير فعال على الإطلاق إلى الرقم 5 = فعال للغاية.

التقييم						النشاط/الممارسة المقترحة التي قد تقوم بها الأستاذة في الصف لدعم وتطوير استقلالياتك في التعلم
5 (فعال للغاية)	4	3	2	1	0 (غير فعال على الإطلاق)	
						1- أن تطلب منك الأستاذة التفاعل في الصف و الإنخراط في الأنشطة المختلفة.
						2- إعطاؤك واجبات ومهام تدعم تعلمك للغة الانجليزية خارج الصف (مثال: عمل مقابلة شخصية باللغة الإنجليزية).
						3- إختيار الأستاذة لأنشطة ذات صلة باحتياجاتك وأهدافك وقيمك كطالبة.
						4- أن تطلب منك الأستاذة بالاحتفاظ بسجل دراسي (أو ملف) يحتوي على كل ما تقومين بتعلمه (مثل الكلمات الجديدة التي قمتي بتعلمها أو المواضيع التي قمتي بكتابتها باللغة الإنجليزية).
						5- أن تطلب منك الأستاذة ترجمة مقاطع من الانجليزية الى العربية (كترجمة مقالة مكتوبة باللغة الإنجليزية).
						6- أن تطلب منك الأستاذة التلخيص باللغة الإنجليزية (كتلخيص مقال أو قصة قصيرة).
						7- أن تطلب منك الأستاذة تحليل جمل وتراكيب باللغة الانجليزية للتوصل الى قاعدة لغوية أو نحوية بنفسك (بدون مساعدة الأستاذة).
						8- أن تطلب منك الأستاذة ملاحظة ومشاهدة كيفية التواصل والتفاعل باللغة الانجليزية عن طريق مشاهدة فيلم اجنبي او برنامج تليفزيوني باللغة الانجليزية.
						9- اعطائك فترة من الوقت للتحضير قبل التكلم والاجابة على الاسئلة باللغة الانجليزية.

التقييم						النشاط/الممارسة المقترحة التي قد تقوم بها الأستاذة في الصف لدعم وتطوير استقلالياتك في التعلم
5 (فعال للغاية)	4	3	2	1	0 (غير فعال على الإطلاق)	
						10- أن تقوم الأستاذة إعادة ترتيب المقاعد وطريقة الجلوس بحيث تسهل عليك المحادثة والتواصل مع زميلتك في الصف.
						11- أن تطلب منك الأستاذة استخدام الموارد الالكترونية المتاحة في شبكة الانترنت (مثل الكتب الالكترونية أو المواقع والبرامج الداعمة لتعلم اللغة الانجليزية).
						12- ان تقوم الأستاذة بالاستفسار عما تفضليه من وضعيات عند اشتراكك في مهام أو أنشطة داخل الصف (مثلا، أن تسألك الأستاذة إذا أردت أن تشارك في نشاط مع شخص واحد أم مع مجموعة من الأشخاص، ومن هم الأعضاء اللذين تفضلين العمل معهم).
						13- الحصول على بعض التوضيحات من الاستاذة حول سبب دراسة تمارين نحوية مملة أو نشاطات لغوية غير قيمة من وجهة نظرك لاستيعاب أهميتها دراستها.
						14- أن تطلب منك الأستاذة بالإشتراك في نشاط جماعي مكون من مجموعات صغيرة.
						15- أن تقوم الأستاذة بتدريبك على كيفية استخدام شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي باللغة الإنجليزية (مثل فيس بوك وتويتر أو المدونات الإلكترونية)
						16- أن تسمح لك الأستاذة بالعمل بشكل مستقل كليا في معمل اللغة الانجليزية.
						17- أن تسمح لك الأستاذة باستخدام المراجع المختلفة في الصف بما في ذلك قواميس الترجمة.
						18- استخدام موارد تعليمية متنوعة في الصف، حيث تكون اللغة النجليزية مستخدمة في محيطها الطبيعي (مثل استخدام مقالات باللغة الإنجليزية مأخوذة من الجرائد أو من شبكة الانترنت).
						19- أن تقوم الأستاذة بتدريبك على كتابة بريد الكتروني باللغة الإنجليزية.
						20- أن تقوم الأستاذة باستخدام اللغة الإنجليزية فقط لا غير داخل الصف.

القسم الثاني: خصائص متعلقة بالمتعلم
يرجى اختيار اجابة واحدة لكل سؤال بوضع اشارة (√).
يرجى الاجابة على الثلاث أسئلة لكل صف، بحيث يصبح هناك ثلاث إجابات في كل صف.

سؤال 3: هل هذه الخاصية تعزز تعلمك للغة الانجليزية؟			سؤال 2: هل هذه الخاصية تعزز استقلاليتك كطالبة؟			سؤال 1: هل ترغبين بتطوير هذه الخاصية؟			الخاصية
لا	لست متأكد	نعم	لا	لست متأكد	نعم	لا	لست متأكد	نعم	
									1- التقييم الذاتي لمدى تعلمك للغة (كتقييم المدى الذي وصلت اليه في تحقيق اهدافك للتعلم)
									2- متابعة ومراقبة تقدمك في التعلم (مراقبة نقاط الضعف ونقاط القوة الخاصة بك تحديدا)
									3- تحديد المشكلات التي تواجهك اثناء التعلم و معرفة طرق حلها أو التعامل معها.
									4- تحديد احتياجاتك كمتعلم (لماذا تحتاجين أن تتعلمي اللغة الانجليزية)
									5- وضع اهداف خاصة بك (تحديد ماذا تريدن أن تتعلمي. مثال: أريد أن أتعلم اللغة للتواصل، لإتقان الكتابة الأكاديمية، أو لتعلم القراءة والفهم).
									6- اظهار الرغبة والإصرار على التعلم.
									7- اظهار إيجابية واضحة نحو التعلم.
									8- تحفيز نفسك بنفسك للتعلم (بدون مكافآت أو حوافز خارجية)
									9- التعبير عن أفكارك وآرائك بحرية.
									10- أن تتعلمي اللغة الانجليزية لأنك تجدي متعة في ذلك.
									11- استكمال المهام الدراسية والواجبات بالتعاون مع الاخرين وليس بمفردك.
									12- التعلم من خلال المشاركة في التفاعلات والمناقشات داخل الصف.

سؤال 3: هل هذا الشيء يعزز تعلمك للغة الإنجليزية			سؤال 2: هل هذا الشيء يعزز من استقلاليتك كطالبة؟			سؤال 1: هل ترغبين بتطوير هذه الخاصية؟			الخاصية
لا	لست متأكد	نعم	لا	لست متأكد	نعم	لا	لست متأكد	نعم	
									13- طلب المساعدة والدعم من أقرانك (زميلاتك في الصف).
									14- العمل مع الجماعة (مثل العمل مع مجموعة، أو مع أحد أقرانك، أو مع استاذتك، أو العمل مع جميع الموجودين بالصف).
									15- التعلم مع الآخرين، ومن الآخرين.
									16- تحديد وتطوير استراتيجيات للتعلم (مثل تعلم الكلمات الانجليزية عن طريق ربطها بكلمات أخرى مألوفة أو عن طريق التكرار للمفردات والجمل، أو تعلم القواعد النحوية المهمة عن طريق تنظيم جدول)
									17- امكانية العمل ضمن مختلف الموارد و المصادر المتاحة لتعزيز تعلم اللغة (سواء الكتب المقررة والأفلام والصحف الاجنبية والمواقع الالكترونية)
									18 التخطيط لاختيار المكان الذي ترغبين أن تدرسي فيه (في الصف أو خارج الصف أو في المنزل أو في المكتبة)
									19- تطوير قدرتك على الدراسة بمفردك والاعتماد على نفسك.
									20- وضع خطة للدراسة سواء يومية أو أسبوعية.
									21- رؤيتك لأستاذتك كأحد والديك.
									22- إبداء الاستقلالية عن استاذتك.
									23- احترام طبيعة العلاقة الرسمية ما بين الطالبة والاستاذة.
									24- إبداء الدور التحكيمي للأستاذة بطريقة ايجابية.
									25- تكوين صداقة مع الأستاذة.

القسم الثالث: آراء عامة

بعد إتمامك للقسم الأول والثاني، يرجى الإجابة على الأسئلة التالية.

1- من وجهة نظرك، ما هو مدى الاستفادة من تطبيق فكرة 'استقلالية المتعلم' في محيطك الدراسي؟
 مفيد جدا غير مفيد لست متأكد

2- هل تعتقد أن استقلاليتك كمتعلم قد يساعد أم يعيق (يعطل) تعلمك للغة (الإنجليزية)؟
 يساعد يعيق لست متأكد

3- هل تعتقد أنه يمكن أن تحقيقي ما يسمى 'استقلالية المتعلم' بدون مساعدة الأستاذة؟
 نعم لا لست متأكد

4- إلى أي مدى تعتقد أن تحفيز فكرة 'استقلالية المتعلم' مرغوبة (كفكرة تصورية) في محيطك التعليمي؟
 ليست مرغوبة بصفة عالية ليست مرغوبة نوعا ما حيادي مرغوبة نوعا ما مرغوبة بصفة عالية

5- إلى أي مدى تعتقد أن 'استقلالية المتعلم' هي فكرة عملية (قابلة للتنفيذ الفعلي) في محيطك التعليمي؟
 ليست عملية بصفة عالية ليست عملية نوعا ما حيادي عملية نوعا ما عملية بصفة عالية

6- ما الذي يعنيه مصطلح 'استقلالية المتعلم' من وجهة نظرك الشخصية؟
استقلالية المتعلم تعني:

القسم الرابع: معلومات شخصية
يرجى الإجابة على الأسئلة التالية.

1- ما هو مستوى اللغة الإنجليزية الذي تدرسينه حالياً؟
1 2 3 4

2- كم عمرك؟ _____

3- هل سبق لك دراسة دورة للغة الإنجليزية خارج نطاق الجامعة؟ (مثال: درستي في الخارج، في معهد للغة خارج الجامعة، في مدرسة عالمية؟)
نعم (يرجى الشرح) لا

نشكركم على وقتكم للإجابة.

Appendix 4: Interview schedule for main study (Teachers)

Interview Schedules (Teachers)

1. Is the term ‘Learner Autonomy’ new to you? Or have you heard of it somewhere before?

- **What about the concept itself, is it new?**
- **What is the alternative term that can be used to refer to learner autonomy?**

2. Do you think that there is a relationship between culture and learner autonomy?

- **In your opinion, does the Saudi culture help or hinder the development of Learner Autonomy? How?**
- **Can you give me a specific example from your experience of teaching in Saudi Arabia?**
- **Do you recall yourself being an autonomous learner? What makes you think so? Can you give me an example or a situation where this was the case?**
- **Do you think the concept is more valued or less valued in a non-Western educational culture such as Saudi Arabia in comparison to other Western cultures? Why?**

3. Do you think that learner autonomy is a skill that any one can learn? Or do you think it is an innate characteristic?

- **In other words, can we say that some learners are autonomous by nature and others are not, and there is nothing we can do about it!**
- **Do you think that becoming an autonomous learner is easy or challenging? Why?**
- **Is an autonomous student autonomous in all subjects, or only in some? Does the development of your students’ autonomy in the language classroom lead to similar autonomous behaviour in other non-language related subjects (e.g. Maths or science classrooms)?**

4. How important is teacher-support in developing students' autonomy?

- **Do the students need more (or less) teacher-support to enhance their autonomy? Will they appreciate your support?**
- **Do university students in particular need more or less autonomy and autonomy support than younger students? What kind of support? Why?**
- **Can students develop their own autonomy without the help of the teacher?**
- **Whose role is more important in developing learners’ autonomy in the classroom: the teacher or the student? Why?**

5. Can you recall any classroom activities or practices that you found useful for supporting your students’ autonomy?

- **What other factors can facilitate the development of learner autonomy in the classroom?**

6. Can you think of any obstacles or barriers that hinder the development of Learner Autonomy in your teaching context?

- **What can we do to overcome the obstacles you have mentioned?**
- **Do you think that the student's level of English can positively or negatively influence the degree of their autonomy? Is it an obstacle?**

7. Does developing Learner Autonomy happen only within the classroom setting or could it have different forms outside the classroom?

- **What out-of-class activities would you suggest your students do in order to further develop their autonomous learning?**
- **What other factors do you think can support the development of learner autonomy outside the academic setting? (i.e. parents, family, home environment)**

8. Does the development of learner autonomy lead to better language learning? In other words, if the students became more autonomous, would their language learning improve?

9. Could you tell me in simple words how you would describe an autonomous learner?

10. Do you have any final comments on the topic?

11. May I ask:

- **How long have you taught English for? In what contexts?**
- **What English language qualifications or degrees do you have?**
- **What English level do you teach most? If you teach more than one level, do your insights in the interview reflect the levels you teach most? Or were they insights from your teaching experience at the university in general**

Appendix 5: Interview schedule for main study (Students)

أسئلة المقابلة (الطلبة)

1. هل تعتبر أن مصطلح "استقلالية المتعلم" جديد بالنسبة لك؟ أم هل سمعت به من قبل في مكان ما؟
 - ماذا عن المصطلح في حد ذاته، هل تظنه مصطلحًا جديدًا؟
 - ما هي العبارة البديلة التي يمكن استخدامها للإشارة إلى استقلالية المتعلم؟
2. هل هناك علاقة بين الثقافة واستقلالية المتعلم؟
 - حسب رأيك، هل تساعد الثقافة السعودية على تنمية "استقلالية المتعلم" أم تعرقلها؟ وكيف ذلك؟
 - هل لك أن تعطيني مثالاً محددًا من تجاربك التعليمية في المملكة العربية السعودية؟
 - هل تعتبر نفسك متعلمًا مستقلًا؟ ما الذي يدفعك إلى الاعتقاد بذلك؟ هل لك أن تذكر لي مثالاً أو حالة كنت تعتقد فيها أنك متعلم مستقل؟
 - هل تظن أن هذا المفهوم أكثر قيمة أو أقل قيمة في ثقافة تعليمية غير غربية مثل المملكة العربية السعودية مقارنة مع غيرها من الثقافات الغربية؟ ولماذا؟
3. هل تعتبر أن استقلالية المتعلم مهارة يمكن لأي شخص تعلمها؟ أم تعتبر أنها سمة فطرية؟
 - بعبارة أخرى، هل يمكننا القول إن بعض المتعلمين مستقلون بالفطرة والبعض الآخر ليس كذلك، ولا يوجد شيء يمكن القيام به حيال ذلك؟
 - هل تظن أنه من السهل أن يصبح الشخص متعلمًا مستقلًا أم أنه أمر يتسم بالصعوبة؟ ولماذا؟
 - هل تظن أن الطالب المستقل هو كذلك في كل المواد الدراسية، أم فقط في بعضها؟ هل تؤدي تنمية استقلالية الطلاب في تعلم اللغة داخل الفصل إلى اكتساب سلوك مشابه في مواد ليست لها صلة باللغة (مثل دروس الرياضيات والعلوم)؟
4. إلى أي مدى يمكن اعتبار دعم المعلم مهمًا في تنمية استقلالية المتعلم؟
 - هل تحتاج إلى قدر أكبر (أو أقل) من دعم المعلم لتعزيز استقلاليته؟ هل تُثمن دعم معلمك؟
 - هل يحتاج طلبة الجامعة على وجه الخصوص قدرًا أكبر أو قدرًا أقل من الاستقلالية أو من الدعم لها من الطلبة الأصغر سنًا؟ وأي نوع من الدعم؟ ولماذا؟
 - هل يمكن للطلبة أن يُنموا استقلاليتهم دون مساعدة المعلم؟
 - أي دور أكثر أهمية في تنمية استقلالية المتعلمين في الفصل الدراسي: المعلم أم الطالب؟ ولماذا؟
5. هل تتذكر أي نشاط من أنشطة الفصل وجدته مفيدًا في دعم استقلاليته؟
 - ما هي العوامل الأخرى التي يمكن أن تسهل تنمية استقلاليته في الفصل الدراسي؟
6. هل يمكنك التفكير في أي عقبات أو حواجز أعاقت تنمية "استقلالية المتعلم" في سياق التعلم الخاص بك؟
 - ماذا يمكن أن نفعل للتغلب على العقبات التي ذكرتها؟
 - هل تعتبر أن مستوى الطالب في اللغة الإنجليزية يمكن أن يؤثر سلبيًا أو إيجابيًا على مدى استقلاليته؟ وهل يمثل ذلك عقبة؟
7. هل تتم تنمية "استقلالية المتعلم" داخل الفصول الدراسية فقط أم يمكن أن تكون لها أشكال مختلفة خارج هذه الفصول؟
 - ما هي الأنشطة الأخرى التي يمكنك أن تنصح بها لمزيد من تنمية التعليم المستقل؟

- ما هي برأيك العوامل الأخرى التي من شأنها أن تدعم استقلالية المتعلم خارج الإطار الأكاديمي؟ (أي الأهل والعائلة وبيئة المنزل)
- 8. هل تؤدي تنمية استقلالية المتعلم إلى تعلم أفضل للغة؟ وبعبارة أخرى، هل من الصواب القول إن صار الطلبة أكثر استقلالية، فإن تعلمهم للغة سيتحسن؟
- 9. هل بإمكانك إخباري بكلمات بسيطة كيف تصف متعلماً مستقلاً؟
- 10. هل لديك أية تعليقات نهائية عن الموضوع؟
- 11. هل لي أن أسأل:
 - كم تبلغ من العمر؟
 - ما هو مستواك في اللغة الإنجليزي
 - هل سبق لك أن التحقت بدروس في اللغة خارج الجامعة

Appendix 6: Interview transcript (Sample)

Interview Transcript

Interviewer: INT

Language Teacher: LT

INT: good morning

LT: good morning

INT: thank you for participating in the study. I'm going to start by asking some questions about my topic which is learner autonomy. I'm going to start by asking you about the term itself learner autonomy, is a new term to you or have you heard of it before?

LT: I have heard of it

INT: you've heard it before?

LT: yes

INT: Is it commonly used here, the term?

LT: no

INT: no? How about the concept behind it, the concept behind learner autonomy or independent learning?

LT: actually for foundation year I don't think so, in the current practice I don't think that autonomy is really applicable or what can I say we can practically and realistically apply it

INT: I see, do you think there is a relationship between culture and learner autonomy?

LT: definitely not culture, maybe the school system, maybe in the recent years they have been improved and students are taking more charge of their learning than before, the schools are staying away from the role of memorization more than before. Students are doing projects, they're doing research projects, but still I've seen that students are always taking the easy way out, copying and pasting from the Internet, and this hinders their learning and the goals that the education system want, and they are getting away with it.

INT: okay

LT: you see, there is no follow-up so they get away with it. I see my own children in schools they are given projects or they are given research but they are always taking the easy way out

INT: I see

LT: and their teachers are letting them do that

INT: oh okay how about university students?

LT: university students, see this level, the foundation year, there's a lot of pressure on them, it's mainly giving them more information than they can handle. So within this tremendous amount of information and knowledge that they're getting, I think this idea of learner autonomy is not going to work

INT: not going to work?

LT: no because the time is short and the information is so much that there's really not much time for them to be thinking

INT: okay I'll ask for more details about this

LT: but this is not my own view or my own practice

INT: okay

LT: if it was up to me, and I taught other courses other than the foundation year, I do emphasize that students take charge of their own learning. I try in the foundation year but it's not really easy, it's not easy

INT: where you an autonomous learner? from your experience as a learner let's say? If you want to compare, for example the way you were educated and now, the new generation

LT: yeah I guess you can say to certain extent, it depends actually on what teachers want, it depends where I was, so it depends on the context really, it's not easy to say

INT: Because I wanted to ask you what are the advantages of being autonomous learner for example, or what are the experiences from your past, or from your school years maybe.

LT: if you can explain more to me the concept, what exactly do you mean by having autonomy or being an autonomous learner? What you mean exactly? I'm trying, you know, go back to the memory to see what exactly

INT: let's say for example, if you are teaching a class you'd give more freedom to your students, to allow them express their ideas and preferences for example, to be responsible for let's say doing homework, doing projects, it's sometimes inside the classroom sometimes outside the classroom, you feel that they are really responsible to take charge of their learning and to develop themselves you know, without the teachers spoon-feeding them, or telling them what to do. They should have their own goals.

LT: Okay

INT: let's continue, can I ask you more questions about the autonomous learning or learner autonomy? Do you think it's a skill that can be developed or is it something innate or natural?

LT: I think it can be developed

INT: it can be developed?

LT: yeah it can be developed, like I said it, always as I feel the teacher, is the teacher. With my students I have always encouraged them to for example, if they want to do a presentation they have to bring up the idea, they have to do the research I just help them, I just help guide them and see if they're on the right track but it's their job

INT: yeah okay so this is an example

LT: it really helps them mature by the end of the year, it really helps them grow, they take charge of their learning and they are happy actually to be developing and learning. I have seen a lot of students really grow from this experience when you let them choose for example also really encourage them to do work in a group and part of their work is to manage how to work in a group

INT: I see

LT: and when they have problems, I tell them that this is part of the work, you have to overcome the problems

INT: okay

LT: you have to overcome the problems, sometimes I do have to interfere and intervene and change some groups, but that was very rare, very rare, but this is really important part of my teaching that I make sure that the students, especially for a project and speaking topics and presentations, from the beginning of the year I would say okay guys we have presentation at the end of the year to have plenty of time, not the year the semester, so plenty of

time to think about it, to change, you go you think, I just give them general guidelines of what I want and then they choose their topic and it can be anything they want, of course there is something within the curriculum that helps them choose and they see examples of what we're doing, and there's guidelines of what we are doing and so it just helps but they take charge of choosing, the way they present it, how they present it

INT: so you give them the freedom somehow

LT: you see a lot of creativity really it really brings the best of them

INT: okay that's great, I think this answers my question about the activity that might develop or fosters learner autonomy, so this is a good example, it seems to be speaking and presentations

LT: yes it is

INT: okay great

LT: I've done this a lot, I've done a lot with students and it just works wonders

INT: okay great, so it's a skill that you can help students to develop

LT: I believe so

INT: you don't believe that some students are autonomous by nature and others students are not in there and they are hopeless cases

LT: No actually there are no hopeless cases as long as you give them a push but there are students that had more practice, it depends on their schooling and their teaching before, it shows where they were, how they study, some students are just natural students but some students they need the push, they do

INT: I see, do you think they need more support than younger students, if we're talking about the first-year students, the foundation year here at the university?

LT: more support than younger students?

INT: more support or less support because they are now at the university level

LT: less because especially at our age now they have access to the Internet all over the place, the information is really at their fingertips so they have no excuse so no, no they know how to do the work they just need that extra push. Some students, very rare just decide they don't want to do the work but that's their problem but the thing with group work is you can't fail your group some most of the time everybody does their job

INT: okay great, here comes the teacher role, I was going to ask you about that, has teacher got an important role to support independent learning or autonomous learning or responsible learning?

LT: absolutely because you have to be there to guide them make sure they are going on the right track see what just like a guide if you watch and kind of like a coach, you watch them and to see if they are doing their job you just follow up and tell them, like some students by the end of the term I tell them like when they don't present well it was their choice. You see because I gave them chances for meetings and these meetings were like, it kind of their choice to come to them

INT: I see

LT: I was there to help them and guide them to tell them if they were on the right track, to correct them, to help them, to make sure that they gained the confidence that they need. Some of them they just ignored this and it just manifests at the end but it was their choice

- INT: I see, so they take responsibility for their actions, yeah and by this you train them to be responsible and then autonomous
- LT: yeah
- INT: Okay great, and the question about the classroom activities, you mentioned the speaking and presentations
- LT: mostly they would choose for example a topic and its mostly speaking and presenting, so speaking and presenting it is both and of course it's kind of research as well as they are researching the topic, they are getting information from here and there and it's collaborative work because it is each of those that responsible for part of it and of course them presenting and facing an audience and speaking as well
- INT: okay
- LT: so it's good learning experience actually for the students here because like it has so many sides to it, especially taking on the responsibility of their own learning and teamwork and you know, not failing the team and language
- INT: great. The obstacles or barriers, you mentioned a few at the beginning of the interview, so my next question is about the obstacles or barriers that might hinder the development of learner autonomy here at the institution or foundation year student?
- LT: the foundation year student's right now don't do it in this new system the modular system and the foundation year students, the students are given too much work to do so with this amount of work and what can I say the framework that we're working within that they want the students not to work in projects and presentations and things, they want them to follow for example what can I say the from the framework, like if a student for example can talk and engage in short speech for example it is geared towards that, so it is geared towards if she can respond or not, and what is asked is really minimal. For example, if I ask 'how are you' and she say's 'I'm fine' so it is really minimal, it is not the same as when you give them a project and they work on it so it is all of that
- INT: so it is not authentic you mean?
- LT: no, not what I mean authentic, what is required of them is very limiting. They're saying that is real life situations and they want to put them in real life situations so it is kind of geared towards a kind of enacting, unreal situations and letting them pass by that they are real. Actually goes into memorization and there is not really any creativity from the students part, and it's really boring actually. In addition to a very intensive program, so when you have an intensive program and have a curriculum to cover this really hinders any creativity and there is no time at all especially if the module is like six weeks and usually because of the modular system here always clashes with the semester system at the University so usually have like four weeks so imagine that.
- INT: so it's really condensed?
- LT: yeah it condensed, and you have a whole curriculum, a whole book to cover, and you have speaking and you have writing and you have reading and you have elements, so there's really no chance to see these things in students, autonomy, and like I told you it is more like giving a lot of information, a lot of information
- INT: so there is not much time to encourage creativity, and you say even choices for students

LT: no there is no place for it actually, there is no place for it because it is all prescribed and they just have to get through it, like I told you even the speaking and the writing is all prescribed, for example you have to write for this level, you have for example to speak this amount of language and even the descriptors if the student can fairly for example give a reply, can give a minimal reply you know

INT: I see

LT: so it is kind of limiting, is not real and is very limiting to the teacher and is very limiting to the student and you just have to cover this curriculum so unfortunately

INT: yeah, I hope that this problem will be solved, hopefully, and if this is the situation in the classroom and in the institution, what suggestions can you give to the students to do outside the educational setting?

LT: I try to overcome this problem by using my experience. So for example, unfortunately, I will tell you the truth, because of the pressure that they are in I'm teaching to the test, my main goal is that I want to help them, the students to pass the test

INT: I see

LT: I want them to do well on the test because all of the curriculum is test orientated

INT: okay

LT: this is the reality of the situation right now unfortunately

INT: so you feel like your role now is to teach them to pass the test not to learn English

LT: exactly

INT: okay

LT: I'm teaching them to pass the test I'm trying to make it as to take some English language, I'm trying my best but it's really hard because of the pressure that were under, so for example in my class of course, they always have to take them to the level of real life, real learning, so for example if I say grammar, I present them with the rules, I let them understand what the rules are, we do drills and then I have to let them start writing their own, correcting their own sentences, so by this application they have to write and they have to make sure that they write it correct so when they produce the idea sticks

INT: I see

LT: I tried for example the speaking to also like to set your imaginary situations but also I let them use their phones, Google some information you know and let them come up with you know, a small set, many presentations in the class on the spot, so just to help them you know, so they look for information and also within groups but it's not like a long-term project, it's just like as you know, at the spot

INT: at the spot

LT: it helps and you do feel that they produce language, but unfortunately because of the time constraints, the curriculum that we have to cover, time is really minimal for the presentation

INT: okay and you said they don't have time outside the classroom to do anything because it's really tough year for them

LT: is a very tough year

- INT: okay I was going to ask you about something outside the academic setting, other factors that might affect the students autonomy. If I want to ask for example, parents or home environment or family, do you think these factors can affect the development of autonomous learning?
- LT: definitely, I think for example the parents maybe, they are too strict in our culture, you might have a son or daughter, they cannot express their opinion freely and we have these cultural issues. There is a change in culture especially with the Internet and mobile phones and there is more freedom than before but is very hard, the girls especially the weaker they are and the less privileged they are the more manifests that they are less autonomous. They depend, for example on the teacher, they depend on the curriculum they don't depend on their own
- INT: I think you mentioned a very important point about the English level, does their English level affect their level of autonomy?
- LT: we can say the more they were exposed to other cultures the more they are exposed to language, because when you are exposed to language your exposed to its culture
- INT: true
- LT: so for example most of the students here at the university are governments students, government students rarely have, in the recent years they have started to focus on improving their English and so if they are government students they are going to be from a lesser social status whereas when you see a different girl that was for example wants to go into medicine and she was in a private school and in this private school where she was given English, French you know, different subjects other than English she was exposed more to creative thinking, creative writing and you can see the difference.
- INT: so background experiences are important?
- LT: very, very important, it shows in background experience, I think that also I told you that their status economically and which types of schools that they were going to, and of course also parents yes, personality
- INT: personality?
- LT: yeah because some students with all of these odds, some students were just excellent and they were government students as well, and they were just amazing because they were motivated, they were self-motivated. It has a lot of factors
- INT: exactly of course, but I am really glad that you mentioned these factors, so personality would definitely be a factor.
- LT: some of them are really self-motivated, they're willing to learn no matter what, and their English is really good and they were only working in the government schools, is was really surprising, I was like 'which school did you go to?', 'Just a government school?'
- INT: okay
- LT: they were really motivated
- INT: Okay that's brilliant, so I'm going to ask you about language learning and learner autonomy. Do you think that autonomous learning would lead to better language learning?
- LT: definitely
- INT: yeah?

LT: definitely yes because if the student takes charge of their own learning and they are motivated and they are directed towards this direction they will do much better than somebody that's forced, and just trying to pass and they just want to get it over with

INT: autonomy would improve the language learning?

LT: definitely yes

INT: how about in other subjects, non-language related subjects?

LT: yes I think it the same

INT: it's the same?

LT: yes I think it's the same

INT: for example if they are taking a math or a science class, can they apply the same skill? if we can call it a skill

LT: yes, yes I think so. You know it might manifest more in language because languages feel that not everybody has because, sometime I see students are really weak but they are not shy, they are not ashamed, the really insisting on learning the language and I have seen, for example when I was studying at the University, I saw students in the first year that were not able to speak English but by the last year they were really fluent and they became like teachers. So it is all self-motivation

INT: I see, well thank you very much. I'll just now ask questions about, general questions about your experience here at the University. How long have you been teaching English for at University?

LT: almost 16 years

INT: 16 years, and your language qualifications or degree?

LT: I have a Masters in linguistics

INT: and what English level do you teach the most? or do you teach all levels? Do you teach lower levels, one, two, three or four or all levels?

LT: I teach all the levels, and but I usually take the higher levels, most generally

INT: you prefer the higher levels?

LT: I prefer the higher levels, it is easier actually

INT: and now from interview I understood that you were speaking about your experience from teaching foundation year students

LT: foundation students

INT: you said if you were teaching another course your working would be different?

LT: like I told you in the beginning I was talking about other courses, and then I told you my experiences now in the foundation years, and the limitations that we are having, but from other courses that I've taught here at the University and also they were foundation students but a different system, there was more room for student autonomy because of the time constraints and the curriculum so there were less limitations than now, now there are so many, the standards officially now higher

INT: okay and you said that there was more room for student autonomy

LT: yes

INT: and less restriction and there was more room for teacher's autonomy

LT: definitely yes

INT: would like to add anything before we finish the interview?

LT: no thank you

INT: Thank you so much for your time, I truly appreciate it and good luck

Appendix 7: Informed consent form for questionnaire (Teachers)

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

Department of Education

Informed Consent Form (Questionnaire)

- ❖ I understand that I am being invited to participate in a research study conducted by Noha Halabi at the University of York in the UK.
- ❖ I understand that the research project focuses on investigating learner autonomy in a Saudi Arabian EFL context. Learner autonomy is broadly defined as taking charge of one's own learning.
- ❖ I understand that the purpose of this research study is:
 1. Exploring the teachers' perceptions of Learner Autonomy in a Saudi Arabian EFL context.
 2. Exploring specific teaching practices for enhancing Learner Autonomy in this context.
 3. Exploring what would motivate or constraint fostering learner autonomy in the context of study.
 4. Exploring the learners' own opinion of the concept and its development.
 5. Exploring cultural-specific attributes of Learner Autonomy.
- ❖ I understand that should I wish to ask questions about the project prior to completing the questionnaire, this option is available to me.
- ❖ I understand that the questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.
- ❖ I understand that I will be providing information on various aspects regarding the concept of 'Learner Autonomy' through a paper survey/ questionnaire. The information I will provide will be confidential and the reporting will be anonymous.
- ❖ I understand that I will be providing suggestions or preferences regarding autonomy-supportive activities and practices.
- ❖ I understand that I will be asked questions about my learners' attitude and reaction towards the concept of Learner Autonomy.
- ❖ I understand that no other use will be made of the questionnaire without my written permission.
- ❖ I understand that I may withdraw my agreement to participate at any time.
- ❖ I understand that the data will be handled and stored in a manner in which ensures that only the researcher can identify me as their source. Therefore personal details will be held electronically on a password protected or encrypted area and hard copies will be stored in a locked filing cabinet.

- ❖ I understand that I am being offered confidentiality in any written report or oral presentation that draws upon data from this research study, and that none of my comments, opinions, or responses will be attributed to me, nor will any other person discussed in the interview.
- ❖ I understand that the information gathered from me will be used for academic purposes and other interventions.
- ❖ I understand that this research study has been reviewed and received ethics approval following the procedures of the Department of Education, University of York.

Do you agree to participate in the study?

Yes ___ No ___

Name of participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Name of researcher: Noha S. Halabi

If you have any concerns or complaints, have further questions about the study, or would like a debrief after the study is completed please write to (nsh512@york.ac.uk) You may also contact the Chair of Ethics Committee, Dr Emma Marsden at the University of York. (emma.marsden@york.ac.uk).

Appendix 8: Informed consent form for questionnaire (Students)

جامعة يورك

قسم التربية والتعليم

نموذج التعريف بالبحث والإفادة بالموافقة

(للاستبانة)

- ❖ أدرك أنه قد تم دعوتي للمشاركة في دراسة تجريها الباحثة نهى حربي بجامعة يورك.
- ❖ أدرك أن مشروع البحث يتحرى عن فكرة استقلالية المتعلم في سياق تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. استقلالية المتعلم بصفة عامة تشير إلى قدرة الطالب على التحكم في زمام أمورهِ الدراسية.
- ❖ أدرك أن هدف الدراسة البحثية هو:
 - ١- استكشاف تصورات المعلمين بشأن استقلالية المتعلم في سياق تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بالمملكة العربية السعودية.
 - ٢- استكشاف النشاطات التعليمية التي تحفز استقلالية المتعلم في هذه البيئة التعليمية بالتحديد.
 - ٣- استكشاف ما قد يشجع أو يكبح تعزيز استقلالية المتعلم في هذه البيئة التعليمية بالتحديد.
 - ٤- استكشاف آراء الطلاب حول مفهوم استقلالية المتعلم وتطويره.
 - ٥- استكشاف سمات ثقافية محددة لاستقلالية المتعلم.
- ❖ أدرك أنه في حال الرغبة بطرح أي أسئلة حول مشروع البحث قبل الانتهاء من الاستبانة، أن هذا الخيار متاح لدي.
- ❖ أدرك أن وقت الاستبانة سوف يستغرق حوالي ١٥ دقيقة.
- ❖ أدرك بأنني سوف أقوم بتقديم معلومات في النواحي المختلفة المتعلقة بمفهوم "استقلالية المتعلم" من خلال الاستبانة، وأن المعلومات المقدمة ستكون سرية ومجهولة المصدر.
- ❖ أدرك بأنني سوف أقوم بتقديم المقترحات المتعلقة بممارسات وأنشطة دعم استقلالية المتعلم.
- ❖ أدرك أنه سوف يتم سؤالي حول موقفي تجاه المتعلمين ورد الفعل تجاه مفهوم استقلالية المتعلم.
- ❖ أدرك أنه لن يكون هناك أي استخدام آخر للمعلومات الواردة في الاستبيان بدون موافقتي الخطية.
- ❖ أدرك أنه بإمكانني سحب موافقتي بهذه المشاركة في أي وقت.

- ❖ أدرك أنه سوف يتم التعامل مع البيانات وتخزينها بطريقة تضمن أن الباحثة فقط هي التي تعرف هويتي، لذا سوف يتم حفظ البيانات إلكترونياً أو حمايتها بكلمة مرور أو في منطقة آمنة وتخزين نُسخ ورقية في خزانة ملفات آمنة.
- ❖ أدرك أن البيانات التي أدلي بها سوف يتم استخدامها في الأهداف التعليمية.
- ❖ أدرك أن هذه الدراسة البحثية قد تم مراجعتها وحاصلة على الموافقة الأخلاقية للإجراءات من قسم التربية و التعليم بجامعة يورك.

هل توافق على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة (وملاء الاستبانة)؟

نعم، لا

اسم الطالب: _____

توقيع الطالب: _____, التاريخ: _____

اسم الباحث: أ. نهى سامي حلبي

إذا كان لديكم أي تساؤلات أو شكوى أو تريدون الحصول على إجابة حول أسئلة أخرى يرجى مراسلتنا على:

Noha Halabi (nsh512@york.ac.uk)

أو يمكنكم مراسلة رئيسة لجنة أخلاقيات البحث بجامعة يورك:

Dr Emma Marsden (emma.marsden@york.ac.uk)

Appendix 9: Informed consent form for interview (Teachers)

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

Department of Education

Informed Consent Form (Interview)

- ❖ I understand that I am being invited to participate in a research study conducted by Noha Halabi at the University of York in the UK.
- ❖ I understand that the research project focuses on investigating learner autonomy in a Saudi Arabian EFL context. Learner autonomy is broadly defined as taking charge of one's own learning.
- ❖ I understand that the purpose of this research study is:
 6. Exploring the teachers' perceptions of Learner Autonomy in a Saudi Arabian EFL context.
 7. Exploring specific teaching practices for enhancing Learner Autonomy in this context.
 8. Exploring what would motivate or constraint fostering learner autonomy in the context of study.
 9. Exploring the learners' own opinion of the concept and its development.
 10. Exploring cultural-specific attributes of Learner Autonomy.
- ❖ I understand that should I wish to ask questions about the project prior to taking part in the interview, this option is available to me.
- ❖ I understand that I will be providing information through an interview.
- ❖ I understand that the interview will take between 35 – 45 minutes in person.
- ❖ I understand that I will be providing information and suggestions on various aspects regarding the concept of 'Learner Autonomy'.
- ❖ I understand that the interview will be audio recorded, and this recording may later be transcribed.
- ❖ I understand that no other use will be made of the recordings without my written permission and that interviews will be recorded solely for the purpose of analysis.
- ❖ I understand that I may decline to answer any questions and that I may withdraw my agreement to participate at any time during the interview or for up to fourteen days after completion of the interview. At that time, I know that I may indicate whether or not the data collected up to that point can be used in the study, and that any information I do not want used will be destroyed immediately.
- ❖ I understand that I will have an opportunity to comment on the written record once it has been produced for accuracy only.
- ❖ I understand that the data will be handled and stored in a manner in which ensures that only the researcher can identify me as their source. Therefore personal details will be held electronically on a password protected or encrypted area and hard copies will be stored in a locked filing cabinet.

- ❖ I understand that I am being offered confidentiality in any written report or oral presentation that draws upon data from this research study, and that none of my comments, opinions, or responses will be attributed to me, nor will any other person discussed in the interview.
- ❖ I understand that the information gathered from me will be used for academic purposes and other interventions.
- ❖ I understand that this research study has been reviewed and received ethics approval following the procedures of the Department of Education, University of York.

Do you agree to participate in the study?

Yes ___ No ___

Name of participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Name of researcher: Noha S. Halabi

If you have any concerns or complaints, have further questions about the study, or would like a debrief after the study is completed please write to (nsh512@york.ac.uk). You may also contact the Chair of Ethics Committee, Dr Emma Marsden, at the University of York. (emma.marsden@york.ac.uk).

Appendix 10: Informed consent form for interview (Students)

جامعة يورك

قسم التربية والتعليم

نموذج التعريف بالبحث والإفادة بالموافقة

(للمقابلة الشخصية)

- ❖ أدرك أنه قد تم دعوتي للمشاركة في دراسة تجريها الباحثة نهى حربي بجامعة يورك.
- ❖ أدرك أن مشروع البحث يتحرى عن فكرة استقلالية المتعلم في سياق تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. استقلالية المتعلم بصفة عامة تشير إلى قدرة الطالب على التحكم في زمام أموره الدراسية.
- ❖ أدرك أن هدف الدراسة البحثية هو:
 - ١- استكشاف تصورات المعلمين بشأن استقلالية المتعلم في سياق تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بالمملكة العربية السعودية.
 - ٢- استكشاف النشاطات التعليمية التي تحفز استقلالية المتعلم في هذه البيئة التعليمية بالتحديد.
 - ٣- استكشاف ما قد يشجع أو يكبح تعزيز استقلالية المتعلم في هذه البيئة التعليمية بالتحديد.
 - ٤- استكشاف آراء الطلاب حول مفهوم استقلالية المتعلم وتطويره.
 - ٥- استكشاف سمات ثقافية محددة لاستقلالية المتعلم.
- ❖ أدرك أنه في حال الرغبة بطرح أي أسئلة حول مشروع البحث ، أن هذا الخيار متاح لدي.
- ❖ أدرك أن وقت المقابلة سوف يستغرق حوالي ٢٥ - ٣٥ دقيقة.
- ❖ أدرك بأنني سوف أقوم بتقديم معلومات في النواحي المختلفة المتعلقة بمفهوم "استقلالية المتعلم" من خلال المقابلة, وأن المعلومات المقدمة ستكون سرية ومجهولة المصدر.
- ❖ أدرك بأنني سوف أقوم بتقديم المقترحات المتعلقة بممارسات وأنشطة دعم استقلالية المتعلم.
- ❖ أدرك أنه سوف يتم سؤالي حول موقفي تجاه المتعلمين ورد الفعل تجاه مفهوم استقلالية المتعلم.
- ❖ أدرك أنه لن يكون هناك أي استخدام آخر للمعلومات الواردة في المقابلة بدون موافقتي الخطية.
- ❖ أدرك أنه بإمكانني سحب موافقتي بهذه المشاركة في أي وقت.
- ❖ أدرك أنه سوف يتم التعامل مع البيانات وتخزينها بطريقة تضمن أن الباحثة فقط هي التي تعرف هويتي. لذا سوف يتم حفظ البيانات إلكترونياً أو حمايتها بكلمة مرور أو في منطقة آمنة وتخزين نسخ ورقة في خزانة ملفات آمنة.

- ❖ أدرك أن البيانات التي أدلي بها سوف يتم استخدامها في الأهداف التعليمية.
- ❖ أدرك أن هذه الدراسة البحثية قد تم مراجعتها وحاصلة على الموافقة الأخلاقية للإجراءات من قسم التربية و التعليم بجامعة يورك.

هل توافق على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة (المقابلة الشخصية)؟

نعم — ، لا —

اسم الطالب: _____

توقيع الطالب: _____, التاريخ: _____

اسم الباحث: أ. نهى سامي حربي

إذا كان لديكم أي تساؤلات أو شكوى أو تريدون الحصول على إجابة حول أسئلة أخرى يرجى مراسلتنا على:

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أو يمكنكم مراسلة رئيسة لجنة أخلاقيات البحث بجامعة يورك:

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Abbreviations

CEA = Commission on English Language Programme Accreditation
CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CLL = Communicative Language Learning
CLT = Communicative Language Teaching
CPD = Continuing Professional Development
EFL = English as a Foreign Language
ELI = English Language Institute
IELTS = International English Language Teaching System
KAU = King Abdulaziz University
KSA = Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
LA = Learner Autonomy
LL = Language Learning
MOHE = Ministry of Higher Education
OOPT = Oxford Online Placement Test
PYP = Preparatory Year Programme
TESOL = Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TOEFL = Test of English as a Foreign Language

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