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**University of Southampton**

Faculty of Humanities

Modern Languages and Linguistics

**The role of the teacher in the implementation of learner autonomy: Investigating the impact of internal and external influences on English language teachers' practices at a Saudi university**

by

**Ashwaq Hamed Alsharif**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2025

**University of Southampton**

**Abstract**

Faculty of Humanity Languages, Cultures and Linguistics

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**The role of the teacher in the implementation of learner autonomy: Investigating the impact of internal and external influences on English language teachers' practices at a Saudi university**

Ashwaq Hamed Alsharif

There has been increasing interest in Learner Autonomy (LA) as it has received a universal acknowledgement of its importance concerning language learning acquisition, in which learners who exercise and achieve some degree of autonomy in their learning will be successful language learners (Dam 2011, Little, 1995). Borg (2016) asserts that even though there have been many publications from the last few decades that emphasise the important role of LA in language education, fundamental questions relating to teacher practices remain uncovered, such as investigating how teachers promote LA and how these practices are shaped not only by their understanding of the concept of LA but also by other influences in the context where language learning happens. He proposes that investigating such issues will help provide important insights for gaining a deeper understanding of the theory and practice of LA. The majority of the existing research studies have employed quantitative or mixed methods and have only focused on investigating teachers' views and their reported practices concerning LA.

This study investigates the role of English language teachers in the implementation of learner autonomy and explores the impact of internal and external influences on their pedagogical practices in a Saudi higher education context at a time of educational policy change. To achieve this aim, an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was adopted to investigate how and why English language teachers support LA and what influences their teaching.

The participants in the study were female English language teachers from a Saudi university. The study was conducted in two distinct phases; a quantitative broad-based approach was adopted in the first phase followed by a qualitative exploratory case study. This latter phase drew on in-depth semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and post-classroom observation interviews in order to identify teacher beliefs about learner autonomy and their role as well as their teaching practices in relation to the promotion of learner autonomy and the influences behind their pedagogical decisions.

It was found that the teachers in this research context held positive beliefs about learner autonomy. All the participants believed that the development of learner autonomy is important and emphasised the importance of the teacher's role in promoting learner autonomy. They laid most emphasis on certain aspects of learner autonomy; specifically, they supported psychological and sociocultural dimensions of LA compared to political and technical dimensions. There was evidence in their teaching practices of activities to develop learner autonomy both inside and outside the classroom. However, it was found that teachers' individual practices were influenced by a number of factors which can be divided into two major categories: contextual factors and individual factors. The former relates to institutional factors, the teaching context, the nature of the course, and the student's level of language proficiency. The latter is

related to personal factors, such as teachers' previous educational and teaching experiences, their beliefs about teaching and learning, and their own beliefs about autonomy. Both factors played a significant role and impacted teachers' practices in relation to creating a space for the learner to develop learner autonomy. These factors are classified as constraints and facilitating factors. Some participants in this study identified factors which they believed, to some extent, hinder the development of learner autonomy. In some cases, they have overcome these factors and found ways to promote learner autonomy among their learners. Others have only recognised these factors and feel that they impose too great a challenge for them to overcome and to be able to fully develop learner autonomy among their learners.

This mixed-method study contributes to the field of LA by investigating teachers' roles and beliefs concerning LA, as well as exploring how internal and external factors influence English language teachers' actual teaching practices in higher education within a non-Western context. By illuminating the current situation in the Saudi EFL context, this study can be expected to contribute to the body of literature relating to the promotion of learner autonomy and the role of the teacher. To this end, this study addresses a gap in the literature.

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## **Research thesis: Declaration of Authorship**

Print name: ASHWAQ HAMED ALSHARIF

Title of thesis: The role of the teacher in the implementation of learner autonomy: Investigating the impact of internal and external influences on English language teachers' practices at a Saudi university

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction to the Study

This mixed-methods study seeks to investigate the role of university-level language teachers in Saudi Arabia in supporting learner autonomy (LA) in the classroom. A major aim of the study is to understand the teachers' beliefs toward LA, together with the internal and external influences on their pedagogical practices.

There has been increasing interest in Learner Autonomy (LA), given the almost universal acknowledgement of its importance in language learning acquisition and the recognition that learners who exercise and achieve some degree of autonomy in their learning, are likely to be successful language learners (Dam 2011, Little, 1995). According to Benson & Huang (2008), in the early work on learner autonomy, the term has also referred to situations in which learning takes place independently from the teacher or includes specially prepared learning materials; it has also related to the learner's capacity to be responsible about their learning. However, it has been acknowledged and commonly accepted that in the early stages of foreign language learning, individuals cannot have the capacity to direct their own learning, in which case the importance of the attributes of teachers who are involved in autonomous learning projects, has been emphasised (Benson & Huang, 2008).

In the educational context, teachers must support learners and encourage them to accept responsibility for their learning (Little, 1995). To enhance LA, the teacher is required to shift his or her role from a knowledge supplier to a *facilitator of the learning process* and *manager of the learning resources* (Little, 1995). Many scholars have suggested that teachers' practices regarding the implementation of LA may be affected by internal influences, such as teachers' beliefs concerning *language learning* and *teaching*, and by external influences, such as institutional systems and fixed curricula (Lamb, 2008; Trebbi, 2008, Benson 2013). However, Borg (2016) asserts that even though there have been many publications from the last three decades that emphasise the important role of LA in language education, fundamental questions related to teacher practices remain uncovered, such as investigating how teachers promote LA and how these practices are formed not only by focusing on teachers' understanding of the concept of LA but also by considering other influences in the context where language learning happens. In addition, he proposes that investigating such issues will help provide important

insights for gaining a deeper understanding of the theory and practice of LA. To this end, this study will help fill this gap in the literature.

Chapter One outlines the background of the research together with its rationale. It gives an overview of the context in which this research takes place and details the research questions and the aims of the study. The structure of the thesis is presented at the end of the chapter.

## **1.2 Rationale of the Study**

The personal motivation for researching teachers' LA practices in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educational context at a Saudi university and the influence of internal and external factors on the teachers' role concerning learner autonomy derives from the researcher's academic qualifications and personal experience. I have a master's degree in curriculum and instruction, and I have been a lecturer in the Applied Linguistics (AL) Department at a public University in the west of Saudi Arabia for more than five years. The study is inspired by my desire to learn about LA practices among English teachers in Saudi higher education contexts, their concerns about the implementation of LA and how they incorporate it into their teaching practice. My study abroad experiences positively impacted my teaching philosophy and my research interests, as it was where I realised that enhancing autonomy is very beneficial for language learners. Thus, it seems important to deeply investigate teachers' beliefs and pedagogical practices concerning LA and the influences of these practices among English language teachers in the Saudi context. Investigating teachers' beliefs and practices in the Saudi context is particularly important due to a number of key factors that relate to the nation's educational reform, cultural, and societal factors. These factors highlight the significance of examining teachers' practices, challenges, and development in Saudi Arabia (See 1.5).

Han (2014) pointed out that there is a need for research focusing on higher education teachers' beliefs and their roles in promoting LA in their language pedagogical practices. Investigating teachers' awareness of the importance of promoting LA and how they transfer their knowledge and perceptions of it into their pedagogical practices is considered an essential factor in successfully developing LA (Han, 2014). It is unreasonable to expect that language teachers will play their respective roles in fostering LA if they lack the knowledge, capability and conditions to do so (Han, 2014). Additionally, Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) highlighted the absence of teachers' views on LA, which represented a significant knowledge gap that warranted research to extend the existing literature.

### **1.3 Research Gap**

There has been a call for further empirical studies, specifically using qualitative and mixed methods, to explore teachers' practices concerning LA in different contexts (Alrabai, 2017; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019). In this recently expanding research area, this study will contribute to the limited existing research in Arab-speaking countries by exploring the issue from English language teachers' perspectives regarding the Saudi context (Alrabai, 2017). Most importantly, this study will fill a gap in the existing literature by investigating the role of teachers in supporting LA in the classroom, which is considered a dimension of teacher autonomy (TA), and the effect of internal and external influences on their pedagogical practices, by using mixed methods, which will provide a deeper understanding of these issues (See Chapter 3).

Most of the existing research studies employing quantitative or mixed methods have only focused on investigating teachers' views and their reported practices concerning LA (See 2.7). This study implemented a mixed method to have a full picture of the topic under investigation in which it emphasised the importance of teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in language education, as well as their actual teaching practices were explored, focusing on how teachers promoted learner autonomy and how their teaching practices were formed. This study focused on understanding teachers' beliefs and practices regarding LA and considering other influences in higher education within a non-Western context, especially during a time of educational policy change. Within the context of Saudi universities, where English language proficiency is of growing importance, the recent changes in the educational sector have stressed the importance of developing lifelong learning skills for teachers and students. Therefore, understanding teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy is essential for this study, as it helps to understand teachers' thinking and practices and the influences on their teaching practices regarding their role in supporting learner autonomy.

### **1.4 Research Context and Participants**

This research was conducted at a university in Saudi Arabia, a government institution. The research was conducted in the English language department at the Women's Campus. The department offers two programmes: an extensive English language programme at the English Language Institute (ELI) in the preparatory year and a Bachelor of Science degree. Before starting the programme, an initial assessment is conducted for each student, in which the student is

assigned to the appropriate language level according to his or her proficiency level. English is used as the language of instruction for all majors in this institution. Based on what is written on the institution's website, it has several accreditations; it is the first educational institution in Saudi Arabia to be accredited by CEA (America's leading accreditation body for English language programmes) from August 2017 to August 2027. It has another accreditation from Eaquals (the largest language accreditation body in Europe). Additionally, it has several partnerships with international institutions. In 2015, it partnered with a German-Malaysian institution, and it conducted several workshops for faculty members to provide them with the latest innovative teaching methodologies and techniques. Based on an introductory video published on its website, they hired experts to train teachers to implement student-centred approaches, such as problem-based learning and project-based learning, which they can apply in their classrooms to help the learners become more independent, self-reliant, and, more importantly, develop lifelong learning skills. They are encouraging teachers to shift from teaching-centred approaches to student-and learning-centred approaches to help learners have an active role in classrooms and help them develop critical thinking skills rather than being passive learners who rely on memorisation. In addition, the English language department offers English courses to students from other departments.

The participants in the study were English language teachers from the English Language Department, which serves as an umbrella for the Applied Linguistics Department and English language institution in the research context, teaching both English and content courses. The English language is used as a language of instruction in this context. There are several recent organisational changes in the research context, such as the consolidation of the Applied Linguistics department under the English Language department and the standardisation of curriculum and assessment processes for quality assurance. Previously, campuses were segregated by gender, but recent administrative changes have merged them under one management. The department's educational philosophy centres on fostering independent and self-directed learning, with teachers encouraged to promote lifelong skills as part of their teaching strategies. This focus makes the English language department particularly relevant for the study, as it provides a rich environment to explore how English language teachers perceive and implement learner autonomy in their classrooms.

Teaching experience for English language teachers varies between 1 and 25 years. In addition to Saudi teachers, there are many teachers from different nationalities around the world, such as Americans, Pakistanis, Egyptians, Jordans, Syrians, Indonesians and Malaysians. Some of them

hold bachelor's degrees, but the majority hold master's and PhD degrees in different specialisations, such as English language, linguistics, TESOL, modern languages and English literature. The majority have worked in different educational contexts inside and outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The majority of Saudi teachers benefit from the scholarship programme, and they have the opportunity to study abroad to complete their higher education.

## **1.5 Language Education and Learning in the Saudi Context**

I have chosen this particular context because of the recent changes in Saudi language education, in which the government has moved to support the development of language education and lifelong learning. At this time of change, it is important to investigate teachers' understanding of the concept of LA and how teachers incorporate it into their teaching practice. As there is limited research in the Saudi context in this area (Alrabai, 2017), this study investigates teachers' roles concerning LA and explores how internal and external factors influence English language teachers' actual teaching practices in higher education within a non-Western context.

In recent years, the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) qualification has come to hold a high level of status in Saudi Arabia, and it is used as the language of instruction in the majority of programmes in the Saudi educational context. Moreover, English proficiency level is vital, as it is a key factor in many opportunities for individuals after secondary schooling, such as securing a job or pursuing postgraduate studies (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Alhaysony (2017, p. 18) noted that the EFL teaching approach has changed significantly from having a focus on "teachers and teaching to learners and learning". In Saudi Arabia, English has a high level of status and is considered to be the main and only foreign language to be taught in public schools. This has contributed to the significant role that the English language has in the country in the wider *social, professional, and educational* fields (Alqahtani, 2019).

The development of teaching English as a second and a foreign language in the Saudi context has gone through several phases, particularly the introductory phases (1944), the informative phase (1958), and the communicative phase (2000) (Alqahtani, 2020). Since 2001, there has been a shift to teaching English within the educational system due to several observations from teachers, parents, and professionals in which they noticed that the proficiency level of intermediate and secondary students was unsatisfying. Therefore, in 2003, the Saudi government began to introduce English in all primary schools from fourth grade. Before that, the students had begun their English studies at around age 12, according to Alqahtani (2020). In order to cope with the contemporary methodology, the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia has taken significant steps

to reform the teaching of EFL by revising the curriculum document in 2000 and updating the textbooks to ensure that it emphasises and integrates the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in order to promote learners' communicative competence. In 2013, a new English language curriculum was released. This framework presents in detail the principles and guidelines to be implemented in language education, including that it should incorporate 'a functional curriculum' based on the contemporary developments of language theory and current practices in the curriculum design and teaching methodology fields. Therefore, the main aim of the new English language curriculum framework is to promote students' communicative competence (Alqahtani, 2019).

The national curriculum has been updated, and all schools have adopted the new textbooks, which are published by accredited international publishers in the field of ESL and EFL materials. According to Alharbi (2020), the updated educational policy is apparently supporting students-centred and it aims to improve learners' language proficiency, increase their awareness of other cultures, and help them to learn the language for daily usage. In the past, the curriculum was based on a teacher-centred approach, and it did not involve communicative activities in the classroom. Therefore, since 2001, there has been a significant modification of the language education curriculum (Alharbi, 2020).

Alharbi (2020) has identified a number of aims and characteristics of the new national curriculum reform. This adapted curriculum has applied new strategies to allow students to use the language in genuine communication usage in the classrooms. Furthermore, it aims to provide students with the freedom to use the language, and it emphasises that teaching should be based on a student-centred approach. In addition, the teaching focuses on improving students' communication skills and enabling them to use the language in authentic situations, and ideas, aiming to develop students' lifelong skills and raise students' awareness of the importance of learning English as it becomes the language of the world.

In the Saudi educational system, a fixed curriculum is a barrier to enhancing LA (Alrabai, 2017). Universities may provide a curriculum to teachers that is not relevant to their students' preferences and lives, making it a possibly demotivating factor for the learners (Halabi, 2018). Moreover, teachers may lack the freedom to provide students with extracurricular activities that they can practice outside the assigned curriculum (Halabi, 2018).

The adoption of an exam-based method to teach is another constraint for LA in Saudi education, forcing students to rely heavily on memorisation to successfully pass the required examination

(Alrabai, 2017). As a result, learners are dependent on teachers as sources of information. It has been argued that the education system in the Saudi educational context is solely focused on students' capabilities in passing exams rather than promoting lifelong knowledge (Alrabai, 2017).

However, there have been recent developments and changes in the Saudi language educational system. The Vision 2030 policy has influenced English language policy and the curriculum by establishing collaboration and partnerships between the government and private education sector (Alqahtani, 2019) On the back of the partnership with the private sector, companies such as *Tatweer* have started to introduce ongoing 'professional development activities' for Saudi English language teachers that target the development of teachers' pedagogical skills, promoting effective teaching and the use of textbooks, and developing the English language proficiency level of EFL teachers. According to Alqahtani (2019, p. 124), "the aim of this initiative is to provide processes and effective training to the approximately 35,000 EFL teachers across Saudi Arabia".

## **1.6 Research Questions and Aims of the Study**

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are:
  - a) the teachers' beliefs about Learner Autonomy and
  - b) how do they see their role in support and promote LA?
2. What teaching practices do English language teachers use to support and promote the development of LA in their classrooms?
3. To what extent do internal and external factors influence teachers' practices regarding LA?

And more specifically:

- a. To what extent do internal factors, in particular, teachers' beliefs—influence their teaching practices in relation to LA?
- b. What external factors influence their teaching practices in relation to LA?

The specific aims behind these research questions are designed to thoroughly investigate and understand various aspects of learner autonomy (LA) as perceived and practised by English language teachers in a Saudi higher education context. The aims of this study are as follow:

1. To gain insight into how teachers view the concept of learner autonomy and their own roles and responsibilities in fostering learner autonomy. This aims to uncover teachers' self-perceptions, which can influence their willingness and effectiveness in implementing LA strategies.
2. To identify specific teaching practices and methodologies employed by teachers to enhance learner autonomy. This helps in understanding the practical approaches and techniques that are currently being used and their effectiveness in promoting LA.
3. To explore the broader context in which teachers operate, examining both the individual (internal) and contextual (external) factors that affect their teaching practices. Understanding these influences is crucial for identifying potential barriers and facilitators to the implementation of LA.
4. To explore the personal beliefs and educational philosophies of teachers, investigating how these internal factors shape their approach to promoting LA. This aims to highlight the connection between what teachers believe and how they act in the classroom.
5. To investigate the impact of external factors such as institutional policies, educational reforms, cultural expectations, and available resources on teachers' practices. This aims to understand the external constraints and supports that affect the implementation of LA.

Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge on learner autonomy, offering practical recommendations for enhancing LA in a Saudi higher education context, especially at a time of educational policy change. Additionally, it seeks to contribute to the discussion around the link between beliefs and practices.

## **1.7 The structure of the thesis**

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the focus of the research, the rationale behind it, and the background. It provides an overview of key literature and the context of the study, followed by the research questions and aims of the study.

The second chapter critically reviews the key research underpinning the study, incorporating related and important theoretical frameworks, such as Learner Autonomy, Teacher Autonomy, teachers' beliefs, and the external factors that influence teachers' practices concerning Learner Autonomy.

The third chapter discusses the research methodology employed in this study. It details how the research was conducted, including the research methods used and the rationale behind them. This chapter explains the data collection process and justifies the approach chosen for each phase of the research. Additionally, the sampling selection for each phase is discussed and justified. The chapter concludes with a discussion on data analysis, data validity and reliability, ethical considerations, and the role of the researcher.

Chapter Four presents the findings from Phase One. It examines Learner Autonomy (LA) in educational settings through a comprehensive questionnaire, providing foundational insights into the context and exploring the population's beliefs regarding LA in the research setting.

Chapter Five presents the findings from the qualitative phase (main phase). This chapter details the results from data gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and post-observation interviews with the main study participants (four cases). The findings address the research questions by highlighting the contextual and personal factors that have influenced the teachers' pedagogical practices and teaching decisions, as well as how they have engaged with and managed these factors within the educational context.

Chapter Six discusses the findings by examining each theme and interpreting them in relation to the theoretical background discussed earlier. It also compares and contrasts the present study with existing literature.

The final chapter, Chapter Seven, concludes the thesis by summarizing the main findings in relation to the research questions. It then outlines the implications and contributions of the study, followed by a discussion of its limitations and suggestions for future research.

# **Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

## **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a critical review of the theoretical framework that underpins this study. It is organized into several key sections, starting with an introduction to Learner Autonomy (LA) and its significance in language education. LA is fundamental to this study, as part of the research investigates teachers' beliefs about LA to understand their perspectives and thinking about its implementation. Then, definitions of the concept of Teacher Autonomy and how it is understood in this study are provided and the dimensions of TA are discussed. Then, the teacher's role in developing LA is discussed, as this is a core dimension of TA, and understanding the teacher's role in developing LA is crucial for the study. Following this, approaches to develop TA are discussed. Furthermore, the link between TA and LA is highlighted. After that, the importance of the teaching context in understanding classroom practices is explored. Internal and external influences on practices are also discussed since it is important to understand them and explore how they influence teachers' pedagogical practices. Lastly, empirical studies on teachers' beliefs and practices regarding LA in different countries around the world are discussed to help identify gaps in the literature.

## **2.2 Learner Autonomy**

### **2.2.1 The Concept of Learner Autonomy**

In this section, the concept of LA will be introduced since it is fundamental for understanding this study, as part of this study will investigate English language teachers' beliefs and practices regarding their role in supporting LA.

One way of looking at Autonomy is as a philosophical concept that is concerned with the individual's relationship to society (Huang & Benson, 2013). Others see it more as a European concept that spread globally and was adapted to various cultural contexts, such as in Southeast Asia, Egypt, and Mexico. This global spread required tailoring the concept to local needs and educational practices (Gremmo and Riley, 1995). The concept of autonomy in education emerged post-World War II and was driven by social movements advocating for individual rights

and empowerment, such as minority rights, women's liberation, and other civil movements, as well as reactions against behaviourist psychology (Gremmo and Riley, 1995). They highlighted that these movements emphasized the learner's role in the educational process, promoting learner-centeredness. Moreover, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a shift from traditional teacher-centred approaches towards learner-centeredness.

Holec's definition according to many is the most influential definition of LA (e.g. Benson, 2006, Chong & Reinders, 2022). In his seminal work, Holec (1981) stated that LA refers to a learner's ability to *take charge* of his or her learning. According to Benson & Huang (2008), the early work of learner autonomy refers to situations in which learning takes place independently from the teacher or purposely prepared learning materials, and it is related to the learner's capacity to be responsible for their learning. Benson and Huang (2008, p. 424) observed a shift in terminology, where "learner autonomy" is increasingly used to refer to the capacity to take control of one's learning, while terms like 'self-directed' or 'independent' learning describe situations in which this capacity is applied. This change is partly linked to the rise of classroom-based approaches to promoting learner autonomy. However, it is widely recognized that most individuals lack the ability to manage their own foreign language learning, particularly in the early stages. In this context, the role of teachers and their qualities become crucial in supporting autonomous learning initiatives (Benson & Huang, 2008).

According to Chong & Reinders (2022), the conceptualization of learner autonomy remains contested, as evidenced by the lack of consensus on its definition and the variety of conceptual frameworks employed in learner autonomy research. The difficulty of defining LA is attributed to its multidimensional nature, as the concept has a variety of meanings and has been discussed from many different perspectives, depending on individual interpretation and context (Benson, 2006, Chong & Reinders, 2022). Furthermore, its complex relationship with other central constructs in language learning, such as motivation, adds to the challenges of achieving a unified understanding (Chong & Reinders, 2022). Oxford (2003) proposed that considering all appropriate viewpoints on LA is useful in providing a strong and rich understanding of the concept, adding that even though there may not be a single definition, there is consensus on the meaning of LA.

It has been noted that researchers had previously explored LA from different perspectives, such as political, technical, psychological and social dimensions (Benson, 2000; Chong & Reinders, 2022). Benson's (1997) paper "Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning" provides a

*model* of LA. Three major versions of learner autonomy were identified *technical autonomy*, *psychological autonomy* and *political autonomy*. He linked each version to different theories of knowledge and learning.

First, the technical version of autonomy is defined “as the act of learning a language outside the framework of an educational institution and without the intervention of a teacher” (Benson, 1997, p.19). The focus is on situational conditions in which learners should take charge of their learning and equip learners with the technical skills they need to manage their learning beyond the classroom walls. It focuses on equipping learners with skills and techniques required for self-directed learning. It is often connected with learner strategies and learner training. It emphasised the management of learning, such as how to learn, organise and plan learning independently. It supports discovery learning, where learners acquire knowledge through exploration and problem-solving rather than direct instruction. Technical autonomy is rooted in positivist approaches, which view knowledge as a reflection of objective reality. It supports that learning can occur effectively outside the classroom with the appropriate skills and tools. (Benson, 1997)

Second, the psychological version focuses on the learner’s ability and capacity, as it is associated with the learner’s cognitive attributes (Benson, 1997). Benson (1997, p19) defined psychological autonomy “as a capacity - a construct of attitudes and abilities - which allows learners to take more responsibility for their own learning.” It focuses on the individual’s internal transformation and views autonomy as an innate capacity that can be nurtured and developed. Benson (1997) linked each version of autonomy with a theory of knowledge and learning. The psychological version is associated with constructivist theories, which see knowledge as constructed by the learner rather than transmitted. It suggests that learning is a process of reorganising and restructuring personal experiences.

Third, the political version emphasises power and control. Benson (1997, p19) defined it “in terms of control over the processes and content of learning.” It highlights the importance of structural conditions that enable learners to manage their own learning and influence the institutional context of education. It encourages critical awareness of the social context and the constraints on learning. It supports learner control over the learning process and the educational environment. It is rooted in critical theory, which argues that knowledge is constructed through ideological processes reflecting power dynamics. It views learning as a process of uncovering and challenging social and ideological structures (Benson, 1997).

Extending Benson’s model, Oxford (2003) added sociocultural autonomy as a fourth version of LA, referring to the substantial role of context and social interaction in enhancing LA. According to Lamb (2017), this acknowledges that learning does not occur in isolation, but *within a sociocultural framework*. Furthermore, the social features of autonomy and how it is valuable for learning in cooperation with other people have been emphasised (Dam, 1995).

Table 2-1 presents various perspectives on learner autonomy, highlighting different dimensions such as technical, psychological, political, and sociocultural autonomy. These views, primarily drawn from Benson (1997) and Oxford (2003), are essential to this study as they inform both the theoretical framework and the design of the research instrument.

Benson’s (1997) model is widely recognised for its multi-faceted approach to autonomy, addressing control over learning in terms of psychological, technical, political, and social dimensions. This framework has been extensively cited in autonomy-related research and provides a solid foundation for understanding the varying degrees of learner control in different contexts. Oxford’s (2003) contribution further refines the conceptualisation of autonomy by incorporating the socio-cultural dimensions, thereby offering a holistic perspective that aligns well with contemporary theories of language learning and self-regulated learning.

The decision to adopt these frameworks over other existing models stems from their relevance to both theoretical and practical aspects of autonomy. Benson’s and Oxford’s models acknowledge the interplay between internal learner attributes and external learning environments. This distinction is particularly useful for the present study, as it seeks to explore autonomy in a structured educational setting rather than in purely self-directed learning environments. By incorporating Benson’s (1997) and Oxford’s (2003) frameworks, this study establishes a well-rounded theoretical foundation that informs both the research design and the interpretation of findings, thereby providing a robust approach to investigating learner autonomy.

Table 2-1: Four versions of Learner autonomy

<b>Technical autonomy (Benson, 1997)</b>	It will be supported when the teacher helps the learners to identify and develop their language strategies and techniques to learn a language. (Benson, 1997) Example: Helping learners to identify their learning goals and helping them use their learning strategies.
<b>Psychological Autonomy (Benson, 1997)</b>	A capacity- a construct of attitudes and abilities- allows learners to take more responsibility for their learning (Benson, 1997). It focuses on raising the students’ awareness, willingness, and motivation to take control of their learning. Example: Helping learners to have positive attitudes toward the learning process.

<b>Political autonomy (Benson, 1997)</b>	'It defines the concept in terms of control over the process and content of learning' (Benson, 1997). It refers to the freedom and the control that is given to the students to control aspects of their learning. Example: Allowing the students to decide concerning the assignment topics and deadline.
<b>Sociocultural autonomy (Oxford, 2003)</b>	It will be supported by focusing on situations in which the learners can learn through social interactions with their classmates or with their teachers. Ex. Peer work, getting engaged in interactions with his classmates.

Thirty years after the first appearance of Holec's definition of LA, it remains the most cited (Murray, 2014). However, there have been significant changes since the first appearance of Holec's (1979) definition that shaped and influenced contemporary thinking on LA in language teaching and learning (Murray, 2014). First, autonomy has spread widely and inspired pedagogical innovations in language classrooms. One of the pioneers who influenced current practices in language learning and teaching was Dam, who worked with school students on autonomy in Denmark. She demonstrated that autonomy could be successful in a collaborative classroom setting and she developed a pedagogical model that could be adapted to the local context by language teachers around the world.

Based on the reviewed literature, LA is supported by a variety of learning theories. Wang (2011) stated that constructivism supports LA as learners actively construct their knowledge by engaging in learning development. In the foreign language context, LA is perceived as a way of empowering learners and encouraging them to take responsibility for constructing their learning (Wang, 2011). Additionally, there has been growing interest in Vygotsky's work. The development of social constructivism and sociocultural theory (SCT) has had a prevalent impact on language learning and teaching (Murray, 2014). Little's work has examined LA regarding SCT, in which Vygotskian ideas established a foundation for conceptualising the association between autonomy and collaborative learning in a language-learning setting (Murray, 2014). Little highlighted that the Vygotskian concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which the process of learning occurs when learners are assessed by people who are more competent than themselves, helped to understand "how autonomous classrooms actually take place" (2007, p. 12).

Little (2007, p. 22) argued that the ZPD definition indicates that learning is the outcome of doing, emphasised the role of the expert (teacher) being responsible for assessing and guiding the learning process and identified autonomy as an aim of learning by ensuring that students enable

tasks for themselves (*independent problem solving*). It has been emphasised that successful learning requires autonomy; however, “autonomy has to grow out of dependence”, in which learners need to be supported and guided by expert adults or capable peers (Little 2000, p. 17). Little (2000) emphasised that LA can be promoted in a social context through collaboration and interdependence. According to Murray (2014), Little’s work, which is associated with Vygotsky’s concept of the ZPD, provides an explanation for the association between autonomy, interdependence and collaboration. Murray (2014) stated that in Vygotsky’s work, one of the focal points for teachers is the ZPD’s “metaphorical space between what learners are able to do on their own and what they are able to do through the help of a more knowledgeable or experienced other” (p. 327). Therefore, by receiving help or instruction when needed, learners will later be able to perform independently. This indicates the important role of LA in education and highlights the important role of teachers in fostering LA in the classroom.

It has been emphasised that successful learning requires autonomy; however, “autonomy has to grow out of dependence”, meaning that learners need to be supported and guided by expert adults or capable peers (Little, 2000, p. 17). This indicates the importance of LA in education and highlights the important role of the teacher in fostering LA in the classroom, in which LA depends heavily on TA (See 2.3.1). The next section will provide some definitions for the concept of TA, discuss the dimensions of TA and highlight the link between TA and LA.

### **2.2.2 Autonomy in Classroom Practices**

Ushioda (2011) indicates that classroom practices that foster autonomy are more likely to help students obtain and reinforce positive values, identities, and motivational paths than practices that aim to control their learning behaviours. She highlights that classroom practices to promote autonomy refer to practices that allow students to express their identities, actively engage, explore opportunities, make choices, negotiate, share experiences with their classmates, and reflect on those experiences. In summary, fostering autonomy is not about motivating students to fit a certain mould, but about helping them reach their full potential and pursue what they value in a healthy manner (Ushioda, 2011).

In addition, Ushioda (2011) highlights the importance of autonomy. She indicates that developing autonomy is not about motivating students to work in a certain way, but about helping them reach their full potential and pursue what they value in a healthy manner. Researchers emphasise that autonomy-supportive teaching leads to more positive outcomes for students (Assor et al., 2002; Reeve, 2009; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). Reeve (2016) explains that autonomy support involves

creating a classroom environment and fostering a teacher-student relationship that addresses students' need for autonomy. It is about the teacher's effort and behaviour to recognise, encourage, and develop students' internal motivation, ultimately aiming to enhance and strengthen these inner resources.

Benson (2013) proposed six general categories of practices that aimed to develop learner autonomy. First, **resource-based approaches** focus on learners independently engaging with learning materials. For example, practices like self-access, tandem learning, distance education, self-instruction, and out-of-class learning are related to resource-based approaches since they emphasise independent interaction with learning resources to develop autonomy. These approaches rely heavily on the use of materials and counselling to support learners in directing their learning. While these approaches inherently minimise teacher involvement, they rely on teachers to guide learners in understanding how to use these resources effectively. Gardner & Miller (2014) indicated that these centres offer resources for self-directed language learning that may be connected to formal courses or available for independent use. Therefore, Gardner & Miller (2014) highlighted the effectiveness of self-access centres, which help learners transition from relying on teachers to becoming more autonomous. Teachers play a critical role in scaffolding this transition, ensuring that learners have the skills and confidence to engage independently. Resource-based approaches risk becoming ineffective without teacher intervention to orient and train learners, especially for learners unfamiliar with self-directed learning.

Second, **Technology-based approaches** highlight independent interaction with educational technologies. Benson (2013, 161) highlights that Technology-based approaches are potentially supportive of autonomy in three main ways: (1) they place the learner (as controller of the technological device) in direct control of key aspects of the learning process; (2) they allow wider access to authentic target language sources; and (3) they also allow wider access to authentic interactive use of the target language. However, he indicated that the focus of resource-based and technology-based approaches to the development of LA is on giving '*opportunities for self-directed learning.*' However, the effective use of educational technologies often depends on the teacher's role in introducing, demonstrating, and facilitating the use of such tools. Teachers can bridge the gap between technological affordances and learners' capacities by providing initial training and ongoing support. Furthermore, as technology evolves, teacher autonomy becomes critical in adapting teaching strategies and integrating new tools effectively. The success of technology-based approaches, therefore, hinges on teachers' ability to guide learners in their

use and adapt to technological advancements. Benson (2013) asserts that these approaches support LA by providing opportunities for self-directed learning.

Third, **Learner-based approaches** concentrate on directly influencing changes in the learner's behaviour and attitude. Benson (2013) indicates that this approach aims to facilitate learners to take significant control over their learning by equipping them with the skills they require to gain advantages from the provided opportunities. While this approach appears learner-centric, it often relies heavily on teacher guidance to initiate and sustain changes in attitudes and behaviours. Teachers can provide targeted training in self-regulation, and offer consistent feedback to empower learners. The relationship between these approaches underscores the importance of teacher autonomy, as teachers need the professional skills to effectively design and implement learner-focused strategies.

Fourth, **Classroom-based approaches** prioritise giving learners control over the planning and assessment by involving them in decision-making processes that relate to daily classroom management of their learning process with appropriate support (Benson, 2013). For example, cooperative learning, self-assessment, and peer assessment are popular forms of these approaches. However, the role of the teacher remains central in facilitating this control. Teachers are required to create an environment where learners feel confident in taking part in decision-making processes. They can also provide guidance to ensure that learners can make informed decisions about their learning. This interplay highlights the interdependence between teacher and learner autonomy: autonomous teachers are better equipped to foster classroom environments that promote LA.

Fifth, **Curriculum-based approaches** to developing autonomy “extend the principle of learner control over the management of learning to the curriculum as a whole” (Benson, 2013, p.176). These approaches stress the importance of negotiation between the teachers and the learners. The effectiveness of these approaches depends on indirect and direct scaffolding structures that guide and support learners' involvement in decision-making processes. Therefore, the teacher has an important role in the negotiation process related to learning objectives and procedures (Benson, 2013). This role necessitates a high degree of teacher autonomy, as teachers must navigate institutional constraints, curriculum requirements, and learners' needs. The negotiation process exemplifies the interdependence of teacher and learner autonomy; teachers' ability to exercise their own autonomy directly influences their capacity to support learners in gaining control over the curriculum.

Sixth, **Teacher-based approaches** emphasise on teachers who have an important role in mediating thoughts about language learning to their learners. Teacher-based approaches propose that the first step in changing how learners learn is to change how teachers teach. These approaches also stress that a teacher's professional skills, education, and commitment to developing autonomy are key factors in the success of any effort to promote learner autonomy. However, Benson (2013) highlights that there is currently limited information on teacher education programs that are particularly designed to develop teacher autonomy; therefore, little is known about the effectiveness of these programs in practice. He indicated that to ensure the success of these programs, it is important to support teachers in adopting their teaching roles that align with their specific teaching practices. Additionally, he indicates that these programs are likely to be more successful if teachers (a) experience autonomy-focused teaching strategies as learners themselves, (b) reflect on these strategies in their role as teachers, and (c) try them out during their teaching practice (Benson,2013). Therefore, the success of each approach is context-dependent, requiring careful adaptation to individual learners, institutional constraints, and cultural factors.

In conclusion, the relationship between teacher-based approaches and the other five categories is deeply intertwined, with teachers playing a critical role in mediating, facilitating, and implementing strategies that promote LA. While each category has distinct strengths and challenges, their success often hinges on teachers' willingness and ability to exercise and model autonomy. This interdependence highlights the critical importance of teacher autonomy as both a goal and a prerequisite for fostering learner autonomy, making it a key focus in any discussion about autonomy in education.

Benson (2013) underscores the reciprocal relationship between teacher autonomy (TA) and learner autonomy (LA). Teachers who experience autonomy in their professional practices are more likely to adopt strategies that promote learner autonomy. Conversely, fostering LA often necessitates teachers to reassess and adapt their roles, which requires them to have the willingness and capacity to innovate. The development of both TA and LA, therefore, is not only interconnected but also mutually reinforcing. The next section will provide some definitions for the concept of TA, discuss the dimensions of TA, discuss approaches to develop TA, highlight the link between TA and LA, and focus on the teacher's role in developing LA.

## 2.3 Teacher Autonomy

### 2.3.1 The Concept of Teacher Autonomy

The concept of TA has gained much attention in the field of foreign language education in the past decade; however, until recently, there has been little agreement over its meaning and significance (Benson & Huang, 2008; Huang, 2015). It has been widely recognised (Benson, 2007; Han, 2020) that Little first introduced the term TA into the field of language teaching, in which he established the theoretical construct and explored the concept of TA. Little (1995) proposed that TA can be shown through a description of successful teachers who have always been autonomous and have “a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest possible degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploiting the freedom that this confers” (p. 179). It has been recognised (Benson, 2007) that some researchers, such as Aoki, suggest that teacher autonomy should be defined by analogy with the concept of learner autonomy. If learner autonomy is concerned with individuals’ capacity, freedom or having responsibility for making choices concerning their learning, teacher autonomy is concerned with individuals’ capacity, freedom or having responsibility for making choices concerning their teaching. However, Benson (2007) stated that this analogy is somewhat problematic since it does not indicate that TA has any relevance to the teacher’s capacity to develop the LA of his/her learners.

Although differences of opinion still exist, there is some agreement in the language teaching literature that TA refers to ‘a professional attribute’ and that there is a link between TA and LA (Benson, 2007), in which the concept of TA “is closely linked to a commitment on the part of teachers to the principle of LA” (Benson & Huang, 2008, p. 423). Han (2017) pointed out that “Language teacher autonomy refers to the professional attribute of a language teacher, which involves the teacher’s professional freedom (from control by others), the teacher’s ability/capacity and willingness to take action for self-directed professional development” (p. 137). Ramos (2006, p. 188) highlighted that TA has been defined by several researchers as “teachers’ ability and willingness” to help their students be responsible for their own learning; according to this definition, teachers need to reflect on their role and find ways to modify their role to adapt to the new learners’ role and to support learners on their way to autonomy and independence. Thavenius (1999, p. 160) stated that TA can be defined as:

The teacher's ability and willingness to help learners take responsibility for their own learning. An autonomous teacher is thus a teacher 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.

It has been seen that a number of researchers have focused on different aspects of TA, which has led to different definitions of TA. It is considered an important concept that has emerged in the field of autonomy in recent years; however, finding a precise definition is still problematic (Benson, 2007). Consequently, there were collective efforts to characterise teacher autonomy. Smith (2003) pointed out that the concept of teacher autonomy can be identified by a number of dimensions rather than being easily deficit to one definition for teacher autonomy. The next section will provide a discussion of the dimensions of teacher autonomy.

### **2.3.2 Dimensions of Teacher Autonomy**

Benson and Huang (2008) stated that foreign language education literature strongly supports the idea that TA has three key components: a) the teacher's role in supporting LA, b) teacher professionalism and c) professional freedom.

First, TA has been conceptualised in reference to the teacher's role in supporting LA, which is viewed as the teacher's capacity to help learners develop LA. Second, TA is conceptualised as a professional attribute to be developed either through teacher education or, more recently, through self-directed professional development. Third, TA is seen as professional development which implies "the ability and the willingness to create spaces for professional freedom in one's own environment" (Benson & Huang, 2008, p. 434). In this study, these dimensions will be considered, given that the focus will be on teachers' perceptions and practices concerning their roles in supporting LA and investigating how these roles are influenced by internal and external influences.

Han (2017) indicated that there are three characteristics of TA. First, TA involves a teacher's *freedom* and *willingness* to implement autonomous teaching practices in which teachers are likely to hold an *active*, *critical* and *reflective* perspective towards their language pedagogical practices and be responsible for taking the needed action for the teaching and the learning process by understanding and accommodating for the factors that hinder the language learning and teaching processes. Regardless of the factors that could affect the teaching and learning process, teachers need to be competent in generating space and freedom to support learners in taking responsibility for their own learning (Han, 2017). Second, TA is referred to as a teacher's

capacity, which means that language teachers are not only restricted to lesson delivery and developing learners' language skills, but they need to be knowledgeable about theory, teaching methods and approaches and, most importantly, how to develop LA that is likely to be promoted by learner training and teacher support (Han, 2017). The third characteristic of TA includes teachers' initiatives in collaborating and making full use of the teaching context (Han, 2017). Due to the influence of 'the political, cultural and education context' on the development of language TA, institution administrators and teacher educators should consider respecting and learning about teachers' development needs, facilitating the environment, context and conditions that are beneficial to the development of TA (Han, 2017). Benson and Huang (2008) stated that one of the important aspects of TA is the teacher's willingness to overcome the challenges of the educational system and resist allowing space in the learning context for learners to practice major control over their learning process.

Smith (2003) pointed out that the term TA can be used in different ways with different dimensions. Therefore, Smith (2003) argued that when the term TA is used in the field of second language education, there is a need to be clear as to which dimensions are referred to. Smith (2003) has revised and updated McGrath's (2000) work on the concept of TA in which he identified two dimensions of the concept of TA: the first is related to *self-directed professional action and development*, and the other is related to *freedom from control by others*. Building on McGrath's (2000) work on the TA dimensions, Smith (2003) mentioned that these two dimensions are useful as a starting point, but they need further clarification for two reasons. First, the distinction between 'professional action', such as teaching and professional development and 'teacher learning' is needed because they do not represent the same thing. Professional action means that the teacher may be self-directed in her/his teaching, but it certainly does not mean that he/she may learn from that experience. Teng (2019) pointed out that what is distinctive about Smith's clarification of TA dimensions is that he differentiated between two independent but interrelated domains of TA: the teaching domain and the teacher-learning domain. Smith (2003) divided the dimensions of TA in relation to professional action and professional development (See Figure 2.1). He referred to the *capacity for self-directed professional action* as Teacher Autonomy (I) and the *capacity for self-directed professional development* as 'Teacher-learner autonomy(I). Both are considered to involve the technical/psychological interpretation of autonomy mentioned by Benson (1997, 2000). *Freedom from control over professional action* is referred to as 'Teacher Autonomy (II)' and *freedom from control over professional development* is referred to as Teacher-learner autonomy (II); together, they comprise the political dimension (see2.2).

<b>Dimensions of teacher autonomy</b>	
<i>In relation to professional action:</i>	
A. Self-directed professional action	(= 'Self-directed teaching')
B. Capacity for self-directed professional action	(= 'Teacher autonomy (I)')
C. Freedom from control over professional action	(= 'Teacher autonomy (II)')
<i>In relation to professional development:</i>	
D. Self-directed professional development	(= 'Self-directed teacher-learning')
E. Capacity for self-directed professional development	(= 'Teacher-learner autonomy (I)')
F. Freedom from control over professional development	(= 'Teacher-learner autonomy (II)')

Figure 2.1 Smith (2003) Dimensions of Teacher Autonomy

Smith and Erdoğan (2008) clarified possible links between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy based on the existing literature. To promote LA, they suggest that teachers need the following:

1. *Capacity for self-directed teaching 'TA (I)'*: Based on the existing work related to TA, to determine the initiatives the teachers take in the classroom, they must have the ability to apply reflection and self-management to their teaching. This aligns with my research' which stresses the importance of teachers taking initiative and making autonomous decisions in the classroom. However, the context in which teachers operate, such as institutional constraints or curricular demands, can constraint their ability to apply these skills fully. My study investigates how teachers navigate these limitations and still manage to implement self-directed teaching strategies.
2. *Freedom from control over their teaching 'TA (II)'*: Based on the existing work related to constraints, the majority of teachers in any institutional setting work under certain circumstances in which their efforts towards the development of LA are severely constrained. The development of LA can take place when teachers have the ability to create a space for their learners' freedom of action. My study aims to critically examine the influence of these constraints and the opportunities on teachers' practices about fostering learner autonomy. In line with the notion that LA develops when teachers create a space for learners' freedom of action, my research will investigate how teachers develop LA within these constraints.
3. *A capacity for self-directed teacher-learning 'Teacher-learner autonomy (I)'*: Referring to the work of Little (2000) and Smith (2000), if the teacher does not have the experience of being an autonomous learner, it is unreasonable to assume that he/she will have the

capacity to foster the growth of learner autonomy in his/her students. My research builds on this idea by investigating how teachers' own learning experiences shape their capacity to develop learner autonomy. I agree with the argument that teachers who have not experienced autonomy as learners may struggle to develop it in their students. Additionally, I support that while experience as an autonomous learner may enhance a teacher's ability to promote LA, other influences can also play a significant role.

Recently, in line with Smith and Erdoğan's (2008) clarification of the concept of TA, Manzano Vázquez (2018) has suggested that there are three interpretations of TA in the literature that he calls TA1, TA2 and TA3. TA1 indicates that the concept of TA is associated with professional freedom and the extent to which teachers can take control over their professional actions. TA2 describes TA as teachers' capacity to take control of their professional development and the process of learning how to teach. TA3 indicates that TA is usually investigated in relation to LA; they are considered interrelated phenomena that are developed "simultaneously as teachers and learners engage in the construction of more democratic pedagogies" (Manzano Vázquez, 2018, p. 387). Manzano Vázquez (2018) argued that teachers have an important role to play in developing their learners' autonomy; consequently, teacher education has an important role in preparing teachers to overcome challenges when promoting LA in their classrooms.

As seen from the above discussion, there are several definitions and dimensions for TA; however, the researcher in this study will focus on investigating the role of teachers concerning LA, which is considered one dimension of TA, as well as exploring how internal and external factors influence English language teachers' actual teaching practices. Therefore, the working definition of TA in this study will follow Han's (2020) definition of TA, in which

TA is embodied and exercised in language teachers flexibility to cope with both external and internal constraints for the benefits of (second/foreign) language learning, professional ambitions and motives to exert his/her full potential and capacity for self-directed professional development, and realisation to develop LA to achieve lifelong learning. (p. 156)

The next section will discuss the relationship between LA and TA as they relate to each other. Understanding the connected relationship between these two constructs is important for this study since the focus will be on the role of English language teachers in promoting learner autonomy, which is considered one dimension of TA.

### **2.3.3 Approaches to Promote Teacher Autonomy**

Teng (2019) has mentioned that even though there has been an increasing body of research in the area of teacher autonomy, there is still a dearth of research supported by empirical evidence in order to identify the development of teacher autonomy in both pre-service and in-service second language teacher education, in diverse socio-educational and cultural settings. Developing teacher autonomy may be beneficial for teachers' development and students' learning; therefore, empowered teachers could adapt the curriculum in regard to their students' needs and based on their own teaching style (Teng, 2019). Ramos (2006) pointed out that there are six important elements in order to implement change to develop teacher autonomy:

1. **Self-awareness:** It helps teachers to have a better understanding of themselves as learners and professionals and be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. To achieve a better understanding of who they are, using self-evaluation and reflections is considered an excellent tool.
2. **Awareness:** Be aware of what happening around them, to their students, at their workplace, in their local community, country and around the world. This will help in identifying their students' needs, goals, capacities, dreams and desires to help them develop autonomy and raise their awareness of their learning process. Awareness can be obtained through observation and monitoring.
3. **Responsibility:** It is considered an important quality in developing autonomy. It gives teachers freedom and empowerment. Teachers need to be dedicated, organised, and have the skills of time management, investing, and committing to their tasks and projects.
4. **Challenge:** It helps in developing teachers professionally and shows them the scope of their capacities. Challenges take different forms such as exploring new areas, making decisions to develop knowledge or skills, etc.
5. **Collaboration and participation:** They are considered key elements to develop autonomy. In the teaching profession working, constructing, and conducting projects collectively is essential. Autonomy does not imply working in isolation, but negotiating, cooperating, sharing, promoting, listening to, and respecting other individual perspectives are important elements of participation and collaboration.
6. **Changing roles:** Teachers transform their roles in the classroom, in which, rather than being controllers, instructors, transmitters, evaluators, and judges, they become advisors, guides, observers, listeners, and researchers.

Furthermore, Teng (2019, p.28) pointed out that there are various means to develop teacher autonomy. Firstly, engaging teachers in action research is considered a practical approach for “teaching, learning, reflection, and self-actualisation as a professional teacher.” Furthermore, action research is beneficial for teachers in making a ‘continuous connection between theory and practice and, help teachers to engage in professional development and exercise of autonomy’ (ibid). Second, involving teachers in reflection on their classroom practice is considered to be important in enabling them to recognise and make changes in their professional practices (Teng, 2019). It can be argued that teachers should receive support to reflect on their professional practices and be encouraged to be willing to develop and change. Through critical reflection on their professional practice, teachers will find opportunities to explore and expand their professional expertise (Teng, 2019). This will be beneficial in developing teacher autonomy. Empowered teachers in this way can adapt the curriculum to their students’ needs based on their own teaching style (Teng, 2019).

Han (2020) argued that the development of teacher autonomy, to some extent, influences language teachers’ beliefs and practices in fostering learner autonomy; and that the pedagogical knowledge that is acquired through pre-service and in-service teacher education and professional training programs will also influence teachers’ beliefs and practices. Consequently, the teachers’ experience in developing learner autonomy, their beliefs and practices in regard to fostering learner autonomy, and their acquired knowledge intertwine to impact the teachers’ role in fostering learner autonomy. This, in turn, further determines their success in developing LA (Han, 2020).

These viewpoints from Ramos (2006), Teng (2019), and Han (2020) align closely with my research on teacher autonomy, focusing on teachers’ role in developing learner autonomy in the context of Saudi Arabia. Each of the mentioned factors plays a significant role in shaping how teachers develop autonomy and, in turn, develop learner autonomy. Additionally, Teng’s (2019) suggestion that empowered teachers can adapt the curriculum based on students’ needs is a significant factor in my research.

Han’s (2020) argument that teacher autonomy influences language teachers’ beliefs and practices in fostering learner autonomy is fundamental to my research. I explore how Saudi teachers’ experiences with autonomy both as learners and as professionals shape their beliefs about teaching and learning. My study aims to understand how these beliefs translate into practice and how they impact the development of learner autonomy in their students. The teacher’s role in developing LA will be discussed in the next section.

### 2.3.4 The Role of Teachers in Supporting Learner Autonomy

Teachers play a significant role in fostering LA. Dam (2011) argued that LA has several advantages for language teaching and learning. Developing LA helps students become actively engaged in their learning, enhances learners' self-esteem, promotes learners' *evaluative competence* towards themselves and others, enhances their acceptance of responsibilities and how to learn appropriately, develops *social competence* and prepares learners with *lifelong learning* skills (Dam, 2011). Therefore, several researchers have highlighted the importance of teachers' roles in fostering LA, which helps encourage learners to become more engaged in active learning (Dam, 2011; Little, 2000; Le et al., 2023). Consequently, teachers' roles are considered a key factor that might influence the development of LA.

The misinterpretation of the teacher's role concerning LA negatively impacts the successful implementation of LA (Little et al., 2017). It has been argued that there are various misunderstandings associated with the concept of LA. For instance, it is associated with *self-instruction*, in which learners must work in isolation without teachers, which is untrue (Little et al., 2017). Little (1995) indicated that literal interpretations of the notion of LA and the teacher's role have guided some teachers to believe that learners should work in isolation. They tell their learners to take responsibility for their learning, and once the desired change does not work, they argue that LA does not work for them. Accordingly, teachers who have traditional perceptions of language education are expected to use a teacher-centred method. On the other hand, teachers who encourage and support student-centred methods are more eager to enhance and develop LA.

A number of studies emphasise the dominance of teacher-centred approaches in Saudi Arabia education, where traditional perceptions of language education often led to teacher-dominated classrooms. For example, Elyas and Picard (2010) indicated that the Saudi education system often prioritises authority and transmission of knowledge, with limited opportunities for students to engage in autonomous learning or critical thinking. Similarly, Alrabai (2014) found that Saudi teachers tend to rely heavily on teacher-centred methods, with teachers controlling the learning process and students being more passive recipients of knowledge. This traditional approach is deeply rooted in the Saudi educational system, emphasising rote memorisation and lecture-based instruction (Alrabai, 2014). According to Halabi (2018), implementing a teacher-centred approach contradicts the concept of 'freedom' in LA. However, Al-Seghayer (2014) pointed out that educators who are willing to incorporate more interactive, learner-centred practices, such

as communicative language teaching, are often more willing to promote learner autonomy and student engagement. Despite this, the transition from teacher-centred to student-centred methods in Saudi Arabia remains challenging due to cultural and institutional constraints (Al-Seghayer, 2014).

Teachers need to both motivate and encourage their students to engage in the learning process and to promote learner autonomy (LA). Dam (2011) noted that teachers must perform two tasks simultaneously. First, they are responsible for making their learners *willing* to gain control and take responsibility for planning their learning, implementing those plans, and assessing the outcomes. Second, they must support learners in becoming *capable* of achieving this autonomy. To ensure the successful implementation of LA, teachers must be aware of their evolving responsibilities.

Many scholars have emphasised that the development of LA requires a shift in teachers' roles from focusing on *teaching* to focusing on *learning* (Ludwig & Tassinari, 2023; Dam, 2011; Little, 2000). Ludwig and Tassinari (2023) underscored the importance of providing emotional and psychological support to students, with a strong focus on creating a safe and empathetic learning environment. Ludwig and Tassinari's (2023) study found that teachers assumed an expanded role that went beyond delivering academic content, especially during emergency remote teaching conditions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. They indicated that teachers adapted their practices to prioritise well-being, foster connection, and maintain motivation in online settings in response to increased student stress, isolation, and uncertainty.

Therefore, the teacher's role is to create a supportive environment that prepares learners to take on the responsibilities of their own learning (Dam, 2011). Dam further explained that a teacher-centred approach focuses on transmitting knowledge, whereas a learner-centred approach encourages teachers to activate students' prior knowledge and engage them in developing *action knowledge*, which contributes to becoming successful, independent learners. Consequently, one of the teacher's key responsibilities in autonomous classrooms is to ensure students' active engagement in the learning process. Teachers should find effective methods to encourage students to *take initiative* and provide guidance throughout the process, as learners gradually develop the capacity to manage their own learning (Little et al., 2017).

Voller (1997) mentioned that the terms facilitator, counsellor and resource are the most widely used terms in the literature that characterise teachers' roles in an autonomous language learning context. He illustrated that the teacher's role as a facilitator is related to the responsibility to

facilitate learning. Voller (1997) mentioned that a facilitator can motivate his/her learners and increase learners' consciousness about the new roles of teachers and learners to support them in perceiving the usefulness of *independent learning*.

Voller (1997) stated that a counsellor provides information and guidance and answers learners' questions related to resource access. Finally, he mentioned that the role of teachers as resources is connected to teacher expertise and the teacher as a knower (Voller, 1997). These different roles indicate that teachers should be aware of the role they must adopt to foster LA. It has been highlighted that even though many theoretical publications support the importance of shifting language teachers' roles to support LA, there is a need for more relevant empirical studies since these are still limited (Han, 2014). The next section will discuss learner autonomy and its relationship to teacher autonomy.

### **2.3.5 Learner Autonomy and Its Relationship to Teacher Autonomy**

Work on teachers' roles in fostering LA led to increased attention to the concept of TA, which to a large extent has risen out of the shift from focusing on teachers "as a conduit for methods devised by experts" to "a focus on the teacher as a self-directed learner and practitioner" (Benson, 2013, p. 187). It has been pointed out that the growth of learner-centred language learning approaches has resulted in proposing a reorientation of teachers' roles in which they share power with their students and provide them with opportunities to have greater control over their learning processes (Teng, 2019). Nevertheless, the reorientation of teachers' roles does not imply diminishing teachers' responsibilities; rather, it may create a great challenge for teachers, as it depends mostly on TA development to successfully meet this challenge (Huang, 2005). As their roles develop and change, language teachers are likely to undertake different roles, such as facilitator, developer, and counsellor (see 2.3.4), as well as carry out his/her more traditional professional role of delivering language lessons (Gao, 2018). Gao (2018) indicated that these new roles could create a notable challenge for those language teachers who have limited experience with the kind of learning that they are expected to promote, who lack the appropriate skills or who are incapable of performing these new roles.

A growing body of literature conceptualises the relationship between learner autonomy (LA) and teacher autonomy (TA) as interdependent (Jiménez Raya et al., 2017; Han, 2020; Lamb, 2000; Little, 1995). According to Jiménez Raya et al. (2017), the relationship between learner and teacher autonomy is deeply relational, mutually reinforcing, and ideologically grounded. Autonomy is not simply about making individual choices in isolation; it is about contributing to a

collective educational project rooted in democratic values, empowerment, and social responsibility. Lamb (2000) argued that there is a cyclical link between TA and innovation in the development of LA. He pointed out that important components are required in any relationship between TA and LA. First, through critical reflection, teachers can learn autonomously how to develop and have the freedom to develop as professionals. The second is the commitment on the teachers' side to empowering their learners by creating appropriate learning spaces. Therefore, autonomy is not merely the freedom to make choices but a reflective, context-sensitive, and socially responsible practice. Jiménez Raya et al. (2017) argue that the pursuit of autonomy in education must be understood not only as an individual capacity but also as a collective and relational practice, where teacher and learner autonomy evolve together. They highlight the importance of viewing autonomy as "authoring our collective world," a notion grounded in democratic ideals, inclusion, and social transformation. From this perspective, teacher autonomy becomes a precondition and a vehicle for learner autonomy. That is, teachers must possess the freedom, critical awareness, and agency to challenge the constraints of institutional norms in order to cultivate similar dispositions in their students. This leads to the conclusion mentioned by Little (1995), in which he argued that LA depends to a great extent on TA. He emphasised the importance of TA in supporting LA, arguing that teachers who do not have autonomous experience will have a detrimental impact on the promotion of LA among learners (Little, 1995). According to Little (2007), this means that it is unreasonable to assume that teachers who do not know what LA is and who are not autonomous will be able to promote LA.

It has been noted that there are several dimensions and interpretations of these constructs, which makes it problematic to find one definition (See 2.2.1). This study will focus on the constructs of teacher autonomy and learner autonomy by investigating the teachers' role in promoting LA, what teachers think about the concept of LA, how they implement it in their classrooms and what influences their practices. The complex interrelated relationship between LA and TA is evident in the literature. Additionally, there is a debate as to the suitability of these constructs in different cultural contexts, since they have been widely promoted by Western teachers and scholars (Palfreyman & Smith, 2003). This study will take place in a non-Western context, so it will contribute to the limited existing research on Arab-speaking countries by exploring the issue from English language teachers' perspectives, with particular reference to the Saudi context (Alrabai, 2017).

The next section will provide a discussion of internal influences on teachers' practices, specifically focusing on teachers' beliefs regarding LA. Beliefs will be used in this study to gain insights into the teachers' thinking before exploring their role in supporting LA.

## 2.4 Internal Influences on Teachers' Practices: Teacher Beliefs

Over the past few years, teachers' beliefs have been an area of interest among scholars. Various research studies have contributed to understanding teachers and have provided insight into teachers' perceptions and practices in language teaching (Hall & Walsh, 2002; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). In language education, teacher cognition has become well known "as an umbrella term for the unseen dimensions of teachers' work" (Borg, 2019, p. 1152). The term teacher cognition was used by Borg (2003) concerning the unnoticeable '*cognitive dimension of teaching*', which focused on exploring teachers' knowledge, beliefs and thinking. It has been found that beliefs have a notable influence on teaching and other areas of life, as beliefs contribute to how individuals conceptualise the world and significantly influence how knowledge is perceived (Borg, 2001). Borg (2001) referred to teachers' beliefs as pedagogical beliefs that relate to their teaching. Language teachers have various beliefs about effective language teaching methods and learner–teacher relationships, which can have a significant influence on their classroom practices (Hall & Walsh, 2002; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Five & Buehl, 2012). Teachers' beliefs also have a substantial effect on shaping learners' beliefs (Kern, 1995). Understanding teachers' beliefs is essential, since it provides an indication of teachers' behaviours in the classroom (Hall & Walsh, 2002). Borg (2019) defined teacher cognition research as "Inquiry which seeks, with reference to their personal, professional, social, cultural and historical contexts, to understand teachers' minds and emotions and the role these play in the process of becoming, being and developing as a teacher" (p. 1167).

Studies of teachers' beliefs have shown the importance of studying teacher cognition. Several researchers have made associations between teachers' cognition, their classroom behaviours, and their perspectives on pedagogical inventions and new teaching approaches (Borg, 2019; Hall & Walsh, 2002; Li, 2019). Li (2019) summarised four main reasons why investigating teachers' beliefs is important. First, teachers' beliefs influence their perceptions and practices in teaching. Second, teachers' beliefs help in understanding the roles of teachers and learners. Third, investigating teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning is valuable for conceptualising and developing pedagogy. Fourth, it provides valuable implications for teacher education. Han (2020) argued that the development of TA, to some extent, influences language teachers' beliefs and practices in fostering LA, and the language pedagogical knowledge acquired through pre-service and in-service teacher education and professional training programmes will also influence teachers' beliefs and practices. Consequently, teachers' experience in developing LA, their beliefs and practices regarding fostering LA and their acquired knowledge are intertwined

together to impact teachers' roles in fostering LA, which further determines the success of developing LA (Han, 2020). Borg (2019) highlighted that there are many influences on teachers' cognition which "it is influenced in powerful ways by a range of personal, physical, socio-cultural and historical milieus which interact, in both remote and immediate ways, to shape who teachers are and what they do" (P.1154). Therefore, exploring internal and external influences in this study is essential, as it will provide a deeper understanding of how these beliefs shape their approaches to supporting learner autonomy in the Saudi educational context. This exploration is critical for understanding how teachers navigate the challenges and opportunities they face in promoting LA.

#### **2.4.1 The Link between Beliefs and Practices**

Beliefs play a crucial role in shaping teachers' instructional practices, though they are just one of many determinants of behaviour (Borg, 2019, p. 76). Understanding the complex link between teachers' beliefs and their teaching practices is crucial for developing effective educational strategies. This complexity is well-articulated in the literature, highlighting how teachers' own belief systems can either facilitate or hinder the translation of these beliefs into teaching practices. For instance, Buehl and Beck (2016) argue that teachers are more likely to act on their beliefs about content and various aspects of instruction when they have confidence in their capabilities. Teachers' capability and self-efficacy beliefs thus moderate the relationship between their beliefs about content and their classroom practices.

These beliefs significantly influence how they approach teaching, interact with students, and implement educational policies. It has been argued that teachers' beliefs can either facilitate or hinder the translation of theoretical knowledge into classroom practices (Buehl & Beck, 2016). According to Buehl & Beck (2016), the relationship between beliefs and practices is reciprocal and complex, influenced by various internal and external factors. Many researchers have argued that beliefs and practices influence each other, though the strength of this relationship varies across people and contexts. (Richardson, 1996; Thompson, 1992). Basturkmen (2012) and Mansour (2009) emphasised that the relationship between beliefs and practices is complex and not straightforward; instead, it includes a dynamic relation where beliefs can drive practices and experiences from practices can reshape beliefs. This bidirectional relationship highlights the need to understand the underlying factors that mediate this interaction.

It has been emphasised that internal factors within teachers play a significant role in how beliefs translate into practices. Buehl & Beck (2016) identified several critical internal factors,

particularly self-efficacy, sense of responsibility, and beliefs about the immediate context. Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1997, p.3) as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments.” Therefore, Five & Buehl (2012, p.482) argued that “teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs and personal identity beliefs” are considered as influences that may facilitate or challenge the implementation of their own beliefs. Moreover, Buehl & Beck (2016) argued that teachers are more likely to act on their beliefs about content and various aspects of instruction when they have confidence in their own capabilities. In such cases, teachers’ capability and self-efficacy beliefs moderate the relationship between their beliefs about content and their classroom practices. This means that the extent to which teachers’ content beliefs are reflected in their instruction depends on whether they are confident in their knowledge and skills (Buehl & Beck, 2016)

Buehl & Beck (2016) indicated that self-efficacy serves as a moderating factor in the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their practices. Therefore, teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to reflect their beliefs in their teaching practices. Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2001) highlighted that teachers with high self-efficacy are more confident, open to new teaching approaches, and persistently face challenges. Moreover, teachers’ sense of responsibility towards their students and learning outcomes influences their willingness to adopt practices reflecting their beliefs; “Teachers’ sense of responsibility for students’ learning has also been identified as a possible moderator and mediator in the alignment of teachers’ beliefs and practices” (Buehl & Beck, 2016, p.75). Lastly, teachers’ perceptions of their immediate teaching context, including their school environment, available resources, and student demographics, impact their ability to enact their beliefs (Buehl and Beck, 2016). This highlights the importance of the teaching and learning context and its influence on teachers’ beliefs and practices.

On the other hand, the relationship between beliefs and practices can be effectively understood through the lens of Lortie’s (1975) concept of the “apprenticeship of observation.” which suggests that teachers’ pedagogical approaches are heavily shaped by their own experiences as students. These experiences create a long-lasting effect on their beliefs about teaching and learning, subsequently influencing their teaching practices. This notion is supported by Borg (2003) and Moodie (2016), who highlight that understanding prior second language (L2) learning is important for understanding the beliefs, practices, and development of language teachers. Teachers bring these experiences and long-held beliefs about effective teaching into the classroom (Borg, 2003; Moodie, 2016). Furthermore, Nguyen and Tran (2024) emphasise that teachers’ experiences play a significant role in shaping their teaching philosophies and methodologies, including their approaches to fostering learner autonomy. These experiences

influence how educators perceive their roles, interact with learners, and implement instructional strategies that encourage independent learning.

Additionally, ongoing professional development is essential for teachers to align their beliefs and practices. High-quality professional development programs offer the necessary knowledge, models for implementing beliefs into practice, and continued support through mentoring and coaching (Buehl & Beck, 2016). Language teacher education programs must empower teachers to become protagonists in their professional lives, promoting their self-development and effectiveness with language learners (Cobun & Borg, 2024; Han, 2020). When teachers' professional knowledge, skills, and commitment to learner autonomy are developed, they are better equipped to foster autonomy in their students (Han, 2020).

In summary, teachers' beliefs significantly influence their instructional practices, moderated by their self-efficacy and autonomy. Professional development plays a crucial role in aligning teachers' beliefs and practices, ultimately developing learner autonomy. Understanding the complex relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices, as well as the factors that influence this relationship, is essential for promoting effective teaching and learning environments. My study examines how these beliefs influence English language teachers' practices, particularly in relation to the development of learner autonomy. The role of professional development is notable, as it helps align teachers' beliefs with practices that support the development of LA. This framework will offer insights into how beliefs, supported by professional growth, can lead to more effective teaching and learning environments in the Saudi context.

## **2.5 External Influences on the Implementation of Learner Autonomy**

The development of English teachers' autonomy in the educational context may be affected by several factors. Benson (2013) pointed out that an important aspect of TA is professional freedom. In this regard, Benson (2013) stated that the development of LA in an institutional context is mainly implemented through transforming control from the teacher to the learner. He argued that the majority of teachers in any institutional setting are working under certain circumstances in which their efforts towards the development of LA are constrained by many factors. Such factors that may influence the development of LA include *education policy*, *institutional guidelines* and *conceptions of language learning methodologies* (Benson, 2013). Benson (2013) mentioned that these broader constraints are mainly embodied in teachers' authority in the educational context. Consequently, Benson (2013) assumed that the teacher's

role should include 'critical pedagogy' to find methods to mediate these broader constraints on learning. Thus, teachers' willingness to contradict and combat the educational system to create space in their working context to pursue control over the learning process is considered another important dimension of TA (Benson, 2013).

Teng (2019) pointed out that many influences need to be considered that could affect the process of achieving TA, such as:

- Sociocultural elements
- Public spheres, such as educational policy and public opinion
- Organisational dynamics, such as policy and the relationship with the institution in which they work
- Personal influences that include internal factors such as *motivation*, *capacity* and *willingness* to make determined efforts for autonomy

Jing (2006) conducted a study to explore educational constraints and found that institutional burdens, social expectations and divergence in students' and teachers' plans are major factors that influence and hinder LA in language education. Trebbi (2008) distinguished between internal constraints, referring to teachers' beliefs and perceptions of language teaching, and external constraints, referring to the institutional system, such as a fixed curriculum and exam-oriented methodology.

Ramos (2006) stated that the development and exercise of TA involve many constraints. First, fear of change is considered to be one of TA's hindrances based on the nature of human beings in which doing things in familiar ways is safer and more comfortable. The second stronger constraint for TA is the fear of releasing control. Therefore, not being in charge of everything in the classroom and empowering students through a rebalancing of power could be frustrating for some teachers, who may not be ready for such change. Another source of constraint is that many teachers' experiences are controlled by and come from educational, governmental, organisational and institutional authorities whose goals are to regulate teachers' actions. These constraints take different forms, such as policies, regulations, demands, reforms and standardised tests. Therefore, these institutional constraints have a negative impact on teachers. Demands on teachers may be high and too many, such that teachers must be 'hard workers' and have little time for critical analysis, adjustment, preparation, professional development and growth. Additionally, teachers themselves could be considered a source of constraint, as they may be resistant to investing their time, efforts and money in their

professional and personal growth and development. Moreover, holding negative attitudes and depending on their own practices, experiences and resources keep teachers behind and out of date regarding new advances, innovations, professional knowledge and skills.

Teachers' actions are described as 'autonomy suppressing' when the realisation and formulation of teachers' interests and goals are affected by the teaching community (Teng, 2019). These barriers are likely to trigger teachers' negative feelings and actions that may influence teachers' attitudes towards teaching (Teng, 2019). Most teachers are faced with *educational or institutional* restrictions; nevertheless, it is important for them to identify ways to overcome these challenges if they have a desire to promote LA (Benson, 2000). Teachers should receive support and training that can be integrated into student–teacher programmes, such as a series of workshops or seminars in which the importance of LA is introduced so teachers can realise the practical value of the concept (Al Asmari, 2013).

However, teacher autonomy can be constrained by various factors, such as school rules, standardized curricula, and educational policies (Benson, 2013). Teng (2019) notes that these constraints can be mediated by teachers' agentic behaviour and strong self-belief. Teachers with a high sense of autonomy are more likely to notice and utilize opportunities in their teaching environment, promoting learner autonomy. In contrast, teachers with a weak foundation of autonomy may struggle to assume more teaching responsibility and hesitate to engage in autonomous practices.

By investigating how these influences impact English language teachers in Saudi Arabia, my study aims to highlight the challenges and opportunities they face in exercising autonomy. Understanding the factors that affect teachers' practices regarding the development of LA provides a deeper insight into how English teachers navigate their roles and support learners in taking charge of their learning processes.

## **2.6 The Importance of Context**

Based on contemporary developments in the sociocultural perspectives on language LA, teachers are considered significant agents for facilitating the development of LA (Gao, 2018). According to Li (2019), the "sociocultural perspective offers a close investigation of what language teachers think, believe and do in their professional practices, and helps readers understand how they may construct assumptions, conceptions and ideologies in context and in social interaction" (p. 8). Li (2019) stated that using the sociocultural perspective in researching

teachers' cognitions helps to understand the importance of context and social interaction in the promotion of people's perceptions and knowledge. A considerable amount of research highlights the significance of context in determining teachers' cognition (Borg, 2003, 2019; Li, 2019). Borg (2003, p. 106) stated that an extensive understanding of contextual factors such as "institutional, social, instructional and physical" plays a role in shaping teachers' practices and helps in gaining a deep understanding of the association between cognition and practices. Therefore, Borg (2003) highlighted the significance of the contextual influences. He stated that "the study of cognition and practices without an awareness of the context in which these occur will inevitably provide partial if not flawed, characterisations of teachers and teaching" (Borg, 2003, p. 106). Hence, this study will pay attention to the role of context by investigating the internal and external factors that influence teachers' perceptions of their role in supporting LA.

The importance of focusing on the learning context and identifying contextual factors that influence the learning process is not a new concept. The influence of these factors has been discussed and highlighted by many researchers in the field of education (Holliday, 1994; Canagarajah, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Holliday (1994) highlights the importance of context sensitivity in order to adopt a suitable pedagogical approach. Considering the social context of language education is fundamental to understanding what is happening in the classroom, and examining these factors highlights that every context is different, and it will help educators determine suitable classroom methodology (Holliday, 1994). Canagarajah (2002) suggested that before deciding which pedagogical practices are appropriate, one must first think of students' needs and contextual authenticities. It is worth mentioning that it is important to recognise these features in any classroom.

Numerous studies have illustrated how teachers' beliefs and local contexts have a significant impact on classroom practices and how teachers interact with students (Li, 2013; Li & Walsh, 2011). The majority of teachers have many conditions that they must consider while working. The control they are exercising is severely constrained by several factors, such as education policies, rules and conventions of the institution and the conception of language teaching and learning (Benson, 2000). The promotion of LA cannot be achieved without a supportive environment and context. For this study, it will be important to understand teachers' beliefs as an internal factor affecting LA, together with external factors, and to explore how they influence teachers' pedagogical practices in the English language teaching context.

## 2.7 Empirical Studies About Teacher's Beliefs and Practices Toward Learner Autonomy in Different Contexts

Several studies have investigated teachers' perceptions concerning LA, how they incorporate it into their teaching practices and how it influences the development of autonomous learning (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Stroupe, Rundle and Tomita, 2016; Van Loi, 2016). This overview of the previous literature aims to offer insights into empirical studies on teachers' beliefs and practices toward learner autonomy in different countries around the world in terms of the methods employed, data on how teachers' beliefs were incorporated into their pedagogical practices and key findings found in the field. This overview aims to frame the current study, situate it among previous literature, and justify the research gap.

Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) conducted a study in which they explored the beliefs of 61 teachers and their teaching practices about LA in a language institution at a university in Oman. They adopted mixed methods, using two research instruments: questionnaire and interviews. The major findings of the study were that teachers held positive theoretical perspectives on the importance of LA in an EFL context. At the same time, the teachers were *less optimistic* about their capability of facilitating autonomous learning. They attributed this belief to several factors that could hinder the progress of autonomous learning, such as an absence of motivation, inadequate experience of autonomous learning and institutional restrictions regarding fixed curricula. Based on these findings, the researchers developed and conducted a number of professional development workshops for the teachers to raise their awareness of LA and how it is implemented in language education.

Many studies have followed the methodological design developed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), to investigate teachers' beliefs and practices towards LA. One of these studies was conducted in Japan by Stroupe, Rundle and Tomita (2016), investigating 16 Japanese language and content instructors' perceptions of LA regarding their students' readiness, the teachers' practices for enhancing LA and the difficulties faced with enhancing LA in a private university in Tokyo, Japan. For data collections, they collected the data through three processes. In the first term of the academic year, they distributed an online questionnaire adapted from Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) study, which was followed up with initial professional development workshops. After that, three interviews were conducted during the academic year with the workshop participants. They found that the participants supported the concept of LA but many obstacles hindered the implementation of LA in the classroom. Those related to educational, cultural and contextual

factors, involving a lack of teacher autonomy, fixed curricula, restricted schedules of teaching content and targeted objectives that needed to be accomplished by teachers. In addition, certain student characteristics, such as a low proficiency level, were considered obstacles in this context, negatively affecting students' understanding of the importance of LA and the rationale for autonomous supportive activities. Moreover, students' educational experiences and backgrounds were considered to hinder the development of LA since secondary education in Japan provides limited space for students to take charge of the learning process. Furthermore, they found that teachers' perceptions and experiences limited the development of LA due to, for instance, uncertainty about LA concepts and underestimation of the value of autonomous supportive activities, along with a lack of confidence in their students' abilities. The researchers asserted that the workshops had positively affected teachers' views of LA and their readiness to implement LA in their classrooms and identify and overcome obstacles to do so.

Another case study has been conducted by Wang and Wang (2016) to investigate Chinese university EFL teachers' perceptions and their pedagogical practices. The research conducted in a national university in northern China. The researchers followed the methodological plan that was used in Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) study; to some extent the questionnaire and the interview were adjusted to be suitable with the participants and the context. They used questionnaire, interview, learner autonomy focused workshops and followed up with emails for the data collection. The questionnaire was translated and delivered in bilingual versions, and it can be conducted both through hard copy or online. They have received 47 responses from the participants; however, only 44 responses were counted and included in the analysis due to incompleteness issue. Among of eighteen questionnaire respondents who showed interests into participations, only ten volunteered EFL Chinese teachers have been chosen to participate based on certain criteria in which it related to their student's types, years of experience and gender. Due to the participance preferences, the interviews were conducted by using only Chinese language and by using two methods of communication: either face to face or via QQ Voice Chat. The interviews were followed by four professional workshops with the ten teachers in which the first two were focused on the understanding of Learner autonomy concept and its applications in the targeted context while the rest of the workshops considered with the potential of learner autonomy *reflective practice* and provided suggestions for further action research. The language of the provided workshops was English since the workshops were delivered by British researchers. The collected data were analysed through NVivo 10, in which the grounded approach was adopted by the researchers. The findings of the study indicate that teachers' beliefs coincided with those in Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) study. It has been found that the EFL

teachers in this context hold general understanding of the concept of learner autonomy and its feature in general. Furthermore, the teachers in the study had positive attitudes toward the implementation of learner autonomy in their pedagogical practices and to some extent they have verbally illustrated a number of evidence of giving the students the opportunities to develop their learner autonomy. However, many contextual constraints that related to teachers, students, and local culture have been identified and to some extent inhibited the implementation of learner autonomy in relation to teachers' pedagogical practices. In addition, they found that the LA focused workshops were very beneficial in developing teachers' perceptions in relation to the concept of learner autonomy and its practical implementations. The researchers have suggested that the teacher's pedagogical knowledge of the actual applications of LA needs to be promoted. The researchers have assured that the finding of their small-scale study cannot be generalized to a wider educational context in China due to methodological limitations in which there was an absence of observable data and they only relied on the reported LA pedagogical practices from the teachers.

Van Loi (2016) conducted an empirical study to investigate the implications of learner autonomy (LA) and provides an in-depth understanding of Vietnamese university English teachers' beliefs regarding LA in language education and their autonomous supportive teaching practices to enhance LA, as well as challenges to their teaching practices in Vietnamese higher education. For data collection, the researcher adopted the questionnaire and interview that employed and designed by Borg and Albusaidi (2012). The instruments were, to some extent, adjusted to be suitable for the study context. The researcher surveyed 84 English teachers from six public universities in Vietnam with teaching experience ranging between five to over 20 years; seven teachers volunteered for the interview. The major findings of this study coincide with those of Nguyen (2014), finding that, even though the teachers recognised the importance of autonomous learning and had the desire to support independent learning, most Vietnamese English teachers in the study seemed to lack the confidence in their learners' capability to be responsible and take control of their learning. In addition, the research found that teachers' beliefs are translated into teaching practices, in which they thought teachers must control students' learning. Therefore, limited evidence of learner autonomy was found in these teachers' teaching practices. Furthermore, the study found that a number of factors have been attributed to hinder the development of autonomous learning, such as teachers supporting traditional teaching methods, absence of confidence in learners' capability to be independent learners, and students' preferences for traditional methods based on past educational experience.

Adopting a case study approach, Nguyen (2014) investigated Vietnamese teachers' conceptualisation of LA and how their stated beliefs were reflected in their teaching practices. Data were collected during two stages. First, a quantitative researcher-generated survey with 78 participants was deployed. In the second stage, four teachers were chosen to attend interviews and stimulated recall interviews and undergo video observation. The study proved that teachers' practices in the classroom were aligned with their stated beliefs about LA and that teachers generally deconceptualized the notion of LA. There was little evidence found in these teachers' classroom practices related to LA. Nguyen's (2014) findings concurred with those of Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012); similar attitudes were found for teachers across both contexts.

A limited number of empirical research studies have examined teachers' perceptions and their teaching practices in a Saudi higher education EFL context. In a study carried out by Al Asmari (2013), in which the focus of the study was on investigating English teachers' perceptions of the notion of *autonomous learning*, investigating current teaching practices and learners' engagement in decision-making during the learning process to investigate teachers' predictions of enhanced learner autonomy in language teaching. The researcher used a quantitative method, deploying a questionnaire for 60 EFL teachers at an English language institution at Taif University, Saudi Arabia. The major findings of the study illustrated that although the teachers held strong preferences for autonomous learning strategies, they did not have sufficient training and lacked expertise in this field. Furthermore, the study found that teachers assumed that autonomous learners had unique characteristics that involved taking charge of their learning, creating ideas and taking advantage of the available learning prospects, rather than waiting for the teacher to supply knowledge. In addition, the researcher suggests that teachers should support learners' involvement in the learning process by giving them accountability for the learning objectives, as well as taking opportunities to reflect on their learning and the target language.

In another questionnaire-based study in an English language institute (ELI) at a Saudi university, Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) explored teachers' beliefs, practices and challenges, their perspectives on LA and how they enhanced LA in the classroom. The participants were 359 English teachers of a Preparatory Year Programme at the ELI. International textbooks specifically designed for Saudi learners were used by the teachers. The classrooms were *well equipped*, and *online resources*, *a library* and *a self-access centre* were available for the learners to support the learning process. The researchers employed a questionnaire, the design of which was based on that of Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) but with numerous modifications. The researchers' goal was to provide an 'institutional perspective on second-language LA'. Research instruments were

employed to obtain quantitative and qualitative data. There were four sections to the questionnaire, three had closed questions to generate quantitative data and the fourth had open-ended questions to generate qualitative data, asking teachers about the types of student behaviours that indicated language LA and for examples of instances when they enhanced autonomous learning in their classrooms.

In line with Nguyen's (2014) findings, Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) found in Saudi universities that the majority of English language teachers considered LA an important factor in language learning. The teachers related LA to the concepts of independence and learning control on the learner's side, associating it with learners' capabilities and motivations to achieve tasks with no or slight involvement from teachers. However, there were discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and the application of autonomous learning in their classrooms, in that there was little successfully enhanced autonomous learning. This was the result of curricular restraints, societal restraints and learner factors involving motivation, independence and language ability.

In sum, the empirical studies reviewed provide foundational insights into the beliefs and practices of English language teachers concerning learner autonomy (LA) across various international contexts. These studies, such as those by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), Wang and Wang (2016), and Stroupe, Rundle, and Tomita (2016), commonly utilise mixed-methods designs, most often combining questionnaires with interviews to explore teachers' beliefs toward LA. However, a more critical evaluation exposes methodological limitations, contextual gaps, and areas requiring further investigation, particularly in Saudi Arabia, which this study seeks to address.

First, there is a persistent over-reliance on self-reported data, which raises concerns about the validity of the findings. Although many teachers report positive beliefs about LA, these do not always translate into observable teaching practices. As Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) acknowledge, the absence of triangulated evidence (e.g., classroom observations) makes it difficult to determine whether these beliefs are enacted in pedagogical settings or remain aspirational. Wang and Wang (2016) similarly note the gap between teachers' stated beliefs and their implementation of autonomy-supportive practices, but fail to provide direct evidence of teaching behaviours to validate their conclusions.

Second, and more critically, the literature frequently treats autonomy as an individual and measurable disposition, often operationalised through Likert-scale surveys that capture surface-level perceptions. As Little (2022) points out, this reductionist approach obscures the

social, cultural, and pedagogical complexity of autonomy as a lived educational process. This critique is particularly relevant to studies conducted in the Saudi context (e.g., Al Asmari, 2013; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019), which have made important contributions but are limited by their narrow methodological focus and minimal engagement with classroom realities.

Third, few studies have critically examined this relationship despite increasing recognition of the interdependence between teacher autonomy (TA) and learner autonomy. Existing research often isolates LA as a learner-focused construct, overlooking how teacher autonomy, professional development, and institutional constraints shape their ability to foster autonomy..

Finally, few studies have systematically investigated these dynamics in Saudi higher education, where shifting policy agendas (e.g., Vision 2030) and culturally embedded teacher-student roles add further complexity to autonomy enactment. There is a lack of context-sensitive, empirically grounded research that captures how teachers in this setting navigate the challenges of promoting LA within rigid curricula, assessment-driven institutions, and prevailing educational traditions.

This study responds to these critiques and gaps in several key ways. First, it employs a robust explanatory, sequential, mixed-methods design that includes questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and classroom observations, thereby mitigating the over-reliance on self-reporting and enabling the triangulation of belief and practice. By directly observing how teachers translate (or fail to translate) their beliefs into classroom actions, this study offers a more reliable account of autonomy-supportive teaching practices. Second, it situates the investigation within both internal and external factors, acknowledging autonomy as a multidimensional and contextually embedded construct. This allows the study to build a holistic model of how LA is conceptualised and enacted, moving beyond abstract notions of readiness or isolated teaching strategies. Third, and most notably, the research foregrounds the relationship between TA and LA, treating teacher autonomy not only as a precondition for learner autonomy but also as a pedagogical value in itself. In sum, this study offers a critical and context-sensitive contribution to the field of autonomy research in language education.

## **2.8 Theoretical framework**

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework that synthesises **learner autonomy (LA)**, **teacher autonomy (TA)**, and the **internal and external mediating factors** that influence teaching practices. The framework is adopted to investigate not only how teachers' beliefs and practices affect the promotion of learner autonomy but also how contextual conditions either

support or constrain these efforts. It offers a dynamic and relational model that highlights the reciprocal nature of teacher and learner autonomy within the realities of the Saudi higher education context. While each of these conceptual elements, LA, TA, and influencing conditions, has been explored in the preceding literature, this section synthesises them to illustrate how they collectively frame the focus, design, and analysis of the current study.

This framework positions LA and TA as interconnected constructs, recognising their reciprocal relationship and the broader contextual and personal influences that affect their implementation in practice. By synthesising these elements, the framework provides a comprehensive lens through which to analyse the dynamics of autonomy in language education.

This study considers Learner Autonomy (LA) as a multidimensional and contextually embedded construct, drawing on the perspectives of Benson (1997) and Oxford (2003). The relationship between LA and TA is central to this framework, emphasising their reciprocal influence. Drawing on Han (2020), TA is understood in this study as the teacher's ability to reflect, adapt, and exercise professional judgment within institutional and sociocultural constraints. It involves professional growth, self-directed development, and a commitment to fostering LA.

Additionally, the framework also considers the critical role of both internal and external factors in shaping teaching practices. These factors interact dynamically, influencing how teachers perceive and engage with autonomy in their professional roles. The framework underscores the importance of examining these interactions to understand how autonomy is operationalised in teaching and learning.

This framework underpins the study's examination of three interrelated dimensions:

1. **Teachers' Beliefs, Roles and Practices:** The study explores how teachers' beliefs influence their ability to implement autonomy-oriented practices.
2. **Enabling and constraining conditions:** how internal and external factors impact teacher ability to implement autonomy-supportive teaching.
3. **The interrelationship between TA and LA,** emphasising that the development of LA is inseparably linked to TA.

This synthesis provides a holistic understanding of the complexities of autonomy in teaching and learning, ensuring that the study contributes meaningfully to the field of language education. By examining how these elements interact, the framework allows for a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of autonomy in language education.

The integrated framework directly informed all aspects of the research design:

- **Interview and observation protocols** were aligned with the framework to explore perceived enabling and constraining conditions, the enactment of autonomy in context, and the role of institutional structures, teacher decision-making, and learner engagement.
- During **data analysis**, the framework guided the mapping of patterns between beliefs and practices, the identification of contextual barriers, and the interpretation of how teachers' autonomy influenced their capacity to foster LA.

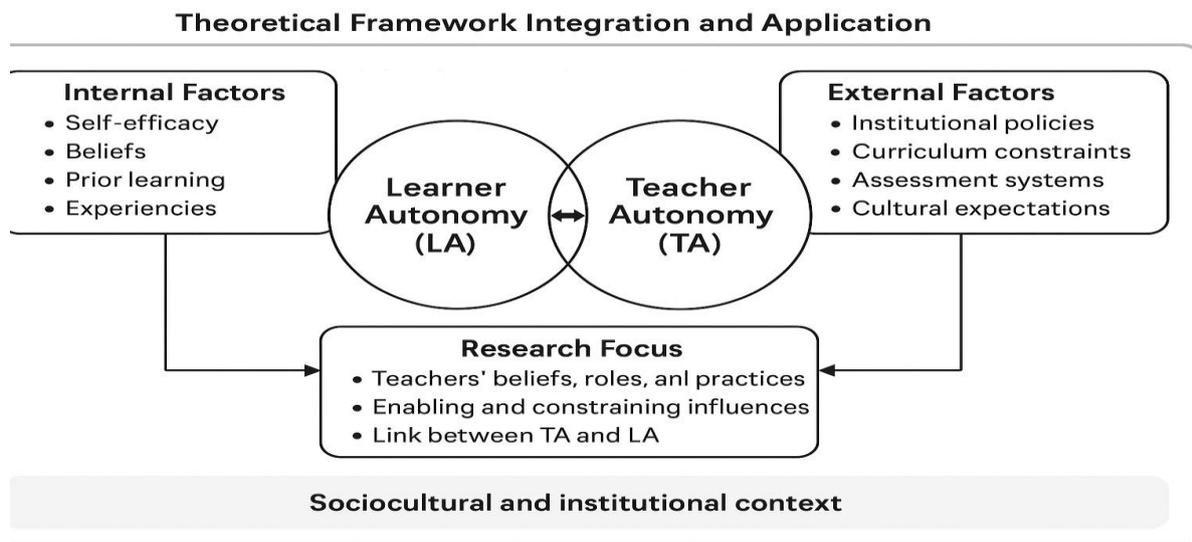


Figure 2.2.2 Integrated Theoretical Framework

Figure 2.2 visually represents the integrated theoretical framework used in the study. At its core, it shows the **reciprocal relationship between Teacher Autonomy (TA) and Learner Autonomy (LA)**, highlighting that the promotion of LA is contingent upon the presence and exercise of TA. Surrounding this core relationship are two layers of **influencing factors: Internal Factors** and **External Factors**, which can either enable or constrain autonomy-supportive teaching practices. The diagram also captures the multidimensional nature of **LA and TA**. Together, these components frame the study's research focus and analysis, illustrating how teachers' autonomy and surrounding conditions collectively shape their practices and influence learner autonomy development, particularly in Saudi higher education. |

The framework also structured the discussion of findings, allowing the study to provide a holistic and context-sensitive interpretation of how autonomy is enacted and negotiated by teachers in Saudi higher education. By integrating these conceptual elements, the framework advances a

relational, ecologically grounded understanding of autonomy, offering a nuanced contribution to both theory and practice in autonomy research.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the reviewed literature offers conclusive evidence of the role of teachers' perceptions and other contextual influences on the development of autonomous learning. Han (2014) has mentioned that there is a need for research that focuses on higher education teachers' beliefs and their roles in promoting LA in their language pedagogical practices. Investigating teachers' awareness of the importance of promoting LA and how they transfer their knowledge and perceptions of it into their pedagogical practices is considered an essential factor for indicating the success of developing LA (Han, 2014). It is unreasonable to expect that language teachers will play their respective roles in fostering LA if they lack the knowledge, capability and conditions to foster LA (Han, 2014). Thus, there is a need for more empirical studies to be done to investigate language teachers' knowledge base and conditions to promote Learner Autonomy (Han, 2014). In the previous literature, there is an obvious trend in all the studies reviewed that focuses on teachers' views about LA; however, there has been very little research directly investigating the role in supporting LA. Borg (2016) indicated that there are many publications over the last three decades that have emphasised the important role of LA in language education, but fundamental questions about teachers' practices remain unexplored such as investigating how teachers promote LA and how practices are formed, not only by focusing on teachers' understanding of the concept of LA but also taking into consideration other influences in a context in which language learning happens.

Investigating these issues will help to provide important insights to gain a deeper understanding of the theory and practice of learner autonomy and Teacher autonomy. This study will help fill this gap in the literature. This study will contribute to the limited existing research on Arab-speaking countries by exploring the issue from English language teachers' perspectives, with particular reference to the Saudi context (Alrabai, 2017). Additionally, my study addresses a critical gap identified by Chong and Reinders (2022), who noted that much of the existing literature on learner autonomy tends to focus on theoretical perspectives or descriptions of best practices, rather than being grounded in empirical research. By employing a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and classroom observations, my study contributes valuable empirical evidence to the field. It not only explores teachers' beliefs and practices regarding learner autonomy but also examines how these are shaped by contextual and

individual factors. In doing so, my research offers a data-driven understanding of the dynamics between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy, particularly within the context of Saudi higher education. This empirical grounding strengthens the theoretical discourse and provides practical implications for policy and professional development.

## **Chapter 3 Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In order to achieve the aim of this study explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was adopted to investigate if and how English language teachers support LA in their classrooms and also the external and internal influences on their pedagogical practices. The study will be conducted in two distinct phases; adopting a quantitative approach in the first phase; followed by a qualitative exploratory case study in order to answer the research questions (See 1.6).

This chapter presents the research approach and the research methods that have been used in this study and the rationale behind them. It explains the research design and how the data was collected and justifies selecting a particular approach for each phase of the study. Additionally, the sampling selection is discussed and justified for each phase. Towards the end of the chapter, the data analysis process is described along with a discussion of data validity and reliability. Ethical considerations and the role of the researcher are also discussed.

### **3.2 Research Paradigm**

Paradigm is a technical term that is used to describe the way that the researcher thinks about the research and the world. According to Creswell & Poth (2017), the paradigm is referred to as “beliefs that the researcher brings to the process of research, or they may be theories or theoretical orientations that guide the practice of research” (p.58). In social research, there are two dominant paradigms: positivism (scientific quantitative approach) and interpretivism (qualitative approach) (Thomas, 2017). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that positivist researchers assume that reality is observable, measurable, and stable in which the gained knowledge of this reality is categorised as scientific and includes the establishment of generalisation and universal law. On the other hand, interpretive research assumes that reality is socially constructed and there are multiple realities or interpretations of a single phenomenon or situation (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Thus, interpretive researchers construct knowledge rather than finding it. The interpretive researcher starts with individuals and set out with them in order to understand their interpretations of the world around them in which he/she interned to see the world through participants' eyes (Cohen et al., 2018). Adopting an interpretivism stance requires the researcher to avoid his/her assumptions about individuals, culture, context and look

at the phenomenon and its own context in its own terms rather than looking for generalisation or universal statement (Hammersley & Campbell, 2012).

In this research, initial data was collected through objective measurement instruments (phase 1) such as questionnaires, suggesting a positivist approach. This initial data is collected in order to obtain an overview of the context and to explore English language teachers' beliefs concerning Learner Autonomy. However, this research is largely dependent on an interpretivist stance. An interpretive stance is suitable for this study in order to investigate whether teachers' roles in implementing learner autonomy are shaped and influenced by what they believe and what they experience in their context and in which ways this impacts their pedagogical practices. The interpretive researcher argues that an individual's actions and practices cannot be justified without focusing on the individual's interpretations of their world and focusing on understanding the distinctive cultural characteristics that shape and influence their beliefs, attitudes, and practices (Hammersley & Campbell, 2012). Therefore, drawing on the interpretive paradigm facilitates my quest to understand and interpret the meaning of English language teachers' beliefs, views, behaviours, practices, and actions.

### **3.3 Research Design**

The mixed methods approach provides a fuller understanding of *a research problem* than using only one approach (Creswell, 2013). This study follows Creswell's explanatory sequential mixed-method design to investigate teachers' roles in promoting LA in the classroom and explore the impact of internal and external influences on English language teachers' pedagogical practices to develop LA in the Saudi EFL education context. By using an explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2013) the researcher first conducted quantitative research (See 0), analysed and interpreted the results before designing and carrying out the qualitative research phase (See 3.5).

The rationale behind using *explanatory sequential mixed methods* was to help the researcher identify *overall patterns* from the quantitative data in phase one and then use qualitative data to clarify and describe those patterns (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The quantitative phase results were also utilised to guide the selection of participants for the qualitative phase (Creswell et al., 2003). Creswell et al. (2003) stated that this design is convenient because when unexpected or surprising results arise in a quantitative study, they can be assessed in more detail in the qualitative data collection phase. This research was conducted at a Saudi university in Saudi Arabia. The research was conducted in the English language department at the Women's

Campus (See 1.4). The next section discusses the data collection procedures for each phase in detail.

## 3.4 Phase One

### 3.4.1 Questionnaire Design

First, the researcher collected quantitative data through a questionnaire. This was likely based on Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) survey of teacher beliefs about LA, and the desirability and feasibility of learners' involvement in decision-making and learners' abilities with slight modifications (See Appendix E) The questionnaire consists of three sections:

1. **Learner Autonomy:** This section focuses on obtaining teachers' beliefs about various aspects of LA. Teachers are asked to respond to a series of Likert-scale statements reflecting different dimensions of LA. It focuses on four key roles undertaken by the teachers in relation to LA within their classrooms: sociocultural, political, technical, and psychological (see Table 2-1). This allows for a detailed understanding of how teachers conceptualize LA and the degree to which they believe it is important in language teaching.
2. **Desirability and Feasibility of Learner Autonomy:** In this section, teachers are asked to assess the desirability and feasibility of involving learners in various educational decisions, such as course objectives, materials, and assessment methods. This section provides insight into the practical limitations teachers face when implementing LA in their classrooms, as well as their perspective on how LA should function.
3. **Background Information:** This section collects demographic data on the teachers, including their years of experience, educational qualifications, and nationality.

Creswell described questionnaires as useful for providing "quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (2013, p. 41). Dörnyei (2007) stated that the questionnaire has been widely used and gained popularity due to its numerous advantages. One such advantage is its ability to collect a large amount of data within a short period (Cohen et al., 2018). Additionally, the administration of this instrument is very useful for the researcher and the participants, as it can be completed without the researcher being present (Cohen et al., 2018). Dörnyei (2007) identified three types of data that can be obtained from respondents through the use of *factual*, *behavioural* and *attitudinal* questions. These help to find out certain facts about the participants, what they are doing and

thinking and their opinions, beliefs and values. All staff teaching English courses at the research site will be invited to participate with approximately 45 staff members.

The use of questionnaire data serves multiple functions. Firstly, the purpose of using a questionnaire in this study was to obtain an overview of the context and to explore the population's (members of the English language Department) views on LA and how they did or did not support it in their pedagogical practices. Secondly, it aids in selecting cases for the qualitative phase of the study, ensuring that the subsequent in-depth investigations are grounded in a representative sample of teachers' experiences and viewpoints. The data collected through the questionnaire will be instrumental in validating and contextualising participants' beliefs and practices, and it will inform the development of questions for the semi-structured interviews, allowing for more targeted and insightful inquiries.

#### **3.4.2 Research Participants: Phase 1**

The study took place in the English language Department at a Saudi university focusing specifically on English language teachers. The department consists of approximately 45 faculty members, all of whom have extensive experience in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). All English language teachers in the English language department ( $n = 45$ ) were invited to fill out the questionnaire online. The questionnaire was completed by 30 English language teachers. The role of this initial questionnaire was to help in the selection of participants for the subsequent qualitative phase of the study. The use of the questionnaire can help "the researcher to establish the representativeness of the cases presented" (Duff, 2018, p. 111). According to Dörnyei (2007), the strength of this strategy is that it can be used to highlight individuals with certain characteristics. Four participants showed interest and agreed to participate in phase two of the study (See 3.5.2).

#### **3.4.3 Internal Consistency Reliability**

Cronbach's alpha is a widely used measure of internal consistency reliability, which evaluates the extent to which items within a scale measure the same underlying construct or dimension (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The alpha coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating stronger internal consistency. General guidelines for interpreting Cronbach's alpha are as follows: a value of  $\geq 0.70$  is considered acceptable for most research,  $\geq 0.80$  indicates good to excellent reliability, and  $\geq 0.90$  reflects very high reliability. These thresholds help researchers

assess whether their measurement instruments are reliable and valid for capturing the intended constructs (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

The Internal Consistency Reliability was measured by using Cronbach’s alpha. The results presented in Table 3.1 demonstrate that the reliability of the scales measuring learner autonomy (18 items), Learners’ involvement in decision-making (7 items for desirability and feasibility), and learners’ ability (7 items for desirability and feasibility) were generally good. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for these scales range from 0.772 (learner autonomy) to 0.894 (desirability of learners’ ability), with values above 0.70 considered acceptable for most research (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). These results indicate that the items within each scale effectively measure the intended dimensions, ensuring internal consistency across the constructs.

### 3.1 Results of reliability using Cronbach’s alpha

Scale	No of items	Cronbach’s alpha
Learner Autonomy	18	.772
Desirability of learners’ involvement in decision-making	7	.773
Feasibility of learners’ involvement in decision-making	7	.776
Desirability of learners’ ability	7	.894
Feasibility of learners’ ability	7	.826

## 3.5 Phase Two

### 3.5.1 Exploratory Case Study

Glesne (2016) stated that the qualitative approach provides interpretations of ‘people constructions of reality’ and identifies patterns and shared features about their thinking and behaviours (p. 23). In this phase, the researcher carried out a qualitative exploratory case study that seeks to investigate teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding LA and explore the impact of internal and external influences on English language teachers’ roles regarding developing LA in the context of Saudi EFL higher education.

A case study is defined as “an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between

phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2018, p. 16). A qualitative case study was chosen because it allows for in-depth investigation of real-life phenomena from various perspectives, capturing the *complexity* and *uniqueness* of the case (Simons, 2009, cited in Cohen et al., 2018). A qualitative case study approach is an effective method that provides a thick description of complex phenomena in a local cultural context (Dörnyei, 2007). Stake (1995) has identified three types of case studies in which they are intrinsic, instrumental, and multiple/collective case studies. First, an intrinsic case study involves one that has been undertaken to investigate the particular case in question. Second, an instrumental case study involves investigating a particular case to understand and have insights into an issue or a theory in particular. Lastly, multiple/collective case study involves more than one participant in order to gain a fuller picture of the phenomena that are being investigated. According to Stake (2005), multiple case study tends to be instrumental, and it increases the sense of representation among cases. Regarding the various types of case studies, the type of case study that was carried out during this phase was exploratory, instrumental that involved multiple cases.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 37), a qualitative case study has some significant characteristics, such as “the search for the meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly description.” Hancock and Algozzine (2006) identified several characteristics that define case study research. First, the case study could focus on an individual representative of a group. However, it frequently addresses a phenomenon, such as a particular event, situation, programme or activity. Second, context is important in a case study in which the phenomenon being investigated is carried out in its natural context, ‘*bounded by space and time*’. Third, a case study is richly descriptive since ‘it is based on deep and varied sources of data. It has the benefit of creating a mental image in order to bring to life the complexity of the many factors inherent in the phenomenon being investigated. The data collection for this phase lasted approximately one academic semester (12–14 weeks) at a Saudi University.

### **3.5.2 Selection of Participants: Phase 2**

In the qualitative phase, the sampling strategy was purposeful sampling, in which the aim was to generate ‘insight and in-depth understanding’ of the research topic. It involves selecting cases on the basis that they will be able to provide ‘information-rich’ data for analysis (Patton, 2002, in Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 56) since this mixed-method study aimed to investigate the role of teachers supporting LA in the classroom. A major part of the study was to understand teachers’

beliefs of LA, together with the internal and external influences on their pedagogical practices in the context of Saudi EFL higher education. The following criteria were followed for recruiting participants:

1. Participants were full-time, in-service English language teachers who were willing to participate.
2. Purposeful selection was based on teachers' responses to the survey and their willingness to participate. Preference was given to teachers who claim and articulate that they believe in LA and that they support and implement it in their pedagogical practices.
3. The selection included both Saudi and non-Saudi teachers who are familiar with the context and have worked in Saudi education for a long time so they can reflect on the current situation of teaching English. Native English speakers were excluded because one of the aims of this project is to explore teachers' beliefs and practices of LA from a non-Western perspective.
4. All selected teachers were female due to gender segregation at this university. It was more convenient for the researchers to access and conduct the study on the female campus.

In this phase, four teachers were selected for interviews and classroom observations. (see Table 3-1). These teachers were chosen based on their responses to the questionnaire where they showed interest to provide more detailed insights into their understanding of autonomy.

Table 3-1 Participant's Profile

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>
Maram	Master's in Teaching English as a Second Language (Western University)	10 years
Haifa	Master's in Linguistics MPhil in linguistics (Eastern University)	17 years
Samiah	Master's in Applied Linguistics (Eastern University)	26 years
Basimah	Master's in Linguistics (Saudi University)	3 years

### **3.5.3 Research Instruments for Phase 2**

#### **3.5.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews**

The first instrument the researcher used to collect data was semi-structured interviews to obtain a clear image and engage in discussion to gather teachers' insights and general thoughts about implementing LA, how they pursue this in their classes and the opportunities and challenges arising. Interviews were used in this study, as they are considered an effective means of gathering information of relevance to the research objectives and gaining insight into the respondents' thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and values (Tuckman, 1972, cited in Cohen et al., 2018).

An interview is described by Burgess (1984) as a 'conversation with a purpose'; Kvale (1996) referred to it as a 'professional conversation', and Silverman (2000) called the interview 'the gold standard of qualitative research' (cited in Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 183). The qualitative interview includes common open-ended questions, which it is limited in number to elicit participants' views and opinions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argued that although the nature of interviewing in qualitative enquiry is more open-ended, less structured and more flexible, in most cases, the interview is guided by a list of questions or topics to be explored in order to gain specific information and insight from respondents. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a semi-structured interview is in the middle of other types of qualitative interviews—highly structured and unstructured interviews. This study will use a semi-structured interview (See Appendix G). It includes a list of topics and questions; the questions are open-ended and the sequence and wording can be adjusted based on individual responses and the purpose of the interview (Cohen et al., 2018).

Using semi-structured interviews fits the purpose and objectives of this study. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), semi-structured interviews are mainly suitable for case study research, as is the case in this phase of this study. One of the advantages of semi-structured interviews is that they provide rich data on different situations and themes by allowing respondents to elaborate on specific issues (Dörnyei, 2007). Additionally, Creswell (2009) mentioned a number of advantages of conducting interviews for qualitative enquiry, as it is useful for allowing the researcher to control the questioning. More importantly, it allows participants 'to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 506). It is a powerful tool for the researcher, as it provides an in-depth exploration of an issue and is utilised to figure out how and why individuals "frame their ideas in the ways that they do, how and why they make connections

between ideas, values, events, opinions, behaviours, etc” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 506). Furthermore, it has the benefit of inviting the participants to express themselves openly and freely and allowing them to define the world from their own viewpoints, not only from the viewpoint of the researcher (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

The purpose of conducting individual interviews is to have the advantage of gaining a sufficient amount of data from individuals’ points of view (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The interviews have been conducted four times during the study. The first interview was conducted in November 2022. The interview was conducted online due to practical reasons for the participants and the researcher. The first interview was a mix of introductory and in-depth interviews. The time of interview for each participant lasts between 50 to 60 minutes. The beginning questions of the interview focused on the participants’ background (their educational and cultural background, their learning and teaching experience, and how they conceptualize themselves as English language teachers. Moving to their beliefs about learner autonomy and how they conceptualize it and how they implement it in their classroom if they support it. Finally, discussing the internal and external factors that influence their pedagogical practices (See Appendix G).

Then, three follow-up interviews were conducted after each classroom observation. Each interview took between 20 to 30 minutes for each teacher. The questions for these interviews were generated based on what was observed in the classroom the purpose of utilising the follow-up interview after each classroom observation was to gain insights into teachers’ perspectives, enable them to provide interpretations of their thinking and performance and allow them to justify their decision-making, provided rationales and expressed their thoughts concerning their teaching practices. Furthermore, the influences that impact the teacher’s pedagogical practices were investigated. The language of the interviews was English, but some interviewees occasionally used Arabic to express their thoughts. Each interview lasted between 20 to 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the first academic semester of 2023, which lasted for 12-14 weeks. The day selection was based on the teachers’ preferences.

Hancock and Algozzine’s (2006) guidelines were followed during the interviews since they provide a detailed description of how to conduct a successful interview: 1) identify key participants who have knowledge and opinions that may provide significant insights in relation to the research questions, 2) develop an interview guideline or protocol to help the researchers identify and design proper open-ended questions that yield vital insights concerning the research questions, 3) consider the interview setting and ensure that it provides a comfortable atmosphere for the interviewee and allows for obtaining high-quality information, and 4) develop

means for recording the interview data. Audiotaping the interaction is the best way for the researcher to record the data interview after obtaining permission from the participants. With the permission of the participants, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. After conducting the interview, the interview recordings were transcribed so that a deep analysis could be conducted and compared with data obtained from other data sources. Finally, the research followed the ethical and legal requirements for research with people, such that participants should provide informed consent for their involvement in the study and any information that is attained from the interviews must be anonymous and confidential (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

### **3.5.3.2 Classroom Observation**

Turning to the second research instrument, observation was used to capture a clear picture of classroom practices. Observation is defined as ‘the conscious noticing’ and in-depth examination of people’s behaviours in a natural context (Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 166). Observation is an effective method for data collection; one of its key features is the provision of valid and authentic data. It has been noted that researchers collect their data by using observations to provide ‘reality checks’ since people may say and do things differently (Robson, 2002 in Cohen et al., 2018). Additionally, it allows investigators to directly observe what individuals do rather than relying on their reports of what they do. “Such data can provide a more objective account of events and behaviours than second-hand self-reported data” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 185).

The purpose of employing classroom observations was to validate the findings from teachers’ perspectives and provide further evidence of their teaching practices, noting supportive teaching activities concerning LA, as well as to what extent and in which ways they enhance LA. This method was used to gain a clear picture of the teachers’ actual practices. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) provided a number of justifications for gathering data through observation. First, it may lead to a better understanding of the context, as it allows the observer to notice things that have become routine to the research participants. Second, providing some knowledge of the context and providing specific incidents and actions that can be used to triangulate emerging findings with other data resources is another reason for conducting observations. Additionally, situations, activities and events can be observed first-hand by the researcher and allow the researcher to utilise his/her own knowledge and expertise to interpret what has been observed. Observation has the benefit of recording behaviours as they happen (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

After securing the participants’ permission, the classroom activities and procedures were audio recorded and field notes were taken. The researcher noted the types of activities or tasks that the

teacher uses, the role of the teacher and the students in the classroom, the students' engagement with the teacher and the learning process, and the types of teaching methodology that the teacher adopted. Each participant was observed three times, and the day selection was based on the teachers' preferences. Therefore, the observation was conducted in the Second academic semester of 2023, which started in January 2023 and lasted for 12-14 weeks. I have sufficient experience observing teachers in the classroom, as I worked for three years supervising and observing pre-service teachers during their practicum.

### **3.5.3.3 Document Analysis**

In addition to interviews and observations, document analysis was considered to be a third important source of data in this qualitative phase. The third instrument of data collection for this study was from documents obtained from the participants, such as lesson plans, course syllabi, instructional documents and assignments handouts, which will be used to validate the interviews and classroom observations data. Document analysis was used as supplementary data; accordingly, I did not intend to utilise the document analysis data as part of evidence in this study; The purpose of document analysis for this research was to provide insights into the teaching context, assist the researcher in generating questions for the interviews and classroom observations and helped in validating and contextualising the generated data from the other research instruments. For instance, I reviewed national and institutional curriculum documents to identify how autonomy was conceptualised and whether policies explicitly supported or constrained teacher decision-making. Also, in the cases where a review of teachers' lesson plans revealed stated intentions to promote learner-centred activities, such as pair work or problem-solving tasks, that were not observed in classroom practice, it would be possible to explore this discrepancy through interview questions aimed at exploring the challenges teachers face in implementing autonomous learning strategies. In this way, the documents served to inform the direction of interviews and provide critical insights into the alignment (or disconnect) between policy intentions and classroom realities, helping to highlight tensions between institutional constraints and individual teacher agency. Hancock and Algozzine (2006, p. 52) stated that documents "provide a rich source of information with which to augment data collected through interviews and observations". Yin (2018) highlighted that one of the important roles of using document analysis in a case study is that "document can provide specific details to corroborate information from other resources" (p.115) According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), since the documents have been created independent of the research problem, they are a product of the context and they have been grounded in the real world and they will not be affected by the

research agenda. Furthermore, document analysis can be helpful for the researcher in uncovering meaning, developing thoughts and discovering insights related to the research problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

### 3.5.3.4 Summary of research methods and descriptive details for phase two:

In June 2022, I applied for ERGO at the same time I contacted the head of the English language department at Saudi University to get permission to conduct my study. In September 2022, I started to conduct phase one of my data collection and I distributed the questionnaire online in which the questionnaire focused on teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in the Saudi higher educational context. In October, I worked on the research instruments for phase two. In November, I started phase two and I conducted the first semi-structured interview with all the participants. By October, I flew to Saudi Arabia to conduct the study. The data arrangement is listed below:

**Phase one:** A questionnaire that focused on teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in the Saudi higher educational context was distributed online.

**Phase two:** Three instruments were used during this phase.

Table 3-2 Summary of Research Methods

Instrument	Detail	Number/duration	Participants
<b>First semi-structured interview</b>	Field notes Audio recording	One hour for each teacher	4 teachers
<b>Classroom observation</b>	Field notes	Three classes for each teacher. Every class lasts for one hour	4 teachers
<b>Follow-up interview after classroom observation</b>	Field notes Audio recordings	Three interviews after each classroom observation. Each interview takes between 20 to 30 minutes for each teacher.	4 teachers
<b>Documents</b>	Curriculum Course specification Lesson plan	One of each	None

## 3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the method of organising, describing, understanding, explaining and making sense of data (Cohen et al., 2018). Since this study follows an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately (Creswell, 2009). For the first phase, the data was analysed statistically using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were

used because they helped summarise the findings by describing general tendencies in the data and describing the overall spread of the scores (Dörnyei, 2007).

For phase two, since the majority of the collected data in this phase was textual, the process of data analysis needed to make sense of the textual data (Creswell, 2009). Data analysis is a process of making meaning of the collected data and includes “consolidating, reducing and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 202). Data analysis in the qualitative phase is considered an ongoing process, as it is conducted concurrently with the data collection process. Case study data analysis involves a detailed description of the setting or individuals, followed by an analysis of the data to identify themes or issues.

The qualitative data collected from the interviews was reinscribed and translated, and the observations were written up and then a thematic analysis was conducted. The thematic approach has been used to analyse the data gathered through the interviews, classroom observations and post-classroom observation interviews. The thematic approach is a systematic method used to break down and organise rich data from qualitative research into categories and themes (Cohen et al., 2018). Clarke and Braun (2006) defined thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). This study utilised a thematic analysis approach to analyse the qualitative data. Using thematic analysis is useful because, according to Clarke and Braun (2016), it is utilised to recognize and identify themes within and across the data that relate to participants’ lived experiences, opinions, perspectives, behaviours and practices; empirical research that seeks to comprehend participants’ thinking, feelings, and practices.

There are two approaches to identifying themes within the data: inductive (data-driven ‘bottom-up way’) and deductive (theoretical ‘top-down way’). Inductive analysis is “a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions” (Clarke & Braun, 2006, p. 83). Therefore, the form of thematic analysis was data driven. On the other hand, the deductive approach tends “to be driven by the researcher’s theoretical or analytic interest in the area and is thus more explicitly analyst driven” (Clarke & Braun, 2006, p. 84).

A combination of both strategies is possible and useful. In this study, I used a combination of pre-existing themes like sociocultural, political, and desirability/feasibility of LA that guided the overall structure of phase one findings. Within these broader perspectives, I have emergent themes that emerged from phase two data, such as specific beliefs, practices, and internal and

external factors influencing learner autonomy. For the qualitative phase, the researcher used a combination of deductive and inductive approaches, so the researcher could build themes inductively from the data by working back and forth among the themes until a comprehensive set of themes was established. Then, the researcher deductively looked back at the data from the themes to look for more evidence supporting the final set of themes. Hence, the process started inductively, but deductive thinking played an essential role as the analysis process moved forward (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

This study followed the data analysis steps provided by Creswell (2009, p. 185):

1. Organising and preparing the data for analysis.
2. Reading through all the data.
3. Beginning detailed analysis with the coding process.
4. Using the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people, as well as categories or themes for analysis.
5. Explain how the description and theme will be represented in the qualitative narrative.
6. Interpreting the meaning of the data.

In this study, the first step of the data analysis was familiarisation with the data. Organising and preparing the data for analysis involved transcribing the interviews accurately and taking detailed notes during classroom observations. Some interviewees occasionally used Arabic to express their thoughts; the researcher translated these interviews as accurately as possible. This was followed by multiple readings of the transcripts and observation notes to obtain a general sense of the information and reflect on the data's overall meaning. Initial impressions and observations were noted down to capture early thoughts and potential themes. During this step, the researcher wrote notes in the margins to record general thoughts about the data.

The next step was moving from managing and making notes on the data to describing, classifying and interpreting the data. This circle is considered the heart of qualitative data analysis, as it involves forming the codes and establishing the categories so the researcher can “build detailed descriptions, apply codes, develop themes or dimensions, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature” (Creswell, 2013, p. 259). The coding phase **involved generating the Initial Codes**. Coding is the process of segmenting sentences or paragraphs of the gathered data into categories and these categories will be labelled with a term usually based on the actual language of individuals (Creswell, 2009). In this study, the data was

systematically coded using qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA) during the coding process (See Appendix B). It involved identifying significant data segments relevant to the research questions. Each segment was labelled with a code that captured its essence.

The next step was **searching for themes, in which the researcher started to organise the codes into themes. During this step**, the initial codes were used to generate several themes that formed the basis of the major findings of the study. A description of people and themes was generated for analysis during this process. The description included detailed information about the people, places and events in the setting which will be useful for case studies. This involved looking for links between codes and organising them into potential themes. They demonstrated various perspectives from participants and were supported by quotations and specific evidence.

During this phase, several themes emerged that were central to understanding how English language teachers support learner autonomy (LA) in a Saudi higher education context. For example, themes such as “Teachers’ beliefs about LA,” “Teaching practices,” “Internal Influences,” and “External Constraints” were identified (See Table 3-3). One surprising theme that emerged was **self-efficacy and teachers’ confidence**. The researcher did not initially intend to examine teachers’ self-efficacy and confidence. However, during the interviews, many teachers discussed their abilities and confidence in their teaching practices. This theme highlights the significant impact of teachers’ confidence in their teaching abilities on their willingness to implement autonomy-supportive practices. Teachers who exhibited higher self-efficacy were more likely to adopt strategies that promote learner autonomy, reflecting the importance of confidence in their professional roles.

Then, the researcher reviewed and refined the themes to ensure they accurately represented the data. This included checking the themes against the coded data extracts and the entire data set to ensure consistency. Themes that were too broad or not sufficiently supported by the data were modified or discarded. The aim was to ensure each theme had a clear and specific focus. Each theme was clearly defined to specify its focus and scope. This involved writing detailed descriptions and summarizing the essence of each theme.

Table 3-3 Themes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Themes focus	Cross-case analysis
<b>Teachers' Beliefs</b>	Understanding of Learner Autonomy - Importance of Learner Autonomy- beliefs about teaching and their role as teachers, beliefs about their current students	This theme captured how teachers conceptualize and define learner autonomy, including their beliefs about its importance and role in language education.	Comparison of how each teacher's understanding of LA influenced their teaching practices.
<b>Role of the Teacher in Developing Learner Autonomy/</b>	Facilitator – Promoting collaborative learning- Resource Provider- Counsellor	This theme highlighted the actual role of the teachers inside their classes that supported LA.	Comparison of how different teachers adapted different roles and the impact on the development of learner autonomy.
<b>Teaching Practices to Support Learner Autonomy</b>	Classroom teaching practices Such as the Use of Technology- Peer work, Collaborative learning, Student choice, and Interactive classroom dynamics.	This theme focused on the specific teaching practices teachers employed to promote LA in their classrooms.	Identification of common strategies and teaching approaches used by each teacher.
<b>Individual Factors Influencing Practices</b>	Teachers' Beliefs - Self-Efficacy and Confidence, Prior learning experiences. Continuous Professional Development Opportunities- Influence of Teacher Autonomy on Student Autonomy-Strategies to Overcome Constraints.	This theme explored the internal factors influencing teachers' practices.	Examination of how internal factors shaped each teacher's approach to fostering LA.
<b>External Factors Influencing Practices</b>	Institutional factors – Factors related to the teachers- Assessment Constraints – lack of control - Continuous Professional Development Opportunities- -Sharing experiences, teachers' collaboration and observing colleagues.	This theme addressed the external factors that impacted teachers' ability to implement LA.	Analysis of how each teacher navigated and responded to these external influences.

According to Creswell (2009), “sophisticated qualitative studies go beyond description and themes identification and into complex themes connections” (p.189). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicated that when analysing a case study, some features of the case study may affect the data analysis and further analysis may be needed. In a multiple-case study, two stages of analysis are followed: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. For within-case analysis, “each case is first treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 234), in which a detailed description of each case is provided and themes within the case are

identified (Creswell, 2013). Then, cross-case analysis will occur in order to conduct a thematic analysis across the cases that ‘seeks to build abstraction across the cases’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 234). Since multiple cases were used in this study, further analysis was conducted by the researcher, providing a detailed description for each case and identifying themes within each case. This was followed by a cross-case analysis in which the researcher compared within-case themes across multiple cases in the cross-case analysis to help prove assertions or interpretations of the meaning of the cases (Creswell, 2013). The final step is interpreting the data, which asks, ‘What is the learned lesson?’ Therefore, a detailed narrative was constructed for each theme, supported by relevant data extracts. This involved weaving together the findings to tell a coherent and compelling story about each case study. Themes were compared across the four case studies to identify similarities and differences in teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding learner autonomy. Cross-case analysis helped to highlight common patterns and unique variations.

### **3.6.1 Overview of Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data**

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data occurred during the interpretation phase. A side-by-side comparison strategy was used, where quantitative results and corresponding qualitative findings were aligned under shared thematic categories. This approach allowed for direct comparison and contrast between what teachers reported in the survey and how they described or demonstrated their practices during interviews and observations.

For example, survey data showed high agreement with the statement that ‘Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do’. This finding was supported by qualitative data from participants who described using strategies such as student-led discussions and allowing learners to choose topics or tasks. In contrast, while some teachers indicated support for LA in the questionnaire, qualitative data revealed that actual implementation was minimal, often due to contextual constraints. This method of integration, juxtaposing statistical patterns with rich narrative explanations, helped uncover the reasons behind belief-practice alignment or misalignment. It also highlighted the critical role of teacher autonomy in mediating the impact of these constraints. To further support the integration process, a joint display table was created (See Appendix C) This visual representation aligned themes such as teachers’ beliefs, roles, practices, internal influences (e.g., prior experiences, confidence), and external factors (e.g., assessment policies, curriculum constraints) across both data strands. The display helped clarify areas of convergence (where quantitative and

qualitative findings aligned), expansion (where qualitative data added new dimensions to survey results), and divergence (where contradictions revealed deeper complexities).

Overall, this systematic process of combining quantitative and qualitative data enabled the development of meta-inferences that were both robust and contextually grounded. It revealed that fostering learner autonomy is not simply about holding beliefs; rather, it depends on a teacher's willingness, pedagogical ability, and capacity to work within or around the constraints of their educational setting (See. 6.4). Integrating both data strands enriched the study's findings and strengthened the conclusions, offering valuable insights for teacher development, policy reform, and future research on autonomy in education.

### **3.7 Research Validity and Reliability**

Internal validity is defined by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2000) as “the truth value, applicability, consistency, neutrality, dependability, and/or credibility of interpretations and conclusions within the underlying setting or group” (cited in Cohen et al., 2018, p. 252). In this study, the researcher reinforced the internal validity or credibility of the study by implementing “respondent validation” or “member checking” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 60). After transcribing the interview, participants checked and ensured that their views were accurately represented without any misunderstanding or misinterpretations, which helped strengthen the internal validity of the study. Furthermore, in the study, the researcher used ‘data triangulation’, in which interviews, classroom observations and document instruments were used to collect data. Triangulation is one of the most effective techniques to strengthen internal validity or credibility (Dörnyei, 2007). According to Dörnyei (2007), triangulation is an effective strategy to reduce bias because it aids in reaching a conclusion for a phenomenon by utilising different data collection or analysis methods that provide ‘strong validity evidence’.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), “external validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (p. 253). The researcher aimed to ensure that external validity is present to the largest extent possible through the following steps. First, the research process has been described in detail by providing a rich, thick description of the research process, the research setting, the participants of the study, the methodology that has been implemented and the data analysis. Additionally, using different sources of evidence from the participants' interviews, classroom observations and documents helped to validate the findings of the study. The study has been supported by adequate evidence to enhance its external validity. Therefore, other researchers interested in investigating the role of teachers in developing

LA and the impact of internal and external influences on their pedagogical practice can use it. In addition, the researcher compared the findings that coincide with other studies that investigate teachers' beliefs and practices regarding LA to validate the results. The researcher has paid careful attention to selecting the study sample so that it includes English language teachers who meet certain criteria. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), giving careful attention to selecting the study sample is an effective strategy to enhance external validity. However, it is not the researchers' task to provide 'transferability'; it is suggested that the researcher's task is to provide a 'thick description' and determine if 'transferability' is achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Cohen et al., 2018).

According to Mackey and Gass (2005), reliability refers to consistency and the ability to obtain the same results if the research is repeated. Reliability can be enhanced by providing a detailed explanation of the data collection method, describing the type of the research instruments, the time framework and the duration of each research instrument and providing the data analysis steps that will be followed. Additionally, providing justification for the decisions that are made and that will be made throughout the study and linking the methodological choices to the research questions and the research objectives helps to enhance the reliability of the study. The use of multiple methods (method triangulation) is considered an effective strategy to enhance the reliability of the study.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

This research project has been guided by the University of Southampton and the research context ethical policies, specifically those dealing with human participants. Since my study involves human participants, I registered and obtained ethical approval from Ethics and Research Governance Online (ERGO) before embarking on the data collection phases of this project. After receiving approval from ERGO (76970), the potential participants were contacted and asked if they were willing to participate in the study. Before participating in the study, all participants were provided with an information form that all needed information related to the study had been explained. The research aims and objectives were clearly described to the research participants before signing the consent forms. The teachers were asked to sign consent forms, which gave me permission to use the data in my study. Participants had the freedom to participate and the right to withdraw at any time during data collection. I made sure that my position at the university would not have any impact on teachers' decisions to participate in the study (see 3.9).

Regarding participants' confidentiality and privacy, all research data was protected during the entire research process. The participants' names, identities and perspectives and any information that may be gained from them, remained anonymous and private. Several researchers, such as Merriam and Tisdell (2015) and Dörnyei (2007), emphasise the significance of ensuring the anonymity of research participants and explaining to them how their participation will be valuable for the research project. The researcher ensured that the data was used only to serve the purposes of this project.

### **3.9 The Role of the Researcher and Bias**

The role of the researcher is crucial in this study since the main phase of the study is qualitative. One of the characteristics of qualitative enquiry is positioning the researcher as a research instrument during the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In qualitative enquiry, researchers' positionality and how they see themselves are important since they have a central role in the creation of knowledge during the research process (Cohen et al., 2018). The researcher is Saudi, has studied abroad and holds a master's degree in curriculum and instruction (TESOL) from the United States. The researcher's background, experience, knowledge, values and beliefs should be made clear. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), the researcher has to clarify "their biases, dispositions and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken in order to understand how the specific researchers' expectations or values influence the conduct or the findings of the research" (p. 249). Bias can be minimised in this study through reflexivity, which suggests that the researcher should intentionally and consciously acknowledge and reveal any influences on the research (Cohen et al., 2018).

I was aware that my experience as a staff member in the research context and my perceptions about the workplace, the working policies and rules might have an impact on my data interpretation. I used self-reflection and questioning to determine whether what I found reflects real data or if it reflects my own assumptions. The participants were asked to verify their interview transcripts to ensure they were properly interpreted. Therefore, through the research process, I avoided being selective and combined the data from multiple methods. My data analysis was examined and supported by evidence from my findings as far as possible. I focused on common themes in the data and found connections between them.

Furthermore, I tried to combat reactivity through reflexivity by monitoring my own interaction, relationship and role with participants or any other influences that might affect the research (Cohen et al., 2018). I was aware of my role as a researcher, my relationship with the participants

and my influence on the teachers. Moreover, I monitored my responses and my own reactions during the interviews and observations to avoid any influence on the participants. I have a good relationship with the teachers in the research context since we have shared departmental meetings and attended professional development sessions held by the AL department in the past. I have to acknowledge that many new policies have been established, and I was unfamiliar with the updated ones since I have been out of the context since 2019. In this section, the researcher's role as an insider has been made clear, and I implemented these strategies throughout the research process to minimise bias.

# Chapter 4 Teachers' Beliefs about LA in the Research Context

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the status of learner autonomy (LA) in one educational setting through the analysis of a questionnaire completed by 30 English language teachers. It focuses on four key roles undertaken by the teachers in relation to LA within their classrooms: sociocultural, political, technical, and psychological. The primary purpose of employing a questionnaire was to provide foundational insight into the context and to explore the population's attitudes towards LA in the research setting.

The findings from this chapter lay the groundwork for the report of the next phase of the research. Therefore, chapter five presents the individual experiences of four selected teachers, providing an in-depth understanding of their beliefs and teaching practices concerning the development of learner autonomy. This qualitative phase explores the internal and external influences on their pedagogical practices within the context of Saudi EFL higher education.

All data in this chapter are measured on a Likert scale, with descriptive statistics, including percentages and means, employed for analysis. The Internal Consistency Reliability was measured by using Cronbach's alpha (See 3.4.2). By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of learner autonomy, contributing valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders striving to enhance autonomous learning environments in Saudi higher education.

### 4.1.1 The Sociocultural Perspective

Table 4-1 provides insights into the 30 respondents' perspectives on various sociocultural activities and their effectiveness in promoting learner autonomy. Statements related to the sociocultural perspective explored the extent to which teachers encourage collaborative learning tasks, peer feedback, and group work. This aimed to assess how teachers promote learning through **peer collaboration** and interaction with both classmates and teachers. The results are categorised into five levels of agreement: strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree, and strongly agree.

A significant majority (90.0%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone promote learner autonomy, indicating strong support for individual learning tasks. This suggests a recognition of the importance of individual agency and self-directed learning experiences. Surprisingly, all respondents agree or strongly agree (100%) that activities giving learners opportunities to learn from each other promote learner autonomy, showing unanimous support for peer learning. This highlights that the teachers in this context perceived the effectiveness of collaborative learning. Moreover, a majority (83.4%) agree or strongly agree that activities encouraging learners to work together promote learner autonomy, though a small portion (6.6%) disagrees. Interestingly, a strong majority (93.3%) agree or strongly agree that cooperative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy, indicating robust support for collaborative learning. Furthermore, a majority (66.7%) agree or strongly agree that learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy; however, there is also a significant portion (33.3%) that is either unsure or disagrees, indicating a more mixed view on the necessity of solitary work for developing autonomy. This variability underscores the complex interplay between individual and social factors in shaping autonomy-related learning experiences.

Table 4-1 Sociocultural Perspective

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone.	N	1	2	0	19	8
	%	3.3%	6.7%	0.0%	63.3%	26.7%
8. Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other.	N	0	0	0	25	5
	%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	83.3%	16.7%
9. autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together.	N	1	1	3	20	5
	%	3.3%	3.3%	10.0%	66.7%	16.7%
12. Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy.	N	0	1	1	22	6
	%	0.0%	3.3%	3.3%	73.3%	20.0%
15. Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy.	N	0	4	6	11	9
	%	0.0%	13.3%	20.0%	36.7%	30.0%

These results indicate that respondents overwhelmingly support the sociocultural orientation in promoting learner autonomy. Activities that provide opportunities for peer learning and group collaboration received near-unanimous agreement, highlighting their perceived effectiveness. While individual learning tasks are also highly regarded, there is some debate over the centrality of working alone, with a notable portion of respondents unsure or disagreeing about its importance. Overall, the data seems to underscore the value of a balanced approach that includes both individual and collaborative learning experiences to foster learner autonomy. These findings highlight the nuanced nature of promoting learner autonomy from a sociocultural perspective, emphasising the importance of considering diverse instructional approaches that accommodate learners’ social and cultural contexts. Further exploration of these divergent perspectives could provide valuable insights for educators seeking to create inclusive and empowering learning environments that foster autonomy among students.

#### 4.1.2 The Technical Perspective

Table 4-2: Technical Perspective

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Independent study in the library is an activity which develops learner autonomy.	N	1	1	5	12	11
	%	3.3%	3.3%	16.7%	40.0%	36.7%
4. Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom.	N	0	7	4	15	4
	%	0.0%	23.3%	13.3%	50.0%	13.3%
9. Learner autonomy is promoted by independent work in a self-access centre.	N	1	2	6	19	2
	%	3.3%	6.7%	20.0%	63.3%	6.7%
16. Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy.	N	0	0	4	19	7
	%	0.0%	0.0%	13.3%	63.3%	23.3%

The **Error! Reference source not found.** provides insights into the respondents' perspectives on various activities and their effectiveness in promoting learner autonomy, which reflects the technical perspective on the promotion of learner autonomy. Statements related to the technical perspective explore the extent to which teachers’ helps the learners to identify and develop their language strategies and techniques to learn a language. A significant majority (76.7%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that independent study in the library develops learner autonomy, indicating high confidence in this activity’s effectiveness. Independent study in the library emerges as a significant factor in developing learner autonomy, with most respondents either agreeing (40.0%) or strongly agreeing (36.7%) that this activity promotes autonomy.

However, a notable proportion also express uncertainty (16.7%), indicating potential variability in perceptions regarding the impact of library-based independent study on autonomy development. Also, opinions differ regarding the effectiveness of learning outside the classroom in fostering learner autonomy. While a substantial proportion agree (50.0%) with this statement, a significant minority disagree (23.3%) or express uncertainty (13.3%), suggesting diverse perspectives on the role of out-of-classroom learning experiences in autonomy development. Likewise, independent work in a self-access centre is perceived as a key promoter of learner autonomy by a strong majority (70.0%) who agree or strongly agree that independent work in a self-access centre promotes learner autonomy, showing significant support for this activity. However, a notable proportion also expresses uncertainty (20.0%), indicating potential variability in perceptions regarding the efficacy of self-access centre activities in promoting autonomy. This variability in perception may stem from the lack of a Self-access centre within the university, leading to differing interpretations of its value. Teachers who have never worked with or directly observed the impact of the Self-access centre may be less certain about its efficacy, which underlines the theoretical nature of their beliefs. Finally, out-of-class tasks that require learners to use the internet are widely perceived as promoting learner autonomy, with an overwhelming majority (86.6%) agree or strongly agree that internet-based out-of-class tasks promote learner autonomy, with no respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

The results indicate that most respondents believe in the effectiveness of various technical activities in promoting learner autonomy. The highest confidence is in out-of-class tasks requiring internet use (86.6% agreement), followed closely by independent study in the library (76.7% agreement) and independent work in a self-access centre (70.0% agreement). However, there is some scepticism about the effectiveness of learning outside the classroom, with 23.3% disagreeing. Overall, these findings reflect a strong belief in the value of diverse, self-directed learning activities outside the traditional classroom setting. Further exploration and analysis of these perspectives will be done in phase two, which could provide valuable insights for educators seeking to enhance learner autonomy.

Overall, these findings underscore the multifaceted nature of promoting learner autonomy from a technical perspective, emphasising the importance of considering diverse instructional approaches and technological tools that empower learners to take control of their learning experiences. Further exploration and analysis of these perspectives could provide valuable insights for educators seeking to enhance learner autonomy within technical learning environments.

### 4.1.3 The Political Perspective

Table 4-3 presents survey responses reflecting the political perspective on learner autonomy within the educational context. The items assess the extent to which students are given freedom in selecting learning activities, setting personal goals, and making decisions related to assignments or project work. Each row corresponds to a statement regarding the promotion of learner autonomy, while the columns represent varying levels of agreement, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

Table 4-3 Political Perspective

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn.	N	0	1	3	20	6
	%	0.0%	3.3%	10.0%	66.7%	20.0%
5. Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.	N	0	0	2	16	12
	%	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	53.3%	40.0%
7. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do.	N	0	0	0	19	11
	%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	63.3%	36.7%
11. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed.	N	2	4	9	14	1
	%	6.7%	13.3%	30.0%	46.7%	3.3%
13. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials.	N	0	3	3	20	4
	%	0.0%	10.0%	10.0%	66.7%	13.3%

A significant majority of respondents agree (66.7%) or strongly agree (20.0%) that autonomy entails learners having the ability to make choices about how they learn. This suggests a recognition of the fundamental role of choice in fostering learner autonomy within educational settings. Moreover, involving learners in decisions about what to learn is widely perceived as promoting learner autonomy, with a majority agreeing (53.3%) or strongly agreeing (40.0%) with this statement. This underscores the importance of participatory approaches that empower learners to shape their learning experiences based on their interests and preferences. Similarly, a majority of respondents agree (63.3%) or strongly agree (36.7%) that learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they engage in. This highlights the significance of providing learners with opportunities to exercise agency in selecting learning tasks aligned with their individual needs and learning styles. Furthermore, opinions vary regarding the promotion of learner autonomy through learners' freedom to decide how their

learning will be assessed. While a substantial proportion agree (46.7%) with this statement, others express uncertainty (30.0%) or disagreement (6.7%), indicating potential divergent perspectives on the role of assessment practices in autonomy promotion. Lastly, the majority (80%) agree or strongly agree that learner autonomy is enhanced by allowing learners to choose their own materials, although 20% are either unsure or disagree, indicating some reservations about this practice. This underscores the importance of providing learners with autonomy in selecting resources that best facilitate their learning process.

The results indicate strong overall support for practices that promote learner autonomy, with the highest consensus around involving learners in decisions about their learning activities and giving them choices in the kinds of activities they do. However, there is some hesitation around the idea of allowing learners to decide how their learning is assessed, suggesting that while teachers support autonomy, they may have concerns about maintaining academic standards and accountability. Further exploration of these perspectives will be done in phase 2, which could provide valuable insights for shaping educational policies and practices conducive to fostering learner autonomy and empowerment.

#### 4.1.4 The Psychological Perspective

The results from Table 4-4 reflect English language teachers' perspectives on the psychological factors influencing learner autonomy. This aimed to assess the extent to which teachers foster students' attitudes and motivation towards taking control over their learning. Each row corresponds to a statement regarding these aspects, while the columns represent varying levels of agreement, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Analysis of the data reveals insights into how psychological factors intersect with the development of learner autonomy.

Table 4-4 Psychological Perspective

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence.	N	1	2	3	13	11
	%	3.3%	6.7%	10.0%	43.3%	36.7%
14. Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy.	N	0	1	0	14	15
	%	0.0%	3.3%	0.0%	46.7%	50.0%
17. The ability to monitor one's learning is central to learner autonomy	N	0	0	5	19	6
	%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	63.3%	20.0%
18. Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.	N	0	1	1	13	15
	%	0.0%	3.3%	3.3%	43.3%	50.0%

19. To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	N	0	0	4	19	7
	%	0.0%	0.0%	13.3%	63.3%	23.3%

Firstly, the majority of respondents (80% combined for "Agree" and "Strongly Agree") believe that confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy compared to those who lack confidence. This suggests a recognition of the role of self-assurance and self-efficacy in empowering learners to take control of their learning process. Moreover, a significant majority of respondents (96.7% combined for "Agree" and "Strongly Agree") believed that learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy. This underscores the importance of metacognitive skills and strategies that enable learners to understand and regulate their learning processes effectively. Furthermore, opinions vary regarding the centrality of the ability to monitor one's learning to learner autonomy. The majority of respondents (83.3% combined for "Agree" and "Strongly Agree") believed that the ability to monitor one's learning is crucial for autonomy. However, 16.7% are unsure, indicating some uncertainty about this factor. Similarly, there is a strong consensus (93.3% combined for "Agree" and "Strongly Agree") that motivation is a key driver for developing learner autonomy. Only a small fraction of respondents disagree or are unsure (3.3% each). This highlights that teachers perceived the importance role of motivation in autonomy development.

Lastly, the majority of teachers (86.6% combined for "Agree" and "Strongly Agree") believe that the ability to evaluate one's own learning is essential for autonomy. This underscores the importance of reflective practices that enable learners to assess their progress, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions about their learning journey.

These results indicate that teachers place significant importance on psychological factors such as confidence, motivation, learning how to learn, and the ability to monitor and evaluate learning in developing learner autonomy. The strongest agreement is on the necessity of learning how to learn and motivation, while monitoring and evaluating one's learning also receive strong support, though with a bit more uncertainty. Further exploration of these psychological dimensions could provide valuable insights for designing effective educational interventions aimed at promoting learner autonomy and academic success.

#### 4.1.5 Descriptive Analysis of Participant Responses Across Four Perspectives: Socio-cultural, Political, Technical, and Psychological

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 4-5 and Figure 4.1 are an overview of participants' responses across four distinct perspectives: socio-cultural, Political, Technical, and Psychological. From a socio-cultural perspective, participants displayed a mean score of 4.01, indicating a generally high level of agreement with the statements presented, with slight variability reflected in the standard deviation of 0.401. Similarly, from the political perspective, the mean score of 3.97 suggests a relatively favourable disposition towards the statements, with a slightly higher standard deviation of 0.458. The Technical perspective garnered a mean score of 3.83, indicating a slightly lower but still positive average agreement level, with a standard deviation of 0.464 suggesting moderate variability. Lastly, the psychological perspective garnered the highest mean score of 4.20, indicating a particularly strong agreement with the statements, with a standard deviation of 0.469 reflecting moderate variability in responses. These statistics offer insights into the participants' perceptions across diverse perspectives, shedding light on the variation and consensus within each domain.

Table 4-5 Descriptive Analysis of Participant Responses

	Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Socio-cultural Perspective	30	3.00	4.80	4.01	.401
Political Perspective	30	3.00	5.00	3.97	.458
Technical Perspective	30	2.75	4.75	3.83	.464
Psychological Perspective	30	2.80	5.00	4.20	.469

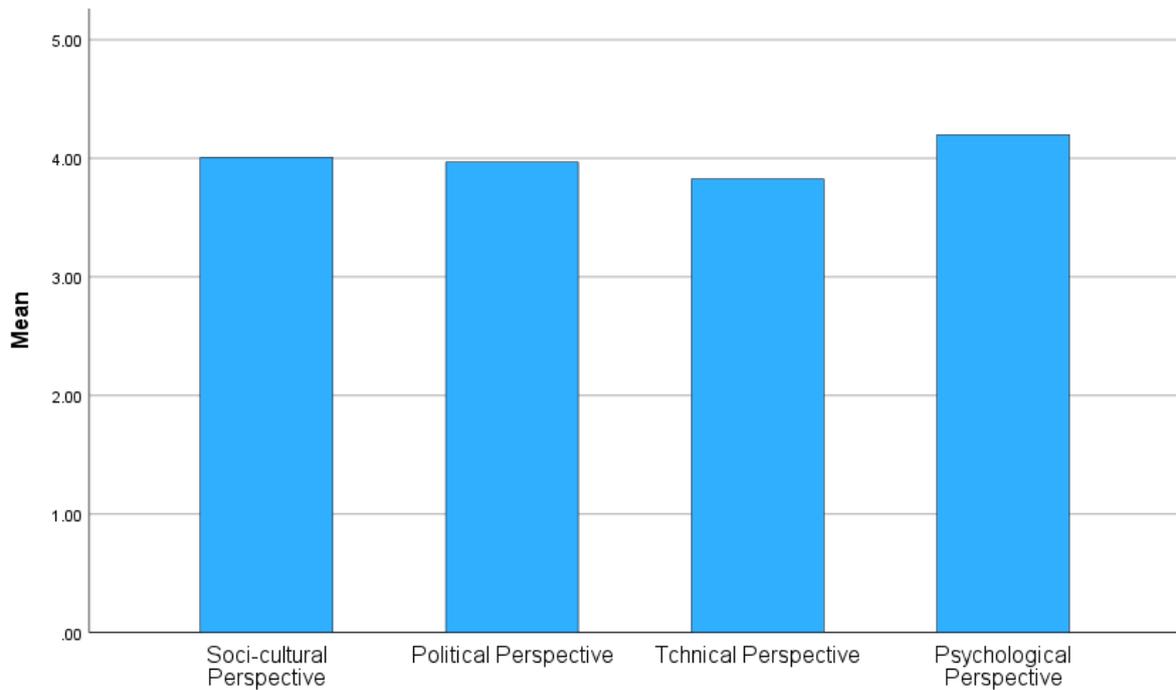


Figure 4.1: Mean level of participants' support across four perspectives to LA

## 4.2 Desirability and Feasibility of Learner Autonomy

### 4.2.1 Desirability of Learners' Involvement in Decision-making

Table 4-6 explores the desirability of involving learners in various aspects of the educational process, including course objectives, materials, tasks, topics, assessment, teaching methods, and classroom management. The results are categorised into four levels of desirability: undesirable, slightly desirable, quite desirable, and very desirable.

The data presented underscores the varying degrees of desirability among teachers around learners' involvement in decisions regarding different aspects of their educational experience. Notably, when it comes to determining the objectives of the course, a considerable portion of respondents find learner involvement to be quite desirable or very desirable, with 66.7% falling within these categories. This suggests a recognition of the value of aligning course objectives with learners' needs and expectations. Similarly, learners' involvement in decisions about the materials used demonstrates a trend towards greater desirability, with 70% of respondents indicating that such involvement is quite desirable or very desirable. This indicates a recognition of the importance of tailoring educational materials to suit the preferences and learning styles of the learners.

Furthermore, learners' involvement in decisions regarding the kinds of tasks and activities they engage in, and the topics discussed demonstrates a strong preference amongst teachers for high levels of involvement, with 80% and 76.7% of respondents, respectively, indicating that such involvement is quite desirable or very desirable. This suggests a desire for autonomy and agency in shaping the learning experience. In contrast, when it comes to decisions about how learning is assessed, there is less consensus among respondents, with 63.3% indicating that learner involvement is quite desirable or very desirable. This indicates a recognition of the complexity involved in assessment design and the need for balance between learner input and educational standards. Similarly, while there is a general trend towards desiring learner involvement in decisions about teaching methods and classroom management, there is also a notable proportion of respondents who find such involvement less desirable. This suggests a recognition of the expertise and authority of educators in these areas, while still valuing collaboration and input from learners.

Overall, the data suggests that respondents generally support involving learners in various aspects of the educational process, particularly in decisions about tasks, activities, and discussion topics. However, there is more reluctance regarding learner involvement in setting course objectives and especially in determining how learning is assessed.

Table 4-6 The desirability for Learners' involvement in decision-Making

		Undesirable	Slightly desirable	Quite desirable	Very desirable
Learners are involved in decisions about: The objectives of the course	N	8	11	9	2
	%	26.7%	36.7%	30.0%	6.7%
Learners are involved in decisions about: The materials used	N	2	7	13	8
	%	6.7%	23.3%	43.3%	26.7%
Learners are involved in decisions about: The kinds of tasks and activities they do	N	2	4	11	13
	%	6.7%	13.3%	36.7%	43.3%
Learners are involved in decisions about: The topics discussed	N	2	5	10	13
	%	6.7%	16.7%	33.3%	43.3%
Learners are involved in decisions about: How learning is assessed	N	12	7	7	4
	%	40.0%	23.3%	23.3%	13.3%
Learners are involved in decisions about: The teaching methods used	N	4	7	13	6
	%	13.3%	23.3%	43.3%	20.0%
Learners are involved in decisions about: Classroom management "	N	7	6	10	7
	%	23.3%	20.0%	33.3%	23.3%

The mean values suggest a moderate to high level of desirability for learners' participation in decision-making processes, see Table 4-7 and Figure 4.2. For instance, learners' involvement in decisions about the materials used and the kinds of tasks and activities they engage in received relatively high mean scores of 2.90 and 3.17, respectively. This indicates a strong desire for learners to have a say in selecting materials and shaping their learning experiences through task and activity choices. Similarly, decisions about the topics discussed and classroom management also garnered relatively high mean scores of 3.13 and 2.57, respectively. This suggests a recognition of the importance of incorporating learner preferences and input in determining the content and structure of classroom discussions and management strategies. While decisions about the objectives of the course and teaching methods used received slightly lower mean scores of 2.17 and 2.70, respectively, they still indicate a moderate level of desirability for learner involvement. This reflects an understanding of the potential benefits of aligning course objectives and teaching methods with learners' needs and preferences. In contrast, decisions about how learning is assessed received the lowest mean score of 2.10, indicating a relatively lower level of desirability for learner involvement in this aspect. This may reflect concerns about maintaining academic standards and ensuring the validity and reliability of assessment methods.

Overall, the descriptive statistics suggest a general consensus among respondents regarding the importance of involving learners in various decision-making processes within the educational context, with a particularly strong emphasis on empowering learners to shape their learning experiences through active participation and input.

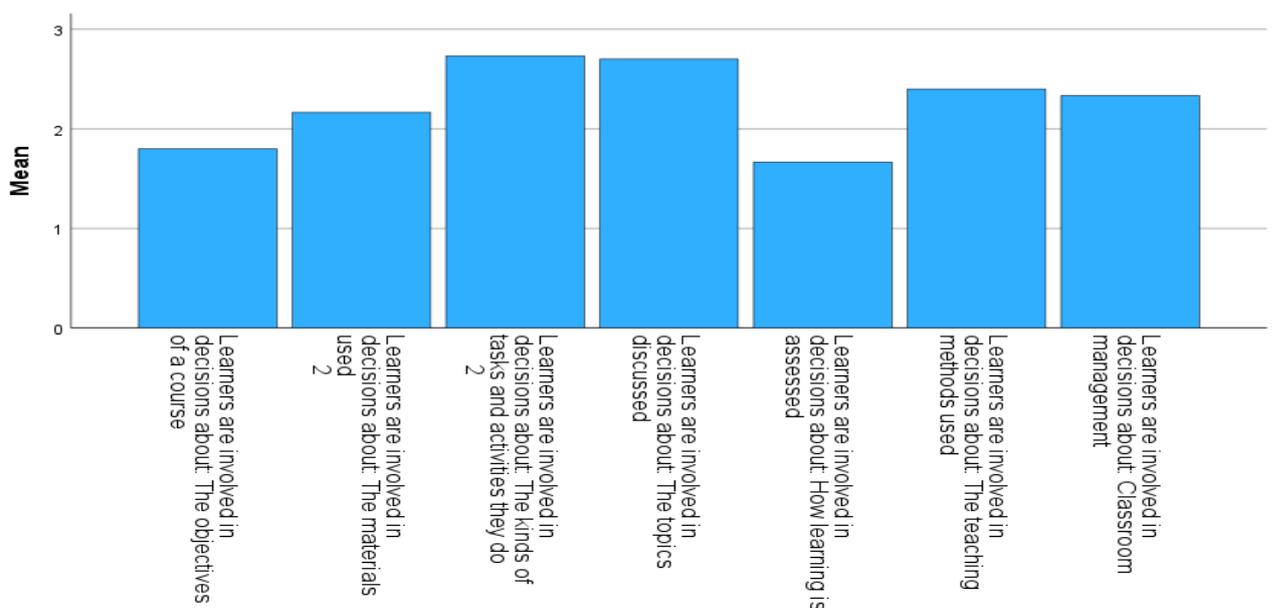


Figure 4.2 Mean levels of desirability for learners' involvement in decision-making processes

Table 4-7 Mean levels of desirability for learners' involvement in decision-making processes

	Mean
Learners are involved in decisions about: The objectives of the course	2.17
Learners are involved in decisions about: The materials used	2.90
Learners are involved in decisions about: The kinds of tasks and activities they do	3.17
Learners are involved in decisions about: The topics discussed	3.13
Learners are involved in decisions about: How learning is assessed	2.10
Learners are involved in decisions about: The teaching methods used	2.70
Learners are involved in decisions about: Classroom management "	2.57
Valid N (listwise)	

#### 4.2.2 Feasibility of Learners' Involvement in Decision-making

The feasibility of learners' involvement in decision-making processes within the educational context reveals diverse perspectives across various aspects of the learning experience. Table 4-8 assesses the feasibility of involving learners in various aspects of course decisions. The results are categorized into four levels of feasibility: unfeasible, slightly feasible, quite feasible, and very feasible. When considering the determination of course objectives, a majority of respondents, comprising 73.3%, find learner involvement to be unfeasible or only slightly feasible, indicating significant scepticism or barriers to this practice. This indicates perceived challenges in aligning learners' input with the overarching objectives set by educational institutions or curricula. Similarly, when it comes to decisions regarding the materials used in the learning process, opinions are divided, most respondents (53.3%) find it slightly feasible to involve learners in selecting course materials, with a mix of opinions ranging from unfeasible to very feasible, highlighting potential practical constraints or institutional barriers. In contrast, there is a stronger consensus on the feasibility of learners' involvement in decisions about the kinds of tasks and activities they engage in, with 56.7% of respondents considering it quite feasible or very feasible, suggesting moderate to strong support for this practice. This suggests a recognition of the potential benefits of tailoring learning experiences to individual preferences and needs. Likewise, A notable proportion (56.7%) find it quite or very feasible to involve learners in choosing discussion topics, reflecting a considerable level of support for this practice. Regarding

assessment methods, a significant majority (66.7%) find it unfeasible to involve learners in assessment decisions, indicating substantial resistance or challenges to this practice. This reflects the complexity of assessment design and the need to uphold educational standards while incorporating learner input. In terms of decisions about teaching methods and classroom management, opinions vary, with approximately half of respondents finding learner involvement feasible to some degree. However, a significant portion remains sceptical, highlighting potential concerns about maintaining pedagogical effectiveness and discipline in the classroom.

Overall, the data indicates varying levels of feasibility for involving learners in different aspects of course decisions. While involving learners in decisions about assessment and course objectives is largely viewed as unfeasible, there is more support for involving them in decisions about tasks, activities, discussion topics, teaching methods, and classroom management. This suggests that while there are significant barriers to learner involvement in certain areas, there is also recognition of the potential benefits and feasibility in others.

Table 4-8 Feasibility of Learners Involvement in Decisions Making

		Unfeasible	Slightly feasible	Quite feasible	Very feasible
Learners are involved in decisions about: The objectives of a course	N	16	6	6	2
	%	53.3%	20.0%	20.0%	6.7%
Learners are involved in decisions about: The materials used	N	6	16	5	3
	%	20.0%	53.3%	16.7%	10.0%
Learners are involved in decisions about: The kinds of tasks and activities they do	N	3	10	9	8
	%	10.0%	33.3%	30.0%	26.7%
Learners are involved in decisions about: The topics discussed	N	7	6	6	11
	%	23.3%	20.0%	20.0%	36.7%
Learners are involved in decisions about: How learning is assessed	N	20	4	2	4
	%	66.7%	13.3%	6.7%	13.3%
Learners are involved in decisions about: The teaching methods used	N	6	11	8	5
	%	20.0%	36.7%	26.7%	16.7%
Learners are involved in decisions about: Classroom management	N	8	8	10	4
	%	26.7%	26.7%	33.3%	13.3%

Across the different domains, the mean scores suggest a moderate to moderately high level of feasibility for learners' participation in decision-making processes, See Table 4-9 and Figure 4.3. For instance, decisions regarding the kinds of tasks and activities learners engage in and the topics discussed received mean scores of 2.73 and 2.70, respectively. These scores indicate that there is perceived feasibility in incorporating learner input into these aspects of the learning experience, suggesting a recognition of the potential benefits of tailoring activities and discussions to meet learners' needs and interests. Similarly, decisions about the materials used and teaching methods employed garnered mean scores of 2.17 and 2.40, respectively, indicating a moderate level of feasibility for learner involvement. This suggests that while there may be some logistical considerations to address, it is generally felt to be feasible to incorporate learner preferences and feedback into decisions regarding instructional materials and methods. However, decisions about the objectives of the course received a slightly lower mean score of 1.80, suggesting that there may be perceived challenges or limitations in involving learners in setting course objectives. This may reflect concerns about aligning learner input with broader educational goals and standards. In addition, decisions about how learning is assessed received the lowest mean score of 1.67, indicating that there may be greater perceived challenges or constraints in involving learners in assessment-related decisions. This may stem from concerns

about maintaining academic rigor and ensuring the validity and reliability of assessment methods.

Overall, while there is a general acknowledgment of the feasibility of involving learners in various decision-making processes within the educational context, the mean scores also highlight areas where there may be perceived challenges or limitations that need to be addressed to effectively incorporate learner input.

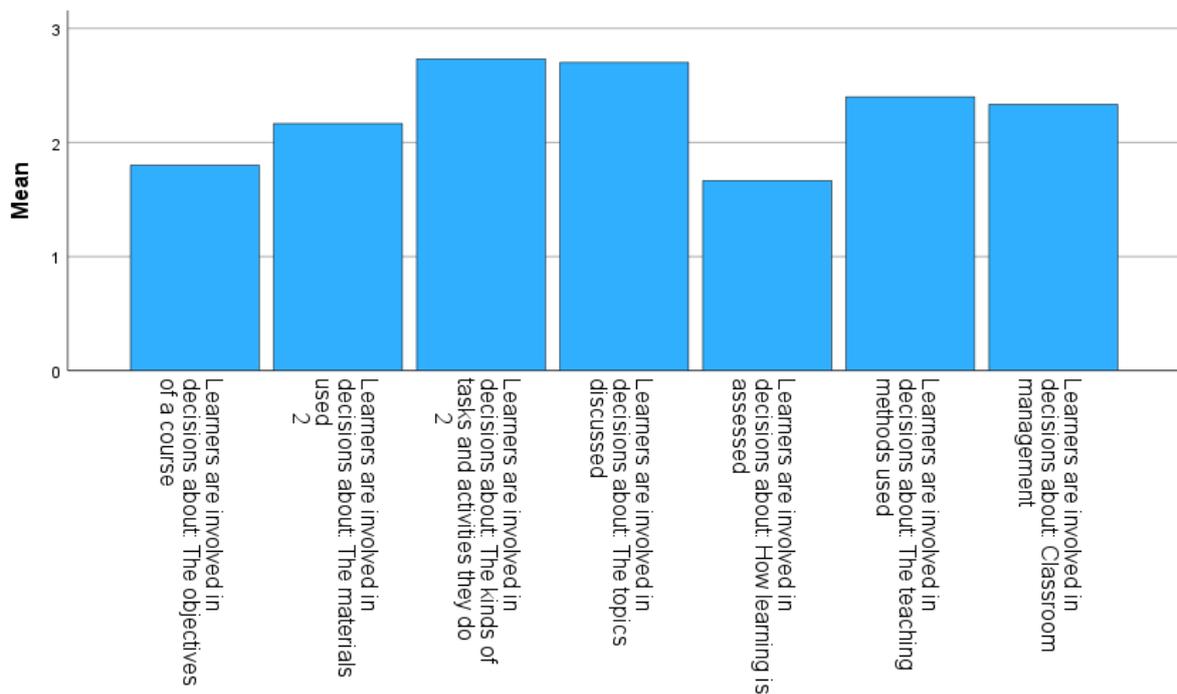


Figure 4.3 Mean levels of Feasibility for learners' involvement in decision-making processes

Table 4-9 Mean levels of Feasibility for learners' involvement in decision-making processes

	Mean
Learners are involved in decisions about: The objectives of a course	1.80
Learners are involved in decisions about: The materials used.	2.17
Learners are involved in decisions about: The kinds of tasks and activities they do.	2.73
Learners are involved in decisions about: The topics discussed	2.70
Learners are involved in decisions about: How learning is assessed	1.67
Learners are involved in decisions about: The teaching methods used	2.40
Learners are involved in decisions about: Classroom management	2.33
Valid N (listwise)	

### 4.2.3 Desirability of Learning to Learn Skills in Learners

The data provided showcases the perceived desirability of learners possessing certain skills that contribute to their overall learning experience. Table 4-10 assesses the desirability of learning to learn skills in Learners based on teachers' views. The results are categorized into four levels of desirability: undesirable, slightly desirable, quite desirable, and very desirable. Notably, there is a strong consensus among respondents regarding the importance of learners being able to identify their own needs, strengths, weaknesses, and monitor their progress. A significant majority, ranging from 86.7% to 100%, find these abilities quite desirable or very desirable. This suggests a recognition of the value of learners being self-aware and actively engaged in their own learning processes. Furthermore, the ability for learners to evaluate their own learning is also widely regarded as desirable, with 80% of respondents considering it quite desirable or very desirable. This underscores the importance of learners taking ownership of their learning outcomes and being able to reflect on their progress and understanding. Moreover, cooperative learning and independent learning are seen as valuable skills by the majority of respondents. An overwhelming majority (96.5%) find it quite or very desirable for learners to learn cooperatively, highlighting the recognition of the benefits of collaboration and teamwork in the learning environment. Similarly, the ability to learn independently is deemed quite desirable or very desirable by 90% of respondents, reflecting strong support for independent learning as a key aspect of autonomy.

Overall, the data reflects strong support among the teachers for the desirability of learners possessing various autonomous learning abilities. Most respondents find it quite or very desirable for learners to identify their own needs, strengths, and weaknesses, monitor their progress, evaluate their learning, and learn both cooperatively and independently. The results

suggest a clear preference for fostering these autonomous learning capabilities among learners. This underscores a shift towards learner-centred approaches in education, where the cultivation of these abilities is prioritised to enhance overall learning outcomes and foster lifelong learning skills.

Table 4-10 desirability of learning to learn skills in Learners

		Undesirable	Slightly desirable	Quite desirable	Very desirable
Learners have the ability to identify their own needs	N	0	4	12	14
	%	0.0%	13.3%	40.0%	46.7%
Learners have the ability to identify their own strengths	N	0	3	10	17
	%	0.0%	10.0%	33.3%	56.7%
Learners have the ability to identify their own Weaknesses	N	0	4	6	20
	%	0.0%	13.3%	20.0%	66.7%
Learners have the ability to monitor their Progress	N	1	2	12	15
	%	3.3%	6.7%	40.0%	50.0%
Learners have the ability to evaluate their own learning	N	1	5	11	13
	%	3.3%	16.7%	36.7%	43.3%
Learners have the ability to learn co-operatively	N	0	1	7	21
	%	0.0%	3.4%	24.1%	72.4%
Learners have the ability to learn independently	N	1	2	7	20
	Row N %	3.3%	6.7%	23.3%	66.7%

Across the range of abilities listed, the mean scores suggest a consistently high level of desirability for learners to possess these skills, see Table 4-11 and Figure 4.4. Notably, the abilities of learners to identify their own needs, strengths, and weaknesses received particularly high mean scores of 3.33, 3.47, and 3.53, respectively. This indicates a strong desire for learners to be self-aware and capable of recognizing their own areas for improvement, as well as their strengths and areas of interest. Similarly, the ability for learners to monitor their progress garnered a mean score of 3.37, suggesting a high level of desirability for learners to be able to track their own learning trajectories and adjust their efforts accordingly. Furthermore, the abilities of learners to evaluate their own learning, learn cooperatively, and learn independently all received mean scores above 3.20, indicating a strong preference for learners to possess these

skills. This underscores the importance of learners taking an active role in their own learning processes, whether through self-assessment, collaboration with peers, or self-directed study.

The data strongly supports the desirability of learners possessing various autonomous learning abilities. Most respondents find it quite or very desirable for learners to identify their own needs, strengths, and weaknesses; monitor their progress; evaluate their learning; and learn both cooperatively and independently. Overall, the mean values highlight a consensus among respondents regarding the importance of fostering a range of abilities among learners.

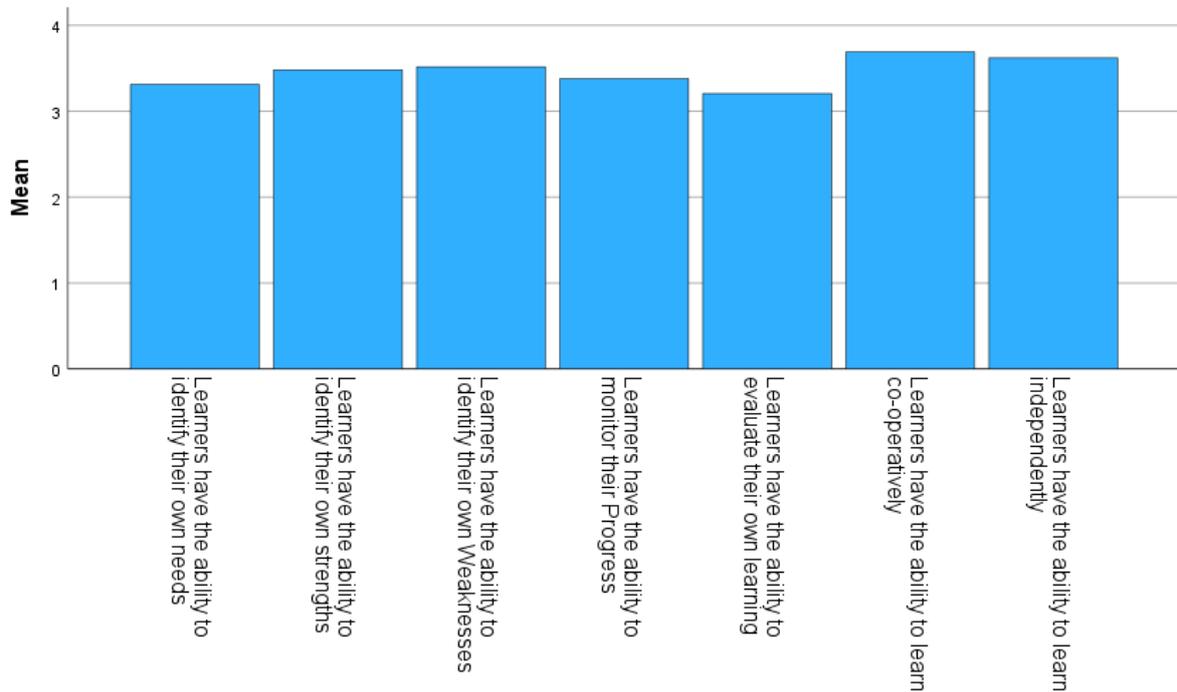


Figure 4.4 Mean levels of Desirability of learning to learn skills in learners

Table 4-11 Mean levels of Desirability of learning to learn skills in learners

	Mean
Learners have the ability to identify their own needs	3.33
Learners have the ability to identify their own strengths	3.47
Learners have the ability to identify their own Weaknesses	3.53
Learners have the ability to monitor their Progress	3.37
Learners have the ability to evaluate their own learning	3.20
Learners have the ability to learn co-operatively	3.69
Learners have the ability to learn independently	3.53

#### 4.2.4 Feasibility of Learning to Learn Skills in Learners

The feasibility of learners possessing certain abilities crucial to their educational journey is reflected in the data provided. Table 4-12 assesses the feasibility of learning to learn skills in Learners based on teachers' views. Notably, there is a general consensus among respondents regarding the feasibility of learners having the ability to identify their own needs, strengths, weaknesses, monitor their progress, and evaluate their own learning. A substantial portion, ranging from 60% to 93.3%, find these abilities quite feasible or very feasible. This indicates a perceived practicality in fostering self-awareness and self-assessment skills among learners. Furthermore, the feasibility of learners engaging in cooperative learning is widely acknowledged, with 82.8% of respondents considering cooperative learning quite feasible or very feasible, indicating high confidence in this learner's ability. This highlights a recognition of the potential benefits of collaborative learning environments in enhancing understanding and fostering teamwork skills. Likewise, the feasibility of learners engaging in independent learning is also perceived positively, with 73.3% of respondents finding it quite feasible or very feasible. This suggests an acknowledgement of learners' capacity for self-directed study and their ability to take initiative in their own learning process. Therefore, it is noteworthy that while most respondents perceive these abilities as feasible, some still find them unfeasible or only slightly feasible. This indicates potential challenges or barriers that may need to be addressed in implementing strategies to cultivate these abilities effectively.

These findings indicate a generally positive outlook on the feasibility of various learner autonomy abilities. The most confidence is shown in learners' ability to learn cooperatively, with 82.8%

finding it quite or very feasible. However, there are mixed views about learners’ ability to evaluate their own learning, with 20% considering it unfeasible. Overall, respondents generally believe that learners have the capacity to develop and exercise autonomy to varying degrees. Further explorations will be done in phase two.

Overall, the data underscores the importance that teachers attached to fostering a range of abilities among learners to empower them in their educational journey, while also highlighting the need to address potential feasibility concerns to ensure the successful implementation of learner-centered approaches in education.

Table 4-12 Feasibility of learning to learn skills in Learners

		Unfeasible	Slightly feasible	Quite feasible	Very feasible
Learners have the ability to identify their own needs	N	4	13	8	5
	%	13.3%	43.3%	26.7%	16.7%
Learners have the ability to identify their own strengths	N	2	11	10	7
	%	6.7%	36.7%	33.3%	23.3%
Learners have the ability to identify their own Weaknesses	N	1	15	9	5
	%	3.3%	50.0%	30.0%	16.7%
Learners have the ability to monitor their Progress	N	2	12	12	4
	%	6.7%	40.0%	40.0%	13.3%
Learners have the ability to evaluate their own learning	N	6	12	7	5
	%	20.0%	40.0%	23.3%	16.7%
Learners have the ability to learn co-operatively	N	1	4	18	6
	%	3.4%	13.8%	62.1%	20.7%
Learners have the ability to learn independently	N	2	10	12	6
	%	6.7%	33.3%	40.0%	20.0%

Across the listed abilities, the mean scores suggest a generally moderate to moderately high level of feasibility for learners to develop these skills, see Table 4-13 and Figure 4.5. The abilities for learners to identify their own needs, strengths, and weaknesses received mean scores ranging from 2.47 to 2.73. While these scores indicate a moderate level of feasibility, they also suggest that there may be some perceived challenges or limitations in facilitating the development of these self-awareness skills among learners. Similarly, the ability for learners to monitor their progress received a mean score of 2.60, indicating a moderate level of feasibility for learners to track their own learning trajectories. This suggests that while it may be feasible for learners to engage in self-monitoring, there may also be practical considerations or support needed to facilitate this process effectively. Additionally, the feasibility of learners evaluating their own learning received a mean score of 2.37, suggesting that there may be perceived

challenges or constraints in fostering this ability among learners. This may reflect concerns about ensuring the validity and reliability of self-assessment practices. In contrast, the abilities of learners to learn cooperatively and independently received higher mean scores of 3.00 and 2.73, respectively. These scores suggest a relatively higher level of feasibility for learners to engage in collaborative and independent learning, perhaps reflecting the recognition of the benefits and practicality of these approaches in the educational setting.

Overall, while there is a general acknowledgement of the feasibility of learners developing various abilities, the mean scores also highlight areas where there may be perceived challenges or limitations that need to be addressed to effectively support learners in cultivating these skills.

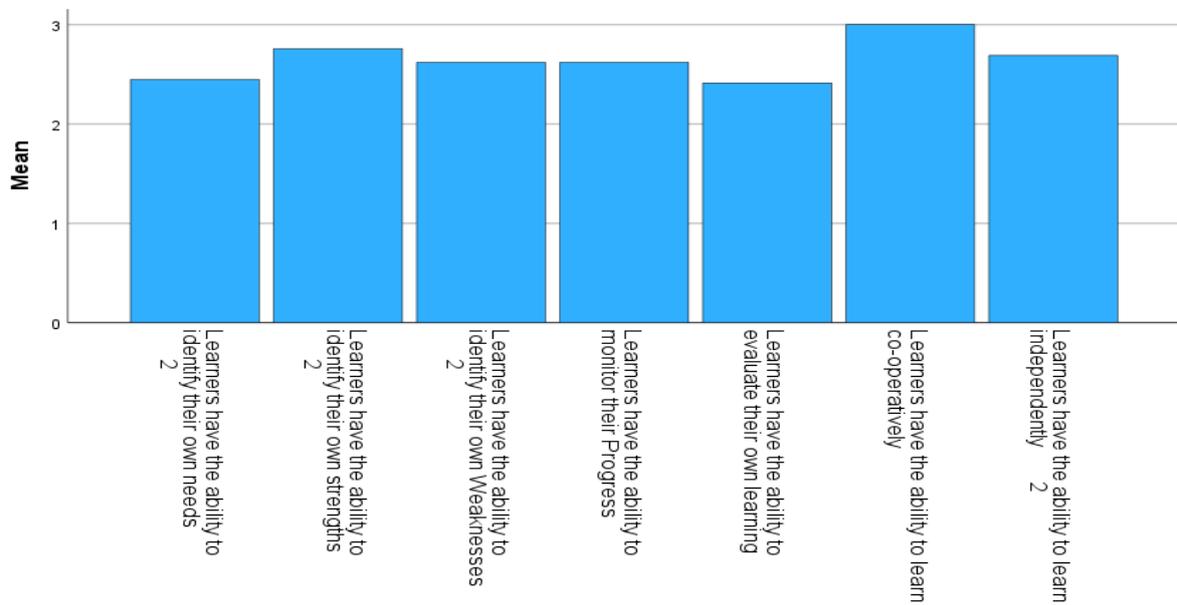


Figure 4.5 Mean levels of Feasibility of learning to learn skills in learners

Table 4-13 Mean levels of Feasibility of learning to learn skills in learners

	Mean
Learners have the ability to identify their own needs	2.47
Learners have the ability to identify their own strengths	2.73
Learners have the ability to identify their own Weaknesses	2.60
Learners have the ability to monitor their Progress	2.60
Learners have the ability to evaluate their own learning	2.37
Learners have the ability to learn co-operatively	3.00
Learners have the ability to learn independently	2.73

### 4.3 Summary of the Chapter

In summary, this chapter provided an overview of the teachers' views regarding the development of learner autonomy in the research context. The analysis of the four dimensions of learner autonomy (sociocultural, political, technical, and psychological) reveals a comprehensive understanding of teachers' beliefs about promoting autonomy in learners. Sociocultural, political, technical, and psychological perspectives each play a crucial role, with psychological aspects receiving the highest emphasis. Regarding teachers' views on the desirability and feasibility of learners' abilities, teachers generally view the development of learners' abilities, such as identifying their own needs, strengths, and weaknesses, monitoring progress, and evaluating their own learning, as both desirable and feasible. However, while involving learners in course decisions is generally seen as desirable, its feasibility varies, with some aspects being more challenging to implement than others. While some aspects, like the topics discussed and the kinds of tasks and activities, are seen as quite feasible, involving learners in decisions about the objectives of the course and how learning is assessed is considered less feasible. This comprehensive understanding of teachers' beliefs and attitudes provides valuable insights into the complexities of developing learner autonomy in educational settings.

Most importantly, this chapter represents the first phase of the study, providing a comprehensive quantitative overview of the context in which learner autonomy (LA) is being implemented in Saudi higher education. By examining teachers' views, this phase has established a foundational understanding of the concept of LA from a broader perspective. The findings have highlighted the

importance of sociocultural, political, technical, and psychological perspectives, as well as the perceived desirability and feasibility of various autonomy-supportive practices.

However, quantitative data alone cannot fully capture the complexities of how teachers perceive and practice learner autonomy. Therefore, the next phase of the study will employ a qualitative approach, involving in-depth investigations with four participants. Phase two aims to explore deeper into their beliefs, teaching practices, and the internal and external influences that shape their approach to promoting LA. Certain surprising elements and unanswered questions that warrant further exploration stand out from the quantitative findings. For instance, while many teachers express positive beliefs about the importance of LA, it remains unclear whether these beliefs translate into consistent classroom practices. Do teachers practice what they perceive as important for fostering autonomy? How do personal and contextual factors impact the actual implementation of LA strategies?

The next chapter will address these questions by closely examining the individual experiences of the four selected participants. Through detailed interviews and classroom observations, this qualitative phase will provide rich, contextual insights into teachers' stated beliefs and their real-world practices. This will help us understand the practical challenges and opportunities teachers face in promoting LA, thereby connecting directly with the aims of the research to investigate how and why English language teachers support LA, the influences on their pedagogical practices, and the impact of these on the implementation of LA within educational policy changes. By implementing a mixed method to examine these aspects, the upcoming chapter aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering a comprehensive understanding of teachers' beliefs and actual teaching practices in promoting learner autonomy. It ultimately contributes valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders aiming to enhance autonomous learning environments.

## Chapter 5 Main Study: Four Cases

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the study findings from data gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and post-classroom observation interviews with the main study participants are presented to answer the study's research questions (See 1.6). None of these research instruments individually can fully answer the research questions, but together they provide valuable insight into English language teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the development of learner autonomy, focusing specifically on teachers' views about their roles concerning LA, as well as exploring how internal and external factors influence English language teachers' actual teaching practices in higher education, especially during a time of educational policy change in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. A major part of the study was to understand teachers' beliefs toward LA, together with the internal and external influences on their pedagogical practices.

The following sections present data and results for four cases, starting with brief demographic information for each case. Each case is examined individually, with each case contributing uniquely to answering the research questions. The first research question, "What are the English language teachers' beliefs in a Saudi university about the concept of Learner Autonomy?" is addressed by discussing how English language teachers perceived the concept of learner autonomy. This involves the analysis of teachers' understanding of learner autonomy to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' beliefs, followed by the teachers' viewpoints about their teaching practices and their role in supporting learner autonomy, the qualities of an autonomous learner, and their views about their current students. Additionally, it explores how teachers promote LA and how their practices are formed, not only by focusing on teachers' understanding of the concept of LA but also by taking into consideration other influences in the context in which language learning happens. This chapter provides insight into teachers' beliefs and practices regarding developing learner autonomy in a Saudi university.

Therefore, this chapter presents the emerging findings and concepts that arise from investigating the contextual and individual factors that have affected the teachers' pedagogical practices and teaching decisions, and how they have engaged with and dealt with them in the educational context. The individual examination of each case will shed light on how different teachers

navigate and respond to these factors, providing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in fostering learner autonomy.

By examining each case individually, we gain detailed insights into the specific beliefs, practices, and contexts of each teacher. Each case contributes uniquely to answering the research questions by highlighting distinct perspectives and strategies for developing learner autonomy. For example, one teacher might emphasize the importance of self-efficacy and reflective practices, while another might focus on navigating institutional constraints to create autonomous learning environments.

Collectively, these individual cases contribute to a broader understanding of the research questions. By comparing and contrasting the findings from each case, we can identify common themes and patterns, as well as unique challenges and successes. This comprehensive analysis helps to construct a holistic view of how English language teachers' beliefs and practices interact with internal and external factors to influence learner autonomy in a Saudi university context. Thus, both individually and collectively, these cases enrich our understanding of the complexities involved in promoting learner autonomy in Saudi higher education.

## **5.2 Maram**

Maram is an English language teacher with 11 years of teaching experience. She has a Bachelor's degree in applied linguistics and a master's degree in teaching English as a second language from the United States. Regarding her professional development, she reported that she attended several workshops related to practical topics that helped her in her teaching. She stated that she has other administrative roles and is assigned to participate in the planning committee for the Department of English. Additionally, she is now a planning specialist.

### **5.2.1 Maram's Beliefs**

#### **5.2.1.1 Maram's Beliefs about Learner Autonomy**

Regarding learner autonomy, Maram was asked about her understanding of the concept of learner autonomy in the first interview. She explained the concept of learner autonomy as having 'the internal drive' and 'ability' to learn without external factors pushing or dragging the learner. In the following extract, she expressed her beliefs about learner autonomy, she said:

Learner autonomy; I think if I want to define it, I would say it's when the learners have the drive from inside to learn. You don't have to have external factors, as I said to push too,

you don't drag them to learn, they want to learn, and they know how to do it. So, if I want to just say it in two words the desire and the know how to get them. So, they know how to do it, and at the same time, they want to do it; to do the Learning. (M INT1)

She perceived learner autonomy as an attribute of the learner for having the desire and know-how to learn. She believes that learner autonomy is related to learners' desirability to learn and be equipped with the essential skills to know how to learn. At the same time, she stressed the importance of the teacher's role in supporting students in developing these qualities. In the first interview, she highlighted that *"As a teacher, you have a significant role in guiding them towards autonomous learning."*

Maram highlights her teaching philosophy, which emphasises the importance of developing learner autonomy as a lifelong skill, stating that

One of my teaching goals is that my students not only pass the course or succeed but also know how to learn. It is a skill for life. So, I think, as a teacher, it gives you hope. When you build autonomy in your students, it gives you hope because they now know how to learn, and when they go into the future, she has the equipment to learn...the most important thing that the student knows is that... She knows that she has the equipment to go next time inshallah. So, as a teacher, I think it is one of the important things that you build Learner autonomy in your students, because you are helping and guiding them. Moreover, this is the goal of teaching. The teaching is not just to give you information and go. Teaching involves the students and teaches them how to learn. Moreover, the most important thing is that sometimes people think that if you think about the learner autonomy, they cancel the teacher role. Actually, I do not think it's conflicted. The teacher has an important role. It is connected. (M Int1)

This extract indicates Maram's awareness of the significance of developing learner autonomy as a key educational goal. Her goal as a teacher is more than just helping students pass the course; she has the desire to develop their lifelong learning skills, which she sees as valuable for life. Her teaching philosophy emphasises the long-term benefits of equipping students with the skills to learn independently "It is a skill for life". Her statement that "this is the goal of teaching" highlights that the purpose of education for her goes beyond transmitting information. The main teaching goal, according to her, is to involve students in the learning process and teach them how to learn on their own. At the same time, she highlights the continued importance of the

teacher's role in guiding and supporting students. She challenges the misconception that promoting learner autonomy "cancel the teacher role", arguing instead for a collaborative and supportive approach where teachers' involvement is vital in guiding students towards becoming autonomous learners. This belief highlights the importance of balancing teacher support with fostering student independence to achieve meaningful and lasting educational outcomes.

Maram Continues to express her view about the qualities of an autonomous learner. She described in the following extract:

I think an autonomous learner is the one who shows interest in the learning process...I think part of the autonomy is when you take charge of your learning and are aware of it in a way that allows you to implement it in your life. So, I think these three things are important: showing interest, doing well on the assessment (and it doesn't have to be a good grade, but at least understanding how to do it). When given an assessment, she can demonstrate the result of her learning. Finally, she is aware of her learning process and can implement it in real life. (M Int1)

The above extract shows that Maram offers a comprehensive view of learner autonomy, focusing on several important qualities: interest in the learning process, performance in assessments, and the application of learning to real life. Maram begins by emphasizing that an autonomous learner shows interest in the learning process. This highlights the importance of intrinsic motivation as a foundation for autonomy. Learners who are genuinely interested in their studies are more likely to take initiative, seek additional resources, and engage deeply with the material. Additionally, she links autonomy with the idea of taking charge of one's learning and being aware of the learning process. This reflects the metacognitive aspect of autonomy where learners need to be aware of their learning strategies, monitor their progress, and adjust their approaches when necessary. Moreover, she emphasizes the importance of being able to implement learning in real life, which highlights the transferability of knowledge as a characteristic of an autonomous learner. Autonomous learners are not just passive recipients of information; they are able to apply what they learn in practical, meaningful ways outside the classroom. She notes that some students may learn without awareness, but autonomy involves consciousness of one's learning. This observation highlights the need for active engagement and reflection in learning. Autonomy is not just about independent study; it is about intentional and reflective learning.

### 5.2.1.2 Maram's Beliefs about Her Role in Developing Learner Autonomy

The dataset reveals how the participant views her role in developing learner autonomy and how she perceives herself as an English language teacher. Maram perceives her role primarily as a 'guide', and 'giver'. She emphasises helping students navigate the complexities of language learning by providing them with the necessary tools and resources to be responsible for their learning. Maram highlights the importance of guiding students toward autonomous learning, recognizing the unique opportunity language teachers have due to extended contact hours with students. In the first interview, she stated that

I think if I would describe my role. I would say I am guider and giver...In the class my students spent with me at least 10 hours a week. So, you as a teacher have a very important role to guide them towards autonomous learning. Even if they don't really reach the fully independent learners, at least they will be aware that they need to take the responsibility when they think about themselves. 'I have to take responsibility for myself. I don't need only people to tell me do this and do that. No, I need to do it, and know how to do it, and learn how to do it'. So, I think this is why it's important for the teacher to guide the students because she has the time and especially for language learning. I think we have this blessing to guide students to develop autonomy, sometimes other subjects like math or physics, maybe teachers don't really have the time to do this. But in language classes, I think you manage to establish this in your students. (M Int1)

The above extract highlights Maram's view about the importance of the teacher's role in guiding students toward autonomy, especially in the context of language learning. By identifying herself as both a 'guide' and a 'giver', she highlights the responsibility of providing students with knowledge and helping learners to develop their skills. She stresses the importance of responsibility and awareness as key components of autonomy. Maram emphasizes that autonomy is not just about working independently but about students realizing that they must take responsibility for their own progress. Moreover, she underlines the unique advantages of language learning in fostering autonomy. The interactive and communicative nature of language classes, combined with the significant amount of time teachers spend with their students '*my students spent with me at least 10 hours a week*'. This helps in creating an encouraging environment to develop learner autonomy. She believes that language teachers have the 'blessing' of guiding students to develop learner autonomy in language classes compared to other subjects which may be more content-heavy and structured, leaving less time for teachers to focus on promoting autonomy.

She continues to describe her role as a guide, facilitator, giver and partner in the learning process. She views her students not as followers, but as partners working together to achieve common educational goals. She indicated that

I think I like to describe myself as a guide. I like to see my students and I work together on this process and achieve their goals which is trying to carry them from one phase to another. So this is how I see the learning process with my students as partners and the relationship between us is important. So that's why I prefer to be like a guide or facilitator. Giver also, but not like giver in the negative way, but in the positive way. I really do see my students as partners in learning, not as, like followers. (M FUInt2)

In the above excerpt, Maram provides further insight into her self-conception as a teacher and emphasizes the importance of her role as a 'guide' and 'facilitator' in the learning process. Her preference for the term guide and facilitator suggests that she sees her role as helping students navigate their learning journey, rather than dictating or controlling the process. She views teaching as a collaborative effort where the teacher and students are partners. She emphasizes the importance of working together with her students to achieve their goals, which creates a sense of mutual respect and collaboration. Maram's teaching philosophy reflects a learner-centred approach, where the teacher acts as a guide and partner, helping students develop both the motivation and skills to become autonomous learners.

Maram believes that there are three significant qualities that the teacher should have to be a good language teacher: be patient, avoid judgement, and be flexible. She emphasises that "patience is very important"; she elaborates in the first interview that

So, patience, not being judgmental and flexibility. I think teachers need to be flexible because flexibility gives them a room to change and a room to improve themselves, and it gives their students the room to show themselves. When the teacher is very strict, students will become afraid to speak or express themselves. (M INT1)

In the above extract, Maram's emphasis on "patience, avoiding judgment, and flexibility" seems to reflect an empathetic and supportive approach to language teaching. These qualities align with her belief in the importance of creating a supportive and adaptive classroom environment, where students feel empowered to take risks and engage actively in the learning process. Maram's teaching philosophy highlights the affective and psychological aspects of language

learning, understanding that a positive, supportive, and flexible learning environment is critical for student success.

When Maram was asked about her teaching beliefs and teaching philosophy and the extent to which her beliefs have changed over time, she stated that:

I would think about myself from the perspective of my teaching philosophy. As a teacher, I think I have really changed. When I started in 2013, I was a very different teacher from the teacher who I am now, it's totally different...I think one of the things that I see myself as very flexible is changing and adapting. I really like to take on new things, especially when teaching new generations. They are not like the generation from 10 years ago, so I adapt my teaching accordingly. (M INT1)

In the above extract, she emphasises on the importance of flexibility and being open to new approaches, especially when teaching new generations of students. For example, the data indicates that Maram's teaching approach has evolved over time, particularly regarding the use of students' first language (L1) in the classroom. Initially, she viewed using L1 as detrimental, believing it compromised her effectiveness as a teacher. She comments *"in the past, I can't use Arabic (L1) in my classes. it was impossible. I will feel it is something bad if I do, and I will see myself as a bad teacher"* Over time, she realized that incorporating L1 could enhance student engagement and create a positive, comfortable learning environment. She stated that

With days and after I studied my masters, I discovered that I was doing something wrong. Why I should eliminate something that it's actually my student's identity! it's part of them, how can I eliminate it. (M INT1)

She indicated that this shift has allowed her to foster a more compassionate and inclusive classroom atmosphere, encouraging participation and reducing anxiety associated with language learning.

So as a teacher, I think I really changed as a teacher when I look back. I was a really different teacher from the teacher who I am now; it's totally different. And I think this is healthy thing... it's actually increasing the positive environment in the class and all of that. So, I was really strict, structured; but now I'm more fluid, I'm more flexible. Lastly, I think I really like that my students even if they don't succeed academically, at least they know how to learn. This is the most important goal for me... I can't make every student

pass, but I can during the semester develop their lifelong skills and they know how to learn. So, this is one of my new goals. I would say I didn't think about teaching like that before. (M INT1)

The above extract showed the development of Maram's teaching approach and her reflection on what sort of teacher she was. The data showed that Maram's role as a language teacher had changed over time. Comparing herself as a teacher in the past and now; she used to view teaching as something structured, but now she feels it should be more fluid and adaptable. Maram's transformation in teaching philosophy reflects a broader shift from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach. She now values creating a safe space for students to learn and make mistakes, promoting their involvement and autonomy.

The data showed that Maram also views herself as a 'learning partner', emphasizing mutual learning and growth. She conveys to her students that learning is a shared journey, enhancing their sense of safety and promoting autonomy. She stated in the first interview:

Every time when I finish the semester, I tell my students, I enjoyed learning with you because I am learning with them. Now, I start the class with it. I tell them 'I'm really excited to learn with you. So, when you give your students that everyone is a learner, even the teacher is a learner. This promote the feeling of safety to learn among my students because some of them come from strict educational environment where they would be afraid to show their learning, especially the mistakes. So, when you give them the safe spot in the classroom environment, I think they will develop autonomy. They feel safe to grow.

The above extract shows the dramatic shift and change in Maram's role as a teacher that occurred during her early years of teaching compared to now. This change is how Maram perceived her role as a teacher and how she practices her teaching and how she interacted with her learners compared to the early years in the profession, which were more dominated by self-control aspect and having the desire to impose her teaching beliefs and philosophy. Years later, Maram's role and practices have shifted from merely focusing on teaching and delivering the content to becoming dominated by involving the learners and providing a safe and encouraging learning atmosphere. Her role shifted to a great extent from teacher-centred to student-centred and her teaching now is more dominated by valuing human feelings and individual differences.

In the first interview, she emphasised the significant role of group work on students' performance and learning development, stating that

I really like group work mostly. This is one of the important things I like... I think cooperative learning is very important in the class, and it promotes—I will steal your word—it promotes autonomy. When you involve them, they become very, very, very energetic. And this is why I adopted this technique. It's a very, very good technique.

She continued to express the significance of group work in developing students' responsibility for their own learning:

You know, when you just give her the piece of information, she will just take it and go...while with group work, by the end, she feels—or the group feels—they did this, so I think it's a really nice thing to see. That's why I really like cooperative learning, especially pair or group work like that. (M INT1)

The data illustrates a dynamic and evolving perception of the teacher's role in developing learner autonomy. Maram's journey from a rigid, teacher-centred approach to a flexible, student-centred philosophy highlights the importance of adapting teaching practices to meet the needs of current learners. Her emphasis on guiding students toward autonomy, creating a safe and inclusive classroom environment, and fostering mutual learning underscores the multifaceted role that she adopted as a language teacher. By integrating students' identities and interests into the learning process, Maram exemplifies how teacher can effectively balance authority and partnership to promote learner autonomy and foster a supportive and engaging educational experience.

### **5.2.1.3 Maram's Beliefs about Her Current Learners**

Maram teaches English to preparatory year students with basic language proficiency based on their placement test and results. Regarding her current learners, Maram was asked how she considers her students' level of autonomy. She states:

Unfortunately, not all of them. But I don't know why the level of autonomy is really low. If you have 30 students, only about five show a high level of independent learning. This is very low. I try to improve it. I try to increase it. (M Int1)

Maram observes the students' level of autonomy in English language classes varied significantly. She indicated that only about five out of thirty students display a high level of independent learning, which she considers alarmingly low. She stated that:

Sometimes I think because of the school system. Not all of them, but some of them. It's the new generation, especially since they get everything quickly, often through mobiles or technology. So, they don't really like the learning process because it feels too slow for them. I think this leads them to the negative side, making it difficult for them to become independent learners... This should support them in becoming autonomous learners, but if they are not aware of this, they will not move in that direction. And unfortunately, the student just wants to be spoon-fed, you know, just give the information quickly. She wants everything to be quick and finished quickly. They need a wake-up call to start thinking of themselves as autonomous learners, or independent learners. But if you just leave it to them, they do not really have enough awareness. (M INT1)

In the above extract, she indicates that only a small percentage of her students show independence in learning, which she attributes to the school system and the new generation's desire for quick results. Moreover, she attributed the low level of autonomy to several factors, including a lack of awareness about the importance of learner autonomy, the fast-paced nature of technology, and the school system. (See 5.2.3). She noted that the students need to be supported to become autonomous learners because change their learning strategies from depending on their teacher and raised their awareness of the importance of learner autonomy. This indicates Maram's awareness of the important role for the teacher to support learner autonomy among their learners.

Overall, the data in this section has shown that Maram's beliefs about autonomy are one of the influential factors for her teaching practices. However, teachers' beliefs are not the only factors that influence the teachers; practices; other factors will be discussed later. The data presented here shows that Maram has a positive theoretical understanding of the concept of learner autonomy, and she is aware of the important role of the teacher in supporting learner autonomy. She indicated that she implemented a number of teaching techniques to support her students to develop aspects of learner autonomy, providing examples such as implementing cooperative learning and group work, promoting responsibility for learning, adopting inductive teaching methods and student-led learning. She also reported using personalizing questions and building rapport, encouraging independent thinking and information-seeking, and providing flexible and doable tasks which suited the students' proficiency language level.

The next section provides an analysis of the Maram's observed teaching practices especially those that relate to the teacher's role in supporting learner autonomy. It also examines the observed classroom dynamic, the teaching approach, approaches to support learner autonomy and finally, the factors that influenced their teaching practices in regard to LA.

## **5.2.2 Maram's Teaching Practices to Develop Learner Autonomy**

In this section, the actual teaching practices related to various aspects of learner autonomy are examined. This includes a focus on the teacher's role in supporting learner autonomy, adopted teaching techniques, students' engagement, and classroom dynamics as indicators of fostering the four dimensions of learner autonomy (technical, psychological, political, and sociocultural). Additionally, the reflection of her beliefs in her teaching practices and the underlying reasons for these practices are investigated. The classroom observations for Maram were held on February, March 2023, and three post-observation interviews have been conducted. The data provided insights into her teaching methods, student engagement, and the overall learning environment concerning her role in developing learner autonomy.

### **5.2.2.1 Classroom Description**

The first observation was conducted on Wednesday, February 1, 2023. The researcher was invited to observe three sessions of a general English language course, with each session lasting around 60 minutes. The participants had 10 sessions every week with the same group of students this semester. The course focused on teaching English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) for the students in preparatory year. It is a requirement for students to pass this course to proceed to the next year. The students were beginners in the preparatory year and based on her description they were repeating the course for the second time. The class layout was in mixed arrangement, and is described in the following observational field notes:

The classroom layout consisted of rows of tables, and some students were forming a semi-circle on the side of the class next to the wall. The teacher stood in front of the students, and she walked around during activities. The class size was very large, and the resources used in the class included a projector, blackboard, PowerPoint, and printable worksheets. There were only 14 students attended the class, and 7 students were absent. (Field notes, MA first classroom observation, Feb)

The sequences of the observed three sessions were almost the same. In the first observed class, the lesson included reviewing simple and compound sentences, fragments, run-ons, tenses and

writing to help the student to develop English language skills. The focus of this class was on using grammar and writing accurate sentences with correct verb form. At the beginning of the class, the teacher clearly presented the lesson's goals and the topics to be covered.

The classroom observations data and post-interviews findings showed that Maram demonstrated several learning strategies and practices which serve as indicators of supporting learner autonomy in her class. The next section will provide more details into Maram's teaching practices regarding the development of LA.

#### **5.2.2.2 Teaching Approach to Develop Learner Autonomy**

One of the teaching approaches to developing learner autonomy is raising the students' awareness of the learning task by telling them what to do and why they do it. One piece of evidence of Maram's support for learner autonomy was her assignment of activities for students to work outside the class, along with clear justification for the activity and instructions on how to accomplish it. For example, Maram increased the students' awareness of their language learning, specifically focusing on the everyday language surrounding them. At the same time, she assisted the students to be involved and take responsibility for their learning process. The following extract from the observation field notes shows a situation in which the teacher was trying to foster learner autonomy through the way she managed the class and the activities that she implemented in her class.

The lesson started with a warm-up activity in which the teacher opened the discussion board and presented some vocabulary from students' work on the blackboard. One of the students post "ministry of education." The teacher asked her, "where did you learn this?" Students started to participate and engage with the teacher. They mentioned that they learned new words from various resources such as "magazine" or from other classes. The teacher then encouraged the students to take responsibility for their learning by looking for new words and writing them down online to discuss them in the classroom. She praised the students for their creativity and encouraged them to continue learning new words.

The above extract from the observational field notes for the first classroom observation presents an example of Maram's role and her teaching practices in developing learner autonomy. It helps encourage students to take responsibility for their learning and motivates them to direct their learning, aligning with the development of the psychological dimension of learner autonomy.

When Maram was asked about the purpose of this activity in the first follow-up interview after the first classroom observation, she stated that

My goal was to make them aware. You know, when you just go outside and look or listen, don't just listen without being aware. I think it's beneficial because now they look at language and think, 'Oh, I need to focus on whether there is a new word for me or not.' Especially for this group, I think it's important. They build awareness that we are surrounded by English, but we don't always see it. This is why I think it's beneficial. (M FUInt1)

The above extract provides insights into Maram's reasons for her actions inside the classroom, highlighting the importance of this practice. She indicated that the purpose was to raise the students' awareness of the English language in their surroundings, believing this would be beneficial and help in developing their noticing skills. This shows that Maram tried to implement autonomy-supportive practices and recognized the importance of beyond-classroom activities to foster lifelong learning skills.

In the interview after the second classroom observation, Maram was asked to reflect on her experience teaching low-proficiency students and how she engaged them in her class. It was observed that most of the students were active and engaged with both the teacher and their peers, regardless of their low proficiency levels. Maram reflected on the relationship between students' language proficiency levels and their engagement in the learning process. She highlighted that teaching students with low language proficiency is a motivating factor for both herself and her students. This demonstrates that students can be engaged and motivated regardless of their proficiency level. She commented that:

"First of all, as I told you about my students' profile, they are repeaters and sometimes people take this as a negative point, but in my case, I think it's a positive point because it pushes them all the time...It is a form of intrinsic motivation. I think this is one of the factors I can't ignore. They are always eager to learn, even if their proficiency is low. Another factor is that they have become accustomed to my teaching style. So, even if they don't initially want to participate, I will encourage them. All the students need to answer and participate, and I think they know this." (M FUint2)

In the above extract, Maram reflects on her students' engagement in her classroom, attributing it to their status as repeaters and her teaching methods. She emphasized the positive aspects of teaching repeater students, viewing it as 'an intrinsic kind of motivation' for them. She perceived

her students' level from a positive stance, focusing on the motivational factor of repetition, their eagerness to learn, and the importance of encouraging active involvement as part of her teaching approach. Her view highlights the flexibility and commitment of these students to their own learning journey. Therefore, her positive perspective on her students reflects her stated beliefs from the first interview into her teaching practices.

Moreover, her teaching approach to develop LA emphasizes personalization and guidance, rather than merely transmitting knowledge. For example, in the first classroom observation, she encouraged her students to participate and being engaged in the classroom in a very compassionate manner. when the students struggle, she encourages them to ask for help and informs them that making mistakes is acceptable. When she was asked about her classroom environment, she said:

I felt this gives them a safer space to speak because they didn't feel ok. They will say 'I didn't know English so I can't speak in this class'. So, I think this gives a safe space. I usually ask them what did you learn from this activity? What is the word that you learned? Also, if they make mistakes; I said 'it's OK' or I ask them why. Why did you have this answer? Sometimes their reasoning tells you about the weak points, and how they rationalize things. I want them to know this part of the learning process. We didn't make mistakes without a reason; and we have the right to talk in the class. I think this is my approach. (M FUint1)

Additionally, classroom observations and follow-up interviews data revealed that Maram prefers a mixed approach based on her learners' needs and preferences, sometimes using traditional methods and other times using communicative methods. She aims to balance teacher-centred and student-centred approaches in her class. The following text from the class observation data illustrates Maram's flexibility in meeting her students' needs:

Some students were struggling with the activity, so the teacher offered help and allowed them to use Arabic. The teacher used English and provided translations in Arabic. For example, she translated "swap" and "expand" to make the activity clear for the students. After they finished writing simple sentences for the provided pictures, she asked them to swap the pictures with other groups and expand the sentences to make them compound sentences. (M obs2)

This example shows how Maram translates her teaching beliefs into action, allowing students to use their first language when needed. In the first interview, Maram expressed her philosophy and

how her beliefs have changed dramatically regarding the use of the first language in class, now considering it part of her learners' identity. In the first follow-up interview, she indicated that this helps create a safe environment and increases student involvement in the classroom. She stated:

Their language proficiency is really low. So even when I ask questions, I say it's OK to answer me in Arabic. You know the answer in Arabic; that means you understand me. So, this is a start. At least you understand what I'm saying. Answer in Arabic. Once she answers, I tell her the answer in English. I felt this gives them a safer space to speak. (M FUint1)

Maram allowed them to answer in Arabic and then provided the English translation to encourage language development. She continued:

I tried it in the beginning and thought it was OK. After we finished, I asked them what they learned from this activity. What is the word that you learned? One student said, 'Miss, (Almiamari) what's the word in English?' She said 'architect,' and since then, she used the word 'architect' every day because it was a new word for her and she was interested in this job. (M FUint1)

This incident showcases Maram's flexibility in her teaching approach, demonstrating her responsiveness to the diverse learning needs and preferences within her classroom. Additionally, it has been found that one of Maram's key teaching strategies is creating a safe and comfortable environment for her learners. For example, Maram's tolerance for her learners' mistakes and her encouragement to express their thoughts and justify their answers help develop their reasoning abilities. She highlighted:

If they make mistakes, I say it's OK or I ask them why. Why did you have this answer? Sometimes their reasoning reveals the weak points, how they rationalize things, and then... They feel it's OK to make mistakes. We didn't make mistakes without a reason, and we have the right to talk in class. I think this is my approach. (M FUint2)

This is evidence of her effort to build a safe and supportive atmosphere in the classroom to assist students in developing their language learning and cognitive skills. It has been found that this approach fosters a safe space for learners, contributing to the affective dimension of learner

autonomy by reducing the fear of making mistakes. This, in turn, enhances overall engagement and motivation in the classroom.

Moreover, the classroom observation data illustrates Maram's adoption of multimodal teaching, incorporating various activities and explanations to cater to learners' differences and their different learning styles, and integrating technology. This has been noticed during the classroom observation. For example,

In the last activity of the class, the teacher divided the students into four teams and asked if they had an internet connection. She then shared a barcode via Telegram. Each team was given a different prompt to write about: team one had to describe themselves as a child in one sentence, team two had to describe their old house or room in one sentence, team three had to write about what they did yesterday, and team four had to write about what they did last summer. The teacher used technology in the classroom, including a document application for the students to write their sentences. She walked around the class to check on their progress and asked them to write one simple sentence in the past using the document application. The students were very engaged in the activity. (M Obs2)

In the post-observation interview, Maram stated that she incorporated technology, such as Google Docs, to save time, provide a collaborative space for students, and track students' answers. She acknowledged that she hasn't deeply considered the impact of technology on student learning, indicating a potential area for further exploration, but she emphasised the time-saving aspect. She stated:

I think why I usually use Google Docs is because it's a collaborative space and at the same time it saves time. This is why I sometimes choose to write in Google Docs instead of writing on the board. It also gives me the space to track their progress. I didn't really think about what they think when they use technology. Your question triggered this thought in my head. I usually think about seeing their answers. To be honest, I think about time. So, I'm not sure how this affects their learning. I hadn't thought about this before. (M Fuint2)

Overall, the teacher's teaching style, the students' familiarity with it, and the use of technology contribute to their engagement and motivation, creating a safe and autonomy-supportive classroom environment.

Additionally, evaluating learning is crucial for learners to develop autonomy. The data showed that Maram integrates self-evaluation and peer evaluation into her teaching, emphasizing their importance for language learners. She stated:

I think peer evaluation will give my students the space to focus more and to learn how to observe. Like the sentences, the grammar. It's not only the responsibility of the teacher but also you need to see your classmates or your peers. How do they do? If it's correct, why it's correct and if it has a mistake, why it has a mistake? So, I think in the beginning, if you remember, I always say I like collaborative work, so this is kind of the way I do it. I don't know how it affects exactly my teaching, but it's part of my style in the class to involve everybody while we're working on something. (M FUint2)

In this excerpt, she illustrates the importance of peer evaluation and highlights its benefits for the learning process. Allowing students to take part in correcting their own or their peers' mistakes helps develop their learning skills. She believes this approach promotes collaboration and observation skills among students and emphasises the importance of involving everyone in the class during learning tasks.

Data from classroom observations revealed that one of Maram's common teaching practices is encouraging students to collaborate with each other. Group Work and Collaborative Learning was one of the noticeable practices that Maram implemented in her teaching practices to develop learner autonomy. She indicated that she prefers to encourage students to work in pairs or groups. For example, when dealing with demotivated or silent students, she promotes participation through group work and asking questions. She stressed the significance of group work in developing students' responsibility for their own learning; stating "*I always say I like collaborative work.*" This type of practice helps to develop autonomy by encouraging students to interact with their peers and raising their awareness of the purpose of the task and its requirements.

The following text illustrates Maram's teaching strategies and how she translated her beliefs into her teaching practices, particularly collaborative work. Classroom observations revealed her use of various techniques, such as pair work, group work, and cooperative learning, to support learners in developing sociocultural autonomy. Her teaching practices greatly align with her stated beliefs about supporting and fostering learners' responsibilities for their learning.

In the third classroom observation, the teacher initiated a writing activity, asking the students to work in groups to write simple sentences about pictures. She assisted the students in correcting their grammar and provided feedback on their sentences. The students explained to each other how to form the sentences, while the teacher guided them in correcting their mistakes. (M Obs3)

Another notable teaching technique was implementing practice to develop students' learning strategies to help them evaluate their learning methods before the actual assessment. Maram indicated that this technique aimed to raise students' awareness of their learning habits and help them improve their learning skills and learn how to learn. In the first follow-up interview, she stated:

As you know, all of them are repeaters, so this is their second time taking the course. They always tell me, 'Miss, we study all the time, but we don't get good grades.' So I always tell them, 'OK, you study, but are you sure you're studying in the right way?' So I told them, 'OK, every time we finish the unit, we will do a quiz and you evaluate yourself. See if you are really studying effectively because I can't be with you when you're studying. (M FUint1)

Maram indicated that self-evaluation and peer evaluation are greatly beneficial, especially for language learners. She believed that these practices are important skills for students, helping them to accurately develop and evaluate their learning. She has observed that students who possess these skills and she noticed that they are different from those who do not. She believes that students who are aware of the importance of self-evaluation and peer evaluation are more likely to improve their performance. Therefore, the emphasis on self-evaluation in her teaching practices aligns with developing a sense of responsibility among her learners. She helps her learners to be aware of the language and will develop their learning skills and at the same time, this has a positive impact on their learning performance.

Moreover, the classroom observations data indicated that Maram employed a mixed teaching methodology, heavily adopting a student-centred approach to meet the student's needs and implementing autonomy-supportive activities. The observed second and third sessions, each lasting two hours, began with Maram thanking students who had given presentations in the previous class. She then introduced the lesson goals, which focused on grammar, specifically the past tense.

The lesson started with an orientation activity, followed by a warm-up where Maram explained the guidelines and provided a printable worksheet for each student. This activity required students to find classmates who had done specific actions mentioned in the worksheet, such as watching Netflix or skipping breakfast. Maram ensured that the instructions were clear and easy to understand. (M Obs3)

This is an illustration of Maram's teaching practices, indicating her support for developing learner autonomy. It appeared that she preferred an inductive teaching approach, centring her classroom around the students. The data revealed that Maram actively promotes autonomy and responsibility for learning among her students. This is evident in her practices, such as encouraging students to work collaboratively and take charge of their learning. Her approach to encouraging students' responsibility for their own learning aligns with her beliefs and teaching philosophy aimed at developing learner autonomy.

Overall, the classroom observations and post-interviews data showed that Maram's actual teaching practices align significantly with her beliefs about developing learner autonomy (See 5.2.1). Her emphasis on activities such as discussion boards, self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and collaborative work indicates a commitment to fostering learner autonomy, particularly sociocultural and psychological autonomy. The data revealed that Maram's adopted active role in developing learner autonomy through implementation of these practices made students more aware of English language usage in their surroundings and helped them evaluate their own learning habits, thereby promoting learner autonomy. The next section provides an analysis of the factors that influenced Maram's teaching practices regarding LA.

### **5.2.3 Factors Influencing Teachers' Teaching Practices to Develop Learner Autonomy**

Maram identified several external factors that were imposed on her as a teacher and how they made her feel challenged in the classroom. She reported in the first interview that:

I think the factors that influence my teaching practices are related to student's level, sometimes it is related to the time. I will also be honest; one of the factors is the personal life, sometimes it affects because it affects my energy. Also, the course syllabus and the learning outcomes. They really affect my teaching decisions. Moreover, the assessment. So, how the assessment comes, I need to adjust my ways of teaching, especially my teaching practices. However, when I am teaching for example the vocabulary, I can be creative and implement my own way of teaching. But when I assess my students, I must

follow the assessment that is followed here in the institution. I think this is what affects my teaching. it's a surviving process, it's not easy. However, if the assessment and the exams question doesn't really follow the way I want to assess my students with, I will not reflect this in my way of teaching. (M INT1)

In the above extract, the teacher indicated that there are several external factors that, to some extent, influence her teaching practices. She believes that various factors that are related to the institutions, students, and the teacher herself affect her teaching, including the students' level, proficiency level, time constraints, personal life, syllabus, learning outcomes, and assessment methods. However, she indicated that she tries to find her own teaching way to decrease the impact of these factors on her teaching practices and create a space for her as a teacher to implement her preferred teaching methodology. It seems that the assessment imposes a great challenge because the institution follows a unified assessment, and the teachers are not allowed to write the exam questions due to quality assurance purposes.

Additionally, Maram highlighted the detrimental effects of the school system's focus on exam-oriented teaching and memorisation on learner autonomy. She emphasises the need for a shift in teaching practices to promote genuine understanding and independent learning skills, particularly in the context of English language education. She stated that

I am thinking actually of the schools; I teach university students, and our students spend in the schools 12 years which is a lot. Schools' systems build things that you cannot break. Sometimes, unfortunately, when you see your students struggling with things, you say, what did the teachers do in the schools... So, in general, I think teachers focus on teaching for examination. In the school context, they are very dependent on theory. I see it not only with my students but in real life... I get some really weak students, and then when they come to the college, they tell me that they got 100 on their English exam when they were in school! I wonder how she got 100? by spoon-feeding and asking them to memorise the content. This is the reason why they did not learn. So, this is really destroying learner autonomy. (M INT1)

The data showed that Maram expressively evaluated the existing educational practices in schools and their impact on learner autonomy. Her observations call for re-evaluating teaching methods in school settings, focusing on empowering students to become independent, lifelong

learners. The challenge lies in transforming entrenched practices and fostering an educational environment that values and nurtures learner autonomy.

Despite these challenges, Maram strives to adjust her teaching practices to guide her students towards success in their learning process. She believes that assessments necessitate adjustments in her teaching approach.

I see the class as a place for teaching, even if I disagree with the assessment policy. I have to not allow this to be reflected in my class. I will go to the class and try to adjust my way of teaching to what I have and guide my students through this even if I didn't like some of it. (M INT1)

This indicates that this teacher has identified and overcome some of the external factors that impose challenges on her teaching practices and decisions through self-reflection. Maram's beliefs about teaching in general, and particularly about learner autonomy, help her to be reflective and find ways to overcome these challenges by creating a space for her learners to develop learner autonomy, raise their awareness, and develop their learning skills. Additionally, she tried to find a compromised teaching approach to overcome these challenges and minimise the effect of these factors by adjusting her way of teaching and balancing between the implementation of her teaching philosophy and meeting the assessment criteria to guide the student to meet the requirements.

Interestingly, Maram reflects on the impact of teacher autonomy and personal learning experiences on the development of learner autonomy. The teacher explains that being an autonomous learner has influenced her teaching practices, allowing them to foster a similar sense of autonomy in their students. In the first interview, she stated that

If you are an autonomous learner, you will see it in your students. And I think the Masters build that in me. They made me ask myself every step I go why I'm doing this why. So yeah, that's so I think experience and the learning experience, especially my masters, I think it was an opening experience. And sometimes the students also they push you to do this, sometimes I give my students the room to suggest. So sometimes they tell you miss we want to do this, we want to do that. So, you realize that oh, they want to do so let me give them the chance. (M INT1)

In the above extract, Maram illustrates how teacher's own journey towards autonomy, particularly through advanced education and reflective practices, equips them to create an

educational environment where students are encouraged to take charge of their learning. This cyclical influence where autonomous teachers foster autonomous learners highlights the importance of teacher development and the adoption of flexible, student-centred teaching practices. Therefore, one factor that seems to greatly influence her teaching practices is her learning experience, obtaining her master's degree, and exposure to different learning experiences in the USA. The data shows that Maram's positive learning experience and her exposure to various teaching and learning approaches have influenced her role as a language teacher. The adopted approach stems from her own positive experiences with professors who fostered supportive learning environments when she was studying abroad. In the first interview, she said *"I learned this approach from one of my professors when I was studying abroad. I saw the benefits of building a safe environment in my classroom."*

Moreover, one of the factors reported by the participant is professional development (PD) and its impact on teachers' beliefs and pedagogical practices. The data revealed that various forms of PD, such as self-improvement, observing others, attending workshops, and friendly peer evaluation, positively impacted teachers' beliefs and practices to some extent. The data indicates the importance of teachers' collaboration and how it positively affected teachers' professional development. Maram interestingly indicated that one of the factors that influenced her teaching practices positively was the collaboration between the teachers through informal classroom observations. She highlighted the significant effect of peer observation on her teaching beliefs, decisions, and classroom practices. This helps teachers to reflect and adopted new and successful teaching activities or approaches. She highlighted that this provides the opportunity to share successful experiences and be exposed to various teaching styles.

All of us are very good and experienced teachers, even the new ones. Everyone has a strength. Peer observation is especially important when it's not for evaluation purposes because it removes the pressure of being judged. The observer is there to give feedback and maybe learn from you. After I came back from the US, I participated in peer observation two or three times. It was really nice. I observed three or four different teachers with various styles. Sometimes a teacher's style doesn't fit your own, but you always learn something. It's very beneficial. (M FUint2)

She continues to reflect on the positive influence of peer observation on teachers:

Peer observation is a great way for language teachers to develop professionally. For example, you might see an activity or a teaching method and wonder why it's done that

way. You might adopt it or adapt it, seeing it from a different perspective. It's really beneficial. Usually, when we teach, we don't see ourselves; we think we are doing the right thing. But hearing comments, especially when they are not for evaluation, is very different. It makes you think without feeling pressured about your performance. It's just constructive feedback. Reflecting on the three or four observations I've experienced; it was really nice. It definitely had an effect on my teaching today. (M FUint2)

In the above extract, Maram expressed a positive view about observing colleagues and peer evaluation, highlighting how these practices affected her teaching. She emphasised that peer evaluation is necessary because everyone has strengths and can learn from each other. She found it beneficial for professional development, allowing teachers to see different teaching styles and activities and receive constructive feedback without the pressure of formal evaluation.

Moreover, the data indicated that teacher's self-efficacy beliefs seem to influence teachers' teaching practices. The following extract demonstrates the Maram's self-efficacy, in which she believes that she has confidence of her ability to overcome institutional constraints through autonomy in teaching methodology. This belief in her capacity enables her to adapt the syllabus and assessments to fit her pedagogical approach, thus maintaining a sense of freedom and flexibility within the classroom. This perspective reflects the teacher's confidence in her skills and her commitment to delivering education in a way that aligns with her professional values and beliefs. She indicated that

Yes, there are some limitations. Regarding the syllabus regarding pacing schedule, you know but when I talk about teaching methodology. I can be what I want to be in the class, I can do it Hamdulillah. I have the freedom to use any teaching methodology I want...Yes, we have a syllabus, assessment we have to follow. But I can implement it the way I want. That's why I think I have the freedom inside the class. (M FUint2)

Overall, an in-depth investigation demonstrated that this case has positive beliefs about LA, and it was evident that she implemented a number of autonomy-supportive practices in her class. However, it has been found that a number of personal and contextual factors, such as teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, previous teaching experience, professional development, and institutional constraints, significantly impact teachers' practices. However, teachers' beliefs in her ability (Self-efficacy), positive learning experience, constructive feedback and sharing experiences,

continuous professional development and recognising challenges helped the teacher to reflect and translate her beliefs concerning LA into her teaching practices.

The following section will examine and investigate another case with positive beliefs about Learner Autonomy (LA). The case demonstrates that holding positive beliefs about Learner Autonomy (LA) does not necessarily indicate consistent implementation in teaching practices. This variation between beliefs and actual teaching practices can be attributed to several personal and contextual factors.

### **5.3 Samiah**

Samiah is an English language teacher with over 25 years of experience teaching general and specialised English courses at various Saudi universities. She has been teaching at the research context for 12 years and holds several roles within the college, including being a member and chair of various departments and involved in the curriculum department. Samiah describes herself as a dedicated English language teacher who strives to make her courses interesting and useful for her students. She teaches linguistics courses in the Applied Linguistics department and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses for students from different specialisations.

In this case, the teacher expresses strong positive beliefs about the importance of learner autonomy. She values autonomy as a crucial aspect of education, promoting lifelong learning skills and student empowerment. However, despite these beliefs, the implementation of autonomy-supportive practices in her teaching varies significantly.

#### **5.3.1 Samiah's Beliefs**

##### **5.3.1.1 Samiah's Beliefs about Learner Autonomy**

Regarding learner autonomy, Samiah shared her perspective in the first interview by stating that "My point of view about learner autonomy is to give space for the learner, to give them freedom in learning, to make them more dependent on themselves, not on the teacher." She views learner autonomy as creating space and giving learners the freedom to develop their own learning. She believes in the significance of developing learner autonomy but questions its applicability, as her own learning experience lacked this practice. She commented in the first interview, *"It is important, but is it applicable? This is the question. When I was a student, I don't think they practised this."*

Samiah initially hesitated to identify an autonomous learner's characteristics, acknowledging that learner autonomy is not her area of expertise. She stated:

Let me tell you from the beginning that this is not my major. However, my point of view is that I expect that an autonomous learner is supposed to have, first of all, good knowledge and must be confident and must also have a strong personality and good command of language so that he can express himself. He must also have skills like respecting and accepting others' opinions. He must have the ability to depend on himself. (S INT1)

In the above extract, she suggested that an autonomous learner should possess good knowledge, confidence, a strong personality, and good language skills. Additionally, she believes such a learner should respect and accept others' opinions while being self-reliant.

Samiah mentioned several techniques she implemented when she was asked about her teaching approach to promote her students' learning and the techniques, she believed would be useful to develop learner autonomy among her students. She indicated that she gives students free class questions or free reading questions to research before discussing a topic, believing this helps them actively participate in their learning process and develop critical thinking and research skills. She also encourages finding similarities between Arabic and English to promote a desire for information, helping to connect the topic with their own learning. She emphasized the importance of giving prior questions about the lesson to allow students to prepare themselves, focusing on promoting student autonomy through self-directed learning and preparation. She stated:

Usually, I give them questions. For example, let's call it free class questions or free reading questions. Before you know about the topic, go and look for answers to these questions. For example, we'll talk about synonymy in English. Can you give me some examples? Also, find similarities between Arabic and English synonyms to promote the feeling of looking for information. I must give prior questions about the lesson so they can prepare themselves. (S INT1)

Samiah believes that teachers should have their own point of view on a topic and share it with their learners, allowing them to accept or reject it. She values giving learners the right to negotiate and discuss their perspectives. In the first interview, she stated:

I mean that a teacher should have a point of view and likes to deliver it to the students so as to let them feel that this is a very important point of view. They may accept it, or they may reject it as well, but at least there is a point of view.

She continued by describing various teaching practices she implements in her classroom to develop learner autonomy.

I always leave room to ask the students: What do you think? Do you agree with this? Do you agree with that? Do you find any disturbances or differences, for example, any similarities as well? I try to get the answer from the students themselves before I give them my point of view. I like this way of teaching, where I ask them: What is your opinion? How do you think about this? Have you read about this? Have you ever asked this question to yourself? For example, before starting the topic of the lesson or the research we are talking about. (S INT1)

The above extract revealed that Samiah teaching approach encourages discussion and asks for students' opinions before sharing her own. She believes that asking questions promotes critical thinking and encourages students to consider their own thoughts and conduct research on the topic. Overall, she values a teaching style that promotes open discussion and encourages students to think independently. The next section provides an analysis of Samiah's beliefs about her role in developing learner autonomy.

### **5.3.1.2 Samiah's Role in Developing Learner Autonomy**

Samiah believes that the traditional perception of the teacher as the sole authority is still prevalent in the Arab world. While she expressed frustration about this traditional role, she acknowledged that she still adopts this approach alongside other teaching roles. She believes that a teacher's role goes beyond just giving lectures; it is important to create opportunities for students to voice their opinions and engage in classroom discussions rather than being passive knowledge receivers. She shared an example from her learning experience, where her teacher did not take learners' opinions into consideration. Her learning experience influenced her teaching practices and motivated her to change her role from being the sole authority in the classroom to giving students the opportunity to express themselves. She indicated:

Actually, the perception toward the teacher in the Arab World is still conventional; that is, the teacher goes to give a lecture. I can't tell you that I am a facilitator or an operator.

As I told you, we are the only change. We can start by knowing students' opinions about the topics. What do you know about the topic? How old were you when you first heard about this? There were many differences compared to before. I remember the professor used to come and keep on explaining. Honestly, there was no question about your opinion, what you had read among Shakespeare's plays. The respect was not for the student. The professor did not take students into account, thinking they didn't have the same knowledge. This is not applicable to all teachers or professors. Nowadays, methods of teaching are much better than before. (S INT1)

She continued to talk about the role of teachers in helping students develop their capacity for learner autonomy. She believes that the teacher's role is to push students to depend on themselves for knowledge while also managing the knowledge they acquire. She emphasized that the teacher should not leave the students alone but should monitor their progress, the information they receive, and the level they are supposed to reach. The teacher can give students freedom but must also ensure they learn useful things. Overall, she believes the teacher's role is to guide and support students in their journey toward learner autonomy. She stated:

In regard to learner autonomy, the teacher's role is to push learners to seek knowledge independently while managing the knowledge they acquire. I won't leave them alone. I want them to learn, but I also want them to learn things they can make use of. I can give them free quizzes, but I have to monitor what information they get and what level they are supposed to reach. This is what I can do as a teacher. (S INT1)

As a teacher with a long teaching record, when asked about what interests her in teaching, she expressed that the best feeling for her as a teacher is when she is able to teach in a way that her students understand and accept new ideas and thoughts. She believes that this mutual understanding gives her a high spirit for teaching. She indicated that...

Actually, I started teaching in 1997. The best thing for me is when you teach and feel that students understand you. This feeling is indescribable. It's like there's a mutual understanding between you and your students. When you introduce new ideas and they accept and understand them, it gives me a very high spirit for teaching. (S INT1)

Ms. Samiah discussed the development of her teaching over time and how her beliefs about teaching have evolved. She talked about her experiences as a fresh graduate teacher, struggling

to teach students her own age. In the first interview, she said, "When I started, it was difficult for me. The beginning was not easy for us as teachers; we were fresh graduates."

She mentioned that she developed her teaching skills by reading extensively and attending various workshops. She indicated a preference for workshops related to developing teaching philosophy and teaching quality, not limiting herself to those solely about English teaching. She highlighted that attending workshops is not an obligation but something she does willingly for personal and professional growth. She said:

I tried my best to develop myself by reading a lot. I checked different websites, and recently, after the pandemic, we moved to online workshops. I try to attend as many workshops as I can that I feel will be useful for my teaching. Sometimes I attend workshops not specifically related to English but to the philosophy and quality of teaching. I like these workshops, even if they are not required. I enjoy involving myself in discussions about teaching and learning and considering other experiences. (S INT1)

Regarding the qualities of a good language teacher, In the first interview, Ms. Samiah emphasized the importance of punctuality and thorough preparation. She believes that a good language teacher is punctual, prepared, adaptable, and hardworking. Samiah prioritizes these qualities, considering them essential for being a good role model for her students. She stated:

I mean the most important thing I feel is that I am punctual in the duties required from me. I like to be at the lecture on time and not be late. This gives a hint that students should be punctual as well; we should teach them these skills in life. I usually arrive before the students, and I always prepare myself before going to the lecture. I like to make changes or updates to the subject I teach, like examples. I must know what I want to teach. I never go to class without reading and making some changes or modifications to the PowerPoint and the material I will deliver. I don't like stagnation. I mean, I hope to be a good teacher, at least from my students' point of view. I work hard and do my best in the classroom. (S INT1)

In the following extract, she indicated that teachers now have the flexibility and freedom to design their courses within certain guidelines. This balance between adhering to course specifications and having the freedom to choose appropriate teaching methods makes her feel more relaxed and comfortable in her teaching. She positively talked about course specifications and study plans, emphasizing the importance of following assessment procedures and not changing topics

without proper procedure. She noted that this approach is not unique to their institution but is found worldwide. She stated:

I have never felt any pressure or observation. You are given headlines, a framework, and the methodology you shall follow. You can do whatever you like. You have the objectives of the program, the goals of the program, and the objectives of the course. You design the course as you see suitable. True, it is restricted with a particular frame, but at the same time, it is free for the teacher. Now things have become a bit better because it is necessary to adhere to course specifications and the study plan. However, this means you are also free with whatever you do in class. You have to follow a specific number of activities, but this is found all over the world. Assessment must be known from the beginning. Topics shouldn't be changed without following proper procedures. (S INT1)

The data in this section showed that Samiah mentioned that she has implemented a number of teaching practices in relation to developing learner autonomy. The next section provides an in-depth analysis of the classroom observational data and post-observational interview to examine the discrepancy between her beliefs and her teaching practices.

#### **5.3.1.3 Samiah's Beliefs about Her Current Learners**

Samiah expressed her thoughts about her current students, noting that they differ significantly from previous generations, possessing more freedom and autonomy. She believes that students today are better able to express themselves, discuss topics, and rely on their own resources and knowledge rather than solely on their teachers. She emphasized the importance of independence for learners:

I think students nowadays are frankly different than we used to be. They have more freedom than we had in the past, especially from an autonomous point of view. Students today can express themselves, discuss, talk, and have their own resources or knowledge apart from their teachers. (S INT1)

She elaborated on the differences between students in the past and those today, explaining that previously, the teacher was the sole source of information. Now, students have many sources available to them and can easily access the information themselves, sometimes even bringing new information to the teacher. She reflected on her own learning experience, where the teacher was a trusted source of authentic information, but now students can easily access knowledge independently. While acknowledging the availability of information, she questioned why the

teacher's role is being diminished, emphasizing that teachers are still important in guiding students and presenting new topics. She commented:

The difference was that previously the teacher was the only source of information for the student. Nowadays, that is not the case. A student may come and say she saw something new. Sources of information are many now, and students can get it easily. True, we had libraries and books, but we depended on our teachers; what the teacher said was authentic. Nowadays, students depend on themselves to get information. Why cancel the role of the teacher, especially in such matters? The teacher can start a topic, and students can complete it on their own. It builds students' confidence, which is something we need to work on, to make students believe in their abilities. (S INT1)

Despite her positive view of learner autonomy, Samiah noted that some students are not engaged in her classes but still achieve high marks in written exams. She attributed this to students' personalities and a preference for passivity in class, coupled with a lack of confidence. She sees this as an issue and believes that building and enhancing students' confidence will help them overcome it, thereby promoting learner autonomy. She observed:

Frankly, I have many students who never speak in lectures. They neither participate nor engage, yet they excel in exams. When I ask why they don't speak in class, they say, 'I don't like to talk.' This is a problem. The more we build and enhance students' confidence, the more they will become autonomous. (S INT1)

The data in this section showed that Samiah's held positive beliefs in relation to LA. However, teacher's beliefs are not the only factor that influence the teachers; practices; other factors will be discussed in later section. the data showed that she held positive theoretical understanding for the concept of learner autonomy, emphasising on the importance of teacher's role and how to implement it in her teaching practices.

The next section provides an analysis of evidence for teachers' actual teaching practices by investigating the teachers' practices that related to teacher's role in supporting learner autonomy, classroom dynamic, teaching approach, approaches to support learner autonomy and finally, the factors that influenced their teaching practices in regard to LA.

### **5.3.2 Samiah' Teaching Practices to Develop Learner Autonomy**

In the previous section, Ms. Samiah's beliefs about learner autonomy and reported teaching practices to support learner autonomy were examined. This section investigates data from classroom observations and post-classroom observation interviews with Ms. Samiah, focusing on her teaching strategies, student engagement, and how her teaching beliefs translate into her practices, as well as factors impacting her teaching.

#### **5.3.2.1 Classroom Description**

In terms of teaching methods and classroom dynamics, the observed classroom had a traditional setup, with students seated in rows and the teacher at the front using a projector to present content via PowerPoint. Across the three observed classes, the sequence remained largely consistent. For instance, in the first observed class, the focus was on explaining the process of writing a business letter, with the teacher taking a controlling and authoritative role. Students listened and applied what they learned on their laptops. The subsequent classes continued with a focus on instructing students on writing professional emails and enhancing their writing skills in a professional context.

#### **5.3.2.2 Teaching Approach to Develop Learner Autonomy**

Data from the first classroom observation and post-observation interview revealed a discrepancy between Ms. Samiah's beliefs and her actual teaching practices. Despite her reported beliefs in learner autonomy, her observed approach was more traditional and teacher-centred, lacking student engagement and interactive activities.

After the first classroom observation, the teacher was asked to reflect on the observed class, specifically on her teaching approach, the class dynamic and the activities that she adopted to promote students' engagement. It has been noticed that the students were unwilling to engage with the teacher. She indicated that she took the initiative to encourage the students and make the class activities more practical, but she argued that the students' low level of engagement in the observed class could be attributed to a number of factors. She indicated that

I sent them the material. I asked them and if I showed you the blackboard, I asked them to prepare. If they prepared themselves, I'm sure the class would be better. I shared the content with them before the class. I sent them an announcement to prepare and to bring the laptops or their iPads as well. I'm sure when I asked them who checked the

PowerPoint on Blackboard, maybe two or three they will respond that they were exercising. I had to present the theoretical and I thought that if I make it more practical it will be more interesting for them. So instead of giving them rules and they listen, at least they can listen to the rule, and they apply it immediately. I thought maybe it will be more interesting for them to use their iPads. I tried to do but it did not success. (S FUInt1)

The above extract is an illustration for Ms. Samiah willingness to promote students' engagement in her classes, but she faced number of constraints. This is an example for this case to willingness to overcome constraints that related to students' demotivation and disengagement and how this impact her teaching practices. In the first classroom observation, it was evident that Ms. Samiah was trying to create a space for her students to practice what they learned in that class, and she tried to make the class more practical for them rather than just setting and listening to her. She indicated that she tried to create a dynamic learning environment and encourage the students to be more engaged by incorporating practical exercises and technology. The aim was to create a more dynamic learning environment and allow the students to apply theoretical concepts immediately, but the result was not desirable. She indicated that she had doubts and concerns in regard to the student's engagement with the uploaded materials. This indicates the importance she placed on the preparation before the class. This illustrated an example for this case and how she linked students' preparation in relation to classroom engagement and she attributed the lack of engagement to students' lack of preparation. She stated that

It is the beginning of the course, this the third meeting with them. In this class I planned to finish all the content that in the PowerPoint, but I could not. I thought it will be more interesting for them, but I wish next time it will be interesting if they prepared themselves. (S FUInt1)

The above extract shows that Samiah expressed a desire to promote student engagement but faced constraints. For instance, she prepared practical exercises for students using technology, hoping to create a dynamic learning environment. However, she noted students' lack of engagement, attributing it to their low level of preparation.

Additionally, her teaching appeared exam-oriented, focusing on delivering required course content and preparing students for upcoming exams and assignments. Although she attempted to shift toward a student-centred approach, her dominant teacher role persisted. For example, in one incident, the teacher emphasised the place of the preposition in a business letter, and she

mentioned that marks would be deducted if the students were misused. When she was asked to reflect on that after the classroom observations, she indicates

I focused on this because my students mark will be deducted if they did not pay attention to these details, I asked (Ms.X), she is the course coordinator and she told me that mark will be deducted, so I warn my students. (S FUInt2)

The dataset from the first classroom observation indicated that the classroom interaction tended to be one way, but the teacher gradually, in the next classes, encouraged the students to participate and express their opinions. For example, in the first observed class, when the teacher asked a question, she answered it immediately without giving the students the opportunity to think and reply. She stated that she followed this teaching approach due to a number of factors. When she was asked about that in the post-observation interview, she attributed this to the novelty of the topic for the students and to their language proficiency level. She said,

“The students are quiet because I think some of them are very weak, if you see what they did and wrote, you will know their level. This is something new for them, they used to write paragraphs, essay but not related to business writing. This is the first time for them to have business writing, so they felt afraid.” (S FUInt2).

It is evident that Ms Samiah adopted an exam-oriented approach in her teaching in which she was preparing the students for the upcoming exam and class assignments. For example, in the second class, she started and ended the lesson by emphasising on the importance of doing the practices in the blackboard manually to prepare them for the upcoming assignment. At the same time, the data from the second classroom observation revealed that the teacher tried to shift her teaching approach from teacher centered to students centered and she put more efforts to create opportunities for the students to share and discuss their opinions, and she asked them question and give them the chance to think and answer these questions unlike the previous class. Even though that tried to create space for learner to express their opinion, the teacher role was more dominant, and she talked most of the time. However, it has been noticed that the students were more open, active and engaged compared to the previous class.

Overall, the data indicated that the role of the teacher in the class was knowledge provider. When she was asked about her role, she said

it is supposed to be facilitator, but not in this class actually the topic is new for them, and the language is not their native language. (S FUInt2).

Even though Samiah has positive views about learner autonomy and her expressed beliefs indicated several strategies that she adopted in her teaching practices to develop learner autonomy such as supported class discussion, students centre approach, independent learning, and promoting critical thinking (see 5.3.1) The dataset from classroom observations and post-observation interviews showed that the teacher's beliefs and reported teaching practices are contradicted by her actual teaching practices and decisions. This case contributed to this conflict to a number of reasons, and she explained what was behind this conflict. She attributed the lack of autonomy in her teaching practices to a number of contextual and personal factors. The next section provides an analysis of the factors that influenced their teaching practices in regard to LA. The following section will explore the factors that influenced Samiah's teaching practices.

### **5.3.3 Factors Influence Teacher's Practices to Foster Learner Autonomy**

It appears that Ms. Samiah has faced many challenges in implementing her teaching beliefs, specifically those related to learner autonomy. The data revealed that Samiah faced a number of institutional constraints in her English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course due to standardized curricula and accreditation requirements. These constraints and limitations faced by Samiah in ESP impacted her teaching practices and influenced her role in supporting learner autonomy. For instance, in the first classroom observation, Samiah focused on delivering the required course content and preparing the students for the next in-class assignment. The students are required to do the assignment inside the class, and it seems like a quiz rather than an assignment because the students cannot use any resources during the assignment time and have to finish it during class time. Ms. Samiah expressed disappointment in having assignments conducted in class, which she felt resembled exams and limited student performance. She said, *"This put pressure on the students, and it seems like an exam not an assignment"* She perceived her role as primarily delivering course materials within a restricted pacing schedule.

It is evident that Samiah adopted an exam-oriented approach in her teaching in which she was preparing the students for the upcoming exams and in-class assignments. For example, in the second class, she started and ended the lesson by emphasising the importance of doing the practices on the blackboard manually to prepare them for the upcoming assignment. She highlighted the challenges specifically to the English for Specific Purposes course (ESP) in which she indicated that the constraints imposed by a standardized curriculum and a strong unification for accreditation purposes in ESP courses can impact teachers' autonomy and limit her freedom

in her teaching practices. Therefore, Ms. Samiah's reflections bring attention to the delicate balance between standardised curricula, accreditation requirements, and the autonomy teachers seek to create engaging and contextually relevant learning experiences for their students, particularly in ESP courses. She stated that

Teachers should have this freedom, at least. Sometimes, especially in ESP courses, we feel that we have constraints. If you feel some kind of freedom, it depends on the course. (S FUInt3).

Additionally, Samiah highlighted challenges with collaborative course sharing across campuses, feeling constrained and limited in her teaching approaches. These challenges, along with the exam-oriented nature of her teaching, hindered her ability to promote learner autonomy effectively. Ms Samiah shared the same challenges as Ms Basimah (see 5.5.3), in which they expressed their disappointment with this restriction that was imposed on them when they were teaching the ESP courses, and they mentioned that they could not even see the questions for the final exam paper. Lack of control over the assessment resulted in a limited role inside the classroom and minimised their responsibilities, in which they intended to focus on delivering the content, since the other duties, such as designing the assessment, belonged to the course coordinator. They indicated that these challenges have impacted the way they teach.

Like other cases in this study, this case expressed her wishes to have more freedom, especially in ESP courses. She indicated that sharing the course with a number of teachers from different campuses makes it more challenging for her. She said *"If you share with me, but actually sharing is not caring here, I'm sad, then we'll feel it again"* (S FUInt2).

Therefore, in this case, sharing the course, while potentially beneficial for standardization, limited her freedom and she felt constrained. This displayed that the collaborative nature of sharing a course across campuses can create challenges for individual teachers who may feel restricted in their teaching approaches. Unlike other teachers who identified a number of institutional constraints and found their own ways to overcome these challenges, Samiah felt that these factors constrained her ability to have control over her teaching practices. Therefore, she acknowledged that she cannot freely translate her teaching beliefs and philosophy into her teaching practices.

In addition to institutional factors, the data showed that there are other personal factors related to the teachers had an influence in their teaching practices such as their previous teaching

experience. Samiah attributed her approach to her own learning experiences. She reflected on the negative experience and how the authority of teachers in the past affected her as a learner and shaped her teaching practices. In the first interview, she said, *"During my academic study, the university professor had, honestly, an authority. He/She had prestige. Even if you disagreed with them, it would be a sin."* She believes this experience impacted her teaching approach, leading her to avoid replicating such an authoritative environment. As a student, she was not given the chance to express her opinions or negotiate with her teachers. Now, she encourages her learners to express themselves, even if their opinions differ from hers. She noted, "Now, the situation has changed. I mean, I expect things are better now, and students can at least express themselves regarding some issues."

She continued to discuss how her learning experiences have influenced her teaching philosophy and beliefs. She commented

Honestly, there was no room for your opinion. I remember a subject about Shakespeare when the professor came in and asked, 'What have you read among Shakespeare's works? What do you know about Shakespeare? What does bla bla bla mean?' This approach showed no respect for the students. The professor didn't consider that the students didn't have his level of knowledge. Of course, this isn't applicable to all teachers or professors. This was just one incident from the past, and there may still be some people like this, but in general, teaching methods nowadays are much better than before. The most important thing is to be different from the teachers of the past. I mean, at least to make some changes. I don't want to be like Professor X or Y; I try to avoid the methodology they used. But there are teachers—may Allah bless them—who were great. I would like, frankly, to be like them. (S INT1)

Samiah continued to express the importance of having good role models during the learning and teaching experience. She emphasised exchanging thoughts and experiences with people around you, and how their experiences can positively benefit you in both teaching and personal growth. She provided an example from her own experience:

For example, I like imitating good models. This is something I strive to do. Besides imitating, I also observe and monitor people around me to see how they work. When students talk about a good teacher, I want to know why they think she is a good teacher. Of course, I wouldn't directly ask any student, but I listen to their conversations. I want to

know about the methodologies these teachers follow. Maybe they use techniques I haven't implemented in my class. (S INT1)

In the above extract, the data show that Samiah's sharing and exchanging experiences greatly influenced her teaching philosophy and shaped her professional identity. Therefore, she indicated that she usually likes to have a role model, and she observed the successful teachers around her in the educational context to exchange and share thoughts with them. Similar to Maram, Samiah emphasized the importance of sharing successful teaching experiences among teachers. She believed observing and mentoring colleagues with good reputations helped her develop her teaching techniques. She highlighted that one valuable way to develop her teaching is through discussions with colleagues and learning from their experiences. She emphasized the importance of continuous learning and development in teaching. Similar to Maram, she emphasized the importance of peer feedback and sharing experiences among colleagues. In the first interview, she said:

I would like to involve myself in discussions about teaching and learning, taking other experiences into consideration. I like to see my colleagues and also people I know in the field of education. How did they make use of this knowledge and what are the experiences they passed by? Because an experience that a colleague has passed by, and I haven't lets me know how the situation was and how the colleague behaved in that situation. This gives me much experience as well. (S INT1)

Additionally, one of the external factors reported by the participants is professional development (PD) and its impact on teachers' beliefs and pedagogical practices. The data revealed that various forms of PD, such as self-improvement, observing others, attending workshops, and friendly peer evaluation, positively impacted teachers' beliefs and practices to some extent. However, the data indicated that teacher's lack of practical application could influence their teaching practices. In Samiah's case, she has a sense of responsibility for her continuous professional development. She attended a number of professional development workshops. This seems to strengthen her theoretical understanding of the importance of LA. Despite this. Although she held a positive theoretical understanding of learner autonomy, there was a noticeable gap between the theory and practices in her teaching practices. She highlighted that some training programs focused heavily on theoretical aspects without adequately addressing practical implementation, stating,

We had some training, but actually, it wasn't enough because it focused on theory. We learn by hands-on and practical experience more than only theoretical training. At that time, it wasn't directed to us compared to these workshops that we see nowadays." This disconnect may explain why she did not translate this knowledge into her teaching practices. She emphasized the insufficiency of certain training. (S FUInt3)

Overall, Samiah's case demonstrated teachers' challenges in translating beliefs about learner autonomy into practice, particularly within ESP courses with standardised curricula and accreditation constraints, lack of practical application for their acquired knowledge, and other personal factors. Despite her desire for more freedom and student engagement, she encountered difficulties implementing these practices. These findings highlight the importance of addressing contextual, institutional, and personal constraints to promote learner autonomy effectively and seek to create engaging and contextually relevant learning experiences for their students, particularly in ESP courses.

The following section will examine and investigate another case with positive beliefs about Learner Autonomy (LA). In terms of teaching practices, the data showed that she committed to fostering student engagement and autonomy due to several personal and contextual factors that influenced teachers' teaching practices, specifically the development of LA.

## **5.4 Haifa**

Haifa is an English teacher who has been teaching linguistics, and general English courses since 2007. She has a master's degree and an MPhil in linguistics, and she has taken professional development courses throughout her teaching career. Her accumulative teaching experience is 25 years at different levels. She has been involved in workshops, presentations, and activities that have helped her grow professionally. She has been a member of various committees, including the examination committee. She was also part of the departmental academic committee and the security and safety committee. Currently, she works as a Planning Specialist at Planning Quality.

#### **5.4.1 Haifa's Beliefs**

##### **5.4.1.1 Haifa's Beliefs about Learner Autonomy**

Haifa teaching journey commenced in 1998 after she completed her master's degree, driven by a desire to cultivate learners with free will. While she adhered to specifications, she ensured ample space for autonomy to flourish among her students. Though she acknowledges the necessity of rules in specific contexts, she endeavoured to practice her teaching philosophy to the fullest extent possible. She stated that

I started 2007 in this context, but I actually started teaching in 1998. So, it was a time when I just recently did my masters. So, I started teaching one of the master's classes. And so again, the focus was the same, because I don't want to be ruled by anyone. So, I wanted to produce the learners of free will. So that was the agenda from day one. But whatever the context is, I wanted to give them a context, I wanted to give them a background, I wanted to teach the plan. I wanted to follow the specification, but at the same time I give them enough space to develop autonomy. So, they know that they have the confidence, or they should have the confidence to know the things on their own. (H INT1)

Haifa's beliefs about learner autonomy underscore its significance in education. She defines it as a student's capacity and willingness to make independent decisions and choices regarding their learning journey. To her, an autonomous learner demonstrates a readiness to tackle tasks based on their strengths and weaknesses, driven by internal motivation and free from external constraints. She expressed her views about learner autonomy by saying that:

Learner who is independent in her decisions in her learning patterns, in her learning choices, and who is ready to do the work based on her own strengths and weaknesses. To me, an autonomous learner is the one that is ready to take up a task. It doesn't matter to me that how good it is done or how badly it is performed. To me it matters that she or he is ready to take the task on his or her own. Number one, this is my understanding of autonomy. Because if a person is willing enough to take up a task, she will definitely do her level best to complete it because this is a thing that is taken by choice by some inspiration that she herself has from inside. So, this is extremely important. As far as are the dimensions of learner autonomy is our concern, definitely to what extent that person is able to do the task. Does that person need a bit of the help; some scaffolding

techniques from the teacher and the other peers who are strong enough? Well, they can, the help would be there. The support could be there... So autonomy means that you have the choice to do the things the way you want to do without the restrictions that are that are system driven on that are society driven or something like this. (H INT1)

In the above extract, Haifa emphasised the sociocultural aspect of learner autonomy, which can be developed through teachers' support or through collaborative learning with their more knowledgeable peers. However, she emphasized the importance of learners' willingness and having a degree of freedom from external constraints.

She emphasizes the importance of inspiring students toward independent learning rather than rote memorization. Haifa believes she succeeds in fostering autonomy in about half of her classes, while the other half may require additional support. Employing techniques like scaffolding, she endeavours to nurture independent learning in her students within the conducive teaching context she finds herself in. She said that

I think this context allows me 100% to be the teacher I wants to be. Because I never wanted to be a teacher who teaches from the book, and who teaches only that is in the book. I always wanted my students to be the better learners, independent learners and better human beings in general. Okay, so the context that is helping me here to bring all these into light. (H INT1)

#### **5.4.1.2 Haifa's Role in developing Learner Autonomy**

Haifa perceives the teacher's role as pivotal in cultivating learner autonomy. She emphasises the teacher's duty to motivate students toward self-directed learning and responsibility for their own success. Motivation, she asserts, lays the groundwork for autonomy, empowering students to embrace learning tasks voluntarily and independently. She perceives herself as a successful teacher when her students demonstrate the ability to become autonomous learners, taking responsibility for their own learning journey. For both herself and her students, success hinges on their capacity to assume responsibility for their learning endeavours and their willingness to embrace this responsibility. She stated that

To me, an inspiration to become an autonomous learner is something that is the basis of my teaching. If I make or produce a student who is with me for years and years, and at the end is unable to do anything on their own. So, I think myself as failure as a teacher, the basis is that the to be an inspiration for them to take up a task on their own, and do the

research work on its own, and come up with the conclusions and results that are totally based on your own investigations. So, if you're unable to take a task, or if your inner self is not ready to do it, then as a learner, you're a failure. (H INT1)

In the above extract, Haifa believes that inspiring students to become autonomous learners lies at the core of her teaching philosophy. She measures her success as a teacher by the extent to which she can cultivate students who, over time, exhibit self-reliance in their learning pursuits. For her, failure as a teacher manifests when a student, despite years of instruction, remains incapable of independent action. Central to her approach is instilling in students the drive to undertake tasks autonomously, conduct research independently, and draw conclusions based on their own investigations. In her view, a student who lacks the initiative or readiness to engage in self-directed learning is, fundamentally, a learner who has not yet reached their potential. She believes that above all else, a teacher's primary duty is to instill in students the understanding that they hold the power to shape their own destinies. Drawing from her own teaching philosophy, she often imparts to her students a simple yet profound message: within the word 'success', the most crucial element is 'you'; For Haifa, this underlines the fundamental role of individual agency in the pursuit of learning. She emphasizes that without intrinsic motivation and a readiness to engage, educational endeavours remain unfulfilled. In her view, the foundational task of teaching is to inspire students, as she explains:

For me, cultivating this mindset is the foremost duty of a teacher, surpassing the mere transmission of course content or adherence to curricular guidelines. I often share with my students a simple analogy: within the word 'success,' there lies a crucial 'you.' If students are not willing to embrace this truth, their path to success remains elusive. No matter the extent of my efforts, unless they themselves are willing to take initiative, my teaching remains incomplete. It's often said in educational circles that if a teacher can ignite a student's motivation, they helped them to achieve by effective teaching; perhaps as much as 90%—because at that point, the student is not only receptive but also proactive, often taking initiative without prompting. (H INT1)

In discussing the role of English language teachers in Saudi Arabia, Haifa acknowledges the importance of traditional teaching methods, particularly in establishing a theoretical foundation. However, she advocates for the integration of innovative methodologies to kindle students' intrinsic motivation and foster autonomous learning:

When it comes to English language instruction, traditional methods such as grammar modules serve to lay a theoretical groundwork for students. Yet, to truly inspire them to engage independently, innovative teaching approaches are indispensable. By connecting classroom learning with real-life contexts and authentic experiences, such as interviews, error analysis, and exposure to current events and technology, students are not only motivated but also better able to apply language fundamentals in meaningful ways. (H INT1)

Furthermore, Haifa champions using educational technology as a catalyst for learner autonomy, contrary to the reservations expressed by some of her peers. She sees technology as a tool for engagement and empowerment, enriching the learning experience:

For instance, assigning tasks related to interviews, error analysis, or real-world applications of language sparks students' curiosity and drives them to explore further. Additionally, integrating educational technology—be it through interactive software, multimedia resources, or online platforms—provides students with avenues for self-directed learning and application, aligning with the evolving landscape of modern education. (H INT1)

Reflecting on her journey as an English language teacher, Haifa acknowledges the gradual evolution from traditional pedagogy to embracing newer technological advancements. Despite initial constraints, she notes a shift towards greater autonomy and innovation, facilitated by administrative support and a willingness to adopt modern teaching tools:

I recall the early days of teaching, marked by numerous constraints and bureaucratic coordination. However, over time, there was a notable shift towards embracing technology within the classroom. From smartboards to multimedia resources and learning management systems, these innovations have transformed the educational landscape, making learning more interactive and engaging for students. (H INT1)

In the following extract, she continued to express her teaching approach and her role to support her learners and to develop learner autonomy among her learners. Acknowledging the challenge of balancing teacher-centred and student-centred approaches, she navigates this complexity by varying her teaching style from lecture-oriented to facilitative mentorship. She stated that

My teaching approach changes from lecture to lecture. I won't say that all the classes are totally students centre, or all the classes are totally teacher centred. For example, I have a three-credit hour course. So, I will divide my task into starting with explanation, definitely it will be more teacher centred. In each class we have students' feedback, discussion, and expressing point of view. But still I will say one class is teacher centred. But the other two classes are student centred, where the teacher is basically a facilitator, mentor, helper in organising the thoughts, letting them practice, but tracking their progress. (H INT1)

In the first interview, when Haifa was asked about her teaching practices to develop learner autonomy, she stressed the importance of aligning tasks with students' standards, providing flexible timelines, offering feasible research opportunities, and facilitating necessary support. She stated that

By giving them the tasks that appropriate with their standards? being flexible regarding the time. And by giving them doable research? And by giving them the opportunities that they are needed? So these are the things that I'm on. (H INT1)

She continues:

It is something that I actually planned initially, that how the teaching will go on... So, I know that what my goal is and how I need to track my class and how I need to give them as practices and sessions. So, I planned in advance. I know that when the times for group discussions, presentations, feedback. I basically plan it based on the content, the specification, the assessment that is in front of me. (H INT1)

In the above extract, Haifa discussed her teaching approach and how she plans for her classes. She indicated that she meticulously plans her classes based on course specifications and assessment requirements rather than making spontaneous changes, ensuring alignment with course objectives. Her teaching decisions are based on careful planning and consideration of the course requirements. In essence, Haifa underscores the critical role of teachers in nurturing learner autonomy, advocating for a blend of traditional wisdom and contemporary innovation to empower students on their educational journey.

#### **5.4.1.3 Haifa's Beliefs about her Current Learners**

In her view, the autonomy of learners hinges on their willingness, motivation, and ability to manage tasks independently. She stated that:

Willingness is number one Yes. If she is extremely willing to do the task, she will do her utmost effort to do the job. This is what I believe. Apart from willingness, if a student is ready, she will find innovative ways to do that. So, innovation is another thing, creativity is another thing, time management is another thing. So, if these are all qualities, they combined really can help and definitely support the learners. (H INT1)

In regard to her current students, she categorises her current students into autonomous, independent, and those needing more assistance, attributing the success of autonomous learners to prior exposure to project-based learning. Acknowledging the challenge of balancing teacher-centred and student-centred approaches, she navigates this complexity by varying her teaching style from lecture-oriented to facilitative mentorship. She said

I can say that 25% are really good, they are autonomous learners, they just need a clarification of the concept and the task explained and they are able to do. The rest of the 75% can be further divided into two categories. Number one, I would saying another 25% are independent, but needs some scaffolding from the teacher. The other 50% need a little bit more effort by the peers and by the teacher...The reason of having high good percentage of autonomous learners is that that because this is the second time I am teaching them. I established this thing in them by teaching a course that was project-based learning. So, from the very beginning, they were in the habit of thinking, developing, getting feedback, correcting the mistakes, meeting with them to discuss the feedback, then producing a work on their own that they are satisfied with.

Overall, this section showed that Haifa's beliefs in her ability (self-efficacy) are one of the influencing factors on her teaching practices in developing learner autonomy. The data showed that she held a positive theoretical understanding of the concept of learner autonomy, emphasising the importance of the teacher's role and how to implement it in her teaching practices The next section provides an analysis of evidence for teachers' actual teaching practices by investigating the teachers' practices that related to teacher's role in supporting learner autonomy, classroom dynamic, teaching approach, approaches to support learner autonomy and finally, the factors that influenced their teaching practices in regard to LA.

## **5.4.2 Haifa's Teaching Practices to Develop Learner Autonomy**

In previous sections, Haifa's beliefs about teaching in general, beliefs about learner autonomy, her role in developing LA, her teaching philosophy and practices regarding learner autonomy, and her view about her current students have been investigated. In this section, the actual teaching practices have been examined. Additionally, how her teaching beliefs are reflected in her practices and the underlying reasons for these practices have been investigated.

### **5.4.2.1 Classroom Description**

Three classroom observations were held. The participant chose a research design course, and the researcher was invited to observe the course. The course objective is to develop students' writing skills and teach them how to carry out and write a research paper. The students in this course are in their third year (juniors) in the Applied Linguistics department. Their language proficiency level is described in the course specification as high-intermediate to advanced. The credit hours for the course were three hours per week, and the course duration lasted for 15 weeks. The sequence of the three observed classes was almost the same.

The classroom setting consisted of tables in rows, and some students were forming a U shape and sitting next to the wall, with the teacher standing in front of the students and moving in front of the class. The class size was small, and the resources used in the class included a projector, blackboard, and PowerPoint. There were only 23 students in attendance. (H Obs1)

### **5.4.2.2 Haifa's Teaching Approach to Develop Learner Autonomy**

In examining Haifa teaching practices, it becomes evident that she is deeply committed to fostering student engagement and autonomy. Through a series of classroom observations, it is observed that she adeptly connects theoretical concepts to real-life applications, encouraging students to think critically and independently. Her approach promotes collaborative learning environments where students are encouraged to work in groups and voice their opinions, facilitating the development of both sociocultural and psychological autonomy.

The following text displays Ms. Haifa's teaching practices in which she promoted students' engagement by applying certain methods. One noticeable practice in the observed class was connecting students' learning to real-life applications to foster their understanding of the assigned topic. It has been noticed that she gradually guided her learners on their learning

journey, starting with representing the knowledge (defining research design, qualitative research, etc.), asking the students to apply it and connect it to known scenarios in various aspects of life, giving them the freedom to choose the topic, assess, and provide justifications for their own choices with their teacher and within their groups.

In the first observed class, after identifying the important components of research design and highlighting the importance of “procedures” in education, she assigned a task to the students. She asked the students to work in groups and identify the steps to register for a course in an MBA program. The students started to work in groups, discussed the activity together, and listed the steps, including checking the internet connection, program schedule, and available courses for successful registration. Then, Ms. Haifa asked them to identify the possible risks while doing this task. The group discussed potential risks and how to handle them. The students were engaged, and the teacher was encouraging during the task.

Then, Ms. Haifa introduced the three types of research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. She explained that qualitative research is about exploring and describing perceptions and emerging questions in a flexible setting. She gave an example of how 26 students can have 26 different opinions on a particular phenomenon, highlighting the need for qualitative research. Ms. Haifa then asked the students to suggest a topic that could fall under qualitative research. She discussed the topic of qualitative research and how it can be applied to any field of life. She encouraged the class to think of any pressing human social problem or issue that could fit into qualitative research. She asked if anyone had something that bothered them or a question that always came to their mind, whether it was at home, in the malls, or on the street. One student mentioned the issue of unemployment after graduation and how it bothered them. Ms. Haifa confirmed that this is a topic that could fit into qualitative research and encouraged further discussion. (H Obs1)

She later commented in the first follow-up interview on the observed class by describing how students applied what they learned to various aspects of life, which shows an active and engaged approach to learning. She stated that:

The class was interesting in the way that the students got the idea of what qualitative research is and tried to apply qualitative research to different fields of life. They gave me examples after listening to the definition and certain important information regarding

qualitative research from different fields of life and chose the topics they were interested in. And then later they did talk about why they chose these topics and what the reasons behind them were and whether they fall into the category of qualitative research. So, it was very fruitful, I would say. (H FUint1)

It has been noticed that Ms. Haifa is aware of the importance of utilizing effective teaching methods to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, reinforcing the idea that learning extends beyond the classroom. The students were engaged with her, and this type of practice promoted students' engagement and provided a practical application of the concept. Additionally, it helps in creating a collaborative and supportive environment in which students are assigned to work in groups and their opinions are welcomed. These practices help in developing a sociocultural and psychological version of autonomy. In the interview after the first classroom observation, she was aware of the importance of applying what they have learned to real-life situations.

It has been found that Ms. Haifa observed teaching practices and her reflections in the post-first observation interview highlighted that she utilized a student-focused approach, adopted an engaging approach to learning, and fostered an environment where theoretical concepts were connected to real-life scenarios.

Despite the time investment required to transition students from dependence to autonomy, Ms Haifa indicated that she has a significant impact on her learners, and she successfully changed them from being totally dependent on the teacher to being independent learners. Through her nurturing guidance, students gradually transition from relying on the teacher to becoming independent learners, actively engaging with course material and contributing to a shared learning and mentorship culture. This dedication to fostering learner autonomy demonstrates Haifa's commitment to creating enriching educational experiences for her students and her belief in her ability to do so. She stated that

If I compare my class to many other classes, I would say that I have been successful in building this culture in my class because this is my third semester of teaching there. Initially, they were totally dependent on the teacher for everything. They wanted everything to be spoon-fed to them. But as soon as they developed trust in the teacher, they automatically started feeling that their opinions were more than welcome. So they tried to share their opinions and later read more about those topics they shared and recommended even more to me. They recommended whatever they read, suggesting that

material for me to read in order to discuss it further. So in this way, we shared our interests and our reading materials in order to help one another, guiding and mentoring each other. (H FUint1)

In section 5.4.1.1, Ms. Haifa expressed her views regarding learner autonomy and highlighted the significance of developing it among her students. Her views on autonomy were related to students' willingness and their ability to take responsibility for their learning. In later interviews, the participant indicated that she is employing certain techniques to increase the level of learner autonomy among her current students. She believes that these techniques help increase students' involvement in the learning process, build a trusting and safe atmosphere in her classes, provide learning resources for them, and give them the opportunity to explore them. She stated that:

I tried to develop autonomy in them by giving them tasks to work on individually and by welcoming their opinions. I refrained from judging them for their opinions, whether they were correct or incorrect. I provided them with opportunities to understand concepts on their own, including giving them reading materials and encouraging them to explore topics beyond what was presented in class. I believe that in this way, I attempted to increase learners' autonomy. (H FUint1)

It was evident from this case dataset that she utilised a consistent capacity to create a space for her learners to develop learner autonomy in her classes. In the above extract, Ms Haifa applied a student-centred approach to promote learner autonomy and empower her learners. Firstly, assigning individual tasks helps in fostering a sense of responsibility and self-reliance. This helps in developing students' problem-solving skills and self-efficacy since students who are given this opportunity navigate through challenges independently. Additionally, Haifa views regarding welcoming different opinions help create a non-judgmental atmosphere in her classes where various perspectives are valued and accepted. This contributed to building a positive classroom culture, and students feel more welcome to express their opinions, which can boost their confidence and willingness to involve themselves in classroom discussions actively. In the first classroom observation, it was noticed that students were confident in expressing their points of view in the classroom discussion.

Another example of this case is from the second classroom observation. The teacher introduced the word "variable" in quantitative research, and the majority of the students did not know the exact meaning. The teacher asked them to use their phones and guided them on how to find the

appropriate meaning. In the second post-classroom interview, she commented on this incident, explaining:

(Using their phones to research) It's valuable for them because it is available as well. The world is different now. I would say that they have to take responsibility for their own learning to some extent, and instead of looking towards me for finding the information because in this way they will always be looking towards me, so I wanted them to use these search engines because they have to use them for this course to find their studies. So sometimes when I'm checking their studies, I think that the information is totally irrelevant. So, teaching while teaching inside the class, teaching them how to search well, is one of the tasks that I wanted to accomplish. (H FUint2)

She continued:

I give them certain activities like I asked them to read on their own, I asked them to discuss. I opened the questions, left them unanswered. I asked them to look for their answers by themselves. So in this way, I made them somehow responsible for their own learning. So even when they asked me to provide an example, they said you, and I said no. Just not me. It's you who will provide the answers. So it is that I asked them or introduced the technique of searching and searching for the specific information. I tried to correct them wherever they were mistaken or wrong in that capacity. (H FUint2)

This example gives evidence of the teacher's desirability and willingness to support learners to have a role in their learning process to empower them and promote learner autonomy. In this example, the teacher was facilitating students' language learning to promote their research skills, and at the same time, she was creating a space for the students to take responsibility for their learning.

In the third classroom observation, the topic of the lesson was an introduction to the research paradigm and the various worldviews. In one of the activities, Ms. Haifa asked the students to work in groups and give her examples of certain beliefs that are practised, whether they are related to their family or their religion. One example given by the teacher is the belief that one should only marry within the same tribe or family name. She highlighted that they have to provide examples of those beliefs that guide actions and shape daily routines. (H Obs3)

The above text displays another example of Haifa's teaching approach: she introduced research paradigms and worldviews through a culturally grounded and interactive activity. This case adopted an interactive and collaborative approach to learning, in which she assigned the students to work in groups and discuss examples of beliefs that emerged from their own lives (interactive learning). When she provided an example from the students' culture, she added a cultural dimension to the lesson, making it relatable and meaningful to students' experiences. She also fostered a connection between theoretical aspects and real-life contexts. Additionally, by highlighting the role of beliefs in guiding and shaping actions and daily routines, Ms Haifa bridged the gap between practical, observable behaviours and theoretical concepts (research paradigm). It is evident that Haifa utilized an application-oriented approach to assess the students' understanding and see the relevance of abstract theories in their own lives. In the third follow-up interview, she reflected on the effectiveness of her teaching strategy. She said:

The class was productive; they understood, they learned something. And inshallah, when we are going to sum up our discussion tomorrow about the worldviews, I hope the background is ready. So today was the background because if I had started it on my own, they would never be able to perceive it well, and they would never understand it. (H Fuint3)

The above extract displays evidence of the intentional teaching approach by Haifa in the observed class. She highlighted the importance of contextual information in facilitating a deeper understanding of complex topics and connecting what the students already know with new information. The sequential building of knowledge and the emphasis on background information contribute to a pedagogical strategy to foster meaningful understanding among students. This indicates that Ms. Haifa employs a pedagogical approach that combines theoretical concepts with real-world examples, cultural relevance, and student interaction. By doing so, she aims to create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that facilitates the learning process.

The data from classroom observation and post-interviews revealed that Ms. Haifa has adopted a number of teaching strategies. Her actual teaching practices, to some extent, align with her stated beliefs regarding learner autonomy. They also align with the principles of student empowerment, fostering autonomy, and creating an environment where learning is a collaborative and independent endeavour. These practices contribute to the development of well-rounded, self-reliant learners who are knowledgeable and capable of critical thinking and independent inquiry.

Overall, it's evident that Ms. Haifa employs a deliberate teaching approach aimed at enhancing students' comprehension of complex subjects. She underscores the significance of providing contextual information to deepen students' understanding and bridge their existing knowledge with new concepts. This sequential approach to knowledge-building, coupled with an emphasis on background information, serves as a pedagogical strategy to cultivate meaningful comprehension and foster learner autonomy among learners.

Furthermore, Ms. Haifa's teaching methodology integrates theoretical principles with real-world illustrations, cultural relevance, and active student participation. This holistic approach fosters a dynamic and interactive learning environment conducive to effective knowledge acquisition. She intends to create an engaging atmosphere that promotes student engagement and facilitates learning.

The analysis of classroom observations and post-interviews reveals that Ms. Haifa's teaching strategies, to some extent, align with her beliefs regarding learner autonomy. Her practices prioritise student empowerment, freedom, and collaborative learning experiences. By implementing these strategies, she endeavours to nurture well-rounded, self-reliant learners capable of critical thinking and independent inquiry. Overall, Ms. Haifa's pedagogical approach reflects a commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment conducive to holistic student development. The next section provides an analysis of the factors that influenced their teaching practices in regard to LA.

#### **5.4.3 Factors influence teachers' teaching practices to Develop Learner Autonomy**

Considering the educational context, Haifa believes the degree of institutional flexibility determines the facilitation or hindrance of learner autonomy. Teaching in a department with fewer constraints allows her to nurture autonomy more effectively compared to contexts with stricter regulations and shared responsibilities across multiple sections or genders. This is aligned with what other teachers (Basimah and Samiah) who shared courses and had multiple sections. They felt that they are restricted, and they have no control over their courses. In Haifa's case, she felt that she could implement learner autonomy because of the lack of these factors, and she has full responsibility for her course which allows her to have a space to practice what she believes in to develop among her learners.

The data shows that Haifa's positive learning experience is considered an importance factor that has impacted her teaching beliefs and practices. She believed that learning could happen when

freedom is given to learn and when an environment is created for learning. Her teaching philosophy was shaped by her own learning experience, where she was exposed to a non-traditional approach emphasising learning beyond classroom confines. She provided an example of beneficial techniques that can help the students to develop their learning in a non-traditional way. For example, instead of teaching the subject in an abstract way, she prefers to implement authentic learning and connect students' learning with real-life situations. She acknowledged that they cannot be independent in a traditional learning environment. However, she tried to implement innovative practices to develop learner autonomy among her learners.

So I was taught in a very different way. The learning was not bound to the classrooms, that was beyond classroom learning, in an open-air environment where you are learning things, for example, If I am learning something that is related to a poem and maybe that needs a garden or some marketplace, I was taken over there in order to live the real experience in the real life. Also, if you want to teach a student two plus two is equivalent to four. So instead of teaching that why don't you take the student to the cafeteria and then afterwards teach them by doing this mathematics in real life, right by buying and selling the things. So, I was raised in that environment. So I knew that learning could happen if some freedom is given to you to learn. If an environment is created for learning, I cannot have the same independence to be very frank over here. Because there are rules and I have to follow them. So I'll put as much as I can to practice my own way of teaching over here. I did. (H INT1)

As an English language teacher, she indicated that she has been passionate about teaching from an early age and pursued jobs that allowed her to grow and learn in a challenging and interesting environment. She was concerned about how external factors can affect students' language learning and because of this, she has studied educational psychology to better understand and help her students become independent learners. Her educational background as a language learner, professional development, and teaching experience shaped her professionally. She indicated that

I actually was very passionate about teaching from the very early stages of my life... So you can say that at a very early age of 20/21, I was in the feeling of who was teaching, it was something that I am passionate about and I'm really concerned about that how students, they are affected by the things that are not only inside the language rather

outside, in the environment, affecting them in some regard. So you can say that no doubt, language learning became a passion for me. But at the same time, educational psychology was something that opened the ways for me to understand my students well and help them to become independent learners. (H INT1)

Haifa reflects on the evolution of her teaching practice, attributing its development to diverse sources such as student feedback, professional development workshops, exposure to new methodologies, literature review, practical experimentation, and self-reflection. Recalling her early teaching years in 2007, she describes herself as young, naive, and inexperienced, teaching graduate students from varied backgrounds. Through her journey, she has evolved into a vastly different teacher, continually enriching her knowledge and experience. She stated that

If I see myself as a teacher of 2007, so young, so naive, so inexperienced. My first class was a class of graduate students. So many, it was a class of MIT students, and from the different gender. So they were too tall, and they were too different to teach. So I still remember myself my experience of that time with my spirits right now. No doubt that whatever I went through and whatever I learned from different mediums, from workshops from different presentations from the authors of the books and from different other I would say different other genres I would say of literature, even book reading really helped me in that regard. I see myself a very different person right now a very different teacher. And I believe that every passing day is bringing more knowledge more experience more grace to me. (H INT1)

However, Haifa has highlighted the impacts of the Covid pandemic on students' learning and development of learner autonomy. She asserts that the pandemic has stripped learners of their autonomy and motivation, leading to a dearth of face-to-face interaction and student grooming. Haifa contends that the absence of in-person engagement, coupled with the detachment from the college environment and culture, has set back students significantly. Moreover, she observes that the pandemic-induced lack of classroom, educational, and learning ethics has hindered students' ability to study effectively. Rebuilding a culture of autonomy and instilling confidence in students to become independent learners will undoubtedly take time, according to her. To achieve this, Haifa suggests increased student participation, the assumption of tasks independently, adeptness at working solo, and allocating time for self-reflection. She indicated that

The pandemic had an extreme influence in terms of everything. To me, whether it is educational grooming or personal grooming. Students these days lack classroom ethics, educational ethics, they lack teaching ethics, and learning ethics. They have almost forgotten how to exactly study. And what exactly need to be done. Now, we have started back to face to face teaching. But every day was important and what we lost for two years, actually; I think we need time now to build back that culture of autonomy; to give them this confidence in order to become independent learners. But to develop this, they need to participate more, they need to be willing to take up the task, they need to work well and being responsible, they need to spend time on themselves. (H INT1)

Reflecting on the pandemic's aftermath, Haifa observes a trend of increased dependence on external resources among students, to the detriment of their belief in themselves. She notes a shift towards reliance on external sources rather than fostering personal development. This trend, she believes, has eroded essential social skills and altered presentation styles.

After the pandemic, they became more and more dependent on the things around them instead of believing in themselves. They forgot to believe in themselves. Instead of looking into their own personal development, they became accustomed to the other things. So, pandemic really took away a lot of things, they the lack of social skills, as I would say is one of them. The way they used to present is not the same anymore. (H INT1)

In examining Haifa's teaching practices, it becomes evident that she is deeply committed to fostering student engagement and autonomy. Through a series of classroom observations, it is observed that she adeptly connects theoretical concepts to real-life applications, encouraging students to think critically and independently. Her approach promotes collaborative learning environments where students are encouraged to work in groups and voice their opinions, facilitating the development of both sociocultural and psychological autonomy. This demonstrated that several personal and contextual factors influenced Ms Haifa's teaching practices, specifically the development of LA. It was evident that Ms. Haifa's self-beliefs about her ability, positive teaching experience, engagement in continuous professional development, and recognition of the challenges that helped shape her beliefs and teaching practices, particularly in the development of LA.

The following section will examine and provide an in-depth investigation of another case with positive beliefs about Learner Autonomy (LA) and identify several challenging factors since she is teaching an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course, sharing a similar context with Samiah.

Surprisingly, the data shows that she implemented some autonomy-supportive teaching practices due to a number of personal and contextual factors.

## **5.5 Basimah**

Basimah is a novice English language teacher with three years of teaching experience. She started teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the year 2023 is her first-year teaching face-to-face. She indicated that as a new teacher, she is still learning and adapting her teaching practices and techniques. She has a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in applied linguistics from a Saudi university. Regarding her professional development, she reported that she attended a number of workshops related to practical topics that helped her in her teaching. She stated that she has other administrative roles, and she is assigned to take part in the curriculum development committee.

### **5.5.1 Basimah's Beliefs**

#### **5.5.1.1 Basimah Beliefs about Learner Autonomy**

Regarding Basimah's views on the concept of learner autonomy and its importance in education, she perceives learner autonomy as developing learners' ability to seek, analyse, choose, and evaluate information. She articulated learner autonomy as follows:

Learning autonomy is to learn how to look for information, how to analyse, how to evaluate. That develops the students' ability to do that; to be able to learn, seek information, and evaluate and choose the best methods, theory, or technique to apply in their context when they graduate. So, when you deliver everything to the students, they're not going to be autonomous, but when you stimulate them to think, ask them to think, analyse, and evaluate, and give them the confidence, they will be autonomous learners.  
(B INT1)

In the above extract, she emphasised the importance of developing students' skills to be autonomous learners through stimulating them to think critically and giving them the confidence to express themselves. She remarked that developing learners' abilities empowers them and helps them apply their knowledge in different contexts after graduation. She is against the old way of teaching that relies on memorization. In the first interview, she argued that simply memorizing information is not enough and that autonomous learners are better equipped to

improve themselves and become independent thinkers. She believes that developing learners' abilities to be autonomous learners is a key aspect of education that should be prioritised. She emphasised,

We're not graduating people who just memorise information; what are they going to do with this information when they graduate? With the content and the skills? If they're just memorising, they won't be autonomous learners. I believe that unless they know how to improve themselves, how to learn, and even when it comes to knowledge, they are going to be independent thinkers. (B INT1)

She believes that autonomous learners possess several qualities that distinguish them. Based on her view, these qualities include thinking for oneself, seeking information independently, asking questions, and expressing opinions confidently. She said:

The characteristics of an autonomous learner, because I taught before, include students who can say, 'Okay, I'm not just going to take this. I'm going to read it whether I agree with it or not.' I think of them as people who can think for themselves. People who can go and look for information before they ask the teacher. So, people who ask questions, people who are confident. They know that it's not about being a good student but being able to say what you think in class, whether it's right or wrong. That's an autonomous learner. (B INT1)

In regard to the strategies that she implements to develop learner autonomy among her students, she indicated that:

Use exercises, and assignments that rely on their thinking and looking for the information, not just going there and completing the tasks. Also, articles and presentations to try to stimulate their analysis and evaluation skills. We talk especially about applied linguistics because I teach them educational psychology. I studied this course before. We do talk about autonomy, motivation and what learning is and how it happens. So, I use it as a chance to explain what learning is. (B INT1)

The data indicated that Basimah tried to implement autonomy-supportive strategies to develop learner autonomy. She mentioned that she uses exercises that encourage critical thinking and information-seeking. She stated that in classroom discussions, she connects the concepts of autonomy, motivation, and learning to student learning. It seems that her teaching practices

were influenced by her previous learning experience and by her educational background in educational psychology (when she was a student in this context).

### **5.5.1.2 Basimah's Role in Developing Learner Autonomy**

In regard to Basimah's role in relation to the development of LA, she described her role in the classroom as a lecturer who explains theories to her students but also gives them space to read and reflect on articles related to the content. She involves learners in the learning process by offering multiple articles for the students to choose from, and if they read and reflect on them, they can earn bonus marks. She stated that her assignments are mostly critiques, and she believes that she encouraged her students to become more autonomous by using exercises and assignments that require them to think and look for information. She also uses presentations and articles to stimulate analysis and evaluation skills. She indicated

I have to explain theories to them, and I have to be the lecturer who is lecturing everything and handing it to them, but I always give space to the students. I need them to read. After that experience, I started to post the articles. So I would give them seven or eight, but not one article. I would give eight, sometimes twelve articles, and they would choose one of these articles that covers the same content or the same theory. And they would read about it and maybe reflect on it. And I would give them that as a bonus. 'If you did like five articles, you're going to take five marks that will be added to your assessment.' This is your assignment. Most of my assignments are critiques. I tried my best. (B INT1)

Basimah emphasised the teacher's role as a facilitator when she expressed her opinion about the qualities of a good language teacher. Her reflection showed a specific philosophy and approach to language teaching, in which she focused on the teacher's role, the nature of language learning, and the methods used to facilitate this learning, she believes that a good language teacher focuses on language skills, stimulates students, acts as a facilitator, and involves students in learning. She stated that

A good language teacher who focuses on skills, stimulating students, and works as a facilitator. Because when it comes to language, you're teaching students a skill. So, it's not about what they say but how they say it. Is it appropriate or not? Is it accurate? When it comes to teaching language as a skill, you have to relate to the students. You have to discuss it with them. You can't just focus on the outcomes of the course. (B INT1)

In the above extract, Basimah expressed her beliefs and teaching philosophy, which prioritises practical language use, student engagement, and the teacher's role as a facilitator. It emphasises the importance of teaching language as a skill, where appropriateness and accuracy are key, and the learning process is interactive and student-centred. This approach aims to develop students' ability to use language effectively in real-world contexts, fostering their proficiency and confidence.

Regarding her professional development, she indicated that she reads and applies new techniques to her classroom, asking for student feedback and adjusting accordingly. She acknowledged that teaching different courses requires different approaches. She said:

Every time it's like a new experience. Sometimes you're not just teaching them writing. You're teaching them logic and argument. So, it depends on the course. I go and read, and then I apply it to my classroom experiment. I ask students, 'Do you like this? What do you want?' Usually, when I teach something, I ask students, 'Okay, do you want me to read? (B INT1)

She mentioned that when teaching business vocabulary, she initially explained the topic and showed videos but then started reading the texts to students and dividing them into groups to complete tasks. She also noted that different groups require different techniques. In the first interview, she provided an example of her teaching practices and how she delivered the lessons. She said:

Like now I'm teaching business vocabulary. The book is basically texts with bolded words, and they have to understand these words. At the beginning, I used to explain the unit because it's a one-page unit. Very simple, you can cover it in one or two sessions. I would explain the topic and show some videos that cover topics like supply chain management. Then, I would divide students into groups; I would like them to discuss these words and complete the tasks, and they do the work. Groups differ. There are some techniques I use with some groups, but I don't with other groups. It depends. Usually, I start with a warm-up; it's either a question or usually the first slide has the topic, and then we discuss it for 10 minutes, maybe 5 minutes, or a video. I like YouTube. I use it a lot in my classroom. Sometimes, I use flashcards. I give students flashcards with questions, and they have to discuss them as a group, and then I will discuss with them, and then I will start with what I have. (B INT1)

Basimah believes that her teaching practices depend on the type of course she is teaching. For example, she discussed her teaching approach for different classes. When she is teaching business communication, she uses discussions and works on tasks together. She applied this approach to most of her classes. For another course, such as contrastive analysis, she starts with a warm-up, asks questions during the presentation, and sometimes uses worksheets.

When Basimah was asked in the first interview about how she has developed her teaching over time, considering her teaching and learning experiences, she responded:

Well, experimenting. I still think that I'm learning because the first year when I taught it was online; the first two years. This semester and the last semester were the semesters where I taught fully on campus. So, I still struggle sometimes. I do see it sometimes that students struggle because I feel that the students are struggling. (B INT1)

In the above extract, Basimah reflects on her teaching journey and highlights the evolving nature of her practice. She states that her first two years of teaching were entirely online, and only recently she had the opportunity to teach fully on campus. This shift from online to in-person instruction presents new challenges for her, and she is still navigating the transition.

Basimah highlights the idea of "experimenting" in her teaching, suggesting that she is continuously refining her approach based on trial and error. This indicates that she is flexible and adaptive, where she views teaching as an ongoing learning process. She also points out that she sometimes struggles, particularly in recognizing that her students are also facing difficulties. Her sensitivity to her students' struggles implies that she is highly adapted to their needs and reflective about how her teaching methods might affect their learning. Her response underlines the idea that teaching is a dynamic and evolving practice. The shift from online to in-person teaching requires adjustments, and both she and her students are learning to adapt to this new environment.

### **5.5.1.3 Basimah's Beliefs about Her Current Learners**

Interestingly, she notes that most of her current students are not autonomous and rely on teachers to provide everything. She provided an example from her experience of learners who do not want to take responsibility for their own learning, even in simple matters. She said, "Some students even ask me how to change the file to pdf. This is a simple question; Google it." She speculated that this may be due to cultural changes or the impact of COVID-19. She indicated,

"Only a few learners are autonomous. Most of them are not. Most of them want everything to be handed to them. They rely on others. I don't know if it's a result of COVID or maybe the culture has changed." In the first interview, she gave examples of students asking simple questions that could easily be answered through a quick Google search. She compared her current learners to herself when she was a language learner in the same context:

I remember I always compare my students to when I was a student here in the department. I wouldn't dare to go and ask my teacher. Wow. I would feel stupid. I don't know why I felt that way. You see nowadays students sending emails asking simple questions like how do I change it to PDF? (B INT1)

She thinks that only a few of her learners are autonomous. She noted that many students struggle to provide examples or explanations without explicit instruction. She provided an example of students' dependence. She said:

For instance, I tell them to explain an easy question. I ask them to explain the differences between the two theories. First, I give them a scenario, and I ask them to choose which theory they would use and explain why. If I did not write examples, they would not write examples. They will say, 'You did not tell us; you did not give us that; we did not learn this in the classroom.' If I review these answers with them, they would ask me, 'Miss, can you please write it down on Blackboard?' This is a huge issue, and not one or two. Only a few are autonomous learners. (B INT1)

This section showed that Basimah's self-beliefs and her previous learning experience, to some extent, influenced her teaching practices. However, other contextual factors will be discussed later. The data indicate that she held a positive theoretical understanding of the concept of learner autonomy, emphasising the importance of the teacher's role and how she provided several strategies to implement it in her teaching practices. The following section provides an analysis of evidence for teachers' actual teaching practices by investigating the teachers' practices that related to the teacher's role in supporting learner autonomy, classroom dynamic, teaching approach, approaches to support learner autonomy and finally, the factors that influenced their teaching practices regarding LA.

## **5.5.2 Basimah's Teaching Practices to Develop Learner Autonomy**

This section examined the classroom observation data and post-observation interview data from Basimah's Business Communication class, focusing on her teaching strategies, student engagement, and plans for increasing learner autonomy.

### **5.5.2.1 Classroom Description**

The class rules established a structured environment with assigned group seating, and students were instructed not to use phones during the lesson. The topics of the units for the three observed classes were team building, marketing, and branding. The teaching sequence for the three observed classes was almost identical, with Basimah initiating the class with a warm-up activity involving open discussion. Notably, she assigned group members to ensure diverse collaboration. During the discussion, open-ended questions were posed by the teacher, prompting students to share their preferences and opinions on the assigned topics.

The Business Communication course was chosen by the teacher for classroom observations. This course is one of the ESP courses taught to students from different majors. Basimah mentioned that this is her first time teaching this course. She described the language proficiency level of her students in this course as beginner or high beginner. She said, "They can understand, they can produce the language, but they still have these developmental errors...They understand what I say, but their language is not perfect yet" (B FUInt1).

### **5.5.2.2 Basimah's Teaching Approaches to Develop Learner Autonomy**

The data from classroom observations for Basimah's Business Communication class provided insights into her teaching approach. It was found that Basimah's teaching practices revolved around communication and group work, real-world relevance, and autonomy. She adopted a learner-focused approach, and her teaching style is adaptable to her students' needs and language proficiency levels. It seems that Basimah prioritised creating a comfortable and engaging learning atmosphere for her students.

One example is from the first classroom observation. The topic was team building, and Basimah initiated the class with a warm-up activity involving open discussion. She assigned group members herself to ensure diverse collaboration. During the discussion, she posed open-ended questions, prompting students to share their preferences for group or individual work, with

reasons ranging from time efficiency to personal trust. Basimah's technique of starting the lesson with a class discussion effectively engaged the students.

The classroom observation data for Basimah showed a consistent emphasis on communication skills and group work. It seems that she encouraged learners to communicate, work collaboratively, and engage in classroom discussions, aligning with the course objectives. In the first follow-up interview, she emphasised the need for students to communicate, creating an environment conducive to language use. She highlighted, *"It's a business communication course. They have to communicate. It's part of the process."*

Despite her students' current low level of learner autonomy, Basimah articulated that she has a plan to gradually increase learner autonomy. She recognised her students' discomfort with public speaking and intended to foster a team dynamic first before giving the students responsibility for their own learning. She indicated that she is working towards developing learner autonomy for her students in the classroom. She stated:

In the first class, I discussed with them their previous background, and they told me that they have never presented in front of anyone. Some of them said that they still feel like shaking when they practice and when they answer questions in the class. So, what I'm doing now is making them comfortable, letting them know each other as a team, and then maybe next week or the week after that we will start. They will be the ones I'm going to assign a unit to, maybe to a group. I told them, 'OK, now you read it and explain this to your classmates while you're sitting there. (B FUInt1)

Interestingly, Basimah set a plan to gradually increase learner autonomy by giving students more responsibilities in leading classes and collaborating with their group members. She emphasized the importance of creating a positive atmosphere and making the students comfortable with each other, building a team dynamic before implementing this plan.

Therefore, it has been observed that the students' level of engagement significantly improved in the third classroom observation compared to the first one. When asked about this, she indicated that she prioritizes providing a positive environment and acknowledges and respects individual learning styles. She wanted to know her students better first. Her teaching strategy revolves around creating a positive and encouraging atmosphere where students are assured, they won't be judged solely on grammar or fluency. The purpose of the course is framed as communication. She indicated:

Maybe you noticed that some students did not even participate. I wouldn't put pressure on them, but later on, when I know them very well, then I would ask them next class. You will read, prepare yourself... The course is interesting. In the first meeting, I told them that I'm not going to judge you on grammar. I'm not going to judge you on your fluency. I displayed the outcomes for them and that what the purpose of this course is for you to communicate. All you have to do is to communicate. So, I think it worked. (B FUInt3)

This shows that Basimah adopted her teaching practices based on her learners' needs, prioritizing creating a comfortable and inclusive learning environment. It has been found that the teacher's awareness of the students' perspectives contributed to a positive and dynamic teaching philosophy.

The data from the post-observation interview clearly showed Basimah's teaching philosophy, in which she views herself as a facilitator. She stressed the need to explain concepts to the whole class to ensure collective understanding, particularly considering her learners' diverse language proficiency levels. She indicated:

I explained some of the words I have to make sure because students are not at the same level. So even if they are, if I assume that most of them understand, I'll also. I think it's my role, it's my job to explain to them again. In my class, I have 37 students. So, I have different levels, and at this stage, I cannot know what every student knows, and so I just explain it to make sure that everyone has it, whether they know it or not. So, I believe I was a facilitator. I was directing them. I'm guiding the whole class. (B FUInt1)

Therefore, across the classroom observations, there is evidence that Basimah tried to promote learner autonomy among her learners, expecting them to look for meaning independently, engage in tasks and classroom discussions without constant guidance, and gradually transition to using English more autonomously.

It was noticed during classroom observations that the lessons revolved around practical topics like team building, marketing, customer care, and branding. The teacher connected vocabulary exercises to real-world scenarios. The classroom activities were led by the teacher, who used open questions to encourage students to participate and asked about their experiences related to the unit topic, linking what they were learning with their real life to facilitate their learning. The following extract is from the field note for the third classroom observation, demonstrating how

the teacher provided the students with real-world relevant applications to link classroom learning with their experiences:

The teacher asked the students to discuss their experiences at SEPHORA and how they perceived the characteristics of good customer care. One student found it annoying that the staff followed them around, which did not make them excited to shop. When the teacher asked about customer service, another student mentioned that they found the staff needy and that they hid the samples. Then they moved to another conversation about the characteristics of good customer care, mentioning it should include being respectful, friendly, and maintaining social distance. In services such as mobile phone communication, it is important for the people in contact with customers to have the right attitude and behaviour, whether in shops or call centres. They should be helpful, well-trained, and highly informed. The students were engaged and started to exchange their experiences with their teacher and group members. (B Obs3)

Another example from the third classroom observation showed how Basimah emphasized the importance of using technology to conduct research and promoting the practical application of what they learn in class to help them develop their language learning and vocabulary expansion:

The teacher instructed the students to work in groups to research and describe different brands. She wrote down several brand names on the whiteboard, including DIOR dresses, VERSACE dresses, and Balenciaga (later changed to Yazzy). The students were asked to use their laptops or iPads and go to Google to answer questions about the brands, such as what they represent and what type of woman would wear them. The teacher encouraged the students to look at pictures and not just rely on written information. The students discussed their favourite brands, including Tory Burch, Michael Kors, Gucci, Adidas, Nike, Zara, H&M, Gap, Under Armour, Hollister, and North Face. They were asked to describe the woman who would wear Dior and other brands. The teacher emphasized the importance of working together as a group and using laptops or iPads to conduct research. (B Obs3)

The data from classroom observations and post-classroom observation interviews reflected that Basimah's teaching practices promoted learner autonomy through practical application, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of the importance of providing a supportive learning

context. Integrating technology, considering cultural differences, and focusing on real-world scenarios contribute to a comprehensive and engaging learning experience.

The data showed that Basimah demonstrated a commitment to creating an engaging, student-centred, and adaptable learning environment. Her teaching practice greatly reflected her beliefs, and her focus on communication, real-world relevance, and autonomy aligns with the principles of developing learner autonomy and modern, effective approaches to language teaching.

### **5.5.3 Factors influence teachers' teaching practices to Develop Learner Autonomy**

The data showed that several factors influence Basimah's teaching practices, including the institution, students, and the teacher herself. She confirms that her previous learning experience as a language learner has influenced her teaching practices. She interestingly reflected on her learning experience, how it influenced her personally, and how it impacted her teaching beliefs and practices. She sees teaching English as more than just teaching a subject but as an opportunity for students to develop personally and learn about the world. She stated:

Actually, I started this (interest in teaching) when I joined applied linguistics as my major in BA. It was very interesting to me the role of teachers and when I joined YUC I couldn't even write a single sentence in English. When I graduated, I was able to speak fluently and accurately and that's because of my teachers who are my colleagues now. (B INT1)

Evidently, similar to other cases, teachers' previous learning experience was one factor that influenced their teaching practices. She mentioned that her positive experience in this context as a language learner was one of the influential factors when talking about how her teaching beliefs and practices evolved over time. She continued:

Their methods of teaching and how teaching and learning English has affected me as a person. So, for me, teaching the English language is not just teaching a subject. It's like you're teaching them a skill, and this is what I always tell my students. This is an opportunity for you to develop on a personal level, to know the world because learning English is a window to the world and I know how it affects your life; your personality and your mentality. So, I take it as an opportunity for students to develop not just in terms of subjects and grades but even as people. (B INT1)

Interestingly, the data revealed that the teachers' previous learning experience as autonomous learner influenced their teaching practices. In the first interview, Basimah stated that

As a student, I used to do a lot of research, a lot of reading, presentations, especially for the topics that surprised me...we did a lot of articles. I still have some of these articles. To develop my language learning, I do my own search and look for information by myself. I watched YouTube lectures... As a student, I wanted to learn English. For me, it's not just for passing the courses. I would do much reading and translating words; that is how I learned English. Then, when it comes to core linguistics courses, the teaching methods that my teacher implemented at that time were not just the teacher handing everything to the students. (B INT1)

The above extract reflects the impact of teachers' personal learning experiences as autonomous learners on the development of learner autonomy. Basimah explains that being an autonomous learner has influenced her learning journey. This illustrates how a teacher's journey towards autonomy, mainly through experiencing autonomy, equips her to create an educational environment where students are encouraged to take charge of their learning. This cyclical influence on teachers' teaching practices and beliefs where autonomous teachers foster learner autonomy among her/ his students. This highlights the importance of teacher development and the adoption of flexible, student-centred teaching practices.

However, it has been found that the nature of the course is an effective factor that impacts teachers' teaching practices. In this study, it was found that two of the cases faced more constraints compared to the others. A shared factor between these two cases is teaching an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course. The data revealed several constraints faced by teachers teaching ESP courses. These constraints and limitations impacted Basimah's teaching practices, particularly those related to standardised curricula.

Basimah shared the same challenges as Ms. Samiah, expressing her disappointment with the restrictions imposed on them when teaching the ESP course. She mentioned *that "we cannot even see the final exam questions; this limits our role in the classroom and minimises our responsibilities."* They intended to focus on delivering the content, while other responsibilities belonged to the course coordinator. They indicated that these challenges have impacted their teaching methods. In the first interview, Basimah revealed, *"This semester, because the English Language department uses a very strict unified curriculum, I am not able to be innovative anymore."* She continued to discuss the control over the material and the assessment:

I am going to use what everyone is using because the writers of the exam rely on this content and these outcomes. So, I cannot be innovative... I believe this affects the learners because when you are not being creative, even the students will not be autonomous. I hope to change this; I tried to complain. Even for the assignments, in the past, the teacher was able to choose the assignment herself and be creative. Now it is different. I think this is a result of quality assurance standards. (B INT1)

She suggested specifying the outcome and the type of question and creating a form or checklist that could be submitted for review to ensure adherence to requirements. She emphasised, "*If we don't do that, it won't be accredited, but they disagreed. They said we must use the same assessment and topics.*"

In addition to institutional constraints, the data revealed that the student's level of learning and learning habits impacted teachers' practices in terms of the development of learner autonomy. All the teachers in this study agreed and mentioned that the student's level and language habits play a crucial role in their learning development. They attributed this to the schooling system and the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding the impact of COVID-19, all the participants mentioned that they noticed changes in the students' learning skills post-pandemic. For example, in the first interview, Ms. Basimah mentioned, "only a few learners are autonomous. Most of them are not. They want everything to be handed to them; they rely on the teacher. I do not know if it's a result of COVID-19... or maybe the culture changed." Samiah expressed a similar concern, reflecting on her students' recent learning experiences: "The students' level before COVID-19 and within COVID-19 is different, specifically related to the level of understanding and acquiring knowledge. Maybe the online learning influenced that. Like other cases, Ms Basimah shared her recent experience with her students, who were surprised by these changes.

In addition, she acknowledged the limitations of time constraints and the need to balance covering topics, assignments, and quizzes with her teaching practices. She indicated:

I try my best, but sometimes you have to think; you cannot discuss everything with students because you have topics to cover. You have assignments. You have quizzes, but I do try my best. (B INT1)

Despite all these challenges identified by Basimah, the data showed that she demonstrated a commitment to creating autonomy-supportive practices and an engaging, student-centred, and adaptable learning environment. To a great extent, her teaching practice reflected her beliefs

where her focus on communication, real-world relevance, and autonomy aligns with the principles of developing learner autonomy and modern, practical approaches to language teaching.

This case demonstrates that even within the constrained environment of an ESP course, it is possible to foster learner autonomy through having belief in one's ability and thoughtful and intentional teaching practices. The teacher's positive beliefs about learner autonomy and her commitment to challenging the constraints, her positive learning experience, and her continuous professional development enabled her to create a learning environment that supports and promotes autonomous learning. This investigation contributes valuable insights into how autonomy can be nurtured in specialised and potentially restrictive educational settings, highlighting the importance of teachers' self-beliefs and contextual adaptability in achieving academic goals.

## **5.6 Summary of the chapter**

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrates that the teachers in this study held positive beliefs about learner autonomy, which stated that the teacher has a fundamental role in developing learner autonomy. The participants believed that the development of learner autonomy is essential, and the cases agreed and emphasised the importance of teachers' role in promoting learner autonomy. All teachers stated that they implemented autonomy-supportive strategies in their teaching practices. They put greater emphasis on the specific aspects of learner autonomy. Specifically, they supported psychological and sociocultural dimensions compared to political and technical dimensions. In terms of teaching practices, it has been found that the teachers adapted several roles to support learner autonomy, except in one case. There was evidence in their teaching practices which they implemented several practices inside and outside the classroom to develop learner autonomy. The data indicated that the teachers suggested and implemented a number of strategies to develop learner autonomy. It has been found that implementing these practices can help create a more engaging, motivating, and effective learning environment that supports the development of learner autonomy (See Table 5-1).

Table 5-1 Autonomy-Supportive Teaching Practices

Autonomy-Supportive Teaching Practices	Teacher role
1. Encouraging Self-Directed Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for students to set their own learning goals.</li> <li>• Allow students to choose their own topics for projects and presentations.</li> <li>• Encourage independent research and exploration.</li> </ul>
2. Facilitating Choice and Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer choices in assignments</li> <li>• Let students decide on the sequence of learning activities.</li> <li>• Allow flexible deadlines where possible.</li> </ul>
3. Promoting Reflective Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage students to reflect on their learning experiences.</li> <li>• Use self-assessment and peer-assessment techniques.</li> <li>• Implement regular reflective journals or learning logs.</li> </ul>
4. Fostering a Collaborative Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate group work and peer learning activities.</li> <li>• Encourage collaborative problem-solving and discussion.</li> <li>• Use cooperative learning strategies.</li> </ul>
5. Developing Critical Thinking Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate problem-based learning and inquiry-based activities.</li> <li>• Challenge students with open-ended questions and real-world problems.</li> <li>• Promote critical discussions and debates.</li> </ul>
6. Integrating Technology and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize digital tools and resources to support independent learning.</li> <li>• Provide access to online learning platforms.</li> <li>• Encourage the use of educational apps and software.</li> </ul>
7. Personalizing Learning Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapt teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles.</li> <li>• Provide differentiated instruction.</li> <li>• Create individualized learning plans.</li> </ul>
8. Encouraging Exploration and Curiosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design activities that spark curiosity and imagination.</li> <li>• Allow students to pursue their interests within the curriculum.</li> <li>• Encourage exploration of topics beyond the syllabus.</li> </ul>
9. Building a Supportive Classroom Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a classroom environment where students feel safe to express their ideas.</li> <li>• Promote respect, trust, and openness among students.</li> <li>• Support students' emotional and social needs.</li> </ul>
10. Linking Learning to Real-Life Contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect classroom learning to real-world applications.</li> <li>• Use examples and case studies that are relevant to students' lives.</li> <li>• Encourage project-based learning.</li> </ul>
11. Enhancing Teacher-Student Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show genuine interest in students' learning and well-being.</li> <li>• Act as a mentor and guide rather than just an instructor.</li> <li>• Foster a sense of security by listening to and valuing student input.</li> </ul>

The data shows that teachers' beliefs, to some extent, were one of the factors that influenced teachers' practices in relation to the development of learner autonomy. However, the data showed that the teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy and their expected role in developing

learner autonomy did not necessarily translate into their teaching practices since only three out of four cases were observed implementing autonomy-supportive teaching practices. Therefore, since it has been found that beliefs are not the only determinants of teachers' practices, the variations between beliefs and practices can be explained with reference to internal and external factors divided into two major categories: contextual factors and individual factors. The former is related to institutional, cultural, and sociocultural factors, the teaching context, the nature of the course, and the student's level. The latter is related to individual factors, such as teachers' previous educational and teaching experiences, their beliefs about teaching and learning, and their own beliefs about autonomy. Both factors played a significant role and impacted teachers' practices in relation to creating a space for the learner to develop learner autonomy. These factors are classified as constraints and facilitating factors from the teachers' point of view. Some of the participants in this study identified factors which they believed hindered the development of learner autonomy to some extent. Some of the participants have overcome these factors and have found ways to promote learner autonomy among their learners. Other cases have only recognised the factors and have felt that they imposed too much of a challenge to overcome and to develop learner autonomy among their learners.

# Chapter 6 Discussion

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the research questions, theoretical framework, and relevant literature. The mixed-methods study sought to investigate how English language teachers perceive and enact learner autonomy (LA) as well as the internal and external influences on their pedagogical practices. As outlined in Chapter 2, this study employed a comprehensive theoretical framework that synthesises LA, teacher autonomy (TA), and the mediating factors – both internal and external – that influence teaching practices aimed at developing LA. This framework positions LA and TA as interconnected constructs, recognising their reciprocal relationship and the broader contextual and personal influences that affect their implementation in practice.

As detailed in the methodology chapter (See 3.6.1), a side-by-side comparison approach was used to systematically integrate the findings from both phases of the study. In phase 1, quantitative survey data provided a broad understanding of teachers' beliefs and self-reported practices related to LA. In phase 2, qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations offered deeper insight into how these beliefs were enacted or constrained in practice. By aligning data from both phases under emerging themes, the study identified points of convergence, divergence, and complementarity. This method ensured a robust and comprehensive analysis, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the complex relationship between teacher beliefs, classroom practices, and the wider educational context.

This chapter is structured around five key themes that collectively provide a holistic understanding of how EFL teachers in one Saudi higher education institution perceive and enact LA. These themes also illuminate the interconnected relationship between LA and TA. The first theme, positive beliefs about LA, explores teachers' favourable perceptions of LA, particularly its psychological and sociocultural dimensions. The second theme, challenges for implementing LA, examines sociocultural expectations and institutional constraints. The third, promoting LA within constraints, illustrates how some teachers exercised professional autonomy to foster LA despite systemic pressures. The fourth, teachers' roles in enacting LA, identifies the specific roles teachers adopt. The final theme explores the broader relationship between LA and TA.

## 6.2 Positive Beliefs about Learner Autonomy

The study's findings, in response to the initial research question concerning teachers' beliefs and practices related to LA, demonstrate a generally favourable view among the educators in this study. Participants consistently acknowledged the importance of fostering student independence, engagement, and responsibility in language learning. Many expressed a clear willingness to incorporate LA into their instructional practices, aligning with prior research (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Stroupe et al., 2016; Van Loi, 2016), which highlights educators' support for promoting LA.

Consistent with Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) and Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), the psychological dimension of LA emerged as the most strongly endorsed. This dimension centres on learners' motivation, metacognitive awareness, self-evaluation, and capacity for self-directed learning – core elements of autonomy. Survey data confirmed this trend, with the psychological dimension receiving the highest average score ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 0.469$ ), followed by sociocultural ( $M = 4.01$ ), political ( $M = 3.97$ ), and technical ( $M = 3.83$ ) dimensions. These scores highlight how teachers conceptually prioritise the various dimensions of LA.

Qualitative data supported these findings. For example, teachers like Maram and Haifa emphasised the belief that fostering LA starts with building student confidence, self-reflection, and a sense of ownership in the learning process. Maram stated that students must 'first believe in their ability to learn independently', while Haifa stressed the value of self-monitoring and goal setting. Observational data confirmed these beliefs, showing both teachers encouraging reflective practices, self-evaluation, and learner-led decision-making (See 5.2.1; 5.4.1)

The sociocultural perspective also received strong endorsement, reflected in both interview data and classroom observations. Teachers viewed autonomy as a socially mediated and contextually situated process, consistent with Lantolf's (2000) sociocultural theory, which conceptualises learning as co-constructed through interaction with more knowledgeable peers and instructors.

In Phase Two of the study, teachers described employing a range of collaborative learning strategies such as peer discussions, small-group work, and cooperative projects to foster learner autonomy. Basimah and Haifa (See 5.4.1; 5.5.1) highlighted group work as a means for students to share responsibility, negotiate meaning, and develop confidence, all of which are critical for

assuming greater control over their learning. Maram noted its value for encouraging mutual accountability and reflection among learners (See 5.2.2.2). These practices resonate with Palfreyman's (2017) argument that group dynamics reduce hierarchical classroom structures, fostering an environment for shared decision-making and collective engagement. Furthermore, this finding reinforces Lamb's (2017) assertion that 'language learning occurs in a sociocultural environment.'

However, the political and technical dimensions of autonomy received less attention in both the survey and interviews. While teachers acknowledged the importance of learner agency (linked to the political dimension), few involved students in curriculum negotiation or institutional decision-making. Similarly, although many recognised the importance of technology for supporting LA, the average score (3.83) suggests limited integration. Teachers cited insufficient training or support for using self-access tools effectively, supporting Lai's (2017) call for embedded technical training in teaching programmes. These constraints reflect the limited influence teachers often have beyond their classrooms (Borg, 2006, 2015).

Most importantly, the findings indicate that these beliefs were not uniform, revealing a range of interpretations of LA among the participants. Existing literature supports this, offering various theoretical perspectives on the concept. The participants' beliefs reflected a multidimensional understanding of autonomy, aligning with the comprehensive theoretical foundations of the LA framework (Benson, 1996; Oxford, 2003; and Chong & Reinders, 2022). This finding supports Benson's (2013) and Chong and Reinders's (2022) arguments that LA is a multidimensional concept shaped by individuals' interpretations and contexts.

Interestingly, an examination of participants' beliefs revealed that their support for LA was not merely a result of adhering to educational policies or instructional techniques. Rather, it stemmed from deeply held educational values centred on empowerment, inclusion, and respect for students as independent learners. Instead of viewing autonomy as a policy requirement or a pedagogical instructional strategy, participants positioned it as central to their vision of meaningful education. These values motivated teachers to foster LA even when external constraints posed challenges.

For example, Basimah's conceptualisation of LA highlights the intrinsic importance she places on critical thinking, evaluation, and independent learning as essential lifelong skills. Her strong emphasis on moving beyond rote memorisation reflects a broader educational philosophy in

which the purpose of teaching is to enable students to become active, self-directed learners capable of navigating future challenges (See 5.5.1). Similarly, Maram's reflections on her evolving approach to language teaching, particularly her revised beliefs regarding the use of students' first language (L1), demonstrate a commitment to inclusion and respect for student identities. Initially holding rigid views about 'good' teaching practices, her master's study and subsequent experiences led her to reconceptualise education as a process centred on learner well-being, confidence, and long-term skill development. Her willingness to embrace practices she once resisted, in order to foster a positive classroom environment, underscores a deep shift in her educational values, prioritising students' holistic development over strict adherence to traditional methods (See 5.2.1).

These cases reflect broader findings across the study, in which teachers who promoted LA did so from personal conviction about the purpose of education, rather than compliance with curriculum or institutional mandates. Consistent with arguments by Little (1995), Smith (2003), Han (2020), and Teng (2019), this study shows that autonomy-supportive teaching emerges when teachers view education as fundamentally about empowerment, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. For these teachers, promoting LA is not simply an instructional technique but a commitment to developing independent, capable individuals. Thus, the promotion of LA in this study reflects a vision of education grounded in teacher-held values and beliefs about its broader aims.

Therefore, the study's findings revealed that beliefs are critically interwoven and substantially shape how autonomy is enacted in the classroom. Internal factors, especially teachers' beliefs, played a decisive role in shaping their instructional decisions and approaches to fostering autonomy. For example, teachers who held strong, theoretically informed beliefs about the value of LA, particularly its psychological and sociocultural dimensions, were more inclined to embed autonomy-supportive strategies into their daily teaching. The findings show that the teachers consistently demonstrated the ability to implement such strategies in ways that reflected their personal pedagogical beliefs, even when faced with institutional constraints. This finding supports Borg and Alshumaimeri's (2019) conclusion that teachers with a nuanced understanding of autonomy are more likely to translate their beliefs into practice.

However, the findings also reveal variation in how teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy were reflected in their classroom practices. Although all participants expressed positive beliefs about

learner autonomy and their role in fostering it, only three of the four participants were observed implementing relevant strategies, indicating a disconnect between beliefs and practices. This variation may be attributed to both internal and external factors that shape teachers' beliefs and influence their actions in the classroom. The findings align with Borg's (2017) suggestion that the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices may be influenced by internal factors (e.g. personal background, awareness, motivation, experience) as well as external ones (e.g. curricula, time, and institutional policy). Borg (2019) further argued that while beliefs can influence teachers' actions, they are only one of many contributing factors and may not always be the most important.

This study confirms the complex, reciprocal relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices (Basturkmen, 2012; Mansour, 2009). In other words, beliefs and practices influence one another (Richardson, 1996; Thompson, 1992). Additionally, the findings are consistent with Buehl and Beck's (2016) suggestion that belief systems can either support or impede the translation of beliefs into teaching practices. The strength of this relationship may vary depending on individuals, contexts, and the specific types of beliefs and practices in question (Buehl & Beck, 2014).

Overall, while teachers in this study held positive beliefs about LA – and in many cases, these beliefs were deeply rooted in educational values – translating them into classroom practice was not without challenges. The alignment between belief and practice often encountered tensions stemming from sociocultural expectations, institutional structures, and assessment-driven curricula. The following section discusses the contextual and institutional challenges that constrained, shaped, or, at times, redefined how teachers enacted their beliefs in autonomy-supportive ways in light of the realities of Saudi higher education.

### **6.3 Challenges for Implementing Learner Autonomy in the Saudi**

#### **Context**

The implementation of LA in Saudi university classrooms presents numerous challenges rooted in the socio-cultural, institutional, and professional landscape of English language education. Drawing on the findings from both phases of the study, this section critically examines key contextual barriers that shape and often constrain teachers' efforts to promote LA. These

challenges illustrate a complex interplay between macro-level educational structures and micro-level classroom practices.

### **6.3.1 Sociocultural Constraints and Traditional Beliefs**

One of the most enduring challenges in the Arab educational context arises from deeply ingrained cultural expectations surrounding the teacher's role. The prevailing belief positions the teacher as the primary source of knowledge, a figure of authority who lectures rather than facilitates learning. This perspective remains widely held among students and, to some extent, educators. As noted by Samiah, this traditional view of teaching continues to limit both student agency and teacher flexibility in the Arab world (See 5.3.1.1).

This mindset aligns with previous research (Abahussain, 2016; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015), which highlights the dominance of rote memorisation and exam-driven learning in Saudi schools. Such practices discourage independent thinking and hinder the development of reflective, self-directed learners. As Teng (2019) observed, students raised in such environments may resist autonomous learning, perceiving it as a lack of structure rather than an opportunity for growth.

Maram's critique of 'spoon-feeding' and memorisation-based approaches illustrates the consequences of these entrenched pedagogical traditions (see section 5.2.3). She observed that students' low competency and lack of initiative were direct outcomes of teacher-dominated strategies. This supports Abdulkader's (2019) argument that Saudi Arabia's exam-oriented approach undermines efforts to foster LA, limits teachers' instructional choices, and encourages students to rely heavily on memorisation to pass exams. The findings suggest that even when teachers are motivated to promote autonomy, cultural expectations can provoke resistance or confusion among students. As a result, teachers may need to gradually implement strategies that support autonomy.

The study also supports Al Asmari's (2015) contention that overcoming sociocultural constraints is essential for future progress in Saudi language education. Effective compromises could improve outcomes and increase teachers' awareness of the value of contemporary teaching approaches. However, shifting entrenched beliefs and practices is challenging, especially given the rapid and significant changes in Saudi Arabia's language education context in recent years. Teachers must be introduced to autonomy-promoting approaches and encouraged to develop their practices accordingly. The findings affirm Al Asmari's (2015) emphasis on the importance

of sustained support through professional development initiatives such as workshops and seminars. These programmes can familiarise teachers with current methodologies, enabling them to appreciate their practical benefits and integrate them effectively into their instruction.

### **6.3.2 Institutional Constraints: Assessment and Curriculum Control**

Institutional structures also pose major challenges to autonomy-oriented pedagogy. Several participants voiced concerns about rigid assessment policies, limited involvement in curriculum development, and centralised decision-making. Teachers like Samiah and Basimah noted their instructional decisions were frequently constrained by institutional mandates, particularly regarding assessments.

Three major assessment-related challenges emerged from the data: teachers' exclusion from the exam design process, lack of access to exam previews, and inflexible assessment timelines. These restrictions forced teachers to prioritise curriculum coverage over pedagogical innovation. As Basimah noted, her instructional focus shifted to 'covering the outcomes' rather than fostering engagement or critical thinking (See 5.5.3). Similarly, Samiah's experiences reveal how assessment pressures influenced her teaching, leading to an emphasis on exam readiness and alignment with test-based methodologies (See 5.3.3). This finding aligns with Benson's (2013) critique of 'teaching to the test', in which public testing systems and standardised curricula limit teacher creativity and LA.

Recent administrative restructuring, including the merging of male and female campuses and the unification of assessments across departments, seems to have further disempowered teachers. These changes created frustration and a sense of restriction, particularly regarding classroom decisions, assessments, and course content. Both Basimah and Samiah expressed dissatisfaction with these top-down reforms, which diminished their control and hindered their ability to adapt materials to student needs( See 5.3.3; 5.5.3). This observation echoes findings by Al-Seghayer (2014) and Shah et al. (2013), who argued that excessive centralisation stifles pedagogical freedom and contributes to teacher dissatisfaction. Teng (2019) similarly contended that institutional constraints can obstruct teachers' pursuit of personal goals, generating negative emotions that affect their overall attitudes towards teaching.

However, the study also reveals that institutional constraints do not uniformly suppress autonomy-supportive teaching. Teachers like Maram and Haifa demonstrated that professional

agency can still be exercised at the classroom level, even when curriculum and assessment decisions are externally imposed. Maram's assertion, 'I can be what I want to be in the class', reflects the notion that autonomy exists on multiple levels, limited at the macro (policy) level but still possible at the micro (instructional) level (See 5.2.2.2). This view is consistent with Lamb's (2000, 2017) concept of 'spaces for manoeuvre' and Teng's (2019) emphasis on teacher agency under constraints.

As previously discussed, the Saudi context poses substantial challenges to implementing LA, but these obstacles are not insurmountable. Cultural expectations, rigid assessment frameworks, and centralised curricula limit autonomy-supportive teaching, but the findings suggest that LA is not a binary concept. Indeed, it exists on a continuum shaped by institutional, interpersonal, and individual factors.

The participating teachers demonstrated varying levels of agency, influenced by their professional self-efficacy, prior experiences, and access to collaborative learning networks. Notably, even within restrictive settings, teachers like Maram and Haifa found ways to maintain agency and reclaim ownership of their practices, affirming Han's (2017) definition of TA as a blend of willingness, capability, and context-sensitive action. This highlights the pressing need for systemic reform in professional development, assessment policies, and curriculum planning – reforms that can provide teachers with both the ideological commitment and practical tools to foster LA. It also calls for a shift in institutional culture that values teacher expertise and supports a more democratic model of educational governance.

Although institutional, societal, and cultural barriers were evident, three participants actively promoted LA by drawing on enabling conditions such as self-efficacy, professional development, and prior experiences as autonomous learners. This highlights the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between TA and LA: teachers' internal strengths helped them navigate and mitigate external constraints. The following section will explore the factors influencing teachers' ability to translate their beliefs about learner autonomy into effective classroom practices.

## **6.4 Promoting Learner Autonomy Within Constraints: The Role of Enabling Conditions**

In response to research question 3, the findings show that both internal factors – particularly teachers’ beliefs, self-efficacy, and prior experiences – and external factors such as institutional policies, socio-cultural norms, and assessment practices significantly influence teachers’ ability to promote learner autonomy. Teachers who exercised professional autonomy were better able to adapt their practices, even in restrictive environments, highlighting its essential role in fostering LA. This section examines the critical conditions that enable teachers to navigate and overcome such challenges. The data suggest that internal and external factors together support the adoption of autonomy-supportive practices, even amidst structural and cultural limitations.

Further analysis identifies three interrelated enablers that are central to this process: teacher self-efficacy, ongoing professional development, and personal experiences as autonomous learners. These elements not only strengthen teachers’ pedagogical skills but also enhance their sense of agency, empowering them to support autonomy in their students. By examining these enablers, this section offers a nuanced understanding of how LA can be cultivated within restrictive educational environments. It emphasises that promoting autonomy depends not only on institutional structures but also on the personal and professional resources teachers bring to their work.

### **6.4.1 Teacher Self-Efficacy as a Predictor of Their Ability to Develop Learner Autonomy**

This study revealed that teacher self-efficacy – defined as the belief in one’s capacity to influence student learning outcomes (Bandura, 1997) – plays a crucial role in fostering LA. While many participants demonstrated a theoretical understanding of LA and acknowledged its value, their ability to implement autonomy-supportive practices was closely linked to their self-efficacy.

Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy, such as Maram, Haifa, and Basimah, consistently employed strategies that encouraged student agency, reflection, and collaboration. They cultivated classroom environments that promoted student responsibility, intrinsic motivation, and decision-making, aligning with the key dimensions of LA from both psychological and sociocultural perspectives (see sections 5.2.3, 5.4.3, 5.5.3). For instance, Maram explained that

her confidence in her teaching allowed her to implement flexible, student-centred activities despite institutional constraints:

Yes, there are some limitations. Regarding the syllabus, regarding the pacing schedule ... but when I talk about teaching methodology, I can be what I want to be in the class. I can do it, Hamdulillah. I have the freedom to use any teaching methodology I want ... Yes, we have a syllabus and assessment that we must follow, but I can implement it the way I want. That's why I think I have the freedom inside the class. (M INT1)

This statement illustrates the synergistic effect of self-efficacy and TA, showing how internal confidence enables educators to exercise professional judgment and pedagogical creativity, even under top-down curricular mandates. Both Maram and Haifa demonstrated a strong belief in their own agency and in their students' capacity for independent learning. This supports Bandura's (1997) assertion that higher self-efficacy is associated with increased persistence, resilience, and a willingness to embrace pedagogical complexity.

Similarly, Haifa demonstrated her self-efficacy through the use of metacognitive tasks and peer collaboration to support LA. She stressed that autonomy begins with belief, both the teacher's and the students', and that building learner confidence was central to her approach. These findings align with Buehl and Beck's (2016) argument that self-efficacy significantly influences the translation of pedagogical beliefs into practice.

In contrast, Samiah's experience highlights the difficulties associated with lower self-efficacy. While she endorsed LA in principle, she struggled to implement it in her classroom. Her concerns about student readiness for independent learning led to hesitancy in using less structured, student-led activities. This hesitation illustrates a critical distinction: Theoretical support for LA does not automatically translate into classroom practices. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) model of teacher efficacy underscores the importance of perceived competence in shaping instructional behaviour.

Cross-phase data further supported the observed pattern. In the phase 1 survey, teachers expressed positive attitudes towards LA, particularly psychological aspects such as motivation, confidence, and metacognition (mean score = 4.20, SD = 0.469). However, it was in the phase 2 interviews and classroom observations that these beliefs, or their absence, became evident in actual pedagogical decisions. For example, Maram and Haifa incorporated student choice, goal

setting, and peer-led discussions. In contrast, Samiah's approach remained largely teacher-centred and directive, despite her stated support for autonomy (see sections 5.3.3 and 5.5.3).

This divergence highlights the mediating role of self-efficacy between belief and practice, reinforcing Bandura's (1997) view that individuals with high self-efficacy are more inclined to take risks, persist through challenges, and innovate. In the context of LA, this suggests that confident teachers are better equipped to manage student-centred environments and create conditions conducive to autonomous learning.

Moreover, high self-efficacy enabled participants to navigate institutional and cultural constraints effectively. Despite operating within a system characterised by standardised curricula, assessment requirements, and hierarchical structures, teachers such as Maram adapted materials, adjusted delivery methods, and reframed learning objectives to support autonomy (see Maram section 5.2.3, Haifa section 5.4.3, Basimah section 5.5.3). This supports Benson and Huang's (2008) argument that TA encompasses not only external freedom, but also internal agency and the capacity to operate within constraints.

These findings have important implications for teacher education and institutional policy. First, they indicate that enhancing teachers' self-efficacy should be a primary focus of professional development (PD). PD should go beyond theoretical knowledge to include experiential, hands-on opportunities that build confidence in autonomy-supportive practices. Second, institutions should establish supportive conditions, such as mentoring, peer collaboration, and flexible curricular frameworks, that empower teachers to confidently exercise their autonomy.

Overall, this study underscores the vital role of teacher self-efficacy in fostering LA. Teachers who are confident in their ability to facilitate student-led learning are more likely to innovate, adapt, and persist, even in restrictive environments. As illustrated by Maram, Haifa, and Basimah, high self-efficacy enables teachers to move beyond theory and implement LA through intentional, reflective, and student-centred pedagogical practices.

#### **6.4.2 Personal Experiences as Autonomous Learners as a Predictor of Their Ability to Develop Learner Autonomy**

The educational histories of teachers significantly influence their beliefs and their ability to promote LA. Those who experienced autonomy-supportive learning environments during their schooling or university studies – such as Maram and Haifa – tend to adopt similar approaches in their teaching. These educators internalised the value of autonomy through their lived experiences, which enhanced their empathy towards students' needs and deepened their understanding of how to foster independence.

Conversely, participants with limited exposure to autonomy in their education, such as Samiah, often defaulted to more traditional, teacher-centred approaches, even when they conceptually supported LA. Thus, teachers' prior experiences as learners had a substantial impact on their classroom practices and pedagogical choices, particularly concerning the development of LA (Nguyen & Tran, 2024).

The study's findings underscore the profound influence of teachers' learning histories on their conceptualisation and enactment of LA. Teachers like Maram and Haifa, who had experienced autonomy, demonstrated a more nuanced and confident use of autonomy-supportive practices. Maram's reflection illustrates how her master's degree marked a 'turning point', fostering critical thinking and reflective decision-making that translated into a more student-centred pedagogy. By actively involving students in decision-making and valuing their input, Maram showed how autonomous learning experiences can enhance a teacher's ability to cultivate similar environments (See 5.2.1.1). Similarly, Haifa's exposure to open, non-traditional learning settings shaped her belief in the importance of offering students opportunities for independence (See 5.4.1.1).

In contrast, Samiah's experiences followed a starkly different trajectory. Educated within a rigid, hierarchical educational system that discouraged questioning and reinforced teacher authority, she found it difficult to implement autonomy-supportive strategies (See 5.3.3). Her narrative reflects internalised cultural and institutional norms that impeded her shift from traditional to student-centred teaching. Samiah's case also highlights the psychological and emotional barriers teachers may face when their own educational experiences have not modelled or valued autonomy.

Overall, these findings support the argument that teachers' educational backgrounds are critical mediators in their ability to promote LA (Borg, 2011; Nguyen & Tran, 2024). Exposure to autonomy-supportive environments not only equips teachers with relevant skills but also shapes their professional identities and beliefs about student capabilities. In contrast, teachers shaped by authoritarian models may struggle to reconceptualise their role and build empowering learning environments.

This study, therefore, highlights the importance of PD initiatives that do not assume all teachers have internalised models of autonomy. Instead, PD should provide explicit opportunities to experience and reflect on autonomy-supportive teaching practices. Such an approach can bridge the gap between past experiences and the pedagogical shifts needed to foster genuine LA. This aligns with Borg's (2019) observation that teachers' behaviours are influenced by a complex interplay of external and internal factors. External factors include institutional policies and assessment frameworks, while internal ones encompass beliefs, knowledge, emotions, perceptions, attitudes, and thoughts.

The study also supports Little's (1995) assertion that teachers who have experienced autonomy in their education are better equipped to foster it in their students. Three participants – Maram, Haifa, and Basima – reported having had autonomous learning experiences that positively shaped their teaching philosophies. They drew on these experiences to develop autonomy-supportive classroom practices.

Moreover, the findings underline the transformative role of higher education in shaping teachers' perspectives and strategies. It empowers educators to reflect critically and adapt their methods to diverse learner needs. Samiah's case exemplifies Lortie's (1975) 'apprenticeship of observation', which suggests that teachers' pedagogical approaches are often shaped by their own experiences as students. Due to her limited autonomy as a learner, Samiah found it challenging to cultivate autonomy in her students, despite recognising its value. Her experience supports Smith and Erdoğan's (2008) view that TA is intricately linked to prior learning. Teachers who have not been exposed to autonomous learning environments are less likely to adopt autonomy-supportive practices. This further validates Little's (1995) claim that language teachers are more inclined to promote LA if they have experienced it themselves.

Teachers who have been encouraged to think critically, take responsibility for their learning, and develop self-regulation are more likely to create classroom environments that support similar

growth in students. This highlights a vital point: Personal experience with autonomy is not only beneficial but also transformative in shaping how teachers understand and implement learner-centred practices. Educators who have experienced autonomy firsthand are more attuned to both its challenges and benefits, enabling them to better support students on the path to independent learning.

These findings also affirm Little's (2000) assertion that we cannot expect teachers to foster autonomy in learners if they have not experienced it themselves. Teachers' beliefs about LA were shaped not only by their current context but also by their educational histories, making autonomy a lived and evolving concept rather than a static pedagogical ideal.

These findings contribute to broader discussions on TA, demonstrating that it involves more than professional freedom. It encompasses the capacity to navigate constraints and exercise agency in fostering student independence.

#### **6.4.3 The Role of Professional Development, Peer Collaboration, and Sociocultural Support**

Previous research indicates that continuing PD (CPD) significantly shapes teachers' professional identities (Borg, 2019; Buehl & Beck, 2016; Jiménez Raya et al., 2024). Borg (2019) noted that teachers often form their pedagogical beliefs based on prior learning experiences. Without targeted interventions, they may unintentionally perpetuate traditional, teacher-centred teaching methods (Borg, 2019; Han, 2020).

This study highlights the critical role of continuous PD (CPD) in developing TA, which in turn enhances their capacity to promote LA. The findings reinforce the idea that while willingness is evident in teachers' beliefs, effective implementation of autonomy-supportive strategies also requires appropriate skills and knowledge. This mirrors the work of Jiménez Raya et al. (2024), who argued that TA is a competence requiring systematic cultivation through structured CPD.

CPD emerged as a key factor in translating teachers' positive attitudes towards LA into practical applications in the classroom. All participants expressed a commitment to fostering LA, but those who had participated in meaningful, experiential PD reported significantly higher levels of confidence and preparedness in implementing autonomy-supportive strategies. Teachers highlighted that the most beneficial PD opportunities were experiential and reflective rather than purely theoretical. This aligns with Jiménez Raya et al.'s (2024) argument that structured and

sustained professional training is necessary to foster autonomy. Similarly, Smith (2003) emphasised the importance of intentional pedagogical reflection and community support in nurturing TA. In this study, teachers who attended autonomy-focused workshops or participated in collaborative peer learning environments felt more confident in their ability to support independent learning and metacognitive growth.

Additionally, the data suggest that PD experiences that model autonomy, by involving teachers in reflective decision-making, task negotiation, and feedback, are more effective than traditional top-down training methods (See 5.3.3). This supports the need to align PD with autonomy-supporting practices, enabling teachers to first experience autonomy themselves before promoting it among their students.

Teachers' pedagogical knowledge, acquired through both pre-service and in-service training, plays a crucial role in their ability to implement autonomy-supportive practices. Educators with a strong theoretical and practical foundation are more confident in adopting innovative approaches (Jiménez Raya et al., 2024). These findings support Al Asmari's (2013) recommendation that teacher education programmes should include dedicated support and training, such as workshops or seminars, that introduce the value and application of LA.

This study found that CPD enhances teachers' competence and confidence in adopting autonomy-supportive practices by influencing instructional decisions, pedagogical beliefs, and their ability to navigate institutional constraints. For example, Haifa, who actively engaged in professional training, reported increased confidence: 'I have participated in several PD courses focused on teaching and learning ... These courses have been instrumental in my growth and development as an educator' (See 5.4.3). This supports arguments by Coburn and Borg (2024) and Jiménez Raya et al. (2024), who stressed the importance of iterative, hands-on learning in CPD programmes. When teachers' professional knowledge, skills, and commitment to LA are well developed, they are more capable of fostering autonomy in students (Han, 2020). Additionally, sustained CPD participation is correlated with higher confidence, adaptability, and readiness to implement autonomy-supportive strategies (Borg, 2019; Han, 2020; Jiménez Raya et al., 2024). These results echo broader research showing that CPD is crucial for developing TA and equipping teachers to support student autonomy (Benson, 2010; Jiménez et al., 2024; Little, 1995; Smith, 2003).

In contrast, Samiah's experience illustrates the difficulties that arise when training lacks practical elements. Despite attending workshops, she found the emphasis on theory unhelpful: 'We had some training, but actually, it was not enough because it focused on theory. We learn through hands-on and practical experience more than theoretical training' (See 5.3.3).

This highlights the persistent gap between professional training and classroom implementation. Without hands-on CPD, even motivated teachers may struggle to enact autonomy-supportive practices. This finding reinforces Jiménez Raya et al.'s (2024) argument that CPD should include experiential learning, pedagogical inquiry, and reflective practice. It also echoes Borg's (2019) concern that many teacher training programmes prioritise theory over the practical tools needed to embed autonomy into everyday teaching. This disconnect is widely recognised as a significant challenge in teacher education (Borg, 2019; Jiménez Raya et al., 2024). Supporting this, Jiménez Raya et al. (2024) asserted that autonomy-supportive pedagogy must be explicitly addressed in training programmes rather than assumed to develop naturally. Han (2020) similarly emphasised that TA must be intentionally cultivated through CPD, as autonomous teachers are more effective in promoting LA.

The findings of this study revealed that teachers who engage in structured, practice-based CPD demonstrate greater confidence, adaptability, and pedagogical innovation. Conversely, when CPD lacks practical application, teachers face difficulty bridging the gap between theory and practice. In line with Benson (2010), and Jiménez Raya et al. (2024), this study confirms that TA and LA are closely linked, with CPD serving as the key mechanism for strengthening teachers' capacity to support LA. By restructuring CPD to prioritise hands-on learning, reflection, and sustained professional support, educators can better cultivate a classroom culture that encourages autonomy, leading to greater student motivation, engagement, and lifelong learning.

Based on these findings and the wider literature, several proposals emerge for improving CPD. First, CPD programmes should incorporate experiential learning opportunities that allow teachers to engage directly with autonomy-supportive practices. Second, reflective practice must be central, encouraging self-assessment, collaborative dialogue, and inquiry-based reflection (Little, 1995). Third, professional learning communities should be fostered to enhance CPD through peer collaboration and the sharing of practical strategies (Borg, 2019). Fourth, CPD should be sustained and ongoing, not limited to isolated workshops, and should include mentorship and follow-up to reinforce learning (Jiménez Raya et al., 2024). Finally, effective CPD must address institutional and cultural challenges by preparing teachers to balance exam-driven

systems and traditional expectations with autonomy-supportive teaching (Benson, 2010; Smith, 2003).

This section has highlighted the crucial role of enabling conditions in fostering autonomy-supportive teaching practices. Even within contexts often marked by structural and cultural constraints, several teachers in this study demonstrated a remarkable capacity to nurture LA. Their success was closely linked to three interconnected enablers: a strong sense of self-efficacy, engagement in meaningful PD, and prior experiences of autonomy as learners. The section explored how these elements manifested in actual classroom practices, despite the challenges identified earlier. The following section examines how participants positioned themselves as facilitators, guides, and supporters of LA and how these roles aligned with – or diverged from – their underlying beliefs.

## **6.5 Teachers' Roles in Enacting Autonomy-Supportive Teaching: Introduction**

In response to research question 2, which explores the teaching practices English language teachers use to support and promote LA in their classrooms, the study found that participants adopted a range of autonomy-supportive roles and strategies. These were shaped by both their pedagogical beliefs and their ability to navigate institutional and contextual constraints.

This section broadens the discussion by examining how teachers who are both willing and able to promote LA assume multiple, dynamic roles in the classroom. These roles include acting as facilitators of choice, promoters of collaboration, managers of learning resources, and providers of psychological support. Drawing on survey, interview, and classroom observation data, the findings highlight the practical implementation of autonomy-supportive pedagogy. Each role is analysed in detail, supported by empirical evidence and connected to pertinent theoretical frameworks, demonstrating how teachers' practices serve as vehicles for fostering autonomy.

### **6.5.1 Facilitator of Choice and Decision-Making**

The literature consistently identifies the facilitator's role as central to promoting autonomous learning. Facilitators help learners become more aware of and value independence (Voller, 1997). To effectively cultivate LA, teachers must shift from being transmitters of knowledge to

becoming facilitators of the learning process (Gao, 2018). This shift requires involving learners in selecting and shaping both the content and structure of their learning experiences (Nguyen, 2014).

The findings of this study support previous research, establishing a clear link between teachers' role as facilitators and the successful development of LA. Notably, facilitation emerged as a pivotal role adopted by teachers in nurturing LA. This reinforces earlier studies that emphasise the effectiveness of facilitation in promoting LA (Dam, 2011; Gao, 2018; Han, 2014; Le et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2014; Voller, 1997). Teachers demonstrated both the willingness and capability to implement autonomy-supportive strategies, actively creating learning environments that fostered independence. Those committed to such practices encouraged students to make decisions about activities, assessment methods, and learning objectives. Their structured approach to decision-making enabled them to gradually grant students greater control over their learning processes. This finding aligns with Tassinari's (2017, p. 165) observation:

Encouraging autonomy within an institutional context is still a challenge. It requires willingness and the capacity to motivate learners; to help them to reorient themselves, if they want; to involve and inspire teachers; to ask uncomfortable questions; and to initiate in ourselves and the other actors of the educational process reflection, critical awareness, self-evaluation, and the desire for inquiry.

In the first phase of the study, 80% of participants expressed support for involving students in selecting their learning activities and materials, including resources, types of tasks, and topics, as well as determining how and what they learn (see section 4.1.3). This view was reinforced in the second phase, where participants stressed the importance of providing structured opportunities for students to make choices about their learning.

Classroom observations further indicated that three teachers consistently employed autonomy-supportive methods, effectively acting as facilitators. They allowed students to select activities, choose group partners, and, in some cases, even decide on learning materials (see sections 5.2.2, 5.4.2, 5.5.2). These findings align with Dam (2011) and Han (2014), who argued that offering learners opportunities to make choices helps cultivate a sense of responsibility and promotes LA within institutional settings.

The data showed that when teachers encouraged student decision-making regarding activities, assessment methods, and learning goals, students developed a stronger sense of ownership

over their learning. These findings affirm Dam's (2011) claim that even limited choices can positively affect students' learning experiences. Moreover, involving students in decision-making fosters responsibility and boosts self-esteem. Creating opportunities for choice, dialogue, and reflection provides essential conditions for the development of LA (Le et al., 2023).

This study also supports Little's (2000) argument that successful learning depends on autonomy and that 'autonomy grows out of dependence'. Teachers in this study did not view autonomy as an innate trait but rather as a developmental process requiring structured support, guidance, and scaffolding. Three of the four teachers implemented autonomy-supportive practices, encouraging student choice in learning activities and materials, promoting learning through project-based and reflective tasks, and gradually reducing teacher control to foster student responsibility (see sections 5.2.2, 5.4.2, 5.5.2). This aligns with Little's (2000) perspective, which highlights that teachers play a vital role in guiding students through structured processes that allow them to gradually assume greater responsibility for their learning.

### **6.5.2 Promoters of Collaborative Learning**

The ability of teachers to foster LA through collaboration was clearly demonstrated in the study. The findings indicate that teachers committed to adopting autonomy-supportive teaching practices effectively integrated structured peer discussions, group tasks, and cooperative activities into their classrooms. In phase one of the study, over 90% of participants agreed that interaction and group work are essential for fostering LA, demonstrating strong support for peer learning and collaboration. This perspective was further reinforced in phase two, where all participating teachers emphasised the importance of collaborative learning in developing LA.

The results showed that teachers in phase two played a crucial role by implementing autonomy-supportive practices. Classroom observations and interviews confirmed that three of the four teachers actively incorporated collaborative learning into their instructional methods by encouraging peer discussions, group tasks, and cooperative activities (see sections 5.2.2.2, 5.4.2.2, 5.5.2.2). This finding aligns with the views of Benson (2013) and Palfreyman (2017), who argued that social interactions enhance autonomous learning.

These teachers' practices demonstrated a strong alignment with autonomy-supportive teaching, particularly through the structured use of group work to enhance student learning and

engagement. The findings suggested that the teachers acted as advocates for collaborative learning. For example, Maram strongly endorsed cooperative learning, highlighting its positive effects on student performance, responsibility, and engagement. She described group work as an effective method for promoting active participation and independent learning. In her first interview, Maram articulated the following:

I like group work. This is one of the important things. I think cooperative learning is very important in the class, and it promotes autonomy. When you involve them, they become very energetic. This is why I adopted this technique. It is a very good technique. (M INT1)

The findings align with existing research suggesting that collaborative learning enhances students' sense of responsibility and accountability (Dam, 2011). Maram observed that students engaged in group work experience a heightened sense of ownership over their learning journey. These results echo Benson's (2013) view that various forms of group collaboration positively influence LA by shifting the emphasis from teacher-led instruction to learner-centred engagement. Similarly, Palfreyman (2017) highlighted that group participation provides distinct opportunities for fostering autonomy, as group dynamics can reduce hierarchical power structures, promoting mutual learning and student agency.

You know, when you just give her the piece of information, she will just take it and go ... while the group work by the end she feels or the group feel they did this, so I think it's a nice thing to see so that's why I like cooperative learning especially pair or group like that. (M INT1)

The study further indicates that collaborative learning is a vital approach for fostering LA. It was evident that three teachers actively engaged students in peer interaction and group work, cultivating a sense of shared responsibility. Consequently, they observed an increase in their students' sense of responsibility (Maram, Haifa, Basimah). This supports Little's (2007) assertion that the development of autonomy requires structured support, guidance, and interaction with capable peers or educators. Little (2000) further argued that autonomy must emerge from dependence, suggesting that students need gradual support and structured opportunities for independent learning before taking full responsibility for their education.

These findings also reinforce Lamb's (2017) argument that learning is embedded within a sociocultural context, where interaction shapes cognitive and metacognitive development. Similarly, Dam (2011) identified a strong correlation between collaborative work and the

successful development of LA, asserting that students who collaborate in groups feel more involved and accountable – an outcome confirmed by this study. Activities such as peer discussions, group work, and peer interaction underscore the social nature of learning and promote LA, student engagement, motivation, and positive learning outcomes.

Moreover, the study supports Vygotskian sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2013), which posits that learning is socially mediated and occurs through interactions with more capable peers or teachers. Classroom observations revealed that teachers who encouraged collaborative learning provided students with opportunities to expand their skills and navigate their zone of proximal development. This suggests that collaborative learning environments nurture both cognitive and social autonomy, enabling learners to make independent decisions while benefiting from peer support and shared knowledge. The findings underscore the importance of diverse instructional approaches that incorporate collaborative learning, peer interaction, and group work to support the development of LA.

### **6.5.3 Teachers as Managers of Learning Resources**

The ability of teachers to manage learning resources both inside and outside the classroom is crucial to successfully implementing autonomy-supportive practices. Educators who actively guide students in using digital tools and self-access resources demonstrate a proactive approach to fostering independence. This supports Lai's (2017) assertion that out-of-class learning enhances autonomy by allowing students to construct their own learning environments. Conversely, teachers who are less willing or lack digital literacy skills often struggle to effectively implement technology-based autonomy-supportive strategies.

The study revealed strong support among teachers for out-of-class learning strategies: 76.7% endorsed independent study in libraries, and 86.6% advocated internet-based tasks to promote LA. However, 20% expressed uncertainty about the effectiveness of self-access centres, likely due to their limited availability in the study's context. These findings are consistent with Benson's (2013) perspective that autonomous learning extends beyond formal education, incorporating authentic, self-directed engagement with learning resources. Benson and Lamb (2020) stressed that autonomy involves not only reducing external control over learning but also equipping students to recognise and use available resources effectively.

This study reinforces the essential role of teachers in guiding students to integrate both in-class and out-of-class learning resources. Data indicated that three out of four teachers encouraged such integration by leveraging technology and assigning structured tasks outside the classroom, thus promoting greater learner responsibility. For instance, Haifa guided students in using search engines for research, helping them develop digital literacy and problem-solving skills. This reflects Benson and Lamb's (2020) view that pedagogy for autonomy should assist students in effectively utilising learning resources. Similarly, Maram adopted Google Docs for collaborative learning, noting its benefits in enhancing engagement, efficiency, and student responsibility. These findings align with Lai's (2017) contention that learning should extend beyond classroom walls to include digital tools that foster independence.

Despite these positive developments, the study also identified challenges related to digital learning tools. One teacher expressed concerns about students' limited awareness of technology's educational potential and their insufficient digital literacy, which could hinder autonomy development. Some students misused mobile devices, prompting restrictions, while others struggled with the fast-paced nature of digital learning, expecting instant results without deep engagement. These issues echo Marek and Wu's (2019) argument that although technology improves access to learning, its effectiveness depends on students' ability to use it responsibly and purposefully.

#### **6.5.4 Counsellor: Provider of Psychological Support**

The psychological support offered by teachers plays a vital role in fostering student autonomy. Educators who engage in emotional and motivational support significantly enhance students' confidence in their ability to learn independently. This finding is consistent with the work of Reeve et al. (2013) and Reeve (2016), who emphasise that autonomy-supportive teachers boost student motivation, engagement, and overall psychological well-being. Haifa's approach to providing individualised support for struggling learners illustrates the powerful impact of effectively implemented emotional support strategies.

Phase one of the study revealed that over 80% of teachers view confidence and motivation as central to the development of LA. Among the participants, psychological perspectives received the highest level of support. This was echoed in phase two, where participants described their roles as extending beyond the delivery of content. Teachers saw themselves as enablers,

responsible for instilling in learners the belief that they can make a difference in their own learning, as reflected in the responses of Maram, Haifa, and Basimah.

This role involves inspiring and motivating students to take responsibility for their learning, recognising them as critical thinkers, encouraging questions and risk-taking, and providing constructive feedback and support to help them achieve their goals. Through these practices, teachers cultivate an environment that promotes growth and development.

The findings from both phases indicate that the teachers in this study placed particular emphasis on the psychological aspects of autonomy, prioritising motivation, learning how to learn, and, although to a slightly lesser extent, skills for monitoring and evaluating one's progress. They consistently underscored the importance of building learners' skills and confidence as essential foundations for autonomy. By strengthening students' self-assurance and motivation, teachers help prepare them for the demands of contemporary education and professional life. This aligns with Little et al. (2017), who argued that in autonomy-supportive classrooms, teachers must encourage active learner engagement, initiative-taking, and self-management. Similarly, Dam (2011) highlighted the need to create environments where learners can gradually assume responsibility for their education.

The teachers in this study also stressed the importance of providing emotional and psychological support to their students. These findings resonate with research by Assor et al. (2002), Reeve et al. (2013), and Reeve (2016), who asserted that autonomy-supportive teachers foster independence, motivation, and well-being. For example, Haifa described her ability to understand students' struggles and offer personalised support, attributing her effectiveness to her background in educational psychology (see section 5.4.3). This is consistent with Ludwig and Tassinari (2023), who found that providing emotional and psychological support has become an increasingly essential responsibility for teachers, especially following the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Aoki (1999) further asserted that a key role of teachers in autonomy-promoting classrooms is to establish an atmosphere of acceptance and relatedness. By recognising and nurturing students' internal motivation, teachers create learning environments in which students feel valued and supported, ultimately strengthening their independence. Reeve (2016) further explained that autonomy support involves cultivating a teacher–student relationship that gives students a sense of control over their education.

Participants in this study emphasised the importance of building positive, sustained relationships with learners until they feel ready to take ownership of their education. Such relationships were seen as crucial not only for academic success but also for students' emotional well-being. This aligns with Reeve et al. (2013), who reported that students with autonomy-supportive teachers demonstrate greater engagement, academic performance, and psychological resilience than those with controlling instructors. The study highlights how a teacher's motivational style – ranging from highly prescriptive to highly supportive – significantly influences student motivation, autonomy, and achievement.

However, fostering a productive interaction between TA and LA is not always straightforward. Teachers often face constraints such as institutional policies, standardised curricula, and resource limitations (Benson, 2000; Lamb, 2000), which can restrict their decision-making capacity. Nevertheless, as both Benson (2010) and Lamb (2000, p. 128) suggested, teachers who respond to these limitations with agency and strategic thinking can identify 'spaces and opportunities for manoeuvring'. In doing so, they reaffirm their professional identities and foster conditions conducive to LA. This view is consistent with Teng (2019), who stressed the importance of recognising affordances within the teaching context that can be translated into actionable strategies. Teachers who 'foresee the potential affordances' and use them effectively help cultivate learner agency and independence (Teng, 2019, p. 56).

The findings also indicate that, even within the same educational context, teachers vary in their pedagogical approaches and commitment to promoting LA. While some participants adopted strategies such as communicative tasks, student reflection, and learner choice, others adhered to more traditional, teacher-led methods. This variation supports Teng's (2019) claim that while all teachers have access to similar resources, their use is shaped by factors such as educational background, professional identity, perceived agency, and teaching goals. Consequently, some teachers creatively adapted their practices to overcome contextual barriers, while others felt limited by the same conditions and were less inclined to promote independent learning.

Overall, teachers in this study assumed a range of interrelated roles to support LA. They acted as facilitators of choice and decision-making, encouraged collaboration through peer learning and group work, guided students in using learning resources, and provided psychological and emotional support. By doing so, they cultivated autonomy-supportive classrooms through both pedagogical strategies and interpersonal relationships.

This section builds on these insights by shifting the focus from the micro-level enactment of roles to the macro-level implications of TA as a structural and conceptual enabler of LA. It explores how teachers' capacity to make independent decisions, adapt curricula, and navigate contextual constraints shapes the opportunities they offer for students to engage in self-directed learning. The study confirmed that in environments where TA is supported, LA is better cultivated, highlighting the interdependent and context-sensitive relationship between TA and LA. This section connects the pedagogical roles discussed earlier with broader systemic factors, providing a comprehensive understanding of the relational dynamics between teacher empowerment and student independence.

## **6.6 The Interrelationship Between Teacher Autonomy and Learner Autonomy**

This section builds directly on the previous themes by shifting the analytical focus from the micro-level enactment of roles to the macro-level implications of TA as a structural and conceptual enabler of LA. It explores how TA, reflected in teachers' ability to make independent decisions, adapt curricula, and navigate contextual constraints, shapes the conditions they create for students to engage in self-directed, responsible learning. The study confirmed that in environments where TA flourishes, LA is more effectively cultivated, underscoring their interdependent and context-sensitive relationship. In doing so, this section offers a comprehensive understanding of the relational dynamics between teacher empowerment and student independence.

The findings strongly support the view that TA and LA are inherently interconnected, relational, and mutually constitutive, aligning with the relational perspectives advanced by Jiménez Raya et al. (2017). In this study, teachers' ability to foster LA was closely linked to their beliefs, experiences of autonomy, capacity for pedagogical decision-making, critical reflection, and ability to navigate contextual constraints. This confirms that TA is not simply a precondition for LA; rather, both develop through a dynamic, reciprocal process in which teachers and learners co-construct autonomy in real educational settings.

Importantly, the study revealed that teachers who successfully promoted LA were not merely following policy mandates or procedural techniques. Their practices were deeply rooted in

intrinsic educational values and strong personal beliefs. For teachers like Maram and Haifa, autonomy-supportive teaching and fostering learner independence were integral to their understanding of education's purpose, not externally imposed goals. They maintained ownership of their classroom practices and adapted learning tasks to promote critical thinking, peer collaboration, and student choice. Their efforts to promote LA were grounded in values such as empowerment, inclusion, critical thinking, lifelong learning, and a belief in students' potential for self-direction. These values shaped both their conception and daily enactment of LA. These findings align with Raya et al.'s (2017) argument that autonomy is fundamentally a dialogic process, not merely a set of transferrable skills. From this perspective, autonomy emerges as a relational construct, co-developed by teachers and learners through shared engagement in meaningful learning, where abstract beliefs are translated into concrete, context-sensitive actions. In such environments, autonomy is not simply taught; it is lived, negotiated, and continually redefined through teacher–student interaction.

Moreover, the relationship between TA and LA was shown to be neither linear nor hierarchical but reciprocal and situated. As teachers exercised autonomy by adapting curricula, encouraging independent decision-making, and creating space for learner voice, they simultaneously empowered students to develop their own autonomous capacities. In turn, witnessing students take ownership of their learning reinforced teachers' professional motivation and autonomy. This dynamic interaction highlights autonomy as an *ongoing, contextually negotiated process* shaped by classroom practices, institutional realities, and evolving teacher identities.

The findings also confirmed that autonomy-supportive teaching does not depend solely on the absence of constraints. What proved most crucial was teachers' perceived *autonomy to act within existing limitations*. Teachers like Maram and Haifa demonstrated that autonomy can be meaningfully exercised even within rigid curricular and assessment frameworks through thoughtful adaptation and principled pedagogical decisions. Conversely, teachers like Samiah, who lacked professional empowerment, struggled to enact their autonomy-supportive beliefs. This illustrates that willingness alone is insufficient; the *actual capacity to act autonomously is essential* (Benson & Huang, 2008; Han, 2017).

This insight echoes Benson and Huang's (2008) view that TA involves not just freedom but the ability to navigate, resist, and transform constraints. Teachers who identified 'spaces for manoeuvre' (Lamb, 2000) within restrictive environments were more successful in fostering LA,

further reinforcing that TA entails professional judgment, reflective action, and ongoing negotiation of institutional pressures.

Additionally, the conceptualisations of TA by Smith (2003) and Han (2017, 2020) were particularly relevant in interpreting these findings. According to Smith, TA includes both professional action and PD. This study shows that teachers who engaged in continuous professional learning, especially those with access to experiential and reflective CPD, were more confident and effective in promoting LA. Haifa's case illustrates this clearly. Her participation in multiple PD programmes not only enhanced her pedagogical knowledge but also deepened her belief in the value of LA. This supports the understanding of TA as both a personal and systemic phenomenon, involving the capacity to learn, reflect, and adapt. Furthermore, teachers' prior learning experiences emerged as powerful enablers. Those who had been encouraged to think critically and work independently as learners were better positioned to instil similar dispositions in their students. These findings affirm Smith's (2003) and Han's (2017, 2020) view that TA requires continuous learning, reflection, and adaptive capacity.

The study also substantiates Manzano Vázquez's (2018) concept of TA3, which describes the *reciprocal development* of TA and LA: Growth in one fosters growth in the other. The promotion of LA was inseparable from the professional empowerment of teachers. Ultimately, this study contributes a *context-sensitive, relational model* of autonomy to the literature. It moves beyond theoretical assumptions by showing, through real-world classroom practices, how TA and LA are co-constructed. Autonomy is enacted not as a technical process but as a shared, principled commitment. Teachers who are trusted to exercise professional judgment, supported through meaningful development, and empowered to adapt to their contexts are better able to create environments in which students can truly become autonomous learners.

The findings, therefore, highlight the urgent need for educational policies and leadership practices that support TA as foundational to the development of LA. Enhancing reflective practice, offering authentic PD, and building supportive institutional cultures are essential for promoting autonomy at both the teacher and student levels. In doing so, education systems can cultivate not only independent learners but also empowered, reflective, and adaptable educators, key agents of change in increasingly complex educational contexts.

When considered alongside the theoretical framework, the findings reinforce the argument that TA is crucial to effectively promoting LA. Teachers who actively navigate constraints, identify and

leverage community resources, and align their professional identities with autonomy-oriented pedagogies create rich opportunities for learners to develop independent learning skills. This alignment is not automatic or uniform; it emerges through continuous, context-sensitive negotiation and sustained reflective practice. Future research and PD initiatives should therefore focus on enhancing teachers' capacity to recognise, interpret, and utilise the resources available in their educational environments, thereby deepening both TA and LA within the complexities of evolving educational landscapes.

This study makes a valuable contribution to the literature by providing concrete, context-sensitive evidence of the TA–LA connection. It moves beyond abstract theory to show how this relationship is enacted in everyday classroom practice. The overlap between TA and LA is not merely conceptual. It is evident in the ways teachers adapted curricula, created spaces for learner voice, and promoted independent decision-making while simultaneously empowering students to develop their own autonomy.

The findings underscore the notion that TA is essential for fostering LA. Educators who are empowered to reflect, make decisions, and act in their professional roles are better equipped to create learning environments where students can take responsibility for their education. This highlights the importance of policies and institutional frameworks that support TA. Promoting reflective practices, offering meaningful PD, and ensuring pedagogical flexibility are key strategies for enhancing autonomy at both the teacher and student levels. Consequently, the results advocate for a comprehensive understanding of autonomy as both an individual and systemic feature – one that must be nurtured through supportive leadership, targeted training, and a culture of shared responsibility for learning.

The Figure (6:1) provides a visual synthesis of the study's core findings and theoretical foundations. It illustrates the complex development of LA, showing how teacher beliefs, TA, institutional conditions, and wider sociocultural contexts interact. This visual framework underscores how these elements dynamically align to either support or constrain autonomy-supportive teaching practices, reinforcing the study's conceptualisation of LA and TA as interdependent, context-sensitive processes.

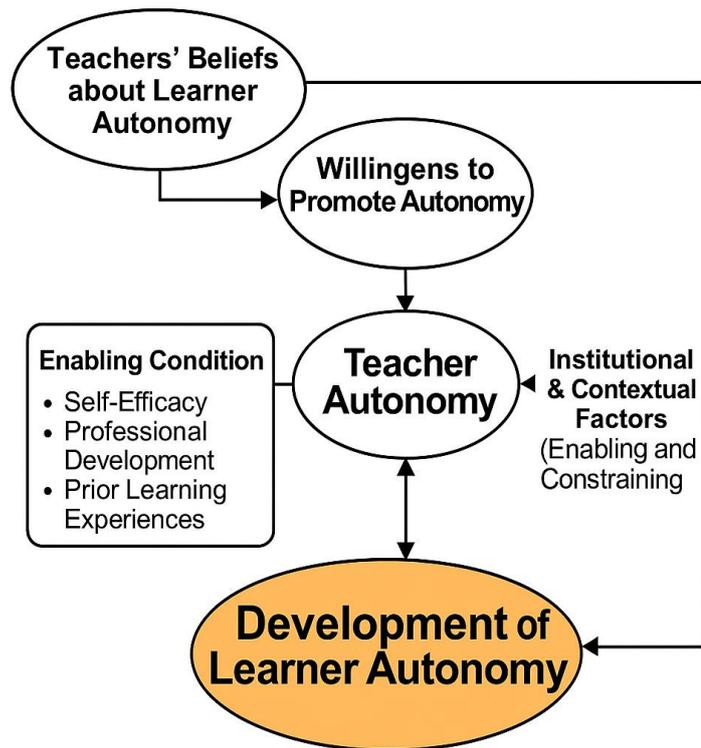


Figure 6.1 Visual Synthesis of the Study's Core Findings and Theoretical Foundations

At the core of the model is teacher autonomy, which refers to educators' capacity and freedom to make instructional decisions, adapt curricula, and exercise professional judgment. This autonomy enables teachers to cultivate learning environments that promote self-directed learning among students. Directly linked to this is the development of learner autonomy, understood as students' ability to take ownership of their learning, which depends on the alignment to these interrelated elements. A key feature of the model is the two-way interaction between teacher and learner autonomy: as teachers support learner independence, they may also strengthen their own sense of agency and motivation. Surrounding this central relationship are influential elements such as teachers' beliefs about autonomy, which shape their perceptions of students' capabilities and influence their willingness to promote autonomy in the classroom. This willingness is, in turn, affected by enabling conditions like self-efficacy, professional development, and prior experiences, which equip teachers with the skills and confidence to support student autonomy. Additionally, the m

odel acknowledges the impact of institutional and contextual factors, which can either constrain or enable the implementation of autonomy-supportive practices. Overall, the model emphasises that fostering learner autonomy is not an isolated act, but a systemic process grounded in empowering teachers within supportive environments.

The figure illustrates the finding of this study which suggest that TA is not only a prerequisite for but also a catalyst of LA. The study's findings advocate for a systemic understanding of autonomy as a relational and evolving construct, negotiated between teachers, learners, and institutional realities. Fostering autonomy thus requires a systemic commitment: educational policies, leadership structures, and PD must prioritise teacher empowerment as a fundamental condition for realising LA. By presenting a relational, context-sensitive model of autonomy, this study contributes significantly to understanding how autonomy can be meaningfully enacted in diverse and evolving educational contexts.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed how teachers' beliefs, prior experiences, self-efficacy, and PD, alongside external institutional factors, shape their capacity to implement autonomy-supportive practices. These enabling conditions inform how teachers enact roles such as facilitators of choice, promoters of collaboration, resource managers, and providers of psychological support. However, the consistent and effective realisation of these roles depends not only on individual commitment or pedagogical skill, but also critically on the extent of TA afforded within institutional settings.

By analysing the alignment and occasional tension between teachers' beliefs and practices, this discussion has highlighted the complex, reciprocal relationship between TA and LA. The findings demonstrate that fostering LA is not merely a matter of technique or policy compliance but a deeply value-driven practice that reflects teachers' broader educational commitments. This context-sensitive analysis contributes to refining theoretical understandings of autonomy and offers grounded insights into fostering autonomy in constrained educational environments. These insights directly inform the practical recommendations and broader implications presented in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion of the Thesis**

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach to investigate the interaction between teachers' beliefs and external factors and their impact on teachers' roles in developing LA. It focused on how English language teachers promote LA by examining how internal and external influences shape their pedagogical practices, particularly within Saudi higher education. The research was conducted in two distinct phases. Initially, a quantitative phase addressed the research questions, followed by a qualitative exploratory case study.

The study aimed to explore teachers' beliefs about LA to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives and how these influence their practices. Investigating these beliefs enabled a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' classroom actions and the underlying reasons for them.

However, beliefs alone were insufficient to provide a complete picture. The study also accounted for external factors that influence teachers' practices, including institutional policies, available resources, PD opportunities, and the broader educational context. By examining these elements, the study identified barriers and facilitators affecting teachers' ability to foster LA.

By addressing factors both within and beyond educators' control, the study offered a detailed view of the complexities involved in nurturing LA. This multifaceted approach illuminated the diverse roles teachers play in supporting LA and the rationale behind their practices, offering a holistic understanding of how internal and contextual influences shape their approaches to autonomy development.

## 7.1 Summary of the Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

The study explored the interplay between teachers' beliefs, practices, and the development of LA within the Saudi higher education contexts. It addressed three research questions. The first investigated a) teachers' beliefs about LA and b) how they perceive their role in supporting and promoting LA. The second explored the teaching practices English language teachers used to support and promote the development of LA in their classrooms. The third examined the extent to which internal and external factors influenced these practices, specifically a) the extent to which internal factors, particularly teachers' beliefs, influence their teaching practices concerning LA, and b) external factors that influence their teaching practices in relation to LA.

The findings revealed a complex, context-sensitive relationship between beliefs, teaching practices, and the promotion of LA. Teachers generally held positive beliefs about LA and acknowledged its value in enhancing students' motivation, engagement, and long-term learning skills. All participants emphasised the critical role of teachers in nurturing autonomy, particularly the psychological dimension – developing students' confidence, motivation, and metacognitive awareness as a foundation for independent learning. They also demonstrated awareness of the sociocultural aspects of LA, highlighting the importance of collaborative learning and adapting instruction to students' individual and cultural needs.

Despite their shared recognition of the importance of LA, the enactment of these beliefs varied among participants. Three teachers consistently adopted multiple roles that supported the development of LA, including facilitator, motivator, resource guide, and psychological and educational supporter. Their practices involved encouraging reflective learning, offering student choice, promoting collaboration, and guiding students in using resources both within and beyond the classroom. These practices aligned with their expressed beliefs and were underpinned by a willingness and ability to support autonomy in diverse ways.

However, one participant demonstrated a discrepancy between belief and practice, suggesting that willingness and theoretical knowledge alone are insufficient. Although this teacher valued LA, they struggled to implement it due to contextual constraints and a lack of confidence in students' readiness for autonomy. The study therefore reinforces the argument that teachers' self-efficacy, prior experiences with autonomy, and access to relevant PD significantly influence how beliefs are translated into classroom practices.

In relation to the third research question, the findings revealed that both personal and contextual factors strongly affect teachers' ability to support LA. Personal factors such as prior learning experiences, self-efficacy, TA, and exposure to autonomy-supportive training shaped how teachers understood and enacted LA. For instance, teachers who had experienced autonomy in their own education were more inclined to apply similar strategies in their teaching. Contextual factors – including institutional policies, rigid curricular structures, and societal expectations regarding the teacher's role – acted as either barriers or enablers. While some teachers perceived these constraints as fixed, others demonstrated the agency to navigate and adapt within them, thereby reaffirming their TA and promoting LA despite systemic challenges.

The findings also highlight that the relationship between TA and LA is not linear but dynamic and contextually negotiated. Teachers with a strong sense of professional agency were more successful in fostering LA, even under restrictive conditions. This suggests that institutional or curricular constraints do not automatically preclude autonomy-supportive practices; rather, it is teachers' ability to interpret and respond to these constraints that determines their success in promoting LA.

Overall, the study illustrates that fostering LA is a complex process shaped by the interplay of personal beliefs, institutional realities, and TA. While positive beliefs about LA provide a necessary foundation, their effective enactment relies on teachers' capacity to adapt, reflect, and respond to contextual challenges. Understanding both internal and external influences is thus crucial for developing informed policies and PD initiatives that empower teachers to cultivate LA in diverse teaching environments.

## **7.2 Theoretical and Methodological Contributions**

This study offers significant theoretical and methodological contributions to the evolving research on LA and TA, particularly within the context of Saudi higher education. It refines existing frameworks by positioning TA as a central and dynamic condition for the meaningful enactment of LA.

Drawing on real-world teaching practices, the study enhances existing frameworks (e.g. Benson, 1997; Oxford, 2003) and aligns with the relational, situated view of autonomy proposed by Jiménez Raya et al. (2017). It conceptualises the relationship between TA and LA as fundamentally interdependent and contextually negotiated. Rather than viewing TA and LA as

separate or sequential, the findings suggest that teachers' beliefs, educational values, decision-making capacity, and ability to adapt practices, negotiate constraints, and reflect critically are all essential for fostering LA. Teachers who feel empowered and exercise professional autonomy are more likely to create classroom environments where students take ownership of their learning.

Importantly, promoting LA in this study was not merely a technical or procedural matter; it was rooted in teachers' values, including empowerment, inclusion, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. This dynamic relationship underscores the relational nature of autonomy. It emerges through the continuous interaction between teachers, learners, institutional realities, and broader sociocultural contexts. Thus, enabling TA is essential not only for teachers' professional growth but also for supporting students in becoming independent, self-regulated learners.

This study presents LA and TA as mutually constitutive, showing that a teacher's capacity to exercise TA directly shapes students' opportunities to develop LA. It advances autonomy theory by offering a *relational, context-sensitive model* in which TA and LA evolve together through ongoing negotiation of beliefs, values, agency, and institutional realities. This theoretical repositioning provides a more nuanced and actionable understanding of how autonomy can be meaningfully fostered, especially in rapidly changing contexts such as Saudi higher education. This relational perspective advances earlier work by Benson (1997) and Oxford (2003), extending it with a more situated understanding of how autonomy develops in practice. It also complements Han's (2020) conceptualisation of TA as the capacity to exercise professional judgment within constraints, demonstrating that TA is both a prerequisite for and reinforced by the development of LA. Through everyday pedagogical decisions – such as encouraging learner choice, fostering collaboration, and adapting curricula – teachers co-construct autonomy with their students in ways that are both contextually sensitive and dynamic.

Moreover, the study shows that autonomy development is a dynamic, situated process shaped by multiple internal and external factors. Teachers' beliefs, self-efficacy, prior learning experiences, and PD interact continuously with institutional demands, curriculum requirements, and broader sociocultural expectations. This reciprocal interaction calls for an integrated model of autonomy, one that moves beyond idealised or decontextualised accounts and instead acknowledges the complexities of real-world educational settings.

Methodologically, the study makes a valuable contribution through its robust explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, combining survey data with in-depth case studies (interviews, classroom observations, and post-observation reflections). This approach enabled the identification of both alignment and misalignment between teachers' stated beliefs and actual practices, offering a rich, layered understanding of how autonomy is enacted. By integrating belief, practice, and context, the study contributes to methodological debates in autonomy research, showing that TA should be examined not only through what teachers say but also through their actions and adaptive responses to real teaching conditions.

The focus on teachers' localised practices within Saudi higher education also provides important cross-cultural validation of autonomy theories, extending their applicability beyond Western-centric contexts. It enabled a contextually embedded analysis that revealed how autonomy-supportive teaching is shaped not only by general principles but also by teachers' ability to navigate, negotiate, and creatively respond to their specific educational environments.

Unlike studies that examine teachers' beliefs about LA in isolation, this study offers a comprehensive perspective by exploring both beliefs and classroom practices. This dual focus highlights the importance of teachers' theoretical orientations while critically investigating how these beliefs are enacted or constrained in practice. By analysing the interaction between beliefs and pedagogical actions, the study sheds light on the complex processes through which LA is either facilitated or hindered in real-world settings. It moves beyond merely documenting discrepancies, offering an in-depth examination of how personal and contextual factors interact to shape the enactment of LA. The findings underscore that it is not isolated beliefs or strategies that promote LA, but the dynamic interplay between internal capacities and external realities.

This approach is particularly relevant given the growing importance of English language proficiency and the increasing emphasis on developing lifelong learning skills within Saudi Arabia's evolving educational landscape (see section 1.3). By exploring the interplay between personal convictions and institutional realities, this study offers a richer, more context-sensitive understanding of how autonomy-supportive teaching can be fostered. It demonstrates that understanding teachers' beliefs alone is insufficient; a deeper analysis of how these beliefs are mediated by prior experiences, contextual constraints, and TA is essential for supporting more effective and sustainable models of LA in practice.

Additionally, the research offers a practical framework (see Figure 7.1) that categorises autonomy-supportive teaching practices into thematic domains such as teacher–student relationships, classroom culture, emotional support, and skills development. This model not only synthesises the findings but also serves as a guide for teacher training and curriculum design aimed at promoting LA.

Figure 7.1 Autonomy-Supportive Teaching Practices



The figure illustrates that creating an autonomy-supportive classroom environment requires a multifaceted approach, integrating the cultivation of a supportive classroom culture, the promotion of reflective practice, and the encouragement of self-directed learning. This study suggests that by adopting these strategies, teachers can create an environment that supports student autonomy, fosters engagement, and promotes deeper, more meaningful learning. These practices help students develop the skills and confidence necessary to take ownership of their learning and become lifelong learners. The following outlines how teachers can implement these practices effectively in the classroom:

- 1. Teacher–Student Relationship:** Practices that focus on respectful, empathetic interaction that builds trust.

2. **Classroom Culture:** Creating a safe, supportive classroom environment that fosters strong teacher–student relationships.
3. **Teaching Strategies:** Using instructional methods tailored to individual learning needs, offering feedback, and organising classroom activities.
4. **Student Engagement:** Encouraging students to be curious, self-directed, and involved in the learning process.
5. **Learning Activities:** Designing tasks that are relevant, reflective, and personalised.
6. **Emotional and Social Support:** Addressing students’ emotional and social needs to ensure they feel respected and understood.
7. **Skills Development:** Enhancing students’ critical thinking and other essential skills through feedback, technology integration, and timely responses.

In conclusion, this study not only refines the theoretical understanding of autonomy by emphasising the dynamic and interdependent relationship between TA and LA but also offers an empirically grounded, context-sensitive model that advances the field. Through its mixed-methods design and case study approach, it bridges the gap between belief and practice, highlighting the critical role of localised teacher practices in navigating contextual challenges. By positioning TA as a central mediator, the study advocates for a more situated, evolving view of autonomy in education. These contributions collectively offer a robust platform for future research, policy design, and PD initiatives aimed at empowering teachers and fostering sustainable LA across diverse educational contexts.

Notably, there has been limited research in the Saudi context examining the complexity of teachers’ practices and the intricate interplay between personal factors, such as beliefs, characteristics, previous experience, and knowledge, and contextual factors in the implementation of LA. This study addresses that gap, contributing valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of teaching practices related to LA.

### **7.3 Implications of the Study**

This study sheds light on the role of English language teachers in supporting LA within the classroom, focusing specifically on how and why teachers either facilitate or hinder LA. A key aspect is the examination of teachers’ beliefs about LA as an internal factor, alongside the

exploration of external influences on pedagogical practices and their impact on LA implementation within Saudi higher education, particularly during a period of educational policy change.

This study contributes valuable insights into the theory and practice of LA, with practical implications for Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 educational reforms. It suggests that sustainable change requires more than policy declarations; it necessitates a fundamental rethinking of how teachers are supported and empowered. This includes replacing one-size-fits-all PD with sustained, collaborative learning opportunities that help teachers adapt autonomy-supportive practices to their specific classrooms. It calls for assessment systems that value and measure self-direction alongside content mastery. Most importantly, it advocates for the inclusion of teachers as partners in reform rather than mere implementers of top-down mandates.

The research also underscores the transformative potential of professional communities in fostering innovation. The most significant changes were observed when teachers had opportunities to share successes, troubleshoot challenges, and reflect on their practices with colleagues, especially in informal settings free from bureaucratic oversight. These findings suggest that the successful cultivation of LA on a larger scale may depend less on prescriptive programmes and more on creating a culture that values teacher learning and experimentation.

Ultimately, this study offers both a warning and a way forward. It cautions that LA initiatives will remain superficial unless institutional and cultural factors influencing teaching practice are addressed. At the same time, it presents a hopeful vision of how education systems might evolve, one in which policy supports rather than constrains teacher professionalism, where reforms are co-created rather than imposed, and where the development of student autonomy begins with trust in teachers' professional judgment. In doing so, the research points towards a more sustainable approach to educational change, recognising teacher empowerment as the foundation for developing self-directed learners.

By incorporating the teaching and learning context into the investigation of teachers' beliefs and practices regarding LA, this study offers valuable insights into how contextual factors influence both beliefs and pedagogical decisions. This aligns with Borg (2016), who argued that fundamental questions about how teachers promote LA and how these practices are shaped remain underexplored. This study moves beyond an examination of teachers' understanding of LA by considering the influence of real-world contextual variables on their beliefs and practices.

By accounting for these factors, the study offers critical insights into the dynamic nature of teacher cognition and underlines the importance of examining cognitive processes within real-life contexts. This approach challenges traditional cognitive theories, which often overlook contextual influences, paving the way for more comprehensive models that better reflect the complexities of human thought.

The findings also highlight the urgent need to establish a supportive institutional context to enhance teachers' professional practices, increase their willingness, and build their capacity to promote LA. Teachers are pivotal agents in the learning process; therefore, empowering them requires that institutions and policymakers address the factors influencing their teaching practices. This includes acknowledging the challenges teachers face, involving them in decision-making processes, and integrating their feedback to help overcome these obstacles.

Investigating teachers' beliefs and practices regarding LA within a specific context can inform the development of diverse and practical instructional strategies. Aligning teaching approaches more closely with the cognitive demands of various learning environments can improve educational outcomes. As a result, integrating contextual awareness into cognitive research can enhance teacher training and support more effective LA implementation.

Additionally, this study advocates for increasing teachers' awareness of the value of effective, practical CPD in shaping their beliefs, professional identity, and classroom practices. Teachers need to be equipped to distinguish between effective and ineffective CPD. Emphasis should be placed on quality rather than quantity. A single, high-quality CPD session can have a greater impact than multiple ineffective ones. Institutions should offer CPD programmes that combine theoretical understanding with practical applications of innovative teaching methods, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice. Furthermore, teachers should engage in reflective practices to evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of CPD from their own perspectives, identifying areas for further development. This reflective approach will ensure that CPD remains impactful and contributes meaningfully to the ongoing enhancement of teaching practice.

This study underlines the critical importance of involving teachers in the assessment process. A key finding is that teachers' practices are significantly affected by their lack of control and involvement in assessments, often due to broader institutional factors such as standardised curricula and assessment processes aimed at ensuring quality assurance. Therefore, it is recommended that institutions and policymakers grant teachers more control over

assessments. Listening to teachers' feedback on appropriate assessment types and providing clear criteria can enhance their sense of security and creativity while also reducing frustration and anxiety. Teachers who have control over classroom assessments are more likely to create opportunities for student engagement and report feeling empowered and less constrained compared to those who lack such control.

Furthermore, the study advocates for the cultivation of informal environments in which teachers, particularly experienced practitioners, can share successful practices without fear of judgment or formal evaluation. Such collaborative exchanges can empower teachers, shape their professional beliefs, and improve their pedagogical approaches. The importance of teacher collaboration highlights the inherently social nature of knowledge construction. This study supports Teng's (2019) assertion that collaboration with peers fosters mutual respect, the open exchange of uncertainties, the celebration of successes, constructive feedback, commitment, and autonomy. As Lee and Anthony (2001) also argued, collegiality enables teachers to experiment with new strategies and gain greater control over their teaching. This perspective underscores the role of interpersonal relationships and collaborative environments in promoting teachers' intellectual and professional growth.

Encouraging collaboration within educational settings can further support teachers' PD, motivation, and engagement. Educators should design collaborative workshops or group activities that promote meaningful interactions, experience sharing, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Fostering a supportive community among teachers can enhance their PD and aligns with Teng's (2019) view that collegial relationships contribute to a culture in which teachers can realise professional autonomy. Consequently, higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia should prioritise fostering collaboration and peer interaction among both teachers and students. This can be achieved through collaborative learning methods, peer mentoring schemes, and interdisciplinary initiatives. Encouraging a culture of teamwork can support LA, increase engagement, and improve knowledge sharing and communication among students and educators.

Saudi institutions must also recognise the impact of individual, cultural, social, and linguistic factors on teachers' beliefs and practices. Given the diverse backgrounds of English language teachers, institutions should embrace this diversity to develop socially responsive teaching strategies that draw on teachers' varied experiences. Emphasising diverse instructional

approaches that reflect students' cultural and social contexts can benefit both teachers and students.

Higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia should also focus on developing lifelong skills and fostering student autonomy. This can be achieved through instructional strategies such as project-based, inquiry-based, and self-paced learning activities, alongside group work that facilitates meaningful peer interaction and critical thinking. Creating a supportive learning community can enhance students' social-emotional well-being and overall satisfaction. Raising awareness among teachers and learners about their active roles in the learning process, and providing resources for skills such as goal setting, time management, and self-assessment, will further support LA. This emphasis on autonomy aligns with Vision 2030 and supports the recent advancements in the Saudi educational system, preparing students to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

## **7.4 Limitations**

While this study offers valuable insights into English language teachers' beliefs and practices regarding learner autonomy, and the factors influencing these practices, several limitations should be noted, which may affect the generalizability and interpretation of the findings:

1. Participants' gender: The study's participants were exclusively female teachers, which might limit the generalizability of the study's findings to a broader population. Gender can impact teachers' beliefs, practices, and teaching styles. Additionally, male teachers' teaching and learning experiences may differ from female teachers. Therefore, future studies should have more diverse participants, including both female and male teachers, to have more comprehensive insights into the impact of gender on teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to LA.
2. Sample Size: The qualitative phase's sample size was relatively small, involving only four English language teachers. Even though in-depth qualitative data was obtained from the participants, the sample size might impact the extent to which the study's findings can be generalised to the wider population of English language teachers. This study suggests that involving a larger sample in future studies would enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, providing a broader perspective on English language teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to LA.

3. **Researcher influence:** Taking into consideration the qualitative nature of the study, there is a possibility that the researcher may have inadvertently impacted the participants. This influence could manifest in the presence of the researcher during classroom observations. I must acknowledge my concerns about classroom observations because English language teachers in the Saudi context are not used to being observed in their classrooms; thus, my presence with them might have impacted their teaching practices. Due to my concerns, I informed all the participants about the purpose of my research and that I did not intend to evaluate or assess their teaching performance. Moreover, I believe most participants acted naturally and followed their teaching practices due to the number of autonomy-supportive practices that emerged.
4. **Clarity and Interpretation of Survey Items:** One methodological limitation relates to the interpretation of the survey questions used in Phase One. While efforts were made to ensure accessibility, there is a possibility that participants, particularly those with varied linguistic backgrounds, may have interpreted some items differently. Misunderstandings could influence the accuracy of the data collected. In future research, incorporating pilot testing, cognitive interviews, or item response validation could help identify ambiguities and refine survey tools for greater clarity and consistency.

In conclusion, while this study provides significant insights into English language teachers' beliefs and practices regarding learner autonomy, these limitations must be considered when interpreting the findings. Addressing these limitations in future research will contribute to a more robust and nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the promotion of learner autonomy in diverse educational contexts.

## **7.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

The study's findings have raised several suggestions for future research, including further exploring and expanding our understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices regarding learner autonomy.

1. **Impact of Professional Development Programs:** Future research should investigate how various types of professional development programs affect teachers' beliefs and practices related to learner autonomy. Specifically, studies could assess which professional development approaches are most effective in enhancing teachers' abilities

to foster learner autonomy. Research could also explore how these programs can be designed to meet the diverse needs of teachers, including tailoring content and delivery methods to different educational contexts.

2. **Perspectives of Students and Parents:** Investigating the perspectives of students and parents on learner autonomy could offer valuable insights into how these stakeholders perceive autonomy and the role of teachers in its development. Understanding their views could help align teaching practices with students' needs and expectations, providing a more comprehensive view of how learner autonomy is promoted and supported.
3. **Longitudinal Studies:** Conducting longitudinal research could shed light on how teachers' beliefs and practices regarding learner autonomy evolve over time. Such studies would be beneficial in identifying the long-term effects of professional development programs, shifts in educational policies, or changes in teaching contexts on teachers' promotion of learner autonomy. Additionally, longitudinal research could track the development of learner autonomy among students over extended periods, providing insights into the sustainability of autonomy-supportive practices.
4. **Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies:** Cross-cultural comparative studies could enhance our understanding of how different cultural and educational contexts influence teachers' beliefs and practices regarding learner autonomy. Comparing findings from various countries or regions, as well as different educational levels, could reveal commonalities and differences. Such studies could highlight best practices and successful strategies for promoting learner autonomy across diverse settings, contributing to a more global understanding of effective approaches.

In conclusion, addressing these recommendations in future research will contribute to a more robust and comprehensive understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices related to learner autonomy. Expanding the scope and diversity of research in this area will aid in developing more effective strategies and interventions to support both teachers and students in achieving autonomous learning.



# Appendix A CONSENT FORM (Teacher’s interview and classroom observation)

**Study title:** The role of the teacher in the implementation of learner autonomy: Investigating the impact of internal and external influences on English language teachers’ practices at a Saudi university

**Researcher name:** Ashwaq Hamed Alsharif

**ERGO number:** 76970

**Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):**

Table 7-1: Consent form (Teachers’ interviews and classroom observations)

I have read and understood the information sheet ( <i>August, 2022 /version no. 1 of participant information sheet</i> ) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.	
I agree to take part in this interview and classroom observation and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study.	
I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw for any reason without my participation rights being affected.	
I understand that if I withdraw from the study that it may not be possible to remove the data once my personal information is no longer linked to the data.	
I understand that I may be quoted directly in reports of the research but that I will not be directly identified (e.g. that my name will not be used).	
I understand that taking part in the study involves electronic and audio recording <i>which will be transcribed and then destroyed</i> for the purposes set out in the participation information sheet.	
I understand that my anonymity cannot be guaranteed, but that any information collected by the researchers will be kept confidential and participants will be asked to keep the discussions confidential.	
I understand that my personal information collected about me such as my name or where I live will not be shared beyond the study team.	
<i>I understand that the transcripts of the interviews and the classroom observation (with all identifying information removed) will be deposited in the University of Southampton archive and made available for future research and study.</i>	

Name of participant (print name).....

Signature of participant.....

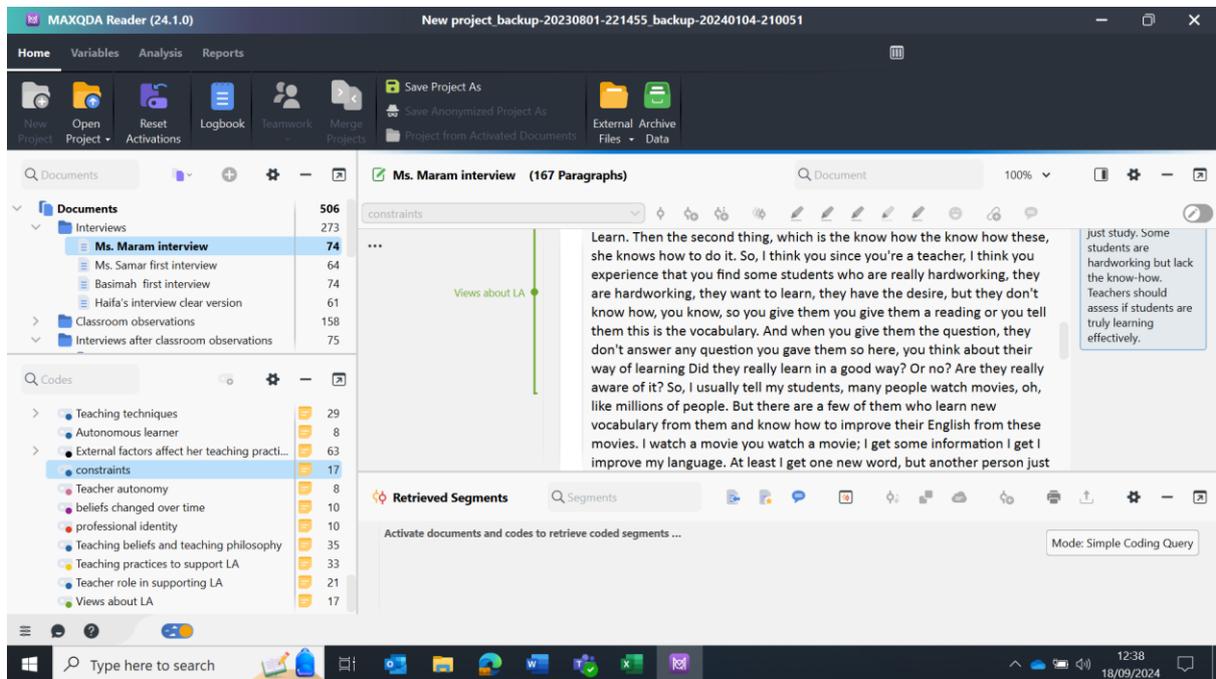
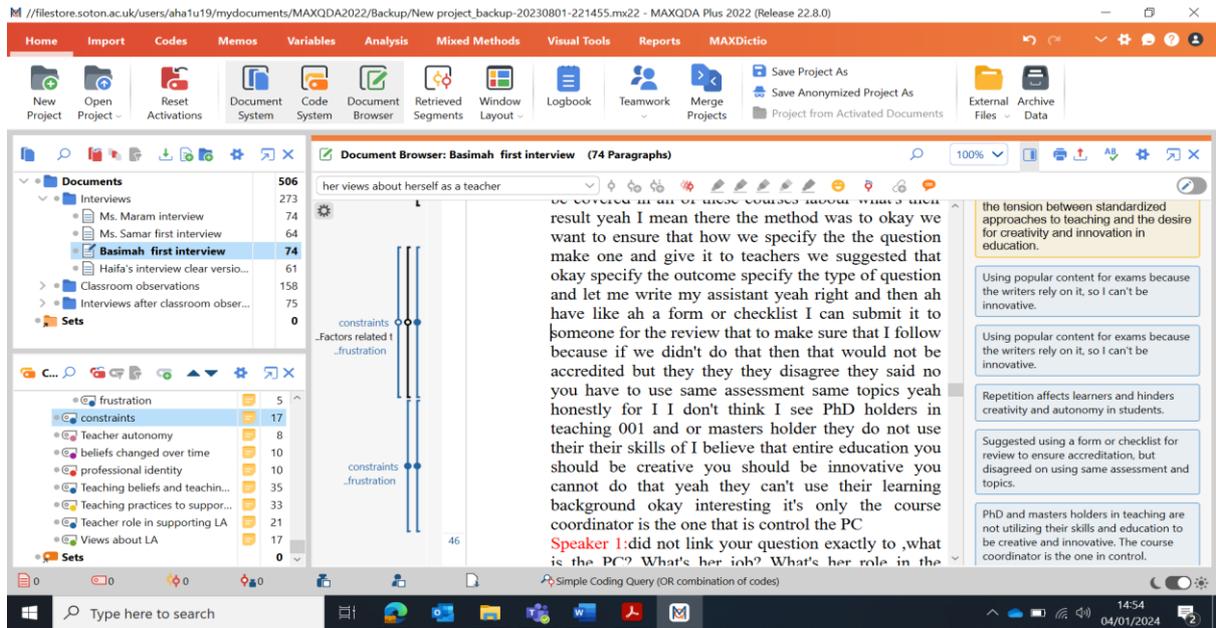
Date: .....

Name of researcher: Ashwaq Hamed Alsharif

Signature of researcher .....

Date.....

## Appendix B MAXQDA SAMPLE





## Appendix C Example of Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Theme / Category	Quantitative Findings (Phase One)	Qualitative Insights (Phase Two)	Integrated Interpretation
Beliefs about Learner Autonomy	High agreement that LA enhances learner motivation, independence, and responsibility	All participants affirmed LA's importance, emphasizing its value in fostering motivation, reflection, and responsibility	Strong convergence: Teachers' conceptual understanding in the survey is affirmed by deeper explanations in interviews and observations
Psychological Perspective	Psychological dimension received the highest endorsement (e.g., metacognitive skills, self-evaluation)	Teachers prioritized motivation, self-awareness, and learner responsibility (e.g., Maram, Haifa)	Convergent: Survey trends are confirmed and elaborated upon through personal teaching philosophies and classroom practices
Sociocultural Perspective	Second highest rated dimension	Emphasis on group work, peer learning, and classroom dialogue as autonomy-building tools (e.g., Haifa, Basimah)	Expansion: While the survey indicated support, qualitative data revealed how sociocultural strategies are applied or adapted in context
Implementation Barriers	Not directly assessed in the survey	Institutional challenges (rigid curriculum, assessment-driven teaching) cited by several teachers (e.g., Samiah)	Expansion: Constraints explain belief–practice gaps in some cases; three teachers (e.g., Maram, Basimah) worked around them—showing the mediating role of teacher autonomy
Teachers' Willingness and Ability	Not directly measured in the survey	High willingness and agency enabled some teachers to implement autonomy-supportive practices; others hesitated	Expansion: Teacher willingness, confidence, and perceived autonomy influenced their ability to enact practices despite shared constraints
Teaching Practices and Teacher Roles	Teachers reported using peer work, independent activities, and reflective strategies	Examples included self-directed learning, project-based tasks, and goal-setting (e.g., Maram, Haifa)	Convergence: Quantitative data on commonly used practices matched rich descriptions from the classroom context
Enabling conditions, example: CPD	CPD not assessed in the survey	Teachers differed in CPD experience: some valued its practical support (Haifa); others found it overly theoretical (Samiah)	Expansion: CPD's quality and applicability affected teachers' confidence and enactment of LA-supportive strategies

## **Appendix D      Combined Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form for Anonymous Online Surveys for Adult Participants (Teacher questionnaire)**

**Study Title:** The role of the teacher in the implementation of learner autonomy: Investigating the impact of internal and external influences on English language teachers' practices at a Saudi university

**Researcher(s):** Ashwaq Hamed Alsharif

**University email:** Aha1u19@soton.ac.uk

**Ethics/ERGO no:** 76970

**Version and date:** [August, 2022] [Version number 1]

### **What is the research about?**

The researcher (Ashwaq Alsharif) is a PhD candidate at the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom. I am inviting you to participate in a study that seeks to investigate the role of a teacher in supporting learner autonomy (LA) in the classroom. You are invited to fill out a questionnaire in which the purpose of using a questionnaire is to obtain an overview of the context and explore English language teachers' views about Learner autonomy and how they support it in their pedagogical practices. The questionnaire is part of a study about learner autonomy in English Language Teaching context. The aim of the study is to investigate teachers' roles concerning LA, as well as exploring how internal and external factors influence English language teachers' teaching practices at Saudi higher education context. The questionnaire will be used in the first stage in the research in which it will explore English language teachers' beliefs about 'learner autonomy'. Participation is voluntary and all teachers of English in the institution will be invited to contribute. Your responses are important as they will inform the finding of the study. The study will be conducted at a university in Saudi Arabia, a government institution. The research will be conducted in the AL department at Women's Campus. The research is funded by the Saudi government.

This study was approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) at the University of Southampton (Ethics/ERGO Number: [76970]).

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

This study involves completing an anonymous questionnaire which should take approximately 15 minutes of your time. If you are happy to complete this survey, you will need to tick (check) the box below to show your consent. As this survey is anonymous, the researcher will not be able to

know whether you have participated, or what answers you provided.

### **Why have I been asked to participate?**

You have been asked to take part because you are full-time, in-service English language teachers who are familiar with the context and have worked in Saudi education for a long time so they can reflect on the current situation of teaching English. The selection will include both Saudi and non-Saudi English language teachers. Your participation will help in understanding how and why English language teachers support LA and investigating the external and internal influences on their pedagogical practices and understanding the impacts of these on the successful implementation of LA in a Saudi higher education context.

I am aiming to recruit around 60 participants for this study in the first phase.

### **What information will be collected?**

The questions in this questionnaire ask for information in relation to of teacher perceptions of Learner autonomy to obtain an overview of the context and explore the English language teachers' views on Learner autonomy and how they support it in their pedagogical practices. You do not have to answer all the questions if you do not wish to do so.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

If you decide to take part in this study, you will not receive any direct benefits; however, your participation will contribute to knowledge in this area of research.

### **Are there any risks involved?**

It is expected that taking part in this study will not cause you any psychological discomfort and/or distress, however, should you feel uncomfortable you can leave the survey at any time or contact the following resources for support:

The researcher, [Ashwaq Hamed Alsharif] ( [Aha1u19@soton.ac.uk](mailto:Aha1u19@soton.ac.uk)) or the University of Southampton Research Integrity and Governance Manager (023 8059 5058, [rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk](mailto:rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk)).

### **What will happen to the information collected?**

All information collected for this study will be stored securely on a password-protected computer and backed up on a secure server. In addition, all data will be pooled and only compiled into data summaries or summary reports. Only the researcher and their supervisor will have access to this information.

### **What happens if there is a problem?**

If you are unhappy about any aspect of this study and would like to make a formal complaint, you can contact the Head of Research Integrity and Governance, University of Southampton, on the following contact details: Email: [rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk](mailto:rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk), phone: + 44 2380 595058.

Please quote the Ethics/ERGO number above. Please note that by making a complaint you might be no longer anonymous.

More information on your rights as a study participant is available via this link:  
<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/about/governance/participant-information.page>

**Thank you for reading this information sheet and considering taking part in this research.**

Please tick (check) this box to indicate that you have read and understood information on this form, are aged 18 or over and agree to take part in this survey.

## Appendix E Questionnaire: English language teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy

This questionnaire is part of a study about learner autonomy in English Language Teaching context. It will be conducted by Ashwaq Alsharif, PhD student at University of Southampton. The goal of the study is to investigate teachers' roles concerning LA, as well as exploring how internal and external factors influence English language teachers' teaching practices at Saudi higher education context. The questionnaire will be used in the first stage in the research in which it will explore English language teachers' beliefs about 'learner autonomy'. Participation is voluntary and all teachers of English in the institution will be invited to contribute. Your responses are important as they will inform the finding of the study. There are no right or wrong answers here. what the researcher interested in is your beliefs about LA. It will take about 15 minutes to complete this questionnaire. Your collaboration is highly appreciated.

### Section 1: Learner Autonomy

Please give your opinion about the statements below by ticking ONE answer for each. The statements are not just about your current job and in answering you should consider your experience as a language teacher more generally.

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Independent study in the library is an activity which develops learner autonomy.					
2. Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone.					
3. Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn.					
4. Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom.					
5. Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.					
6. Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence.					
7. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do.					
8. Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other.					
9. Learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together.					
10. Learner autonomy is promoted by independent work in a self-access centre.					
11. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed.					
12. Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy.					

12. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials.					
13. Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy.					
14. Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy.					
15. Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy.					
16. The ability to monitor one's learning is central to learner autonomy.					
17. Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.					
18. To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.					

**Section 2: Desirability and Feasibility of Learner Autonomy**

Below there are two sets of statements. The first gives examples of decisions LEARNERS might be involved in; the second lists abilities that learners might have. For each statement:

- a. First say how desirable (i.e. ideally), you feel it is.
- b. Then say how feasible (i.e. realistically achievable) you think it is for the learners you currently teach most often.

You should tick TWO boxes for each statement – one for desirability and one for feasibility

	<b>Desirability</b>				<b>feasibility</b>			
	<b>Undesirable</b>	<b>Slightly desirable</b>	<b>Quite desirable</b>	<b>Very desirable</b>	<b>Unfeasible</b>	<b>Slightly feasible</b>	<b>Quite feasible</b>	<b>Very feasible</b>

**Learners are involved in decisions about:**

The objectives of a course								
The materials used								
The kinds of tasks and activities they do								

The topics discussed									
How learning is assessed									
The teaching methods used									
Classroom management									

**Learners have the ability to:**

Identify their own needs									
Identify their own strengths									
Identify their own weaknesses									
Monitor their progress									
Evaluate their own learning									
Learn co-operatively									
Learn independently									

### Section 3: About Yourself

Please tell us about your background.

1. Years of experience as an English language teacher (Tick ONE):

0-4  5-9  10-14  15-19  20-24  25+

2. Years of experience as an English language teacher at YUC (Tick ONE)

0-4  5-9  10-14  15-19  20-24  25+

3. Highest qualification (Tick ONE):

Certificate  Diploma  Bachelor's  Master's  Doctorate  Other

4. Nationality

### Section 4: Further Participation

1. In the next stage of the study, the researcher would like to talk to individual teachers to learn more about their views on learner autonomy and their teaching practices. Would you be interested in discussing this issue further with us?

Yes

No

If you answered YES to questions 1 above and if you are willing to take part of the main study, please email me on the following

<b>The researcher E-mail:</b>	<a href="mailto:Ahajul19@soton.ac.uk">Ahajul19@soton.ac.uk</a>
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Thank you for taking the time to respond.

## Appendix F Invitation Letter for the English language teachers who are willing to participate in the Main phase

**Study title:** The role of the teacher in the implementation of learner autonomy: Investigating the impact of internal and external influences on English language teachers' practices at a Saudi university

**ERGO number:** 76970

Dear English language teacher,

My name is Ashwaq Alsharif and I am a PhD candidate at the University of Southampton, UK. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study *The role of the teacher in the implementation of learner autonomy: Investigating the impact of internal and external influences on English language teachers' practices at a Saudi university*. The study has two phases. First, you were invited to fill out a questionnaire in which the purpose of using a questionnaire is to obtain an overview of the context and explore English language teachers' views about Learner autonomy and how they support it in their pedagogical practices. The questionnaire is part of a study about learner autonomy in English Language Teaching context. The aim of the study is to investigate teachers' roles concerning LA, as well as exploring how internal and external factors influence English language teachers' teaching practices at Saudi higher education context. Thank you for filling out the questionnaire and show your interest to participate in the next phase.

Since you are willing to participate on the second phase of this study, and once you give consent to take part in the study, you will participate in interviews and classroom observations. The interviews will be conducted four times during the study. Individual face-to-face interviews or online interviews based on your preferences will be conducted with you. A first interview will be scheduled at the beginning of the semester as an initial conversation to gather teachers' insights and general thoughts about implementing learner autonomy, how they pursue learner autonomy in their pedagogical practices and gain insights about the opportunities and challenges that arise. Then, three interviews will be conducted after each classroom observation to gain insights into teachers' perspectives, enable them to provide interpretations of their thinking and performance and allow them to justify their decision-making, provide rationales and express their thoughts concerning their teaching practices. The day selection will be based on your preferences.

After securing your permission, you will be invited to participate in classroom observation. The observation will be conducted three times during the semester. The day selection will be based on your preferences. All interviews and classroom observations will be recorded if possible and filed notes will be taken. The observation will be related to the types of activities or tasks that the

teacher uses, the role of the teacher and the students in the classroom, the students' engagement with the teacher and the learning process, the types of teaching methodology that the teacher adopts, etc.

However, all obtained data from you will be stored securely on a University of Southampton computer or in the University of Southampton OneDrive storage. Your responses will be anonymised when I report the study findings. The research is funded by Saudi cultural Bureau in London, UK.

Remember, your participation is totally voluntary and you have the right to participate or not. Your responses are important as they will inform the findings of the study. Please send me your response no later than September 15th, 2022. If you are willing to participate,

please fill out the attached consent form and the participant's information sheet.

Once I receive your agreement to participate and the forms, I will contact you and provide you with further information about the interviews, classroom observations and the timings. If you any further questions about the study, do not hesitate to contact me at: [Aha1u19@soton.ac.uk](mailto:Aha1u19@soton.ac.uk)

Many thanks.

Sincerely,

Ashwaq Alsharif

PhD Candidate (Modern Languages)

Faculty of Humanities

University of Southampton

Email: [aha1u19@soton.ac.uk](mailto:aha1u19@soton.ac.uk)

## **Appendix G Interviews**

### **Part 1: Background information**

1. What is your name?
2. Which is your highest qualification? (BA, MA, PhD)
3. How long have you been an EFL teacher at this university? Have you got any other roles? May you please talk about your learning and teaching experience?

### **Part 2: First Interview Questions**

#### **Section 1: Understanding Learner Autonomy**

1. How do you define the term “learner autonomy”?

Probing: Can you provide more details? Why do you define it this way?

2. What does the term “learner autonomy” mean to you personally?

Probing: Why do you think it holds (or does not hold) significance in education?

3. Do you consider learner autonomy important?

Probing: Why or why not?

#### **Section 2: Characteristics of Autonomous Learners**

4. What are the characteristics of an ideal autonomous learner?

Probing: How do these characteristics obvious in practical classroom settings?

5. What do you think about your present students in terms of their learner autonomy?

Probing: Are they independent learners? In what ways do they develop learner autonomy?

#### **Section 3: The Teacher’s Role in Learner Autonomy**

6. What are the roles of teachers in helping students develop the capacity and ability for autonomy?

Probing: Why do you believe these roles are important?

7. What are your roles in the classroom when it comes to fostering learner autonomy?

Probing: Can you provide specific examples from your teaching experience?

8. What do you often do to encourage your students to become more autonomous?

Probing: What strategies or activities do you use in the classroom?

9. Why do you (not) think that the teacher has an important role in creating an autonomous learning environment?

10. In your teaching, you describe yourself as (...). Why do you take this approach, given your views on learner autonomy?

Probing: How do you balance being the knowledge provider with fostering autonomy?

#### **Section 4: Decision-Making in the Classroom**

11. What factors affect your teaching decisions in the classroom?

Probing: Can you explain how these factors influence your teaching methods?

12. What were the reasons behind your decision-making in your class regarding promoting autonomy?

#### **Section 5: Autonomy in the Saudi Arabian Context**

15. Is it possible to foster learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia?

Probing: Why or why not? What challenges or opportunities do you see?

16. In your classroom, is fostering learner autonomy feasible?

Probing: Why or why not?

17. Does the teaching and learning environment in Saudi Arabia help or hinder the development of learner autonomy?

Probing: In what way does the context either support or limit autonomy?

18. In your opinion, what is the best way to foster learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia and your classroom?

#### **Conclusion**

Closing Statement:

“Thank you so much for your time and cooperation. Your insights have been very valuable in helping us understand how learner autonomy can be fostered in your teaching environment. If you have any additional comments or reflections, feel free to share them”.

#### **Follow-up interviews:**

1. What were you thinking when...?
2. You were..... What were your thoughts when you decided to.....?
3. Why did you decide to...?

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