

Exploring EFL University Teachers’ Conceptions of Learner Autonomy

Dr. Salama Embak Saleh

*Dept. of English – Faculty of education - Agelat
Zawia University*

Abstract :

This study aims to investigate the conceptions of 48 Libyan English foreign language (EFL) university teachers of learner autonomy and explores their views about its principles and practices. It also aims to enhance these teachers’ awareness about the importance of shifting their teaching methods from teacher-centred to learner-centred through creating more autonomous learners. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire. The findings of this study reveal the participant teachers’ lack of clear understanding of learner autonomy as shown in their different definitions of this concept. Lack of facilities, students’ hesitation to share responsibility of their learning, low

proficiency, accountability for examinations and imposed learning materials were found to be serious obstacles for the promotion of a strong version of learner autonomy in Libyan universities. Nevertheless, the positive views of the teachers about the theoretical principles and pedagogical practices of learner autonomy indicate the possibility of promoting a weak version of this concept among the students in these universities.

1-Background of the Study

Learner autonomy has deep roots in humanistic psychology (Rogers, 1983). Dewey (1916:38) insisted that “education is not an affair of ‘telling’ and being told”. Friere (1998:59) believed that “respect for the autonomy and dignity of every person is an ethical imperative and not a favour that we may or may not concede to each other” as for him autonomy “is a process of becoming oneself” (p.98). Similarly, Boud (1981:12) considered autonomy as “a vital requisite for someone to be able to function effectively in modern society”.

The widespread of notions such as learner-centeredness, independent learning, self-regulated learning, self study, lifelong learning and the integration of technology into education has a significant impact on English language teaching and EFL classroom approaches of instructions. Recently, there has been a shift towards offering learners more freedom to choose and to exercise more responsibility and control over their learning. This involves a radical change on the role played by teachers and learners. Therefore, promoting learner autonomy has now become an important aim for education (Benson & Huang, 2008). Benson and Huang (2008:422) reported that “it has been viewed as both a desirable goal of education and a constituent element of good teaching and learning”. Borg and Al-Busaidi

(2012:3) claimed that it gained credibility in FL and SL settings over the last 30 years and has become a fundamental topic in foreign language education (Yagcioglua, 2015:428). This positive impact led Little to describe the autonomous learner as a “maximally successful” (Little,2004:1).

Teaching English in the Libyan context has been affected by this shift in changing the conceptions of teaching and learning . Aspects of this shift have been manifested in the introduction of communicative curriculum into secondary schools (Orafi & Borg, 2009)’ integrating technology in teaching English (Emhamed & Krishnan, 2011 ; Abukhattala, 2016.), using language games in the FL classroom (Aldabbus, 2008); teachers’ positive attitudes towards learner-centred approach (Shihiba, 2011) and students and teachers’ readiness for learner autonomy (Elmahjoub, 2014). However, local research revealed the failure of most of the attempts which have been made towards implementing these new ideas and many obstacles have been reported as responsible for this failure (Orafi & Borg, 2009; Shihiba, 2011; Elmahjoub, 2014). For example, the findings of a recent study conducted by Jha (2015) revealed that ‘learner autonomy’ is rarely used in the Libyan context. Teachers’ lack of understanding of this concept and its principles and practices can be one of the possible reasons for not promoting it successfully among Libyan university students. This study focuses on investigating this issue through answering these questions:

- What are the Libyan EFL university teachers’ conceptions of ‘learner autonomy’?
- What do these teachers think about the principles and practices of learner autonomy?

The term conceptions in this study is used according to Pratt’s (1992: 204) definition “conceptions are specific meanings attached to phenomena

that then mediate our response to situations involving those phenomena. In effect, we view the world through the lenses of our conceptions, interpreting and acting in accordance with our understanding of the world.”

2. Defining Learner Autonomy:

There is a lack of consensus in the literature about defining learner autonomy as its interpretation differs from one culture to another (Sinclair, 2000).

Learner autonomy is a humanistic concept and it was first introduced in Holec's seminal report (1981) who defined it as “the ability to take charge of one's own learning” (p.3). Little (1999:78) believes that it “entails the conscious deployment of appropriate strategies in relation to particular learning activities and to the learning process overall, and those strategies are generated within the minds of individual learners”. Tudor (2001:17) defined it as “the independent or self-regulated study which takes place outside the classroom in self-access centres or other independent learning facilities”. Later, Little (2004:105) adds that the concept implies “learning how to learn intentionally” and it involves “the learner's full involvement in planning, monitoring and evaluating his or her learning”. Benson (2011:17) focuses on the socio-cultural implications of learner autonomy and pointed out the shift in thinking about autonomy “as a matter of individualizing learning though-out of class initiatives...to classroom-based approaches”. However, he suggested swinging back towards methods in which “classroom teaching with students' self-directed language learning beyond the classroom..p:18).

All scholars who defined learner autonomy agree that autonomous learners should develop the ability to make decisions about their learning such as identifying needs, setting goals, selection of learning resources,

carrying out effective learning strategies and evaluating their learning. In other words, “being autonomous means doing things for yourself” (Little, 2004:105).

In this study, the researcher adapts a narrow view about learner autonomy. It is used with the sense of empowering language learners inside classrooms through accounting for their interests and needs, enhancing their active participation in communication activities, involving them in organizing classroom activities. In other words, learners share with their teacher the charge of managing the learning process.

2-Teacher’s Understanding of Learner Autonomy :

The integration of the principles and practices of learner autonomy into education has resulted in significant changes on teacher and student role, materials development, classroom approaches of instruction and methods of teaching. The instruction approach of teachers who are concerned with promoting learner autonomy is clearly described in this ancient proverb “give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish and he eats for a life time” (An ancient proverb). The explanation of this proverb implies developing learner’s ability to learn independently through promoting his/her lifelong learning skills. Fostering learner autonomy requires teachers’ understanding of its principles and knowing the appropriate methods and strategies that lead to the realization of this goal. In addition, teachers must have positive beliefs about learner autonomy and its incorporation in their pedagogy. Boud (1981:28) stressed that “non-autonomous teachers do not make the best facilitators of autonomous learning”.

A broad view of learner autonomy entails “the learner’s full involvement in planning, monitoring and evaluating his or her learning” (Little, 2004: 105). Applying this approach in the classroom will definitely affect the role of the teacher. The new role of the teacher involves being observer, adviser, manager of learning resources and a facilitator of learning. However, this does not suggest the teacher’s withdrawal to the sidelines as he/she must always play the decisive role (ibid:106). Accordingly, one serious issue about learner autonomy is lack of understanding of its theoretical principles and pedagogical practices; particularly about the role of the teacher. The overlap between this concept and individualistic concepts such as independent learning, self-regulated learning may lead to the confusion around its meaning and practice. In this regard, Murray (2014:336) conducted a comparison study between the constructs of ‘learner autonomy’ and ‘self-regulated learning’ and concluded by viewing them as “being two separate areas of inquiry that involve different mindsets”. Little (1999:78) pointed out the “widespread misconception that learner autonomy is essentially a matter of learning without a teacher”. This concept was also understood differently by 20 EFL teachers in the Language Centre at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman (Al-Busaidi & Al-Maamari, 2014) and by Vietnamese higher education EFL teachers (Nguyen et al, 2014). These different views were attributed to the teachers’ background, culture, education and experience. Due to these challenges, Little (1999:77) argued that learning autonomy “ has only rarely been a central and explicit concern of pedagogical practice”. These challenges also indicate that the teacher has an important role in promoting learner autonomy.

3. Promoting Learner Autonomy:

Learner autonomy has an individual as well as a social dimension (Little: 2004) and therefore promoting it requires accounting for these two dimensions. This makes its development among students “a lengthy process” (Gardner & Miller, 1999: 51). This section explains how EFL teachers can promote learner autonomy in their classrooms.

Many factors contribute to the creation of autonomous learners. One of these factors is teachers’ clear understanding of the philosophy and principles of learner autonomy and their adoption of the appropriate strategies which promote it. Teachers’ misunderstanding of this concept may result in either their development of negative attitudes towards it or to their improper integration of its principles into their pedagogy . Little (1999:78) pointed out the misconception of learner autonomy, particularly in universities, “where it is often associated with self-access learning. ”.

Nunan (2003) focused on the implementation aspect of learner autonomy and reported the nine steps he had successfully followed in leading his students along the continuum from dependence to autonomy.

Step 1: Make instruction goals clear to learners

Step 2: Allow learners to create their own goals

Step 3: Encourage learners to use their second language outside the classroom

Step 4: Raise awareness of learning processes

Step 5: Help learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies

Step 6: Encourage learner choice

Step 7: Allow learners to generate their own tasks

Step 8: Encourage learners to become teachers

Step 9: Encourage learners to become researchers

It seems to be possible for Libyan EFL university teachers to follow some ; if not all, of these steps. Clarifying the goals for learners should be the starting point for all language learning programmes or courses. Explicit goals can help in raising learners' awareness about their personal needs. Allowing language learners to set their own goals or involving them in this process will enhance their motivation and make them feel responsible for achieving these goals. Although the chance of using English language outside classrooms in the Libyan context is very limited as noted by (Rajendran , 2010), teachers of English in Libyan universities should encourage their students to use English outside classrooms as much as possible. Now, the chance of using English outside classrooms is more available through online social networks. Raising learners' awareness about the learning process enhances their sense of ownership about it and can lead to transferring responsibility from the teacher to the learner. Mohammed (2014) believes that through raising learners' awareness about their learning strategies, language teachers can help students develop stronger learning skills. EFL learners' identification of their preferred learning styles and strategies promotes their interest in the learning process and may lead to better learning. Encouraging learners' choice of the materials they use, the approach of instruction they follow, the assessment strategies they apply and the learning styles and strategies they prefer increases their involvement in the learning process and promotes their autonomy. Offering language learners the chance to create their own learning tasks increases their engagement and active participation in performing these tasks. EFL teachers' encouragement of their students to practice model lessons where they can reflect on their own performance often results in enhancing self-confidence and raising self-esteem. Regarding these issues, Elmahjoub (2014) found Libyan EFL teachers

ready to transfer responsibility of these issues to their students. Developing EFL learners' research skills and offering them clear guidelines for conducting small research about issues related to their learning represents another important strategy for promoting learner autonomy. Yahong (2009) reported about his 2-months successful experience in promoting three Chinese EFL learners' autonomy through helping them defining their learning goals, setting up plans and working towards them. Kavaliauskienė (2002) suggests three activities for EFL teachers to promote autonomy: 'crossword session', 'grammar training' and 'translation'. Macaskill and Denovan (2013) believe that using perspectives from positive psychology is essential for creating autonomous learners. They reported how they successfully managed in enhancing the self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy among 214 EFL university students through using such perspectives. Lazar (2013) insisted on putting strong emphasis on using pair and group work, authentic materials and self and peer assessment in order to develop FL learner autonomy. Jingnan (2011:28-29) stressed the notion of equipping learners with two basic factors 'willingness and capacity' to promote their autonomy. AL-Busaidi and Al-Mamari (2014:12) recommended that "teacher education programs need to provide opportunities and training for their student teachers on how to promote learner autonomy in their teaching".

3.1 Approaches for Developing Learner Autonomy:

The teacher's approach of instruction is an important issue for consideration in creating the appropriate environment for developing learner autonomy. Smith (2015:84) suggested five approaches: 'Resource-based approach', 'Technology-based approach', 'Learner-based approach',

‘Classroom-based approach’, ‘Curriculum-based approach’ and added Benson’s (2001) ‘Teacher-based approach’. All these approaches emphasize involving the learner in managing the learning process and developing learner autonomy. In his explanation of ‘Teacher-based approaches’, Smith emphasizes the role of the teacher and teacher education in creating autonomous learners. Lazar (2013) described the role of the teacher in this process “to help students establish study goals, choose the learning content and progress, select the learning method and strategy, monitor the learning process and evaluate the learning effect”. Teachers can help learners in assessing their needs, setting their goals, planning work, selecting learning materials, carrying out their independent language learning and acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge for implementing all these tasks. A recent study conducted by Jha (2015) to investigate the desirable characteristics of ELT practitioners in Libya through exploring the views of 50 final year undergraduate students and 15 teachers in Benghazi University about this issue. One of the interesting findings of this study is the dominance of the Grammar Translation Method comparing with approaches of cooperative learning, learner autonomy and task-based learning. These approaches were found to be either rarely or never be used. The dominance of such rote traditional learning does not help in promoting learner autonomy. This conclusion has been reached by Yuxiu (2015) who investigated the views of 461 EFL Chinese university students about the effect of teaches’ teaching on promoting learner autonomy. Such teacher-centred approaches limit learner's freedom which is seen as a "prerequisite for learner autonomy" (Trebb, 2008: 1). On the other hand, Garner and Miller (1999:40) pointed out the effectiveness of learner autonomy for helping language teachers in establishing links with learners at a “more individualised level, and to connect classroom learning

with out-of-class language use". Jarvis (2012) reported his 123 EFL university students' positive views about the effect of integrating computers and social networking into their language courses on developing their autonomy. The findings of Mynard (2004) also emphasized the positive impact of computer-mediated communication on developing autonomy among EFL university students in United Arab Emirates. This discussion suggests that EFL teachers have to change their conceptions of the teaching/learning process and have to be willing to integrate new principles and practices which can significantly affect their role in the learning process. Only then, they can successfully promote learner autonomy.

4. Methodology:

This study aims to investigate Libyan EFL university teachers' conceptions of learner autonomy. Therefore, it was necessary to explore these teachers' understanding of this concept and to identify their views about its principles and practices. The sample consisted of 48 Libyan EFL university teachers working in Zawia and Tripoli university in Libya. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire starts with this open-ended question "how do you define learner autonomy?" This question addresses teachers' understanding of the concept of learner autonomy. Cohen et al (2007:321) believe that "open-ended questions are useful if the possible answers are unknown or the questionnaire is exploratory. They also enable respondents to answer as much as they wish.... to write a free account in their own terms, to explain and qualify their responses". The second close-ended part of the questionnaire consists of 37 statements adopted from the

questionnaire of Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012). These statements are listed on a Likert scale with response options including strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree and strongly agree. Cohen et al (2007: 325) described Likert scales as “very useful devices for the researcher, as they build in a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of responses”. This part addresses the teachers’ views towards the principles and practices of learner autonomy. These methods were found appropriate for gathering sufficient data for answering the following research questions:

- What are the Libyan EFL university teachers’ conceptions of ‘learner autonomy’?
- What do these teachers think about the principles and practices of learner autonomy?

Content analysis has been applied for analyzing the participants’ responses to the first research question. Cohen et al. (2007:475) defined content analysis as “the process of summarising and reporting written data” and they recommended using it for reducing a “vast amount of written to smaller groups of information”. The teachers’ definitions of learner autonomy were grouped together in terms of similarity and then; the main ideas related to learner autonomy were identified. These ideas were later discussed in connection with the teachers’ responses to the statements of the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics have been applied for analyzing the close-ended part of the questionnaire focusing on the frequency of responses as an indication for the participants’ positive or negative views towards the principles and practices of learner autonomy (see table 1).

5. Results & Discussion:

The results are presented below followed by their discussion according to the research questions:

5.1 Teachers' Definitions of Learner Autonomy:

The teachers' responses to the question 'how do you define learner autonomy?' reflect their lack of clear understanding of this concept. Some of them defined it as:

“ learner's self study reliance’., “ revolves around a monitored self-reliant learner”, “the learner can set his/her own aims and organize his/her own study. They are autonomous and independent”, “intendancy to assign some learning aims or targets and improve his/her own learning. This does not mean the learners depend completely on their own charge but they should rely partially upon teachers to support the development and the achieved level of learner autonomy”; ‘independent learner’.

This sample of definitions indicates linking the concept of learner autonomy with notions of 'self study', 'self-monitoring', 'self-reliant', 'setting own aims', 'organizing learning materials' and 'independence' . All these notions are central in the theory of learner autonomy (Holec, 1981). Little (2004:116) explained that learner autonomy involves learner's exercise of responsibility for planning and monitoring their learning. Benson (2011:16) also emphasized these notions as main principles in learner autonomy. He believes that “autonomy involves learners taking more control over their learning”..... “self-regulation”. These notions have been also included in the ways suggested by Benson and Voller 1997:1–2) for using learner autonomy in language education. Those definitions which imply handing over the full responsibility of the learning process (planning, monitoring and evaluating) to the learner represent a broad and narrow

view of learner autonomy whereas those which suggest sharing this responsibility between the learner and the teacher describe a narrow view of this concept.

Notions of learner autonomy similar to those provided by the participants in this study were also reported by the participants in the studies conducted by Al-Busaidi and Al-Maamari (2014) and Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012). However, this study participants' definitions seem to be adopted from the literature

and could not be related to their own understanding and experiences. This can be explained by referring to the fact that most of the approaches of instruction in Libyan schools and universities are characterized by teachers' control over the learning process. In other words, they are teacher-centred oriented (Orafi & Borg, 2009; Shihiba, 2011; Elmahjoub, 2014; Mohammed, 2014; Jha, 2015). The dominance of this approach of instruction does not promote learner autonomy as it offers the major role in the learning process for the teacher. Unlike, the teacher-centred, the autonomous teacher in the language classroom encourages students to take part in planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning.

There is no doubt that teachers who do not understand the pedagogy of this role and have not experienced it cannot understand what learner autonomy really means and ,therefore, they will not be able to provide their students with an appropriate environment for promoting it. Balçıkanlı (2010) states that “language teachers without any autonomy-oriented training may experience difficulties in creating such a classroom culture”. Teachers' changing of their role is a necessary condition for promoting autonomy as Yan (2012:559) emphasizes that “the promotion of autonomy is dependent greatly on how teachers are aware of their new roles”. EFL

teachers have to understand and adopt the appropriate approaches of instruction for developing learner autonomy.

5.2 Teachers’ Responses to the Statements of the Questionnaire

Good understanding of the teachers’ conceptions of learner autonomy required identifying their views about its principles and practices. Therefore, all these principles and practices were listed on Likert scale and the participants were asked to tick the option that matches their views (see appendix). The participants’ responses to the statements of the questionnaire are presented on table (1).

No.	statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Language learners of all ages can develop learner autonomy.	4.16%	12.5%	27.8	37%	18.75
2	Independent study in the library is an activity which develops learner autonomy.	0%	4.16	8.33	43.75	22.91
3	Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone.	4.16	10.41	8.33	43.75	33.33
4	Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn.	6.25	14.58	16.66	50%	12.50%
5	Individuals who lack autonomy are not likely to be effective language learners.	25%	18.75	25%	14.58	16.66

No.	statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
6	Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom	8.33%	6.25%	22.91%	29.16	33.33%
7	Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.	16.66%	8.33%	12.50%	41.66%	20.83%
8	Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher.	47.91%	37.87%	6.25%	8.33%	0.0
9	It is harder to promote learner autonomy with proficient language learners than it is with beginners.	18.75%	52.08%	18.75%	6.25%	4.16%
10	It is possible to promote learner autonomy with both young language learners and with adults.	8.33%	14.58%	29.16%	29.16%	18.75%
11	Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence.	6.25%	10.41%	8.33%	54.16%	20.83%
12	Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would.	14.58%	18.75%	22.91%	25%	18.75%

No.	statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
13	Learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all cultural backgrounds	2.08%	10.41%	8.33%	52.08%	27.08%
14	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do.	16.66%	10.41%	27.08%	35.41%	10.41% ^j
15	Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centred classrooms	4.16%	6.25%	10.41%	58.33%	20.83%
16	Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other.	00	4.16%	8.33%	62.5%	25%
17	Learner autonomy implies a rejection of traditional teacher-led ways of teaching	8.33%	6.25%	14.58%	60.41%	10.41%
18	Learner autonomy cannot develop without the help of the teacher.	00	4.16%	8.33%	75%	12.50%
19	Learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together.	4.16%	6.25%	4.16%	68.75%	16.66

No.	statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
20	Learner autonomy is only possible with adult learners.	33.33%	39.58%	8.33%	14.58%	4.16%
21	Learner autonomy is promoted by independent work in a self-access centre	6.25%	8.33%	18.75%	64.58%	2.08%
22	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed.	39.58%	29.16%	16.66%	8.33%	6.25%
23	Learner autonomy is a concept which is not suited to non-Western learners.	27.08%	45.83%	6.25%	14.58%	6.25%
24	Learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher.	45.83%	39.58%	00	6.25%	8.33%
25	Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy.	00	2.08%	00	81.25%	16.66%
26	Promoting autonomy is easier with beginning language learners than with more proficient learners.	25%	52.08%	12.50%	4.16%	6.25%
27	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials.	25%	33.33%	10.41%	20.83%	10.41%

No.	statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
28	Learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy.	4.16%	6.25%	6.25%	56.25%	27.08%
29	Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy.	00	4.16%	14.58%	68.75%	12.50%
30	Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy.	2.08%	4.16%	10.41%	56.25%	27.08%
31	Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy.	2.08%	6.25%	8.16%	54.16%	31.25%
32	The ability to monitor one's learning is central to learner autonomy.	10.41%	25%	12.50%	33.33%	20.83%
33	Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.	00	4.08%	16.66%	75%	4.08%
34	The proficiency of a language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy.	16.66%	14.58%	18.75%	43.75%	6.25%
35	The teacher has an important role to play in supporting learner autonomy	00	4.08%	8.16%	72.91%	14.58%

No.	statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
36	Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner.	6.25%	10.41%	16.66%	43.75%	22.91%
37	To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	35.41%	29.16	16.66	4.08%	14.58%

5.2.1 Teachers' Views about the Principles and Practices of Learner Autonomy:

The statements of the questionnaire describe the main principles of learner autonomy. The participants' responses to these statements have been interpreted as an indication of their acceptance or rejection of the ideas implied in these statements. The participants were generally positive about most of the principles and practices but they had some concerns about the feasibility of implementing them in the Libyan context. Similar beliefs and concerns were reported by 120 EFL teachers participated in a study conducted by Alibakhshi et al. (2015).

5.2.2.1 Accepted Principles and Practices

All the participants believe that studying in the library is a useful activity for developing learner autonomy. They confirmed this belief by their agreement on statement (21) which emphasizes the importance of self-access language centres for achieving this goal. Providing university libraries and self-access centres with sufficient learning materials and resources and equipping them with comfortable study areas encourages students to study in those libraries. McMurry et al. (2010 :114) reported

about the essential role played by self-access language centres in developing EFL university students' autonomy especially for those who were "well oriented". The findings of Chiu (2012) revealed the effective role of self-access language centres on developing students' independent learning skills especially in reading and writing. The book of Gardner and Miller (1999) '*Self-Access: from Theory to Practice*' offers clear guidelines for the effective use of these centres in developing learner autonomy. However, the researcher's personal experience indicates the nonexistence of self-access centres and the very poor conditions of some of the libraries available in Libyan universities. This will not encourage the teachers to send their students to study in these libraries and therefore they miss an important opportunity for developing their autonomy. All the participants also agree that a traditional teacher-centred approach does not help in promoting learner autonomy. This has been confirmed by the agreement of most of them on the notion that learner-centred classrooms can provide ideal conditions for achieving this goal. This belief was shared by (Reinders, 2010; Salimi & Ansari, 2015; Lazar, 2012). Lazar states that "with the learner-centred approach, teachers agree to share responsibility with their students, helping them to discover their own meaning instead of lecturing and controlling all classroom activities". Yilimic (2012: 306) linked the popularity of the term autonomy with the wide spread of learner-centred approaches in language education. Yan (2012:559) explained that in the autonomous classroom the role s shifted "from teacher-centered to the learner-centered mode, in which the learner is the centre of the program". Another notion was accepted by all the participants that learner autonomy has positive effect on success in language learning. Little (2004:1), Benson and Huang (2008) and Salimi and Ansari (2015) also emphasized this notion. 'learning how to learn' and 'learning to work

alone' were seen as central principles to the notion of learner autonomy by all the participants. The participants confirmed their positive belief about the notion of 'learning how to learn' through their agreement on statement (29). Independent learning can foster autonomy as it offers the learner the choice to make decisions about what, when and how to read. The last two principles imply the principle of learning outside classrooms which was seen by most of the participants as essential for developing learner autonomy. Similarly, the majority of the participants were positive about the important role of out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet in developing autonomy. Wojciechowska (2015:68-69) emphasized the effectiveness of using internet on developing EFL learner autonomy and explained the ways of using it inside and outside classrooms. This notion was also emphasized by the 46 EFL high school students who participated in the study conducted by Pawlak and Kruk (2012). However, the poor internet service in many FL contexts may not allow students to use it properly. In the Libyan context, for example, internet is not available for all university students either in their colleges or at home. Involving learners in making decisions about what to learn is another fundamental principle of learner autonomy (Little, 2004; Benson & Voller, 1997) accepted by the majority of the participants. These teachers' acceptance of sharing the responsibility about the learning process with their students can be seen as indication of their interest in developing autonomy. This finding contradicts with the common belief in the literature that teachers often hesitate in implementing learner-centred approaches in their classrooms as they are not ready to give up their control of the learning process (Little, 2004; Orafi & Borg, 2009). Enhancing learner's motivation is seen by most of the participants as an essential factor for autonomy development. This fact has been confirmed through the findings of (DaLian & DaLian, 2012).

Group work activities is a useful strategy for promoting learner autonomy (Kavaliauskienė, 2002). This belief was shared by most of the participants through accepting this notion as implied in statements (16 & 19 & 25). The majority of the participants believe that learner autonomy can be promoted by offering students regular opportunities to do tasks individually. However, this should not be taken to mean that teachers' withdrawal from the responsibility of monitoring students while they are working alone. Encouraging students to do tasks in self-access centre is a useful strategy through which students enhance their self confidence and ability to complete tasks alone (Gardner & Miller, 1999). They also believe that offering learners the opportunity to learn from each other represents a useful strategy for promoting autonomy. Implementing pair and group work is a useful teaching strategy for improving students' communication skills and for enhancing their autonomy. This belief is shared by Lazar (2013).

5.2.1.1 Rejected Principles and Practices:

However, the participants reported their disagreement with some principles and practices of learner autonomy. They all rejected the interpretation of learner autonomy as learning without a teacher. This rejection was emphasized by their disagreement on statement 24 which suggests learner's total independence of the teacher. The notions implied in these two statements represent a common misconception of learner autonomy (Little, 2004; Benson & Voller, 1997). The participants' agreement on statement (18) indicates their belief that the teacher still has a major role to play in the autonomous classroom. This role involves different tasks and responsibilities ranging from providing necessary

information through explanation to facilitating students' independent learning. Yan (2012: 559) emphasized that "without teachers counsel and supervision, the whole process will result in low efficiency or even fall into disorder". This misconception of learner autonomy may result in EFL teachers' rejection or hesitation to adopt this pedagogy and therefore they should be assured about their significant role within this pedagogy. The majority of the participants rejected the principle that only adult learners can develop autonomy. This belief was confirmed by their agreement on statement 13 which imply the possibility of developing autonomy for both young as well as adult learners. 13/14 of the teachers were not sure about their understanding of this issue and therefore they ticked 'unsure' for statements (1) and (10) respectively. The principle of linking autonomy development with high language proficiency was also rejected by most of the participants. The findings of Zarei and Zarei (2015) revealed that language proficiency is not an influential factor for developing learner autonomy. All the participants did not agree with the belief about the suitability of the concept of learner autonomy to Western contexts only. They contradicted with the view of Smith (2002) who believes that a strong version of the pedagogy of learner autonomy is not suitable for non-Western contexts. Anderson & Sert (2012:23) state that "certainly, learner autonomy appears to have been labelled as a western concept deeply influenced by native speakers ideology....and rejects styles of all non-western learners". The principle of learners assessing themselves has been also rejected by the majority of the participants. This was reflected in their disagreement with statements (22 & 37) which imply this principle. Gardner (2000:56) argues for involving learners in assessing themselves and suggested 'generic assessment' which involves the role of learner in selecting of the content of the exam and its administration whereas the

assessment criteria are decided by the teacher. He claims that “ generic assessments which are likely to be the most effective in terms of balancing the benefits against the pitfalls of self-assessment” (p.58). Self-assessment is a concept can be linked with a strong version of learner autonomy but not with a narrow one. Accounting for learner’s needs in test construction should be central in a narrow version of learner autonomy. Teachers’ rejection of this notion can be explained by their interest in keeping the assessment aspect of the learning process at their hands as this ensures maintaining a significant role for them. The majority of the teachers were not positive about the notion of allowing learners to choose their learning materials or classroom learning activities as implied in statements (8 & 27) and about allowing them to decide the instruction approach as mentioned in statement (4). The 13 teachers who ticked ‘*unsure*’ seemed to be not certain about their understanding of this issue. Limiting learner’s choice about these decisions may not lead to developing his/her autonomy (Little, 2004). Therefore, the decision about these issues is better to be taken through negotiation as both the teacher and the learner will develop a sense of responsibility and ownership for realizing the goals of their choice.

Power and responsibility seem to be the areas of tension among the participant teachers in their interpretation of the concept of learner autonomy and its associated principles and practices. They seem to be interested in maintaining their control over issues of classroom instructional approaches and assessment. In other words, they still want to be seen as a man figure in the classroom. Generally, they were positive towards the pedagogy of learner autonomy but they were not so positive towards its principles which imply disempowering them. This suggests that these teachers can accept a gradual integration of a weak version of learner autonomy into their pedagogy. This integration involves enhancing

students' active participation in classrooms and increasing their maximum use of the target language through engaging them in communication activities and working in pairs and groups under the supervision of their teacher.

6. Conclusion:

Promoting autonomy in the FL classroom requires accounting for many factors. The social interactive dimension of learner autonomy makes its interpretation culture and context dependant. Therefore, this concept is understood differently especially by EFL teachers. Two different views of this concept can be distinguished; a broad and a narrow view. A broad view of learner autonomy entails handing over the full responsibility for planning, monitoring and evaluating the learning process to the learner. It also entails developing the learner's lifelong skill for learning independently outside the classroom. This view entails minimizing the role of the teacher which leads to his/her rejection or hesitation to accept its principles and practices. On the other hand, the narrow view of this concept maintains a significant role of the teacher as it is limited to empowering learners inside classrooms through accounting for their needs and interests , enhancing their active participation and increasing their use of the foreign language. The responsibility of managing the learner process is shared between the teacher and the learner. Such a narrow view of learner autonomy accounts for the contextual and cultural particularities of FL contexts and therefore integrating this version may yield better results than taking the risk of integrating a strong one. The teachers seem to be positive about the principles and practices of learner autonomy except for those which significantly minimize their role. However, there are still many personal, institutional and contextual challenges they have to consider in

order to implement these principles and practices successfully in their classrooms. EFL teacher education and training should include among its aims developing the student teachers' understanding of learner autonomy and enhancing their positive attitudes towards it. In FL contexts, there seems to be a need for reconceptualising the concept of learner autonomy into a weak version which accounts for the cultural and contextual particularities of these contexts.

This findings of this study shed the light on the Libyan EFL university teachers' understanding of learner autonomy which implies the possibility of shifting their classroom practices from teacher-centred to learner-centred. Careful guidance and support are needed in order to lead these teachers to promote their students' autonomy.

References :

Abukhattala, I. 2016. The Use of Technology in Language Classrooms in Libya. International Journal of Social Science and Humanity, Vol. 6, No. 4, (262-267).

Al-Busaidi , S. & Al-Maamari, F. 2014. Exploring university teachers' understanding of learner autonomy. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vol. 4, (10), pp: 2051-2060.

Aldabbus, S. 2008. An Investigation into the Impact of Language Games on Classroom Interaction and Pupil Learning in Libyan EFL Primary Classrooms. PhD Thesis: Newcastle University. UK.

Alibakhshi, G. & Keikha, A. & Nezakatgoo, B. 2015. On the Feasibility and Desirability of Learner Autonomy from Iranian EFL Teachers'

Perspectives. International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature , vol. 4, (6), pp:141-147.

Anderson, J. & Sert, N. 2012. *Autonomy in learning English as a foreign language. International Journal of Global Education*, vol. 1 (2), pp:23-27.

Balçıkanlı, C. (2010). *Learner Autonomy In Language Learning: Student Teachers' Beliefs. Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(1). P p 90-103 <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2010v35n1.8>

Benson, P. & Huange, J. 2008. *Autonomy in the transition from foreign language learning to foreign language teaching. D.E.L.T.A.*, 24 (421-439) <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/delta/v24nspe/03.pdf>.

Benson, P. (2011). *Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning. Applied linguistics in action series. Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Education.*

Benson, P. & Volker, P. 1997. *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning. London: Longman*

Borg, S . & Al-Busaidi. S. 2012. *Learner Autonomy: English Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices. ELT Research Paper . University of Leeds. <http://www.britishcouncil.org/> ISBN 978-0-86355-686-9*

Boud, D. (ed.) 1981. *Developing student autonomy in learning. London : Kogan Page Ltd.*

Cohen et al (2007). *Research Methods in Education. USA and Canada: Routledge*

DaLian, R. & DaLian, Z. 2012. *Motivating Chinese Students by Fostering Learner Autonomy in Language Learning. Theory and Practice in*

Language Studies, Vol. 2, (4), pp. 838-842.

<http://www.academypublication.com/issues/past/tpls/vol02/04/27.pdf>

Dewey, J. (1916/1997): Democracy and Education. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education. New York: The Free Press.

Elmahjoub, A. 2014. An Ethnographic Investigation into Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions and Practices in Relation to Learner Autonomy in a Secondary School in Libya. PhD Thesis. University of Sheffield . UK.

Emhamed, E. & Krishnan, S. 2011. Investigating Libyan teachers' attitudes towards integrating technology in teaching English in Sebha secondary schools. Academic Research International Vol, 1, (3). sarojani@uum.edu.

Freire, P. 1998. Pedagogy of freedom : ethics, democracy and civic courage. USA : Rowman Littlefield Publishers, INC.

Gardner, D. & Miller, L. 1999. Establishing Self-Access : From Theory to Practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gardner, D. 2000. Self assessment for autonomous language learners. Links & Letters, 7, pp:49-60.

Holec, H. (1981). Autonomy and foreign language learning. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Jarvis, H. 2012. Computers and learner autonomy: trends and issues. ELT Research Papers 12–02. ISBN 978-0-86355-682-1 www.britishcouncil.org.

Jha, S. 2015. Exploring desirable characteristics for Libyan ELT practitioners. Journal of English Language and Literature (JOELL),vol.2, (1), pp 78-87.

Jingnan, S. 2011. *Autonomy in EFL education*. *Canadian Social Science* Vol. 7(5), pp. 27-32 DOI:10.3968/J.css.1923669720110705.381: www.cscanada.net www.cscanada.org.

Kavaliauskienė, G. 2002. *Three activities to promote learner autonomy*. *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. VIII, (7). <http://iteslj.org/http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Kavaliauskiene-Autonomy.html>.

Lazar, A. 2012. *Learner autonomy and its implementation for language teacher training*. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Vol. 76, pp: 460 – 464. Available online at www.sciencedirect.com.

Little, D. 1999. *Developing learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom*. *DEVELOPING LEARNER : a social-interactive view of learning and three fundamental pedagogical principles*. *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, No. 38, 77-88.

Little, D. 2004. *Democracy, discourse and learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom*. *UTBILDNING & DEMOKRATI* , VOL 13,(3), PP. 105–126 .

Macaskill, A. & Denovan, A. 2013. *Developing autonomous learning in first year university students using perspectives from positive psychology*. *Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive Volume 38, (3)*. Available online at: <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/5767/>.

McMurry, B; Tanner, M. & Anderson, N. 2010. *Self-Access Centre: maximizing learners' access to Centre resources*. *SiSAL Journal*, Vol. 1 (2), pp: 100-114.

Mohammed, J. 2014. *Teaching English in Libya: Reflective Views*. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*

(IJSELL) V, 2 (8) , PP 32-39. ISSN 2347-3126 (Print) & ISSN 2347-3134 (Online) www.arcjournals.org ©ARC Page | 32

Murray , G. 2014. *The social dimensions of learner autonomy and self-regulated learning*. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 5(4), 320-341.

Mynard, J. 2004. *Investigating learner autonomy in a virtual EFL classroom: a grounded theory approach*. In J. Hull, J. Harris and P. Darasawang (eds.) *Research in ELT: Proceedings of the International Conference*.

Nguyen, N. T., Tangen, D., & Beutel, D. (2014). *Exploring the concept of learner autonomy in cross-cultural research*. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 5(3), 202-216.

Orafi, S. & Borg. S. 2009. *Intentions and realities in implementing communicative curriculum reform*. *System* 37 , 243–253 Available online at www.sciencedirect.com.

Pawlak, M. & Kruk, M. 2012. *The development of learner autonomy through internet resources and its impact on English language attainment*. *STUDIA ANGLICA POSNANIENSIA* 47(2-3) •

Rajendran, S. 2010. *ELT in Libyan Universities - A Pragmatic Approach*. *LANGUAGE IN*

INDIA Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow, V, 10.

Reinders, H. 2010. *Towards a Classroom Pedagogy for Learner Autonomy: A Framework of Independent Language Learning Skills*. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* Vol. 35 (5), pp:40-55

Rogers, C. 1983. *Freedom to learn for the 80's*. 2nd ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Salimi, A. & Ansari, N. 2015. *Learner Autonomy: Investigating Iranian English Teachers' Beliefs. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vol. 5, (5) pp: 1106-1115. ISSN 1799-2591 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0505.28>.*

Shihiba, S. 2011. *An investigation of Libyan EFL teachers' conceptions of the communicative learner-centred approach in relation to their implementation of an English language curriculum innovation in secondary schools. PhD Thesis: Durham University. UK. Online at: Durham e-Theses.*

Sinclair, B., McGrath, I., & Lamb, T. (Eds.). (2000). *Learner autonomy, teacher autonomy: Future directions. Harlow: Longman.*

Smith, R. 2002. *Autonomy, context, and 'appropriate methodology' . In Vieira, F., Moreira, M.A., Barbosa, I. and Paiva, M. (eds.). 2002. Pedagogy for Autonomy and English Learning: Proceedings of the 1st Conference of the Working Group – Pedagogy for Autonomy. Braga, Portugal: Universidade do Minho, pp. 13–23.*

Trebb, T. 2008. *Freedom-a prerequisite for learner autonomy. In Lamb, T. & Reinders, H. Learner and teacher autonomy: conceptions, realities and responses. John Benjamins Publishing Company . pp: 33-47.*

Tudor, I. (2001). *Dynamics of the Language Classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.*

Wojciechowska, A. 2015. *The use of the internet in developing learner's autonomy. World Scientific News 8, pp: 54-81 EISSN 2392-2192 Available online at www.worldscientificnews.com.*

Yagcioglu, O. 2015. *New approaches on learner autonomy in language learning. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 199, 428 – 435. Antalya – Turkey. Available online at www.sciencedirect.com.

Yahong, L. 2009. *How Can I Help My Students Promote Learner-Autonomy in English Language Learning? Educational Journal of Living Theories* ,Vol. 2, (3): 365-398.

Yan, S. 2012. *Teachers' roles in autonomous learning. Journal of Sociological Research* , vol. 3 (2).557-562.

<http://www.macrothink.org/journal/index.php/jsr/article/viewFile/2860/2371>.

Yildirim, O. 2012. *Understanding the Concept of Learner Autonomy in the Context of Second and Foreign Language Learning: Definitions, Misconceptions, and Applications. AWEJ Vol.3 (2), pp: 305 – 328* www.aweg.org.

Yuxiu, Y. 2015. *The Effect of Classroom Environments on University Students' Autonomous EFL Learning. Studies in Literature and Language Vol. 11, (2), pp. 72-79. DOI:10.3968/7371/ ISSN 1923-1563[Online]* www.cscanada.net www.cscanada.org.

Zarei, A. & Zarei, N. 2015. *On the effect of Language Proficiency on Learners' Autonomy and Motivatio Journal of English Language and Literature Vol.3, (2), pp:263-270.*