

Evaluating Algerian EFL Teachers' knowledge about Autonomy in Foreign Language Education

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Abstract

Although it has been proven to be all-important in the language classroom, learner autonomy is still a new and vague notion for a considerable number of English language teachers worldwide. This paper aims to check whether or not EFL teachers in Algeria know enough about learner autonomy in foreign language education. Accordingly, a questionnaire has been administered to a group of EFL teachers at the universities of Constantine and Setif. The analysis of data showed that the majority of teachers do not have accurate and extensive knowledge about learner autonomy. For them, it is a new notion that they rarely read about or consider promoting in the classroom.

Keywords: Learner Autonomy, Beliefs about Learner Autonomy, Foreign Language Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy is widely deemed crucial for the formation, evolution and achievements of learners within and beyond academic circles. In effect, there has been a noticeable shift towards learner-centred approaches in language education over the last few decades, especially in Western Europe (Nunan, 2012). This major and gradual change has led to an increased focus on learner autonomy, a new concept at that era, as a critical factor for learner growth and success. In Algeria, however, the notion learner autonomy is still relatively new in foreign language pedagogy, and is slowly gaining importance and popularity. This paper seeks to evaluate a sample of Algerian EFL teachers' knowledge about and familiarity with the notion learner autonomy in foreign language pedagogy. Through such evaluation, we are likely to verify whether EFL teachers in North-east Algeria are ready and able to implement learner autonomy in their classrooms.

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2. Review of the Literature

2.1. What is Learner Autonomy?

Holec (198: p.3), who coined the term, described it as “the ability to take charge of one’s learning,” claiming that this ability “is not inborn but must be acquired either by ‘natural’ means or (as most often happens) by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way.” Holec, furthermore, clarified that “to take charge of one’s learning is to have [...] the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning [...]” (p. 3). To put it differently, autonomy in learning refers to learners’ capacity and readiness to shoulder responsibility for their learning, thereby demonstrating less reliance on the teacher. Holec’s definition, which is apparently the most frequently cited of all definitions existing in the autonomy literature, encompasses four major characteristics of autonomy in language education. First, autonomy is related to learners’ beliefs and attitudes towards learning and not to the setting and mode of learning. Second, it is not a single behaviour, but a set of interrelated behaviours that are manifested, by learners, throughout the learning process. Third, it is not an innate skill but one that is acquirable and can be implemented in learners through various means and in different contexts. Last, and just as important, the idea of autonomy embraces the learners’ right to make choices and reflections at the level of the content being taught to them as well as the method adopted by their teachers or institutions (Benson & Voller, 1997). In a similar vein, Little (1991) defined autonomy in language learning as a learner’s capacity to produce critical reflections, make decisions, and act independently to enhance both the process and outcome of his own learning.

On his part and in an attempt to delineate the concept learner autonomy, Littlewood (1999, p. 75) proposed two levels of autonomy: “proactive” and “reactive”. The former involves the learner’s capacity to manage the direction and objectives of his own learning, as well as his evaluation of and reflection upon the leaning process. The ‘reactive’ autonomy is limited to control over methods and refers to the learners’ positive reaction and attitudes to autonomy when offered to them.

Dickinson (1988), on the other hand, adopted a completely different viewpoint and excluded the teacher’s role, educational settings and formal learning materials (e.g. course-books) from the gist of autonomy, when a learner reaches what Dickinson called “full autonomy”. In simpler terms, autonomy in learning, for him, has to be developed by the learner himself and in total independence of a teacher and any formal institution of education.

Indeed, a proliferation of definitions for the notion ‘learner autonomy’ has unfolded through the years, as many researchers and educators have attempted to describe it from a multiplicity of perspectives (Cotterall, 2000& Benson, 2001). Yet, the debate on its exact meaning is still open and intense among experts and educators (Benson, 2013). Seemingly, the philosophical and multidimensional nature of autonomy in language education has made it difficult for academics to provide a satisfactory and extensive definition for the concept. Hence, learner autonomy, as a notion, is quite controversial (Little, 2002), and teachers or researchers who have an interest in autonomous learning seem to be compelled, in a way or another, to opt for one category of definitions or get bewildered somewhere in between.

2.2. Teacher Autonomy in Language Education

Although some scholars (e.g., Dickinson, 1987) tend to neglect the teacher's role in the development of autonomy among learners, the majority of them (Benson, 2011; Little, 2001; Sinclair, 1999; Dam, 1995) expressed a total agreement about the major role the teacher plays in the autonomous classroom. Hence, these researchers attempted to draw attention to the notion 'teacher autonomy' as an essential element for the promotion of autonomy within language education circles (Smith, 2008).

Little (1995, p.75), for instance, stated that since "learning arises from interaction and interaction is characterised by interdependence, the development of autonomy in learners presupposes the development of autonomy in teachers." This indicates that there is a strong relationship between learner and teacher autonomy, in the sense that if a teacher is not autonomous himself, he is likely to fail at developing his student's autonomy. In a similar vein, Smith (2008, p.3) defined teacher autonomy as "the ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes for oneself as a teacher, in cooperation with others." This description seems to imply that, from the autonomy perspective, teachers are expected to acquire a set of skills, adopt a range of behaviours and broaden their knowledge about teaching to boost their performance in the classroom. Furthermore, Lamb (2007) described teacher autonomy as the ability to regulate and self-direct one's own teaching. In this regard, autonomy in teaching advocates self-direction, thereby calls for a more personalised mode of instruction. Likewise, Aoki (1999, p. 19) defined teacher autonomy as "the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one's own teaching". Aoki's account emphasised that teacher autonomy, just like that of learners, denotes a capability, independence and willingness to "make choices" (e.g. what to teach) and decisions (e.g. how to teach) pertaining to teaching.

It is evident that there is a close resemblance between the previously stated definitions and the ones describing learner autonomy. More precisely, teacher autonomy, similarly to learner autonomy, is an attribute of the teacher and denotes his willingness and capacity to shoulder [more] responsibility for his own teaching and professional development. In this respect, autonomous teachers are thought to be reflective, supportive, spontaneous, independent, communicative, and self-directed (Dikilitaş & Griffiths 2017; Dam, 2011).

Vieira (2009) deemed teacher autonomy to be a matter of independence from external control imposed by administrators and/or teacher-development programmes. From a similar outlook, McGrath (2000) proposed two different dimensions of teacher autonomy: self-directed action or development and freedom from control by others. Put differently, a teacher's autonomy could manifest through two main channels: independent action as regards teaching and professional development, and self-control concerning the management of teaching and the decisions associated with it. In like manner, Smith (2003) highlighted the multidimensional nature of the term teacher autonomy; which might be employed differently by language education scholars. The following table presents the different dimensions of teacher autonomy suggested by Smith (2008, p. 4):

In relation to professional action	
A. Self-directed professional action	i.e. ‘Self-directed teaching’
B. Capacity for self-directed professional action	i.e. ‘Teacher autonomy (capacity for self-direct one’s teaching)’
C. Freedom from control over professional action	i.e. ‘Teacher autonomy (freedom for self-direct one’s teaching)’
In relation to professional development	
D. Self-directed professional development	i.e. ‘Self-directed teacher-learning’
E. Capacity for self-directed professional development	i.e. ‘Teacher-learner autonomy (capacity for self-direct one’s learning as a teacher)’
F. Freedom from control over professional development	i.e. ‘Teacher-learner autonomy (freedom to self-direct one’s learning as a teacher)’

Table 01: Dimensions of Teacher Autonomy (Smith, 2008)

The above summary provides new insights into the notion ‘teacher autonomy’ as it covers six possible dimensions, which are associated with the concept. Smith’s account might indicate the ways in which “the pedagogy for learner autonomy” is associated with teacher autonomy. In furtherance of this outlook, Vieira (2009) put forward multiple methods and practices for autonomous learning that highlights the relationship between teacher training and that of the learner based on the idea that reflective teaching and learner autonomy are, to a certain extent, interdependent. Vieira explained that reflective and self-directed teaching was not only the means to the development of learner autonomy, but its outcome as well.

2.3. Assessing Language Learning Autonomy

Similar to the debate on its conceptual and terminological nature, the assessment and measurement of learner autonomy within the domain of language education has been provoking many controversies (Nunan, 2012). Yet surprisingly, giving the theoretical and practical implications of the issue, no major contributions have been made to accurately describe the connection between autonomy and assessment (Everhard & Murray, 2015).

In fact assessment, in relation to learner autonomy, can be viewed from two main perspectives: assessment as a means or technique through which learner autonomy could be promoted, and as a measurement tool with which autonomy might be evaluated (Lamb, 2010). Seemingly, for this reason, many educators adopt the term ‘self-assessment’ when referring to assessment as a key practice within the process of autonomous learning. ‘Self-assessment’ is simply “the act or process of judging one’s own achievements or progress” (Merriam Webster Online, 2022). Due to its potential benefits, self-assessment is considered an essential component of the process leading to learner autonomy (Gardner, 2000).

The alternative meaning of assessment in this context (viz. measurement) seems; however, to pose various complications because learner autonomy is a controversial and multidimensional concept whose measurement is extremely challenging (Mynard, 2011). Concerning this critical issue, Everhard and Murray (2015: p. 61) stated that although “learner autonomy may be a measurable construct; the idea of measuring [it] is still regarded as problematic. The problem here lies in the purpose of measurement, which inevitably

reflects how we see the construct.” In simpler terms, even if the quantified assessment of learner autonomy is achievable, the idea itself might be, according to Everhard and Murray, unsuitable because autonomy comprises various interconnected behaviours and attitudes.

Although quite challenging, several attempts have been made over recent decades to come up with a measurement tool for learner autonomy (Benson, 2010). What follows is a brief overview on major contributions towards the measurement of autonomy.

- *Learner Autonomy Profile Short Form*: Is a reputed tool of measurement invented by Gary Confessore, a leading learner autonomy expert, in 2004 at the University of George Washington, USA. This instrument, a computer-based questionnaire, comprises 66 items clustered under four major inventories, namely desire, resourcefulness, initiatives, and persistence. Each inventory measures certain dimensions of learners' views of themselves and their environment, along with their intentions and attitudes towards a range of learning processes and practices (Confessore and Park 2004).

- *Measuring Instrument for Language Learner Autonomy (MILLA)*: this tool comprises 113 items that assesses learner autonomy based on four major dimensions: a) technical; deals with behavioural and situational aspects, b) psychological; investigates motivational, metacognitive, and affective aspects, c) political and philosophical; focuses on factors related to group/individual word and freedom, and socio-cultural; considers social interactive, and cultural factors. MILLA, a self-completion questionnaire, is the outgrowth of an extensive experimental study conducted at a Japanese university by Fumiko Murase in 2010 (Everhard & Murphy, 2015).

- *The Dynamic Model with Descriptors*: This is a tool for self-reflection and self-assessment used generally in self-access learning and language advising. It assesses learner autonomy from several dimensions, namely cognitive and metacognitive, affective and motivational, and action-oriented dimensions. Structurally and functionally dynamic, this tool includes 118 descriptors concerning learner beliefs, attitudes, competencies and experiences. Giovanna Tassinari designed this instrument in 2010 as a topic of her PhD (Gitaski & coombe, 2016).

- *Formative (self-) Assessment Tool*: Based on a number of statements and learner profiles, this instrument evaluates learner autonomy according to a range of elements including metacognitive awareness, learner control, critical reflection, motivation, confidence, and information literacy. This learner-generated tool for self-assessment and development was developed by Lucy Cooker in 2012.

As outlined above, learner autonomy could be relatively measured using a few tested tools of measurements. The value of such tools lies in the fact that they render the empirical researches on learner autonomy feasible. They could also be used in the evaluation of the different methods and practices that aim principally at promoting autonomous learning. However, more instruments are needed to ensure highly accurate measurements of the construct learner autonomy.

To sum up, assessment, in its comprehensive sense, is an integral part of autonomous learning procedures, for it could yield valuable insights about both learning and teaching. By all accounts, without assessment, autonomy risks to be regarded as vague and unrealistic.

2.4. Nunan's Five Levels of Implementing Autonomy in Classroom

Nunan (1997) suggested a series of procedures and attitudes that any teacher can adopt to help learners move from a total or limited dependence on the teacher to a certain degree of autonomy. His approach to implementing learner autonomy in the language classroom is widely known as 'Nunan's five levels of implementation'. The first level is "awareness", and it refers to the teacher's efforts and readiness to keep their students informed about the content, methods and resources used in the classroom. The second level focuses on the decision and willingness of teachers to provide learners with a choice of options from which they can select their own objectives as regard their learning. The third level, in a similar vein, revolves around allowing learners to have a voice and take decisions at the level of the modification and adaptation of the content and objectives of learning. The forth level put emphasis on giving learners the chance to construct their own learning activities and objectives. The fifth level, on the other hand, calls attention to the significance of building a bridge between the classroom content and the world in order to push learners to take their learning beyond the classroom walls and explore their world. The following table comprises a summary of the five levels put forward by Nunan (1997).

Level	Learner Action	Content	Process
1	Awareness	Learners are typically made aware of the pedagogical and content of the materials that they are using.	Learners identify strategy implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their preferred learning styles /strategies
2	Involvement	Learners are involved in selecting their own goals from various alternatives	Learners make choices among a range of options
3	Intervention	Learners are involved in modifying and adapting the goals and content of the learning programme	Learners modify/adapt tasks
4	Creation	Learners create their own goals and objectives	Learners create their own tasks
5	Transcendence	Learners go beyond the classroom and make links between the content of classroom learning and the world beyond	Learners become teachers and researchers

Table 02: Nunan's Levels of Implementing Learner Autonomy (1997)

Nunan (2003) went back to the above model and developed it into a nine-step approach to promoting learner autonomy in classroom –perhaps to make things easier for teachers, and provide new insights and thoughts. In fact, the 9-step model can be viewed as a revised version or a new edition of the 5-level model. Below are the nine steps that Nunan (2003) recommended, along with a brief explanation of each step:

- Make instruction goals clear to learners: teachers are urged to explicitly inform their learners about the objective and plans of each lesson, activity and/or project. The importance of this technique lies in raising learners' awareness about what, why and how they learn.

- Allow learners to create their own goals: teachers are also advised to provide their learners' with real opportunities to suggest, modify, adapt and even create the content of their learning. This step is crucial because it recognises the learner as an important partner in the learning process.
- Encourage learners to use their second language outside the classroom: teachers are expected to think of ways and design activities that would stimulate learners to practice the target language beyond the classroom and in a variety of contexts.
- Raise awareness of learning processes: Teachers should keep in mind that making students aware of their learning styles and strategies is essential in the language classroom.
- Help learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies: teachers are also expected to coach their learners on how to discover the learning strategies or styles that suit them and meet their learning goals. Teachers are, thus, urged to offer to their learners a chance to adopt the learning strategy and/or style they prefer.
- Encourage learner choice: teachers are encouraged to gradually engage their learners in a process of making choices as regards their learning. For instance, learners can choose the activity they want to do first in a grammar lesson or the kind of tasks they favour in order to achieve the objectives of that lesson.
- Allow learners to generate their own tasks: students should be allowed, under the supervision of the teacher, to alter, adjust and/or make adaptations to the learning tasks to satisfy their learning styles and objectives. However, the modifications and/or adaptations, the learners would suggest, should not blemish the technical identity of the tasks.
- Encourage learners to become teachers: taking into consideration the idea that teaching is one of the best ways of learning; teachers are advised to motivate their students to learn through teaching. Teacher may assign tasks that require learners to prepare certain materials, on a given topic, and present them to their classmates, at a later stage.
- Encourage learners to become researchers: doing research is often regarded as an effective mode of learning due to a variety of factors, and thus teachers are invited to engage their learners in a repeated process of research to boost their learning experience and outcome. The collection, interpretation, comparison and classification of data and facts are but a few examples of the essential tasks in any kind of research.

It can be noticed that there is a little intersection between some of the above-listed steps (from 4 to 9) due to their common characteristics (Nunan, 2013). In fact, the reason behind expanding the five-level model is to help educators comprehend Nunan's approach, and not to cause confusion. With respect to the existing literature on learner autonomy, this approach is probably one of the few approaches that endow teachers with a detailed account of how to implement and encourage autonomy in the foreign language classroom (Everhard & Murphy, 2015).

3. Methods

3.1. Teacher Questionnaire

The teacher questionnaire, of two sections and Likert-scale organised, was administered to 16 teachers in the Department of English at both the Universities of Constantine and Setif, Algeria. Section one consists of four questions and seeks to determine the teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom and the ways in which this implementation is performed by teachers - if they have ever attempted to do so. Alternatively, section two comprises fifteen statements that attempt to assess the

teachers' knowledge, understanding and familiarity with learner autonomy as a relatively new concept in the field of language education.

Section 1: *Teachers' Practices and Attitudes towards Implementing Learner Autonomy*

Q.1: What Academic Degree do you hold?

Bachelor Degree	Master Degree	Doctorate Degree	Total
00	10	06	16
00%	62.5%	37.5%	100%

Table 03: Degree Held by the Participant Teachers

The majority of teacher respondents, making up 62.5%, hold a Master Degree, while the rest of them (37.5%) are Doctorate holders. None of the teachers holds a BA degree.

Q.2: How long have you been teaching English?

01-05 years	05-10 years	10- 20 years	+ 20 years	Total
08	05	02	01	16
50%	31.25%	12.5%	06.25%	100%

Table 04: The Teachers' Experience

Half of the respondents (50%) have a relatively short experience in teaching, ranging from 1 to 5 years, against (31.25%) who have more experience, as they have taught between 5 and 10 years so far. Two teachers, representing (12.5%) of the total number of informants (N=16), have a long experience of more than 10 years. Only one informant has been teaching English as foreign language for more than 20 years.

Q.3: How would you describe your teaching method/approach in general?

Learner-centred	Teacher-centred	Total
05	11	16
31.25%	68.75%	100%

Table 05: The Teaching Approach Adopted

As Table 05 indicates, the majority of respondents (68.75%) deemed their teaching method to be teacher-centred in the main, against (31.25%) who described their method of instruction as learner-centred.

Q. 4: Have you ever attempted to implement learner autonomy in your classroom?

Never	Once or twice	A few times	Many times	Total
12	02	01	01	16
75%	12.5%	06.25%	06.25%	100%

Table 06: The Teachers' Attempts to Implement Learner Autonomy

The bulk of teachers (75%) have never attempted to promote autonomy through their teaching. A minority of roughly (12.5%) said that they have tried once or twice only. One teacher (06.25%) claimed that he attempt a few times to foster autonomous learning in his classroom. Only a single teacher, representing (06.25%), seemed to have made efforts to foster autonomy among his students.

Section 2: Teachers' Beliefs and Familiarity with Autonomy in Language Education

Statement 1: Learner autonomy means that the teacher is no longer important.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
00	00	12	02	02	16
00%	00%	75%	12.5%	12.5 %	100%

Table 07: The Significance of the Teacher in the Autonomous Classroom

The vast majority of teacher informants (75% & 12.5%), as the figures show, disagree with the 'misguided' belief that learner autonomy is all about learning without a teacher. Only two teachers, representing 12.5%, showed uncertainty as regard the statement.

Statement 2: Learner autonomy can only be developed outside the classroom.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
02	05	06	00	03	16
12.5%	31.25%	37.5%	00%	18.75%	100%

Table 08: Learner Autonomy beyond Classroom Walls

Many teachers (31.25% & 12.5%) said that learner autonomy is not an extra- classroom practice, while 37.5 % seemed to think otherwise; they consider autonomy as an out-of-classroom procedure. Two teachers are fully convinced that autonomy is something that students develop independently and beyond the classroom walls. Only 18.75% of teachers (N = 16) said that they did not know whether the statement is true or false.

Statement 3: There are degrees of Learner Autonomy.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
00	02	02	00	12	16
00%	12.5%	12.5%	00%	75%	100%

Table 09: On the Degrees of Autonomy.

Of all the respondents (N= 16), 75% expressed that they do not know whether there are degrees of learner autonomy, against (12.5%) who agreed with the statement. An equal number of teachers (12. 5%) assumed that there no degrees of autonomy.

Statement 4: Cooperative learning is the opposite of autonomous learning.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
00	12	04	00	00	16
00%	75%	25%	00%	00%	100%

Table 10: Cooperative Learning vs. Learner Autonomy

Three quarters of the informants (75%) indicated that autonomy is the opposite of cooperation. That is, autonomous learning is some kind to 'solitary' learning (i.e. studying alone). Conversely, the remaining quarter (25%) confirmed that autonomous learning is not an antonym of cooperative learning.

Statement 5: Learner autonomy is a teaching method.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
00	05	09	00	02	16
00%	31.25%	56.25%	00%	12.5%	100%

Table 11: Learner Autonomy as a Method of Teaching

For many of the informants (31.25%), autonomy is more or less a method of instruction; yet for a considerable number of them (56.25%), it is not. Only 12.5 % of teachers, as the figures display, had no answer.

Statement 6: In an autonomous classroom, learners make choices about how and what to learn.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
00	12	04	00	00	16
00%	75%	25%	00%	00%	100%

Table 12: Autonomy and Learner Choice

The mainstream of respondents (75%) showed agreement with the statement, against (25%) who do not consider choice making as a characteristic of the autonomy-friendly classroom.

Statement 7: Autonomy in learning refers to the ability of learners to take charge of their own learning.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
00	01	14	00	01	16
00%	06.25 %	87.5%	00%	06.25%	100%

Table 13: Description of Learner Autonomy

The vast majority of the teachers (81.25%), expressed disagreement with Holec's definition of learner autonomy, which is the basic of all definitions available in the relevant literature. In fact, as the table exhibits, only one of the informants (6.25%) accepted the description as correct. Another one (6.25%) opted for 'I do not know' as an answer.

Statement 8: By encouraging learner autonomy, teachers evade responsibility on their learners' learning.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
03	00	10	00	03	16
18.75%	00%	62.5%	00%	18.75%	100%

Table 14: Teacher Responsibility in the Autonomous Classroom

A large number of the teachers (62.5%) displayed disagreement with the idea that learner autonomy entails throwing all the responsibility on the learner, against (18.75%) who deemed the statement accurate. An equal number of teachers (18.75%) said that they completely disagree with the belief of evading responsibility by promoting learner autonomy.

Statement 9: Autonomous classrooms are better than traditional ones.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
00	05	06	03	02	16
00%	31.25%	37.5%	18.75%	12.5	100%

Table 15: Autonomous and Traditional Classroom

Table 15 illustrates that (31.25%) of the participants preferred autonomous classrooms over traditional ones, against (37.5%) & (18.75%) who showed a preference for traditional methods and procedures of instruction. Only few teachers (12.5%) expressed uncertainty regarding the statement; they had no answer.

Statement 10: Learner autonomy is a new (emerged 10 years ago or so) concept in foreign language education.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
00	00	14	00	02	16
00%	00%	87.5%	00%	12.5%	100%

Table 16: The Notion of Learner Autonomy

Nearly all the teachers (87.5 %) considered learner autonomy a relatively old notion in the field of language instruction. Only two teachers, representing (12.5%), had no idea as regards the emergence of learner autonomy as an educational construct.

Statement 11: Learner autonomy is all about learning at home with a computer or any smart devices.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
00	04	07	03	02	16
00%	25%	43.75%	18.75%	12.5%	100%

Table 17: On Understanding Learner Autonomy

Of all the teachers (N= 18), (43.75%) were against the belief that learner autonomy is a matter of non-classroom independent learning which involves the use of technology and the internet. Likewise, three other teachers (18.75%) showed strong disagreement with the statement, against 25% who agreed with it. Only (12.5 %) of the informants had no answer.

Statement 12: Autonomy is a method of language learning.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
00	09	06	00	01	16
00%	56.25%	37.5%	00%	06.25%	100%

Table 18: On Autonomous Learning

More than half of the informants (56.25%) deemed learner autonomy a language learning method, against (37.5%) of them who disapproved the statement. Only one teacher was not sure about the nature of learner autonomy.

Statement 13: Learner autonomy is a set of interrelated behaviours associated with learning.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
00	03	08	00	05	16
00%	18.75%	50%	00%	31.25%	100%

Table 19: On the Nature of Learner Autonomy

Half of the teachers (50%) were in disagreement with the statement that describes learner autonomy as a set of interconnected learning behaviours, while (18.75%) were in favour. The rest of teachers, making up (31.25%), were uncertain.

Statement 14: I have never heard of the notion 'learner autonomy'.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
00	04	12	00	00	16
00%	25%	75%	00%	00%	100%

Table 20: The Teachers' Cluelessness about Learner Autonomy

The majority of teachers (75%) affirmed that they were familiar with the notion learner autonomy. Only 25% of the informants admitted to have never heard of the concept.

Statement 15: I have heard of the concept 'learner autonomy' but I do not know what it truly means.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not Know	Total
00	13	03	00	00	16
00%	81.25%	18.75%	00%	00%	100%

Table 21: The Teachers' Familiarity with the Concept 'Learner Autonomy'

In response to a follow up statement, (81.25%) of the teachers confessed that they do not fully understand the notion learner autonomy. Only (18.75%) seemed to have a clear idea about the construct learner autonomy.

4. Discussion of Results

The findings yielded from the analysis of the teacher questionnaire provided significant insights regarding the teachers' practices, familiarity with, and beliefs about the construct learner autonomy. The surveyed sample included inexperienced (50%), experienced (31%) and highly experienced teachers (19%); many of them (37.5%) hold a PhD, while the majority (62.5%) are MA holders. The responses obtained from this sample generated the following conclusions.

First, the participant teachers' familiarity with the concept learner autonomy is very limited and unpremeditated, as inferred from the responses to statements 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 13. This clearly indicates that the teachers' understanding of autonomy in language education is superficial, unfounded, and inadequate. In fact, according to the figures displayed in Table 21, the majority of teacher respondents (81.25%) confessed that although they had heard of the notion learner autonomy, they did not know what it truly means. This matter could be attributed to the lack of reading and extensive research among less experienced teachers, as it could be linked to the multifaceted nature of the construct learner autonomy and the disagreement amid scholars about its exact meaning. Furthermore, the vast majority of teacher respondents (81%), as shown in the

results pertaining to statement 7, considered Holec's widely cited definition of autonomy to be 'wrong' – Holec (1981) was the one who coined the term learner autonomy. Likewise, the majority of teachers (87.5%) showed uncertainty (75%) and ignorance (12.5%) as regards the degrees and dimensions of learner autonomy. These instances, therefore, endorse the deduction that teachers' knowledge regarding autonomy in language learning is remarkably narrow.

Second, as Table 06 shows, the vast majority of the teacher informants (75%) confessed that they have not considered implementing learner autonomy in their classroom practices. This seems to imply that teachers are in the main unaware of the significance of learner autonomy. It also suggests that learner autonomy is probably not a priority for the mainstream of the surveyed teachers, and thus they have never attempted to promote it among their learners.

One more reason why teachers appeared careful with learner autonomy is that the majority of them (75%) consider it an antonym for collaborative learning, when in fact it is not. Indeed, the relevant literature emphasised cooperative learning as an essential element for the promotion of learner autonomy (see, Jacobs et al., 2006; Murray, 2014). In other words, an autonomous learner is he who effectively fulfils his role within a team and is aware of the importance of collaboration. In fact and based on the responses to Q4, only a few short-termed attempts have been made towards implementing learner autonomy in the English language classroom. This is definitely not enough because fostering autonomous learning is a complex undertaking that needs time, patience and persistence (Nunan, 2012). That is, as noted in the theoretical part, learner autonomy is a multifaceted construct that requires exhaustive exploration and extensive reading to be fully grasped and properly implemented.

Third and as could be inferred from the figures exhibited in table 11 and 15, teachers tend to stick to traditional approaches to teaching whereby learners are not the focal point. Specifically, the mainstream of teacher respondents (68.74%) described their teaching method as teacher-centred, against only (31.25%) who seemingly adopt a learner-centred approach to teaching. This denotes that the vast majority of teachers have a habit of employing traditional procedures and methods of instruction (e.g. teachers direct all the learning and do most of the talking), which do not fully support learner choice, involvement, responsibility, self-evaluation, and learner-teacher partnership (Doyle, 2012). This inclination towards old-style approaches could be associated with the overall policy of the Algerian educational system, which is teacher-centred in the main (Lakehal-Ayat, 2008). Hence, it is understandable why learner autonomy is not a prime concern for the vast majority of the surveyed teachers. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 15, a considerable number of them (31.25%) expressed a preference towards autonomous classrooms (i.e. learner-centred pedagogy).

Finally, what could be described as positive among these findings is that the majority of teachers (87.5%), as table 10 indicates, seemed cognizant of the fact that language learner autonomy do not entail excluding or devaluing the role of the teacher in the language classroom. The teachers, a majority of 75%, were also enlightened about the principle that the promotion of learner autonomy pivots on allowing and urging the learners to make choices

related to the manner, duration, space and materials of learning (Sinclair, 2006). Likewise, nearly all the teachers (15 out of 16) were aware that learner autonomy is not a decade-old notion, but rather a relatively old concept in the sphere of foreign language education. Another important point is that a significant number of teachers (56.25%) knew that learner autonomy is by no means a teaching method. It is also favourable that half of the participant teachers (50%) do not view learner autonomy as solely an out-of-classroom practice. This indicates; however, that many teachers (31.25%) deem learner autonomy a simple extracurricular mode of learning, thereby it is among neither their duties nor their instruction goals.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that a considerable number of EFL teachers in North East Algeria have a very limited knowledge about learner autonomy alongside a wide range of misconceptions about it. This could well explain the shy presence of learner autonomy in EFL research and pedagogy in Algeria. Hence, extensive efforts should be made to raise the teachers' awareness about the important of autonomous learning in foreign language education, thereby urge them to extensively read about learner autonomy and benefit from its advantages later onwards.

6. References

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