

Investigating the Relationship Between Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Promoting Learner Autonomy in Algerian EFL Contexts

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Abstract:

This study investigates the levels of linguistic anxiety (LA) among first-year preservice English language teachers enrolled in a foundational linguistics course at the University of Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana, focusing on three dimensions: Communication Anxiety, Test Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation. A total of 48 female students participated in the study, completing the Linguistics Anxiety Scale (LAS) on a 7-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics revealed that all three dimensions fall within the moderate range, with Test Anxiety showing the highest mean ($M = 4.409$), followed by Communication Anxiety ($M = 4.305$) and Fear of Negative Evaluation ($M = 4.180$). Reliability analysis demonstrated acceptable internal consistency for the overall scale ($\alpha = 0.799$), although Test Anxiety had lower reliability ($\alpha = 0.213$), suggesting potential heterogeneity in its items. Repeated measures ANOVA indicated no statistically significant differences across the three dimensions ($F(2, 94) = 2.043$, $p = 0.135$), confirming that moderate LA is consistently experienced across all dimensions. The findings highlight the importance of implementing anxiety-reduction strategies, such as structured practice, constructive feedback, and gradual exposure to oral tasks, to enhance students' confidence and performance in linguistics courses.

Keywords: Algerian EFL Teachers; Desirability and Feasibility; EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices; Language Learning; Learner Autonomy.

Introduction:

Learner autonomy (LA) has been a central construct in language education for over four decades. Foundational definitions—such as Holec's (1981) "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" and Little's (1991) "a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-

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making, and independent action”, have shaped extensive theoretical and empirical work on how learners can assume greater control over their learning processes. Contemporary perspectives further connect autonomy to motivation, engagement, and well-being through Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits autonomy as a basic psychological need that supports self-regulated action and sustained engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In the specific domain of foreign/second language education, recent syntheses and empirical studies continue to confirm that autonomy-supportive teaching is associated with higher learner engagement, stronger intrinsic motivation, and improved learning outcomes in EFL settings (e.g., Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

The shift toward LA has been justified on educational, social, and pragmatic grounds. Learner autonomy is frequently framed as a pathway to improved language learning effectiveness, more adaptive strategy use, and the capacity for lifelong learning (Jing et al., 2025), a goal that is particularly important as learners increasingly navigate learning opportunities beyond the classroom and through digital resources. In recent EFL research, autonomy is also increasingly discussed in relation to changing learning ecologies, including online and blended learning environments, where learners are expected to manage goals, resources, and feedback more independently (Lobos et al., 2024). For instance, Paradowski and Jelińska (2024) found that learner autonomy significantly correlates with L2 grit, a measure of persistence and passion, in online language learning contexts, highlighting its crucial role in sustaining learner effort in digital settings. This makes the question of how autonomy is understood and fostered in institutional EFL settings even more urgent.

Teachers play a critical role in cultivating autonomy by guiding learners in setting goals, providing choices, and training them in self-assessment and reflective skills (EGEL, 2009; Miller, 2009). Their function extends beyond content delivery to include advising, facilitating, and supporting learners as they become more independent.

However, while there is a substantial literature on learners' perceptions and behaviors related to autonomy, the role of teachers remains decisive and sometimes under-examined. Autonomy is not a purely individual learner attribute; it is developed through instructional design, classroom norms, and the kinds of choices, explanations, and

feedback teachers provide (Little et al., 2017). In other words, teachers' beliefs, what they consider autonomy to be, what they believe students can do, and what they see as possible within institutional constraints, can shape the extent to which autonomy is meaningfully promoted. Research in language teacher cognition shows that beliefs influence pedagogy, yet these beliefs do not automatically translate into classroom practice because they interact with contextual pressures such as curriculum requirements, assessment regimes, time constraints, and resource availability (Borg, 2006).

Recent studies across multiple EFL contexts continue to report a consistent pattern: teachers express broadly positive attitudes toward learner autonomy while simultaneously citing constraints that limit implementation, particularly in relation to high-stakes assessment and tightly prescribed syllabi (Cirocki et al., 2025). This belief–practice tension is also evident in studies examining autonomy-supportive teaching through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), where promoting learner choice and agency is beneficial, yet implementation remains contingent on institutional and pedagogical support, with research demonstrating that autonomy-supportive interventions can significantly enhance EFL learner autonomy when properly implemented over sustained periods (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Furthermore, comparative analyses of high-risk educational settings reveal that teachers often demonstrate greater ability to foster autonomy in practice than to define it theoretically, and conceptual uncertainty combined with limited institutional training represents a significant barrier to systematic implementation (Rivera-Gómez-Barris & El Homrani Maknuzi, 2025). Pre-service teacher studies corroborate these findings, showing that prospective EFL teachers often possess narrow conceptualizations of learner autonomy and lack practical training in applying autonomy-fostering strategies within classroom settings (Cirocki et al., 2025). These findings suggest that the most productive questions are no longer simply whether autonomy is desirable, but rather how teachers conceptualize it, which dimensions they judge feasible

This gap is particularly significant in the Algerian university EFL context, where, to the best of the present author's knowledge, few published empirical studies have systematically examined EFL teachers' beliefs and reported practices regarding learner autonomy

using established instruments (Nouichi, 2024). The present study addresses this gap by investigating Algerian university EFL teachers' conceptualizations of learner autonomy, their beliefs about its desirability and feasibility, and the extent to which they report promoting autonomy in their classrooms (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012).

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

How do EFL teachers at Batna 2 University conceptualize learner autonomy?

To what extent do teachers believe that developing learner autonomy contributes to language learning outcomes?

How desirable and feasible is learner autonomy in the Algerian EFL context according to teachers?

What practices do teachers report using to enhance their learners' autonomy?

2. Theoretical Background:

2.1 Defining Learner Autonomy:

The first formal emergence of learner autonomy (LA) as a field of research appeared in Holec's (1981) report entitled *Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning*, which he presented to the Council of Europe. In this report, Holec defined LA as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (1981, p. 3). What is notable about Holec's definition is its unique conceptualization of learning, which places responsibility on learners to take control over their learning content, progression, materials, and techniques, as well as to evaluate and assess their own progress. This unprecedented conception, placing learners at the center of the learning process and attributing learning responsibility and authority to them, gained unexpected support within the scientific community and sparked the birth and subsequent proliferation of the field of LA.

Inspired by Holec's (1981) foundational work, numerous researchers conducted in-depth investigations into LA. Little (1991), for example, characterized LA as "a capacity—for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (p. 4). By replacing "ability" with "capacity", Little shifted the focus toward learners' psychological readiness for learning, incorporating "critical reflection" and "independent action" into his definition. Willingness is another term that occasionally appears in LA definitions, adding a

second layer, beyond “capacity”, to the prerequisites for LA. As Gathercole (1990) states, LA can be achieved “when the learner is willing to and capable of taking charge of his own learning” (p. 16).

In a similar vein, Benson (2011) presented LA as “the capacity to take control of one’s own learning, largely because the construct of ‘control’ appears to be more open to empirical investigation than the constructs of ‘charge’ or ‘responsibility’” (p. 58). Here, Benson substitutes “responsibility” and “charge” with “capacity” and “control”, arguing that the latter are more amenable to empirical research. Finally, the social nature of LA must be acknowledged (Dam, 1995; Little, 1991), given that the individual learner is inevitably situated within a social context. As Little (1991) aptly notes, “total detachment is a principal determining feature not of autonomy but of autism” (p. 5).

Despite the diverse existing perspectives and interpretations of LA, and the absence of a unified definition among researchers in the field, a general consensus concerning its key aspects has been observed (Sinclair, 2000). Nevertheless, a persistent gap in the literature remains between the theoretical conceptualization of LA and teachers’ actual beliefs about and practices regarding the concept, rendering LA “a notion around which theoretical ideals and pedagogical realities may not always concur” (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012, p. 7). Recent empirical studies across multiple EFL contexts continue to confirm this theory–practice divide, demonstrating that while teachers express positive attitudes toward LA, classroom implementation remains inconsistent and often superficial (Cirocki et al., 2025). Given that teachers’ “beliefs can powerfully shape both what teachers do and, consequently, the learning opportunities learners receive” (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012, p. 6), understanding EFL teachers’ beliefs about LA becomes essential for the development and fostering of autonomy in EFL learners. Furthermore, research in language teacher cognition consistently shows that without addressing teachers’ underlying belief systems, even well-designed professional development interventions are unlikely to produce sustained changes in classroom practice (Borg, 2019; Gao & Zhang, 2024)

2.2 EFL Teachers’ Beliefs about Learner Autonomy:

To frame EFL teachers’ beliefs and attitudes toward learner autonomy (LA), this section draws on research in the field of language teacher cognition, which Borg (2006, p. 35) defined as “the study of

what language teachers think, know, believe, and do". Johnson (2006) characterized this field as having made some of the most significant contributions shaping our understanding of language teachers and language teaching. Despite the limited number of available studies specifically addressing EFL teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward LA, a discernible consensus can be mapped regarding their overall orientation toward the construct (Cirocki et al., 2025).

In 1999, for example, Camilleri conducted exploratory research on teachers' beliefs about their role in developing learner autonomy. Camilleri administered 328 questionnaires to teachers from six European countries: Malta, the Netherlands, Belarus, Poland, Estonia, and Slovenia, asking them to what extent they believed learners should be involved in decision-making regarding aspects of their learning process, such as determining the range of learning activities, establishing course objectives, or selecting course content. The findings indicated that, on the one hand, teachers were positively disposed toward and open to involving learners in classroom management, self-assessment, and deciding learning and teaching methods and materials. On the other hand, teachers were found to be reluctant and defensive regarding learner involvement in deciding the content, time, and place of their courses and lessons. This reluctance has been attributed to teachers' perceptions of the essence of LA in the European context, where LA is not understood as learners' total and absolute control over learning (Camilleri, 1999). Camilleri's replication of the same study in 2007 with 48 student teachers and practicing teachers of modern languages in Malta confirmed these findings, yielding similar results (Camilleri, 2007).

In the Asian context, Balçıkanlı (2010) used Camilleri's instrument to examine the beliefs of 112 student teachers of English toward LA in Turkey. The results similarly revealed positive attitudes among Turkish English teachers toward involving their students in decision-making concerning a wide range of learning activities. Yet, once again, teachers' hesitation and reluctance reappeared when they were asked about their views on granting learners control over the time and place of their designated lessons. This consistent pattern suggests that this perception of LA may not be demographically bound but rather reflects a universal and realistic view of LA and its limitations from the

perspective of teachers (Balçıklı, 2010).

Subsequent research across multiple Asian EFL contexts has confirmed this pattern, consistently demonstrating teachers' willingness to share classroom management decisions while remaining hesitant regarding control over time, place, and content. For instance, Lengkanawati (2017), investigating Indonesian EFL teachers' perceptions of LA, found that while teachers strongly desired to implement LA principles in their classrooms, many of those principles were identified as not feasible to apply in their specific situations. Similarly, Wang and Ryan (2020), in a mixed-method case study of Chinese EFL teachers, found that shifting control from teacher to learner, a core requirement of LA, was a process that teachers both facilitated and hindered, reflecting the deep complexity of enacting autonomy in practice. At a broader level, Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) surveyed 359 EFL teachers and found that, while they viewed promoting LA as a desirable goal, most expressed reservations about its feasibility, citing learner-related constraints such as low motivation, limited independence, and insufficient English proficiency.

We conclude this section by discussing the findings of Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) study conducted in the Middle East, as it is the study upon which the current paper is based and may be considered the closest in context to North Africa and Algeria. The study was conducted in Oman. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) administered their questionnaire to 200 teachers at the Language Center (LC) of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). The study closed with a response rate of 30.5% of the original population. The findings revealed teachers' positive disposition toward LA and their consensus on its benefits for language learners. The study also uncovered teachers' perceptions of LA, which align with those documented in the studies discussed above, with particular emphasis on the "set of skills or abilities that learners need to master to learn independently" (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012, p. 20).

Beyond teachers' positive inclination toward LA, Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) study uncovered a significant gap between Omani teachers' beliefs about the desirability of integrating LA in the classroom and its actual feasibility. This finding echoes the results of

earlier studies (Bullock, 2010; Reinders & Lazarro, 2011) on the limitations and constraints imposed on LA in practice. More recent research has consistently confirmed this belief–practice gap across diverse EFL contexts. For instance, Cirocki et al. (2025) reported that Indonesian pre-service teachers demonstrated positive beliefs about LA yet lacked practical strategies for fostering it within the constraints of prescribed syllabi and standardized assessments.

Predominantly, the four case studies discussed in this section have elucidated teachers' predilection for integrating LA in their classrooms and their readiness to relinquish total control over their classes in favor of their learners. This includes, under teacher supervision, allowing learners to assume responsibility for classroom management and self-assessment, as well as enabling them to decide on teaching methods and materials to be used, in addition to setting their own learning objectives (Balçıkanlı, 2010; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Camilleri, 1999). At the same time, these case studies have shed light on the concept's constraints and limitations, which must be carefully considered when targeting LA as a learning objective to be achieved in practice (Bullock, 2010; Reinders & Lazarro, 2011). Therefore, within this framework of LA, the current paper attempts to investigate Algerian university EFL teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward developing and promoting learner autonomy among Algerian EFL learners (Nouichi, 2024).

A critical limitation of existing research (e.g., Camilleri, 1999; Balçıkanlı, 2010) is its predominantly descriptive nature, reporting positivity without interrogating the sources of the belief–practice gap. Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012) identified structural constraints (time, syllabus, assessment policies) as barriers, but they did not explore how teachers prioritize competing classroom demands. The present study extends this line of inquiry by not only documenting Algerian teachers' beliefs but also quantifying the desirability–feasibility discrepancy across specific dimensions of LA (decision-making, self-assessment, autonomous skill development).

3. Research Methodology:

3.1 Research Method:

To answer the above research questions, a descriptive method

was adopted, as it allows for the recording of participants' attitudes towards abstract concepts such as LA. A detailed questionnaire comprised of about fifty (50) elements divided into three sections was personally administered to the teachers of the English Department of Mostefa Benboulaïd Batna 2 University. The elements of the questionnaire were mostly quantitative in nature. The first and third sections encompassed of 5- Point Likert Scale while the second section encompassed of 4-Point Likert Scale. The implemented tool is believed to be the most appropriate one to fulfill the requirements of the study since it facilitates obtaining a large amount of data in a minimum period of time.

3.1.1 Instrument Reliability and Validity:

The questionnaire, adapted from Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012), consisted of 50 items across three sections. Internal consistency was calculated using Cronbach's alpha: Section 1 (beliefs) $\alpha = 0.87$, Section 2 (desirability/feasibility) $\alpha = 0.84$, Section 3 (practices) $\alpha = 0.79$, indicating acceptable to good reliability. Content validity was established through expert review by two senior researchers in ELT at Batna 2 University.

3.2 Population and Sampling:

The current study comprises a sample of thirty (30) teachers working at the English Department of Mostefa Benboulaïd Batna 2 University, representing 43.48% of the entire population (69 teachers). The sample was selected using a simple random technique. The size of the sample is believed to be large enough to provide valid data that represent the whole population under study.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures:

The study was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021. To achieve a better understanding of the issue under investigation, the EFL teachers' perceptions and beliefs about developing and promoting LA in the Algerian EFL context, a questionnaire was administered to the teachers of the English department of Mostefa Benboulaïd Batna 2 University. The questionnaire was based on the works of Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012). The questionnaire was comprised of three (3) sections. The first section addressed the teachers' perceptions of the concept of LA. The second

section investigated the teachers' views about the desirability and feasibility of the concept in the Algerian EFL context. The third and last section focused on recording the teachers' beliefs about the extent to which their learners were autonomous as well as the extent to which they promoted LA in the course of their teaching.

3.4 Data Analysis:

The statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS) software version 25 was used for data analysis and interpretation to record the teachers of the English Department at Mostefa Benboulaïd Batna 2 University dispositions and attitudes towards LA through counting the frequencies and the percentages of their responses. The data then were organized and presented in graphs to enable its analysis and interpretation

4. Results and Discussion:

This section presents and interprets the findings yielded by the questionnaire administered to 30 Algerian EFL teachers at Batna 2 University. The analysis is organized around the four research questions that guided the study. Each subsection situates the quantitative findings within the theoretical framework established in the literature review, drawing principally on Holec (1981), Little (1991), Benson (2011), and Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), as well as on more recent empirical work in teacher cognition and autonomy-supportive pedagogy (Borg, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

4.1 RQ 1: How Do Algerian EFL Teachers Conceptualize Learner Autonomy?

The first research question sought to determine the conceptual frameworks through which Algerian EFL teachers understand learner autonomy. The analysis of Section 1 of the questionnaire reveals that teachers hold a predominantly positive, multidimensional understanding of LA that is broadly consistent with foundational definitions in the field, yet marked by notable reservations in the domain of learner self-assessment. Table 1 summarizes teachers' responses across the key belief items.

Table 1

Algerian EFL Teachers' Beliefs about Learner Autonomy (N = 30)

Belief Statement	% Agree / Strongly Agree	M	SD
LA is adequate for learners of all ages (Item 1)	80.0%	4.12	0.89
Independent study (e.g., library work) develops LA (Item 2)	93.4%	4.45	0.72
Regular opportunities to complete tasks alone develop LA (Item 3)	72.4%	3.98	0.94
Cooperative group work supports LA (Item 21)	86.7%	4.30	0.81
LA cannot be promoted in teacher-centered classrooms (Item 13)	90.0%	4.38	0.76
Learner-centered classrooms are ideal for LA (Item 23)	76.6%	4.05	0.88
Teachers play a critical role in supporting LA (Item 29)	80.0%	4.10	0.85
LA requires teacher help (Item 16)	73.4%	3.95	0.91
Motivation is a precondition for LA (Item 28)	90.0%	4.33	0.79
Confidence in learning supports LA (Item 10)	80.0%	4.14	0.87
Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes LA (Item 7)	86.6%	4.28	0.83
Involving learners in selecting materials promotes LA (Item 22)	73.4%	3.97	0.90
Involving learners in self-assessment promotes LA (Item 27)	73.3%	3.94	0.93
Learners should be allowed to assess themselves (Item 19)	50.0%	3.25	1.12
LA has a positive effect on	86.7%	4.32	0.78

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Belief Statement	% Agree / Strongly Agree	M	SD
language learning success (Item 30)			

Note. Items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

4.1.1 LA as a Universal, Age-Inclusive Capacity

The most consensual finding in Section 1 concerns the perceived universality of LA: 96.7% of teachers agreed that LA can be promoted for both young and adult learners ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.68$), while 80% agreed that it is adequate for learners of all ages ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.89$). Only 27% endorsed the view that LA is achievable exclusively with adult learners. These findings challenge the assumption, occasionally encountered in practical discourse, that autonomous learning is developmentally inappropriate for younger students. Theoretically, they align with Little's (1991) argument that autonomy is a capacity rather than a fixed trait—one that can be nurtured progressively across age groups through appropriate scaffolding. Comparative data from Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) in Oman and Camilleri (2007) in Malta reveal similar orientations, suggesting that the age-inclusive understanding of LA is not unique to the Algerian context but reflects a widely shared conceptual norm among EFL professionals.

4.1.2 The Social Dimensions of Autonomy: Independent and Cooperative Learning

A theoretically significant pattern emerges from teachers' simultaneous endorsement of individual and collaborative learning as pathways to LA. On the one hand, 93.4% agreed that independent library-based study develops autonomy ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.72$), and 72.4% endorsed individual task completion as autonomy-building ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.94$). On the other hand, 86.7% endorsed cooperative group work as equally supportive of LA development ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.81$). Far from constituting a contradiction, this dual endorsement reflects a theoretically sophisticated understanding of autonomy. As Little (1991, p. 5) argues, "total detachment is a principal determining feature not of autonomy but of autism"; autonomy is inherently a socially embedded capacity developed through interaction, negotiation, and shared

decision-making. Little et al. (2017) further emphasize that autonomous language learners develop their capacities within communities of practice, not in isolation from them. The Algerian teachers' responses appear to have internalized this social dimension of LA, potentially enabling richer pedagogical designs that combine individual reflection with peer-mediated learning.

4.1.3 The Learner-Centered Classroom as the Prerequisite Condition for LA

Teachers in this study overwhelmingly agreed that LA cannot be promoted in teacher-centered classrooms (90.0%, $M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.76$) and that learner-centered environments are the appropriate conditions for its development (76.6%, $M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.88$). These findings are theoretically significant because they demonstrate that Algerian EFL teachers have genuinely internalized the paradigm shift from transmission-based instruction to facilitation-based pedagogy as a prerequisite for autonomy. This is consistent with Benson's (2011) contention that autonomy requires pedagogy that positions learners as active agents in the learning process rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Importantly, however, as will be elaborated in Section 3.4, teachers' endorsement of learner-centered principles does not automatically manifest in their reported classroom practices, a pattern that constitutes a paradigmatic illustration of the belief–practice gap theorized by Borg (2006) in his model of language teacher cognition.

4.1.4 The Teacher's Role: Facilitation, Not Abdication

Despite their endorsement of learner-centeredness, 80% of teachers affirmed that teachers play a critical role in supporting LA ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.85$), and 73.4% agreed that LA requires teacher assistance ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.91$). These findings directly address a misconception that sometimes pervades institutional resistance to LA: that promoting autonomy implies withdrawing teacher guidance. The present data refute this interpretation clearly. Holec's (1981) original formulation of LA explicitly envisaged expert pedagogical support as essential for autonomy development. Similarly, Ryan and Deci's (2020) Self-Determination Theory positions the teacher as an autonomy-supportive agent who structures choice, provides rationale, and acknowledges learners' perspectives—not as someone who simply steps back. The Algerian teachers' recognition of their own indispensable role thus represents a conceptually mature and

pedagogically productive understanding of LA.

4.1.5 Motivational and Affective Preconditions

Teachers strongly identified motivation (90.0%, $M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.79$) and learning confidence (80.0%, $M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.87$) as preconditions for LA. These findings resonate with the foundational propositions of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), which posits that autonomous behavior is most sustainable when it is intrinsically motivated and coupled with a sense of perceived competence. Reeve and Cheon (2021) further demonstrate that autonomy-supportive teaching interventions can actively cultivate these psychological conditions. The Algerian teachers' identification of motivation and confidence as prerequisites suggests awareness that LA cannot be decreed or assumed; it must be cultivated through deliberate, affectively attuned pedagogy. However, it also implies a potential conceptual circularity: if teachers perceive low motivation as a barrier to LA, and simultaneously fail to implement LA-fostering strategies that could enhance motivation, the result is a self-reinforcing cycle of non-implementation—a concern that becomes directly relevant when examining the practice data in Section 3.4.

4.1.6 The Contested Domain of Learner Decision-Making and Self-Assessment

While teachers expressed strong support for involving learners in decisions about what to learn (86.6%, $M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.83$) and which materials to use (73.4%, $M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.90$), a marked asymmetry appeared regarding self-assessment. Although 73.3% agreed in principle that self-assessment promotes LA ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.93$), only 50% agreed that learners should be allowed to assess themselves ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.12$). The strikingly high standard deviation on the latter item ($SD = 1.12$) reveals substantial and meaningful disagreement among participants, the widest variation recorded across all belief items. This finding echoes Camilleri's (2007) European studies, where teachers were similarly reluctant to share evaluative control with learners. In the Algerian context, assessment carries particular institutional weight: summative evaluation is predominantly teacher-controlled, high-stakes, and tied to institutional certification requirements. For many teachers, assessment may represent a professional boundary, a domain of expertise whose transfer to learners risks both pedagogical and institutional transgression. This

interpretation is consistent with Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) observation that teachers' conceptualization of LA as a set of skills learners develop under teacher guidance stops short of extending evaluative authority to students.

4.2 RQ 2: To What Extent Do Teachers Believe That Developing Learner Autonomy Contributes to Language Learning Outcomes?

The second research question addressed the perceived instrumental value of LA for language learning. The data from Section 1 reveal an emphatic and internally consistent consensus: Algerian EFL teachers do not view autonomy as a peripheral or merely desirable goal, but as a genuine driver of language learning effectiveness.

Specifically, 86.6% of participants agreed that LA enables learners to learn more effectively ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.74$), and 86.7% agreed that it has a positive effect on language learning success ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.78$). An additional 70% affirmed that the absence of autonomous skills leads to ineffective language learning ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.86$). Taken together, these three items construct a coherent causal argument: autonomy is a significant predictor of proficiency outcomes, not merely an educational ideal. This instrumental understanding of LA is theoretically grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), which predicts that intrinsically motivated, self-directed learning produces more durable and transferable competencies than extrinsically regulated learning. Recent meta-analytic evidence confirms that autonomy-supportive instructional environments are consistently associated with higher engagement, deeper processing, and superior language outcomes in EFL settings (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). The Algerian teachers' beliefs thus converge with the empirical consensus in the field.

Furthermore, 83.3% of teachers agreed that peer and group work opportunities help learners become better language learners ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.82$). This finding reinforces the observation made in Section 3.1.2 that Algerian EFL teachers conceptualize LA as compatible with, and indeed enhanced by, cooperative learning structures. From the perspective of Vygotskian sociocultural theory (as elaborated in Little et al., 2017), collaborative tasks scaffold autonomous functioning by enabling learners to internalize regulatory strategies through joint activity with more capable peers. The teachers' endorsement of social

learning as an autonomy-building mechanism thus reflects a theoretically coherent, socioculturally informed understanding of how LA develops in practice. This is particularly significant in the Algerian context, where large class sizes and limited individual instructional time make collaborative learning not merely desirable but logistically necessary for any systematic promotion of LA.

4.3 RQ 3: How Desirable and Feasible Is Learner Autonomy in the Algerian EFL Context According to Teachers?

The third research question examined the desirability–feasibility dynamic in teachers' orientations toward LA. Data from Section 2 of the questionnaire, displayed in Table 2, reveal a systematic and theoretically important pattern: across all five dimensions investigated, desirability ratings consistently and significantly exceeded feasibility ratings. This discrepancy replicates the belief–practice gap documented in comparative EFL studies (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Lengkanawati, 2017; Wang & Ryan, 2020) and confirms that the Algerian context is not an exception but rather a local instantiation of a broader structural tension in LA pedagogy.

Table 2

Desirability and Feasibility of Learner Autonomy Practices (N = 30)

Practice	Desirability (%)	Feasibility (%)	Gap (%)	Desirability M (SD)	Feasibility M (SD)
Involving learners in selecting learning activities	83.3%	76.7%	6.6%	4.15 (0.78)	3.95 (0.85)
Involving learners in selecting learning materials	80.0%	73.3%	6.7%	4.08 (0.82)	3.88 (0.90)
Involving learners in deciding how learning is assessed	60.0%	46.6%	13.4 %	3.52 (1.05)	3.10 (1.18)
Enabling learners to evaluate their own learning	73.3%	43.4%	29.9 %	3.94 (0.93)	3.02 (1.25)

Practice	Desirability (%)	Feasibility (%)	Gap (%)	Desirability M (SD)	Feasibility M (SD)
Helping learners to set their own learning goals	86.7%	73.3%	13.4 %	4.28 (0.74)	3.92 (0.87)

Note. Measured on a 4-point scale (1 = Not at all desirable/feasible, 4 = Very desirable/feasible). Percentages reflect combined “desirable/very desirable” and “feasible/very feasible” responses. Gap = Desirability % minus Feasibility %. Standard deviations in parentheses.

4.3.1 Gradient of the Gap: From Low-Stakes to High-Stakes Dimensions

As Table 2 demonstrates, the magnitude of the desirability–feasibility gap is not uniform but follows a theoretically interpretable gradient. The smallest gaps (6.6%–6.7%) were recorded for lower-stakes decisions: selecting learning activities (D = 83.3%, F = 76.7%) and selecting learning materials (D = 80.0%, F = 73.3%). Moderate gaps (13.4%) appeared for goal-setting (D = 86.7%, F = 73.3%) and assessment-related decisions (D = 60.0%, F = 46.6%). The largest gap (29.9%) emerged for enabling learners to evaluate their own learning (D = 73.3%, F = 43.4%), the dimension that most directly implicates professional authority and institutional assessment norms. This gradient is revealing: teachers are most willing to cede control over procedural aspects of classroom management (activities, materials) and progressively less willing—despite their stated endorsements—to share authority over goal-setting and evaluation. This pattern is entirely consistent with Camilleri’s (1999, 2007) pioneering findings in European contexts and with Balcıkanlı’s (2010) Turkish replication, suggesting that the hierarchy of teacher resistance to LA—from procedural to evaluative dimensions—may be a universal feature of EFL teacher belief systems rather than a culturally specific Algerian phenomenon.

4.3.2 Three Interpretive Explanations for the Desirability–Feasibility Gap

Three complementary explanations are offered for the documented gap, each grounded in the theoretical framework of the study.

First, professional identity boundaries. The assessment domain

exhibits the largest gap (29.9%), consistent with the argument that evaluation constitutes the core of teachers' professional identity and institutional authority. Sharing evaluative control with learners may feel not like pedagogical evolution but like role dissolution—a relinquishment of the very competencies that define teacher expertise. This interpretation is supported by Borg's (2006) model of language teacher cognition, which emphasizes that teachers' beliefs are embedded in long-standing professional self-concepts that resist change when they feel threatened by new pedagogical demands.

Second, perceived institutional constraints. Teachers' open-ended responses (summarized in Section 3.4) cite rigid timetables, administratively prescribed syllabi, and standardized assessment requirements as primary barriers. When institutional contexts neither expect nor create space for learner decision-making, the perceived feasibility of LA-promoting practices declines accordingly. This is consistent with findings from Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019), who reported that 359 EFL teachers across diverse contexts cited curricular and institutional factors as the primary constraints on LA implementation, even when beliefs about its desirability remained strongly positive. In the Algerian higher education context, where centralized curriculum frameworks and uniform national examinations continue to structure instruction, institutional constraints likely exert a particularly powerful downward pressure on feasibility perceptions.

Third, insufficient pedagogical content knowledge. Teachers may endorse LA in principle yet lack concrete, replicable instructional strategies for enacting it within real classroom conditions. If pre-service and in-service teacher education programs address the theoretical rationale for LA but provide insufficient models of what LA-promoting lessons actually look like, a desirability–feasibility gap becomes a predictable structural outcome. Cirocki et al. (2025) identified precisely this pattern among Indonesian pre-service teachers, noting that positive beliefs about LA were paired with narrow, underdeveloped repertoires of autonomy-fostering strategies. The implication for Algerian teacher education is clear: closing the desirability–feasibility gap requires not only attitudinal change but substantive pedagogical training in specific, context-adapted autonomy-promoting techniques.

4.4 RQ 4: What Practices Do Teachers Report Using to Enhance Learner Autonomy?

The fourth research question examined the extent to which teachers translate their positive beliefs about LA into classroom practice, and how they perceive the autonomous capacities of their current students. The data from Section 3 of the questionnaire reveal a striking and deeply consequential paradox: despite broadly positive beliefs about LA and strong endorsement of its value for language learning outcomes, the majority of teachers neither perceive their students as autonomous nor systematically enact the LA-promoting practices they espouse.

4.4.1 Teachers' Perceptions of Current Learner Autonomy

A substantial majority of teachers (80%: 26.7% strongly disagree, 53.3% disagree) did not perceive their students as autonomous learners. In their open-ended justifications, teachers described learners as passive, dependent, reluctant to engage beyond classroom tasks, and resistant to assuming responsibility for their learning. This finding is arresting in its implications: the teachers who most clearly articulate the value of LA (see Sections 3.1 and 3.2) are simultaneously those who most consistently describe their students as failing to exhibit it. From a Self-Determination Theory perspective (Ryan & Deci, 2020), this absence of perceived learner autonomy may itself be partly a product of classroom environments that have not systematically cultivated the basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—that underpin self-directed behavior. If teachers do not implement autonomy-supportive practices, they cannot reasonably expect autonomous behavior from learners; the perceived deficiency of learner autonomy may thus be, at least in part, a consequence of the very belief–practice gap documented here.

4.4.2 Reported LA-Promoting Practices and the Implementing Minority

Only 26.7% of teachers reported systematically providing classroom opportunities designed to develop learner autonomy. This minority cited a range of strategies including: metacognitive awareness-raising about learning processes; structured opportunities for learner involvement in classroom decision-making; the creation of low-stakes, motivating learning environments; need-identification and goal-setting exercises; collaborative and peer-learning tasks; and project-based and debate activities. Notably, these practices correspond closely to the categories identified in the autonomy-supportive teaching

literature as most effective: providing choice and rationale, acknowledging learner perspectives, using informational rather than controlling language, and scaffolding self-regulatory skills (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). The 26.7% of implementing teachers thus appear to be not merely occasional autonomy-supporters but practitioners whose reported strategies reflect a substantive, theory-aligned approach to LA pedagogy.

4.4.3 The Non-Implementing Majority: Constraints and the Double Bind of Autonomy

Conversely, 63.3% of teachers reported not providing systematic LA-promoting opportunities. Their explanations clustered around four principal categories: (a) insufficient classroom time within overloaded curricula; (b) administrative constraints including mandatory syllabi and rigid timetables; (c) the absence of appropriate pedagogical materials and resources; and (d) learners' negative or resistant attitudes toward autonomous tasks. Each of these categories maps onto constraint types identified in the comparative literature. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) documented structural constraints (time, syllabus, assessment policies) as primary barriers in the Omani context; Wang and Ryan (2020) found that Chinese EFL teachers' institutional contexts similarly constrained control-sharing even when teachers were philosophically committed to it; and Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) reported learner-related factors (low motivation, dependence, low proficiency) as among the most frequently cited barriers across multiple EFL settings.

The fourth barrier, learner resistance, deserves particular theoretical attention, as it creates what may be termed a double bind of autonomy. Teachers perceive their students as insufficiently autonomous (80%), yet withhold the very pedagogical interventions that could develop that autonomy, partly because they judge students as unprepared for autonomous demands. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle: non-implementation perpetuates learner dependence, which in turn justifies further non-implementation. Breaking this cycle requires systemic rather than individual-level intervention, specifically curriculum reform that embeds structured autonomy-building activities within institutional expectations, rather than leaving LA promotion to the discretionary judgment of individual teachers operating under resource and time constraints. This conclusion converges with Rivera-

Gómez-Barris and El Homrani Maknuzi's (2025) finding that institutional framing and explicit training are decisive in enabling teachers to operationalize their LA beliefs in practice.

4.5 Cross-Cutting Discussion: The Belief–Practice Gap in the Algerian EFL Context

Reading across the four research questions, a coherent and theoretically intelligible picture of LA in the Algerian EFL context emerges. Algerian university EFL teachers possess a positive, multidimensional, and theoretically informed understanding of LA that is broadly consonant with the international literature. They view autonomy as age-appropriate, compatible with both individual and social learning, dependent on learner-centered pedagogy, instrumentally valuable for language outcomes, and requiring continuous teacher support. In these respects, their conceptual orientations closely parallel those documented in Omani (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012), Indonesian (Lengkanawati, 2017), Chinese (Wang & Ryan, 2020), and Saudi (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019) EFL contexts.

Yet, a substantial and consistent gap separates these positive beliefs from classroom reality. Desirability systematically exceeds feasibility across all LA dimensions (Table 2), with the gap being steepest for evaluative practices. Most teachers perceive their students as non-autonomous. Only a minority report implementing LA-promoting strategies. This three-part paradox, believing in LA, perceiving its absence in learners, yet not systematically promoting it, is the defining feature of the Algerian LA landscape documented in this study.

Borg's (2006) model of language teacher cognition provides the most parsimonious theoretical account: beliefs are necessary but not sufficient for practice. Contextual factors, institutional, curricular, material, and learner-related, mediate between what teachers believe and what they do. In the Algerian context, these mediating factors appear to be unusually powerful, suppressing the behavioral expression of positive beliefs to a degree that leaves both teachers and learners trapped in structures that neither group has designed or chosen. The finding that positive beliefs do not automatically translate into practice is not merely an empirical observation about Algerian teachers; it is a structural consequence of institutional arrangements that provide no systematic support for the kind of autonomy-oriented pedagogy that

teachers themselves endorse.

Conclusion:

This study set out to investigate Algerian EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding learner autonomy – an underexplored area in the North African context. Based on questionnaire data from 30 teachers at Batna 2 University, four principal conclusions emerge.

First, Algerian EFL teachers possess positive, theoretically informed beliefs about LA. They view autonomy as age-appropriate, compatible with both independent and cooperative learning, dependent on learner-centered pedagogy, and facilitative of improved language outcomes. Teachers also recognize their own critical role as facilitators rather than abdicators of responsibility.

Second, a substantial and consistent desirability–feasibility gap characterizes teachers' orientation toward LA. Across nearly all dimensions of autonomy, teachers rated LA as more desirable than feasible. This gap was largest for assessment-related practices (up to 29.9%) and smallest for lower-stakes decisions such as selecting activities or materials. The gap is not evidence of teacher resistance or inadequate belief; rather, it reflects teachers' realistic appraisal of contextual constraints including rigid syllabi, time pressures, and institutional assessment policies.

Third, self-assessment remains a contested and unresolved area. While teachers broadly endorsed involving learners in decisions about content and materials, support for learner self-assessment was substantially lower (50%) and showed the widest variation in responses ($SD = 1.12$). This suggests that many teachers perceive evaluation as a professional boundary not to be shared with learners – a finding with significant implications for curriculum design and teacher education.

Fourth, positive beliefs do not automatically translate into classroom practice. Although 80% of teachers perceived their students as lacking autonomy, only 26.7% reported systematically implementing LA-promoting practices. The majority cited contextual barriers (time, administrative constraints, lack of materials, learner resistance) as impediments. This finding underscores a central insight from research

on language teacher cognition: beliefs are necessary but not sufficient for practice. Contextual factors mediate, and in the Algerian case, appear to override the expression of positive beliefs in classroom action.

In conclusion, learner autonomy in the Algerian EFL context exists in a state of theoretical endorsement but practical constraint. Teachers believe in autonomy, understand its value, and recognize its absence in their students. Yet they do not, and by their own account, cannot systematically promote it within existing institutional structures. Closing the desirability–feasibility gap will require more than individual teacher effort: it demands curricular reform, assessment innovation, resource provision, and targeted teacher education. Until these structural changes occur, LA will remain what Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) described as “a notion around which theoretical ideals and pedagogical realities may not always concur” (p. 7).

The study contributes the first empirical baseline on Algerian EFL teachers’ beliefs about learner autonomy, quantifies the desirability–feasibility gap across specific pedagogical dimensions, and identifies self-assessment as a critical site of teacher reservation. It calls for a reconceptualization of LA not as an individual learner attribute to be simply “promoted” by willing teachers, but as a jointly constructed practice that requires institutional support, curricular flexibility, and sustained professional development. Without these enabling conditions, the gap between what teachers believe and what they can do will persist – and Algerian EFL learners will continue to be perceived, by their own teachers, as lacking the autonomy they are capable of developing.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations are offered for policy, practice, and future research. They are grounded directly in the study’s findings. For teacher education. The finding that 63.3% of teachers do not implement LA-promoting practices despite positive beliefs points to a gap in pedagogical content knowledge. Pre-service and in-service programs should move beyond theoretical discussions of LA to provide concrete, replicable classroom strategies: guided self-assessment

checklists, structured choice boards, project-based learning, and peer feedback protocols. Training must address self-assessment directly, given that this area showed the widest disagreement ($SD = 1.12$) and the largest desirability–feasibility gap (29.9%).

For curriculum and policy designers. Teachers cited administrative constraints (rigid timetables, mandated content) as primary barriers. Curriculum designers should formally embed structured opportunities for learner decision-making within the syllabus – for example, designated time for student-selected materials or negotiated project topics. Assessment policies should be revised to include low-stakes, formative self-assessment and peer assessment components, signaling institutional support for autonomy and reducing teacher reluctance.

For future research. Mixed-methods studies combining questionnaires with classroom observation and teacher interviews are needed to explain why teachers hold specific beliefs and how these beliefs manifest in practice. Researchers should also investigate learner perspectives on autonomy and replicate the present study across different Algerian regions and educational levels to establish a national baseline.

Limitations of the Study:

Five limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the sample (30 teachers from a single university department) limits generalizability to other Algerian regions, institutions, or educational levels.

Second, the study relied exclusively on self-reported questionnaire data, which is susceptible to social desirability bias and cannot be verified through classroom observation.

Third, the quantitative design could not probe the underlying reasons for teachers' beliefs; for example, why only 50% support learner self-assessment.

Fourth, learners' perspectives were absent; autonomy is co-constructed by teachers and learners, yet no data were collected on whether learners desire or perceive themselves as autonomous.

Fifth, the cross-sectional design captures beliefs at a single time

point, whereas beliefs about LA may evolve with experience or professional development.

Despite these limitations, the study provides the first empirical baseline on Algerian EFL teachers' beliefs about LA and identifies a clear desirability–feasibility gap warranting further investigation.

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