

2013

A Dissertation on Students' Readiness for Autonomous Learning of English as a Foreign Language

Presented to the Faculty of Education and
Society of the University of Sunderland

FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF
OTHER LANGUAGES



BY OMER TAMER

2/15/2013



*To my Almighty Creator Who made me;
my beloved Prophet who guided me;
my dear mother who raised me;
my esteemed father who nourished me;
my darling wife who encouraged me;
and my loved ones who remember me.*

I love you all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my module tutors at The Faculty of Education and Society of The University of Sunderland, Jakub Mincewicz, Juan Whiston, Judith Turner, Katy Mann, Kim Wills, Meg Timmins, and Petra Schoofs for their invaluable contributions to my studies.

I would like to thank my dear wife for her encouragement, support and help with translation of Arabic texts.

My thanks also go to teachers and students for their contributions, without whom this study could not have been possible.

DECLARATION

The material contained in this dissertation is all my own work. When the work of others has been adopted/paraphrased (e.g. books, articles, handouts, conference reports, questionnaires, interview questions, etc), it has been acknowledged according to appropriate academic convention. Sources of direct quotations are clearly identified. I have read and understood the University's statement concerning plagiarism and collusion.

Date: February 15, 2013

Signature:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	2
Acknowledgements	3
Declaration	4
Table of contents	5
List of tables	7
List of charts	7
Abstract	8

CHAPTER I

Introduction	9
1. An overview of student autonomy	9
2. Autonomy from Saudi Arabian perspective	12
a. A brief look at the Saudi education system	12
b. Memorization versus retention	13
3. Significance of the research	13
4. Purpose of the research	15

CHAPTER II

Literature Review	16
1. What is learner autonomy?	16
2. Why autonomy?	20
3. Autonomy from the cultural perspective	25

CHAPTER III

Method	30
1. The aim of the study	30
2. The participants	30
a. Students	31
b. Teachers	32
3. Data collection process	32
4. The questionnaires	33
a. Design process	33
b. Sections	34

i. Responsibilities	34
ii. Abilities	34
iii. Motivations	35
iv. Activities	35
c. Distribution and collection	36
d. Data processing	37
5. Teacher interviews	37

CHAPTER IV

Results and analysis	39
1. The questionnaires	39
a. Responsibilities	39
b. Abilities	42
c. Activities	45
d. Motivations	50
e. Open-ended question section	55
2. The interviews	57

CHAPTER V

Discussion of findings	62
1. Restatement of the research question	62
2. Summary of the findings	62
a. Responsibilities	63
b. Abilities	63
c. Motivations	64
d. Activities	65
e. Responses to the open-ended questions	65
f. Teacher interviews	66
3. Implications of practice	67
a. Learner training	67
b. Designing a learner autonomy-friendly curriculum	69
4. Limitations of the study	70

CHAPTER VI

Summary and conclusion	72
Recommendations for further research	74
Appendix	76
References	80

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Characteristics of dependent and independent learners	11
Table 2: Defining learner autonomy	18
Table 3: Students' bio	31
Table 4: Teachers' bio	32
Table 5: Division of responsibility between students and teachers	40
Table 6: Abilities	43
Table 7: The frequency of activities	48
Table 8: Motivation-Activity relationship	52
Table 9: Students' suggestions	56
Table 10: Teachers' views on student autonomy	58

LIST OF CHARTS

Chart 1: Division of responsibility	40
Chart 2: Responsibility ranked by "teacher's and mine"	42
Chart 3: Abilities	44
Chart 4: Frequency of voluntary activities	46
Chart 5: Often versus Never	47
Chart 6: Motivation levels	51
Chart 7: Motivation-Activity relationship	53
Chart 8: Motivation-Ability relationship	54
Chart 9: Motivation-Responsibility relationship	55
Chart 10: Teachers' view of students' readiness for autonomy	60

ABSTRACT

The shift from teacher-based classroom to student-based learning has been accelerated by the concept of learner autonomy, putting students in charge of their own learning while reducing the role of the teacher to that of a facilitator. In the Saudi Arabian context of this research, the traditional rote learning in teacher-controlled classrooms still continues, which is no longer sustainable at a time when the world is heading into a new horizon. In this respect, this study was designed to assess the readiness of the Saudi university students on a preparatory English program to partake in autonomous learning of English as a foreign language. 121 students were polled with questionnaires on their perceptions of responsibilities, abilities, motivation, and self-directed activities inside and outside the classroom for independent learning of English. The results show a discrepancy between adequate motivation level accompanied by high confidence in abilities, and, lack of voluntary learning activities coupled with reluctance to take up responsibility for own learning. This may be attributable to students' over-reliance on teachers and the spoon feeding habit.

In addition to student questionnaires, 10 teachers were interviewed on their perception of where their students stand in relation to autonomous learning of English. The results of the teacher interviews indicate a cautious optimism: Teachers believe that, although learner autonomy is hard to achieve against the backdrop of a rote learning tradition; a gradual transition to learner autonomy would still be possible if administrative restrictions were removed and students were properly trained. Two main practical implications resulted from the study: necessity for learner training and the need to design a curriculum that supports learner autonomy. Due to some limitations of the study, further research is suggested to investigate the problem.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

1. An overview of student autonomy

Since its debut about three decades ago, learner autonomy has changed the traditional roles of teachers and students as we have known them, introducing a new era in which students are no longer the passive learners who sit and listen; and the teachers are no longer the front of knowledge. Students are now being transformed into independent learners assuming more responsibility for their own learning as teachers are becoming facilitators, advising more and lecturing less. Today, there is a growing trend amongst learners to be more and more independent of teachers and classrooms spurred by advances made in information technology. Distance learning, home schooling, external studying and computer assisted language learning (CALL) are some of the examples of self-study in which students are increasingly taking charge of their own learning and becoming less dependent on a physical classroom teacher in the traditional sense. Holec (in Lamb and Reinders, 2008:3) describes this change as a paradigm shift:

From linguistic to communicative competence, from behaviouristic to cognitive descriptions of the acquisition process, from priority to teaching and the teacher to priority to learning and the learner, this on-going investigation drive has progressively allowed the learning/teaching community to conceptualize and

in some environments to put into practice an entirely new, incomplete and imperfect though it still may be, pedagogical paradigm.

According to Holec (in Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012:4), ability to take charge of one's own learning pertains to a wide range of capacities of someone to exercise control over his or her learning process such as determining the objectives, choosing the content materials to study, selecting strategies and methods of study, monitoring and evaluation of one's learning. This implies full autonomy that comes with full responsibility on the shoulders of learners. Sinclair (in Lamb and Reinders, 2008: 243) states that "this capacity consists of the development and conscious awareness of a body of specific meta-cognitive knowledge about one's self as a learner; one's learning context; the subject matter to be learnt; the processes of learning." Little (in Thanasoulas, 2000) reaffirms Sinclair's view by stating that autonomous learners use meta-cognitive skills which relate to capacity for critical reflection, decision-making, independent action and transferring what one has learnt to other contexts of learning.

Mynard and Sorflaten (in Al-Saidi, 2011: 99) illustrate the contrast between dependent and independent learners across a line of continuum with the dependent ones on one end and the independent ones on the other. The dependents' side represent conventional learners who lack independent learning skills whereas on the other side of the continuum are the ones who are self-reliant, motivated and capable of learning without a teacher. There is a gradual transition from the depended side to the independent side by the successful learners with the scaffolding of teachers and other sources of support. Mynard and Sorflaten (ibid) have compiled the characteristics of dependent and independent learners from (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Dickinson, 1987; Broady & Kenning, 1996; Oxford, 1990; Barnett, 1993), as shown in Table 1:

Dependent learners	Independent learners
Rely heavily on the teacher	Are self-reliant
Cannot make decisions about their learning	Can make informed decisions about their learning
Do not know their own strengths and weaknesses	Are aware of their strengths and weaknesses
Do not connect classroom learning with the real world	Connect classroom learning with the real world
Think that the teacher is wholly responsible for their learning	Take responsibility for their own learning· Know about different strategies for learning
Do not know the best way to learn something	Plan their learning and set goals
Do not set learning goals· will only work when extrinsic motivators such as grades or rewards are offered	Are intrinsically motivated by making progress in learning
Do not reflect on how well they are learning and the reasons	Often reflect on the learning process and their own progress

Table 1 - characteristics of dependent and independent learners (Mynard and Sorflaten, 2002)

Students mostly fall between the two extremes on the continuum according to their capacities, motivations, and attitudes.

2. Autonomy from Saudi Arabian perspective

From the current outlook, the educational institutions in Saudi Arabia are mostly maintaining the traditional teacher-student-classroom setting where the roles of teachers and students remain basically the same: teachers lecture and students listen. This type of teacher-student relationship starts early in the elementary school and continues through secondary school and high school, breeding a student population who are accustomed to following rather than leading. When these students come into the universities, they mostly bear the characteristics of dependent learners as listed in the table above.

a. A brief look at the Saudi education system: General education in the Kingdom consists of kindergarten, six years of primary school and three years each of intermediate and high school followed by higher education at colleges and universities. Although the curriculums offer some basic elements of student initiative at schools, the actual situation is teacher and test based. Students do not have a say in the selection of teaching materials or methodology. Despite the fact that the government is generously investing in promoting the quality of education, traditional teacher-fronted classrooms continue to be the norm. The ministry of labor has launched a national ‘Saudization’ program which encourages prioritizing the employment of Saudi citizens over foreign expatriates working in the country. Nevertheless, most companies continue to employ non-Saudis. Why? Nadia Aldossary, chief executive of scrap metal company

Al-Sale Trading Co., states that the problem mainly stems from an outdated education system which fails to provide students with the right skills. She says “I am with the young people. I think they want to do a lot of things but if they don’t know how to speak English, which is a vital skill, or if they don’t know how to go to a library, then yes, they will feel as if they don’t want to work” (Billing, 2009). This summarizes the current state of the majority of the Saudi students who have grown up memorizing information to pass tests rather than “connect classroom learning with the real world” (Mynard and Sorflaten, 2002).

b. Memorization verses Retention: Rote memorization is the preferred student strategy instead of retention by critical thinking. This can be attributed to the tradition of memorizing the Holy Book of Koran and the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him). As observed by Vassall-Fall, “memorization of Quran remains an important part of education in Saudi Arabia” (2011:48). The tradition of rote memorization dates back to early Islamic schools in the 7th century, and “when the Saudi public school system was created, the strategy of memorization was transferred to all content” (ibid). The use of memorization starts in elementary education and continues throughout their schooling. This approach inevitably creates a learning context in which teachers command students. There are no creative activities engaging learners in autonomous study. When these students arrive at the doorstep of higher education institutions, they are reliant on memorizing instead of retaining knowledge by critical thinking. To add to the vicious cycle, teachers hold on to their habits of lecturing and the administrative policies at schools and universities maintain the status quo.

3. Significance of the research

Saudi students bring with them their previous learning habits of over-reliance on teachers when they arrive at the universities. This can be a frustrating experience both for them and their teachers because universities demand academic achievement and work habits which necessitate a great deal of independent study and research by students unlike the elementary and secondary schools where they came from. Teachers are frustrated as they get little in return for the effort they put into their classes. Poor motivation, procrastination of assignments, low attendance and reluctance to do work in and out of the classroom are some of the common problems students have. As a result, teachers find themselves constantly instructing, explaining, tutoring, and pushing their students every step of the way, wishing that they would do things on their own.

Students are no less frustrated. They suddenly find themselves in a new environment which is not familiar with what they were used to. There are now projects and assignments with deadlines, topics to be researched which necessitate visiting the library and browsing the Internet, and reading assignments which demand critical thinking instead of rote memorization; and other independent studies for which they are not trained and do not know how to cope with. They feel as if they were dropped into the sea without having been taught how to swim; so they desperately reach for their life jackets: teachers.

The situation stems from students' over-reliance on teachers and it is imperative that they learn how to survive on their own because the current situation as it stands is unsustainable. Learner autonomy is the answer to the problem and the sooner they achieve self confidence, the

better for them and their teachers. As much as learner autonomy sounds as if it is the magical solution to the problem; the change will not come overnight. They first need to be tested for their preparedness for taking control of their own learning and given any required training before autonomous policies can be administered.

4. The purpose of the research

This study has been designed to answer the question: whether, or not, the students on an English Preparatory Program at a Saudi university are ready to take charge of their own learning for autonomous study of English as a foreign language. The study examines students' readiness for autonomous learning of English from four perspectives: responsibilities, abilities, motivation, and self-directed activities.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

1. What is learner autonomy?

According to Trebbi (in Lamb and Reinders, 2008), before we can answer the question what learner autonomy is, we need to understand what freedom is; because it is a prerequisite to learner autonomy. He contends that the definition of freedom can be subtle; it may mean different things to individuals living in different cultures. Owing to the fact that we all live in a society that is subject to rules and regulations, we cannot talk about absolute freedom. Our minds have been hardwired by our history and socio-cultural context, as a result of which, we all have our own attitudes, beliefs, and insights. Trebbi says “the question is not whether we are free or not, but rather whether we are victims of constraints or not” (ibid: 35). He believes that “we are bound to both external and internal constraints” and “from an ontological point of view, human beings are not free in an absolute sense” (ibid). He then establishes a link between the concept of freedom and learner autonomy. Consequently, if freedom at broader sense suffers from external and internal constraints, learner autonomy will also be bound by those constraints in the same way. He adds, “Educational systems in many societies put constraints on teachers and learners that are not likely to promote learner autonomy” (ibid: 36). What we can gather from this view is then, even if we cannot talk about absolute autonomy, we can still explore the possibilities of

pushing the limits set by those constraints in order to achieve more autonomous language learning.

Nevertheless, various definitions are used in the literature to refer to learner autonomy with nuances based on versions of it such as **learner autonomy**, **learner independence**, **self-direction**, **autonomous learning**, and **independent learning**. With all these references to autonomy notwithstanding, there is consensus on the basic definition of autonomy as being “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (Holec, 1981:3). While autonomy is the common denominator, sub definitions and references which radiate from the root may focus on different facets of autonomy. Thus, the sub division independent learning, for instance, focuses on “a need to develop long-term learner strategies which will be of use in current or future learning situations where a teacher may not be available” (Macaro, 1997:167). Student centered learning, on the other hand, puts focus on “theories of *individual learner differences* and proposes a learning environment which might best cater for those differences” (ibid). Defining autonomy in terms of what it is *not* rather than what it is, Esch, (in Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012:4) states that:

It is not self-instruction/learning without a teacher, it does not mean that intervention or initiative on the part of a teacher is banned; it is not something teachers do to learners; i.e. a new methodology; it is not a single easily identifiable behavior; it is not a steady state achieved by learners once and for all.

To give a broader description, Sinclair (in Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012:5) comes up with thirteen aspects of learner autonomy as shown in Table 2:

1.	Autonomy is a construct of capacity.
2.	Autonomy involves a willingness on the part of the learner to take responsibility for their own learning.
3.	The capacity and willingness of learners to take such responsibility is not necessarily innate.
4.	Complete autonomy is an idealistic goal.
5.	There are degrees of autonomy.
6.	The degrees of autonomy are unstable and variable.
7.	Autonomy is not simply a matter of placing learners in situations where they have to be independent.
8.	Developing autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process – i.e. conscious reflection and decision-making.
9.	Promoting autonomy is not simply a matter of teaching strategies.
10.	Autonomy can take place both inside and outside the classroom.
11.	Autonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension.
12.	The promotion of autonomy has a political as well as psychological dimension.
13.	Autonomy is interpreted differently by different cultures.

Table 2: Defining learner autonomy (Sinclair, 2000)

As outlined in Sinclair’s definition, learner autonomy does not necessarily mean that a learner should study in isolation. Collaboration with other members of the community is

indispensable for autonomy to truly succeed. “Socio-cultural context and collaboration with others are important features of education, and of our lives.’ (Palfreyman and Smith, 2003:2). It is possible to draw a link in this perspective between learner autonomy and the theory of ‘Communities of Learning’ (Wenger, 2006). According to Communities of Learning model, social interaction is crucial to language learning as it helps mastering discursive skills that can only be achieved through active engagement with the community one lives in:

In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other (ibid).

Such social engagement necessitates autonomous-minded learners with social skills which will enable them to courageously get involved with activities in their communities. In this sense, although **independence** relates to learners’ ability to be independent of the teacher, some linguists including Boud (in Palfreyman and Smith, 2003:4) advocate ‘interdependence’ as opposed to independence for a more successful achievement of autonomy. Learners’ ability to collaborate with others to set and achieve goals has come to be recognized as an important merit. Collaboration and interaction with others and working together with other members of the society is in line with the socio-cultural theories inspired by Vygotsky (1978) as well.

Benson argues that “autonomy requires some degree of freedom from two basic kinds of constraints: internal and external” (2008:18). Internal constraint relates to psychological capacities such as setting personal goals from free will for the future and pursuing those goals; capacities which a person can exercise control over. External constraints, however, relate to

elements of autonomy which should be available from external surroundings, such as living in a free society where individuals are granted rights and freedoms to make decisions for themselves and have options to choose from. In other words, “individuals must strive to lead autonomous lives and society must strive to respect the freedoms that such lives require” (ibid).

Additionally, Benson (2003:3) outlines three perspectives shaping up autonomy as technical, psychological, and political. According to Benson (ibid), technical perspective relates to learners’ cognitive, meta-cognitive, and social skills which they use to teach themselves without supervision. Psychological perspective relates to learners’ motivation and attitude which drive them to take responsibility for their own learning. Political perspective relates to enabling learners by giving them control over content selection and their learning process. Although we see many different interpretations of student autonomy in the literature, a consensus exists on the basic qualities of autonomous learners in that they understand the aims and targets of their studies, claim responsibility for their own learning, take active role and initiative in learning activities both inside and outside the classroom and exercise meta-cognitive skills of monitoring and evaluating their learning progress. It is also unanimously agreed that such student initiatives entail high motivation and positive attitude towards learning.

2. Why autonomy?

The main argument as to why students should be autonomous as opposed to being dependent on teachers is that autonomous learning activities engage them in authentic learning situations and therefore, is more effective than learning in an artificial classroom context.

Another argument is that autonomous learners are intrinsically motivated. According to Little,

(n.d.) “if learners are proactively committed to their learning, the problem of motivation is by definition solved”. He maintains that such learners have developed “the reflective and attitudinal resources to overcome temporary motivational setbacks” (ibid). Motivated, autonomous learners learn the language through using it effectively, which enables them to master receptive and productive skills of the target language much more efficiently than the non-autonomous ones learning in traditional, teacher-centered classroom context.

Literature also points to a philosophical aspect of granting autonomy to learners, the argument of which is that it is basic human right to be free. The argument goes, if it is the learners themselves who participate in the activity of learning and studying and take responsibility for their learning, then they ought to be entitled to a vote on what to learn and how to learn. According to Macaro (1997:168), this type of freedom in learning implies full access to content materials, setting goals, curriculum design, progress and methodology of learning. It implies taking charge of one’s learning with all the responsibilities that come with it. External factors alone, such as being independent from teachers, do not constitute full autonomy. Distance learners, for example, do not have teacher supervision as the traditional classroom students do, however, this type of learning “only enables autonomy of pace and rhythm, not of objectives or content” (ibid).

It is also generally agreed that achievement of full autonomy with all of its principles is highly difficult, and I think perhaps even too idealistic especially in the Arabian context. Instead, we may talk about degrees of autonomy being exercised in different ways and in varying portions according to various cultural settings. Macaro (1997) breaks what he refers to as

“functional autonomy” down into sub segments as “autonomy of language competence”, “autonomy of language learning competence”, and “autonomy of choice and action”. Autonomy of language competence occurs as a result of having mastered an L2 enough which allows learners to stand on their own feet and proceed with their learning without depending on others for help, such as the teacher in the classroom. Autonomy of language learning competence, however, occurs when learners acquire cognitive and meta-cognitive language learning skills which they can reproduce in other similar situations and transfer these skill into learning or studying other subjects, such as a third foreign language. In a nutshell, this means acquiring the knowledge of how to learn and what strategies to employ for learning the target subject matter. To illustrate the relationship between cognitive skills and meta-cognitive skills, Macaro says:

Thus whereas a cognitive strategy is a learner using a dictionary for words s/he does not know, a meta-cognitive (or planning or procedural) strategy might be deciding in advance how much time to allocate to dictionary use in a timed exam (ibid:170-171).

Autonomy of choice or action is making long-term or short term decisions on learning goals, choice of content, motivational issues, and cognitive/meta-cognitive strategy implementation to reach the set goals. According to Macaro, this form of autonomy can mean giving learners the ability to “develop a coherent argument as to why they are learning a foreign language even if they may not have the choice of not learning that language” (1997: 171). I find this view contradictory per se, as on one hand learners are not given a choice between accepting and refusing to learn a subject; on the other hand it seeks autonomy in enabling them to explain why they should be doing something which has been imposed on them. This in principle stands in contrast with the commonly accepted definition “the ability to take charge of one’s own

learning” Holec (1981:3), according to whom learner autonomy entails that learners take charge of their learning in all aspects willingly. They set their goals and objectives, select content and control the progress of their learning. They choose methods and strategies to be employed to reach their targets, and at the same time use meta-cognitive skills to monitor their progress or lack of it and employ corrective strategies accordingly.

An interesting observation by Legenhausen (in Murray, Gao, and Lamb, 2011:17) points to the difference between ‘students as learners’ and ‘students who speak as themselves’. Comparing two classrooms, one in Germany and the other in Denmark, he showcases the communicative value and appropriateness of language used by Danish students who use autonomous learning to be much higher and realistic than those of German students who adhere to textbooks. He contends that bridging the gap between the classroom and the real world, by giving students the opportunity to speak as themselves and express their own identities, likes/dislikes, hobbies and interests, will cause them to be more successful and more motivated to use the language than containing them in a classroom context where learning activities are artificial. This typically depicts the current classroom setting in Saudi Arabia where textbooks are followed to the letter with little or no student involvement in content selection, depriving them of the opportunity to be students who speak as themselves. This impacts students’ enthusiasm in a negative way. The following dialogue between a teacher and a student, presented by Scrivener shows the significance of granting autonomy to learners to speak as themselves:

Student: I am feeling bad. My grandfather he die last week and I am . . .

Teacher: No, not die; say died because it’s in the past. (ibid).

There obviously is a need for teachers to be autonomous-minded as well before students can be made autonomous. Students should not only be seen as learners but also as human beings who have emotions, feelings and experiences that can be a vast, authentic source of learning in an autonomous setting. One of the fundamental elements of Suggestopedia, for example, is to remove anxiety from the learners and create a comfortable, non-intimidating learning environment in accordance with the humanitarian approach (Lozanov, 1978). Similarly, in the neo-Vygotskian psychology, (in Little, n.d.), the role of the teacher is to support a learning environment in which learners can be autonomous in order to become more autonomous. Oxford agrees with teachers playing an important role teaching or assisting, however, “the ultimate responsibility lies with the learner themselves” (1990:23).

The link between motivation and learner autonomy is one of the main focus areas in the literature. There is a strong relationship between motivation and autonomy. As observed by Ushioda, “we can never say which comes first, autonomy or motivation” (in Murray, Gao, and Lamb, 2011:43). Many language professionals teaching in the Middle-Eastern context will attest to the fact that lack of motivation amongst the students is at endemic proportions. Where motivation does not exist, we cannot realistically talk about learner autonomy either as they are almost mutually exclusive. According to Ushioda (ibid), creating a classroom where learners are allowed to express their likes, and dislikes freely promotes motivation and autonomy. In the current Arabian setting, however, classroom activities are based on textbooks which will not leave much room for self expression or genuine communicative language use. As a result, motivation suffers.

3. Autonomy from the cultural perspective

One of the main arguments about learner autonomy is that it originates from the West; therefore implementation of this particular approach in non-western settings cannot be expected to be as seamless as in the west. As observed by Palfreyman and Smith, “one important question is therefore whether the idea of learner autonomy is ethnocentric.” (2003:1) They draw a strong relationship between autonomy and culture, arguing that it is “important for language learning and education because these take place *within* a culture” (ibid:5). This argument holds true in the middle-eastern context where freedoms available to Western societies are restricted, which makes fostering full learner autonomy challenging if not impossible. Kneller (in Palfreyman and Smith, 2003:5) says that learner’s culture plays a significant role in determining the degree of autonomy as it relates to one’s “modes of thinking, acting, and feeling”. By this argument, one’s culture determines his or her attitude towards education and learning as well. Each learner is endowed with a cultural attitude towards learning that shapes the learning behavior both inside and outside the classroom. A learner who belongs to a certain culture may find autonomy easier than another who belongs to some other culture which encourages respect to someone more authoritarian and more knowledgeable. Consequently, educators are raising the question as to whether autonomy is compatible with “particular *national/ethnic cultures* such as ‘Japanese culture’ or ‘Arab culture’” (ibid:7). Cultural link to autonomy is of particular interest in this research as the quest of this research is to examine the Saudi university students’ aptitude and incidentally, their compatibility with autonomous learning of English as a foreign language. This research may also give rise to an important question with regard to the compatibility of autonomy with the Saudi culture, as raised by Palfreyman and Smith: “Is autonomy (in the sense

that it has been interpreted in language education) an appropriate educational goal across cultures?” (ibid: 2).

Autonomy may be exercised in different ways and manners in different cultural settings. Oxford (in Palfreyman and Smith, 2003:8) developed a questionnaire with the acronym SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning). SILL is used to identify learning attitudes and habits of people existing in various cultural settings. The results of a SILL questionnaire, for example, may reveal certain learning strategies peculiar to a certain group such as “guessing are used more by students in Mainland China than by students in Egypt or Puerto Rico” (ibid:8). It is not entirely possible, however, to make a generalization of any given culture to all members of its subjects. The results of a questionnaire or observation may lead one to conclude that the members of a particular cultural upbringing are non-autonomous; however, on closer inspection it may be seen that they may be exercising a variation of autonomy in a different manner. According to Dore and Sako, Japanese university students are often seen as “receptacle into which knowledge and ideas have to be poured” (1989: 7–8), meaning they depend on the teachers to feed them. However, they also observed that Japanese students exercise a high level of autonomous learning activity in the solitude of their studies at home with “a lot of the pouring done by the student himself” (ibid). A parallel may be drawn here between the Saudi university students and the Japanese students in this regard. Memorization is a commonly used learning strategy amongst the Saudi students; a practice which may be attributed to over fourteen centuries of memorizing the Holy Book of Quran. These students bring their memorization habits they develop in the Madrassas (religious schools or mosques) into schools as their learning strategies. Since memorization is an important cognitive skill in learning a second language, -i.e.

memorization of vocabulary and grammatical drills, etc., we may regard such memorization activities done by Saudi students at their homes as a type of autonomous learning activity. According to Watkins and Biggs (in Palfreyman and Smith, 2003), Chinese students employ memorization as a learning strategy “which are frowned upon in progressive Western circles, and yet achieve higher than average academic success (ibid: 11).

Learners’ belief and feelings towards autonomy also play a significant role for learner independence as well as their aptitude. Some learners rely on teachers more than the others; some perceive them as instructors while others may regard them as facilitators. Obviously, the latter group of learners tend to be more apt to becoming autonomous than the former ones. In this context, Cotterall (in Palfreyman and Smith 2003) studies learners’ beliefs about teachers, risk-taking, and self confidence. The outcome of such a study reveals learners’ readiness for autonomy: if a student feels that a teacher should be dominant, than this student should be judged “to be less ready to be autonomous than the one who expresses a preference for a facilitating teacher” (ibid: 8).

According to Pierson (in Palfreyman and Smith, 2003), in some cultures respect to the elderly (whether it is for parents or as in this particular case for teachers) is taken as a hindrance to autonomy as it is deemed a sign of “passivity”. From anecdotal experience, I can attest to the existence of the same tenet in Turkish culture in which respect to teachers is held sacred. The anonymous proverb prevalent within conservative Turkish society, “teach me one letter; and I will be your slave for forty years,” shows the extent of such respect for knowledge and teachers. Similar sentiments are shown towards people of authority across various cultures in the world.

Chandler describes teachers' and students' roles in Cambodia: "The teacher, like the parents, bestows, transmits and commands. The student, like the child, receives, accepts and obeys" (ibid: 9). In the Arabian context, the setting of this research, similar sentiments are shown towards teachers by both students and parents. Students hold them second to their parents in esteem, the male teachers are treated like fathers and females like mothers. Such respect, while praiseworthy and humanly virtuous, is seen by Ho and Crookall (ibid: 7) as a cultural obstacle in the way of becoming autonomous learners.

Changing a teacher centered environment to that of student centered is obviously a gradual process which will take time, training, and patience. A teacher survey carried out in Britain on installment of learner autonomy in the classroom has brought up some limitations and concerns which teachers harbor toward learner autonomy (Macaro, 1997:179-180). Some of the main concerns as outlined by teachers involved in the study are the fossilized teachers themselves who won't easily "relinquish control" over to students or give up their lecturing habits. Teachers also contended that this type of enterprise needs new resource centers or corners to be built inside the classrooms with good quality resources; and not all schools or institutions may have space for that or be able to afford that financially. Another question raised was with regard to the fulfillment of curriculum requirements in terms of covering the designated course materials within the set deadlines should students go autonomous. Teachers believed that while autonomous learning would suit some students, it would not necessarily suit some others. According to the teachers involved in the study, only highly motivated or clever students would handle autonomy, whereas those who were dependent on teachers for help would not. I believe that this applies to the context of this study where most students are used to spoon feeding by

upbringing aside from very few who are intrinsically motivated. Therefore, there is a need for a transitional period during which the teacher control would be gradually claimed by the rightful owners: students themselves.

CHAPTER III

Method

In this chapter, the details of data collection process will be presented including the aim of the study, the participants in the survey, the research instruments used, preparation, distribution, administration and collection of the qualitative and quantitative data gathered from questionnaires and teacher interviews. The first section rephrases the aim of the study. Section 2 will give a brief synopsis of the participants in the study. Section 3 will present the research instruments used: when, where, and how the student survey and teacher interviews were conducted and how data was collected and processed.

1. The aim of the study

This study has been designed to answer the question: whether, or not, the students on an English Preparatory Program at a Saudi university are ready to take charge of their own learning for autonomous study of English as a foreign language from the perspectives of responsibilities, abilities, motivation, and self-directed activities; and identify the obstacles that stand in the way.

2. The participants

Table 3 and 4 gives details of the participants:

a. Students

The number of participants	121
Gender	All male
Average age	Between 19 and 21
English proficiency level	False beginner or lower intermediate
Nationality	All Saudi citizens
Future goals	Upon successful completion of the English Foundation program at the English Language Institute, they will go into their chosen majors at various faculties at the university campus, where the medium of instruction will be English.
The place where study was conducted	English Language Institute, King Abdulaziz University campus, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
The date when study was conducted	Between December 15, 2012 and December 19, 2012
Data collection instrument	Mix-method questionnaires

Table 3: Student bio

These students have all finished six years of mandatory primary education and three years of secondary/high school education. Although they start receiving English instruction as of grade six (state schools), the majority come to universities with poor language proficiency as

false beginners owing to teacher-fronted, grammar-translation method used for teaching English at their previous schools.

b. Teachers:

The number of participants	10
Gender	All male
Teachers' nationalities	Miscellaneous, Non-Saudi
Academic backgrounds	8 with MA degrees; 2 with B.A.
Native/Non-native speaker	6 non-native speakers; 4 native speakers
The date of interviews	December 29, 2012 - January 3, 2013
The places of interviews	Teachers' lounge; Teachers' offices, Faculty cafeteria
Data collection instrument	Semi-structured interviews

Table 4: Teachers' bio

3. Data collection process

Questionnaires with quantitative and qualitative questions were used to elicit students' views on their perceptions of responsibilities in and out of the classroom; their motivation level towards learning English; their cognitive and meta-cognitive abilities for independent study of

English, and their voluntary activities in and outside the classroom, followed by an open-ended question seeking their suggestions on how they would like the English program to be designed.

For teachers, semi-structured interviews were conducted to learn their views on their perception of learner autonomy in general and how they thought their students related to the concept of learner autonomy in terms of their abilities, motivations, attitudes, and study habits.

4. The questionnaires

This section elaborates on the process of designing, administration, collection, and processing of the student questionnaires.

a. Design process: According to Spratt, Humphreys, and Chen (2002), there is a strong positive correlation between motivation and student autonomy. Spratt *et al* argue that motivation takes the priority in terms of being the more influential factor in the duo of motivation and autonomy. Lack of student interest and motivation being one of the compelling factors afflicting our students, and agreeing with the strong relationship between motivation and self-directed learning, I studied the questionnaire Spratt *et al* (ibid) created and used at Hong Kong Polytechnic University; and decided that it closely related to our students as well. In addition to the 52 questions adopted from Spratt *et al*, an open-ended question was added at the bottom of the questionnaire to obtain qualitative data. Bearing in mind the fact that the students lacked the required English proficiency to comprehend the questions and instructions, a bilingual colleague

whose first language is Arabic was contacted for translation of the questionnaire into Arabic. The questions and instructions in English were printed side by side in a table formatted with cells so that students would read with ease and go through the sections without frustration. To assure accuracy and internal validity, two other Arabic speaking colleagues were shown the finished questionnaire with Arabic translation, who attested to the perfect match between the English and Arabic text. The finished four-page master copy was multiplied and stapled by a photo-copier for distribution to students (*see the Appendix*).

b. Sections: Following a brief introduction informing of the purpose of the study, the respondents were presented with questions in four sections in the following order:

i. Responsibilities: This section asked students about WHOSE responsibility they felt it should be to accomplish certain aspects of learning English stated in questions 1 - 13. They were given three choices, respectively, as “Teacher’s altogether”, “Teacher’s and mine”, and “Mine altogether” in three separate columns. The questions in this section conform to Holec’s definition of autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (1981:3), which holds the learners themselves responsible for all aspects of their learning, and examine the extent of students’ readiness for claiming their responsibilities.

ii. Abilities: According to Holec (1981), responsibilities and abilities go hand in hand in the achievement of autonomous learning. These are cognitive and meta-cognitive abilities such as setting goals and objectives, choosing the study content and selecting strategies to reach the set goals, monitoring own progress, and evaluating own progress. The 11 questions spanning

from 14 to 24 in this section asked students how well they felt they would do in carrying out certain aspects of learning English on their own without teacher supervision. The respondents were presented with five choices on a Likert scale as “Very poor”, “Poor”, “OK”, “Good”, and “Very good”. These questions elicit the respondents’ cognitive/meta-cognitive skills for self-directed study of English in and out of the classroom.

iii. Motivations: This section checks the degree of students’ willingness for learning English on a Likert scale of five as “Highly motivated”, “Well motivated”, “Motivated”, “Slightly motivated”, and “Not at all motivated”. This section is hoped to shed light on the relationship between the participants’ motivation level and their attitudes toward autonomous learning abilities and activities.

iv. Activities: The activities section was divided into two sub sections as activities done outside the class and those done inside the class. Within the first sub-section, the respondents were asked 22 questions with regards to voluntary English learning activities outside the classroom. On a Likert scale of 4, they were directed to state how often they have done each activity since the beginning of the academic year at the English Language Institute by choosing one of the choices “Often”, “Sometimes”, “Rarely”, and “Never”. Next sub-section contained 5 questions pertaining to voluntary activities done inside the classroom to which the subjects were asked to respond in the same way as they have done in the preceding section. The answers given to these questions will shed light on the degree of students’ self-directed study activities both inside and outside the classroom without being told to do them by their teachers. They will also

let us see which particular activities are done more than the others; and which ones are not done at all.

In addition to the 4 sections introduced above, one extra open-ended question was added at the bottom of the questionnaire asking the subjects to write down any suggestions they may have to help design more effective English Learning programs at the university. This question is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it is an open ended question which prompts the participants to provide valuable qualitative data. Secondly and more importantly, any response to the question, whether it is negative or positive will imply the willingness of the respondents to have a say in what they are learning; hence indicate a mindset for becoming autonomous. In this respect, I find the mere count of responses to this question as significant as their content.

c. Distribution and collection: All 121 questionnaires were distributed during classes. Teachers were notified prior to the distribution, and upon receiving consent from the teachers, a brief introduction was made to the students about the survey. It was communicated to the students that participation was voluntary and they were given assurances that no personal data was being collected. They were told that it would approximately take 20 minutes to finish, and they were encouraged to give their honest answers to the questions so that the implications could be used beneficially for them. The questionnaires were collected by the teachers and they were later retrieved from them at the end of the classes.

d. Data processing: Microsoft Excel was used for analysis of the quantitative data. The results of each section were entered separately in their own spreadsheet, thence analyzed and calculated using the program functions to create tables and charts.

The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended question, however, had to be analyzed manually. Since all of the answers were written in Arabic save for two in English, a colleague whose first language is Arabic was called to help translate students' written answers into English. 43 students responded to the open ended question. Each answer was translated into English by the colleague orally while they were recorded on a tablet computer for subsequent analysis. The recording was later played back a number of times and each student's answer was written in a document. At the next phase, the written information was browsed for similar and contrasting views, which were categorized according to their themes and put in a table in a separate document.

5. Teacher interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain teachers' opinions on the topic of their students' readiness, motivation, and aptitude for becoming autonomous learners of English at the English Language Institute. Teachers were approached for interviews during their recess times in their offices, sometimes outside while sitting in the teachers' lounge or in the faculty cafeteria. In some cases when they did not have enough time to do the interview at that particular time, they were contacted by phone and interviewed later on the phone. The purpose of the study was informed to the teachers. It was explained to them that participation in the study was consensual;

and they were assured that they would remain anonymous. They were also asked if they would be comfortable with recording the interview on a recorder, to which they all responded affirmatively. Hence the interviews were recorded for later analysis.

The teachers were asked nine questions (*see the Appendix*) with regards to their opinions on learner autonomy in general and what they thought about their students' abilities and problems to become autonomous learners of the English language. The first question explored teachers' perception of learner autonomy in general. The second set of questions sought their opinions of the state of their students in relation to learner autonomy as they defined themselves; whether they thought that the students at the ELI were autonomous learners or not and if they believed that their students had the ability to become autonomous learners. The third set of questions inquired about the problems and challenges teachers saw hindering autonomous learning by the students and how they thought these hindrances could be overcome. The last question inquired about whether they allowed their students autonomy, if any, during their classes and in what ways they did so. The interviews were later played back one by one, and the main highlights and important quotes were written in a word document for each teacher. The written text was then studied and similar and contrasting views on each question were categorized for data analysis.

CHAPTER IV

Results and Analysis

1. The Questionnaires

The findings of the student questionnaires are presented in three main parts: The first part shows the statistical results of the 4 sections; responsibilities, abilities, activities and motivation. The second part re-examines the first 3 sections with respect to their correlation with the motivation levels to see if highly motivated students tend to be more self-reliant than those who are not. The third part shows the results of the qualitative data students provided in response to the open ended question.

a. Responsibilities: In this section, 13 aspects of learning English in and out of the classroom were listed, and students were asked to indicate whose responsibility they thought these aspects were: teachers', teachers' and theirs, or theirs only. According to the results, of these 13 aspects of learning English, they considered 42% to be teachers' responsibility alone. They thought that 38 % of these aspects were the joint responsibility of theirs and teachers' both; and they claimed 20% as their own alone. Chart 1 illustrates the division of overall responsibility:

Whose responsibility?

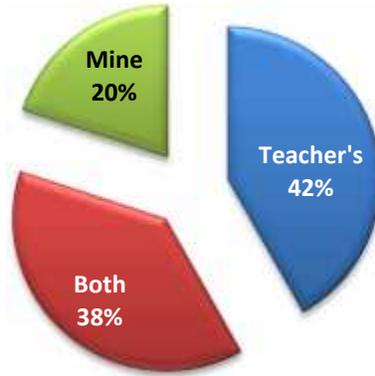


Chart 1: Division of responsibility

Table 5 lists the 13 aspects of learning English and shows how students distributed the responsibilities between teachers and themselves, ranked in descending order on teachers:

Whose responsibility should it be to:	Teacher's	Teacher's and Mine	Mine
Decide what you should learn next	103	13	5
Decide the objectives	81	37	3
Evaluate your learning	75	37	9
Choose what activities to use	71	47	3
Decide how long to spend on activities	64	52	5
Choose what materials to use	57	49	15
Evaluate your course	51	52	18
Stimulate your interest	46	51	24

Whose responsibility should it be to:	Teacher's	Teacher's and Mine	Mine
Make you work harder	45	57	19
Identify your weaknesses	33	68	20
Make progress during lessons	15	96	10
Decide what you learn outside	9	29	83
Make progress outside class	8	13	100

Table 5: Division of responsibility between students and teachers

These findings show that they generally hold the teacher responsible for most of the language learning aspects, with setting the objectives of their learning and deciding for them on what to learn next topping the list. For language learning aspects outside, however, they claim the responsibility, apparently thanks to the phrase “outside” which occurs within the question. This implies that they believe that whatever is happening inside the classroom is primarily teachers’ and secondarily both teachers’ and theirs. Only if it falls outside the classroom then do they reluctantly claim the responsibility because the teacher is no longer physically available to lead them.

Chart 2 illustrates the joint responsibility ranking. The numbers show students out of 121:

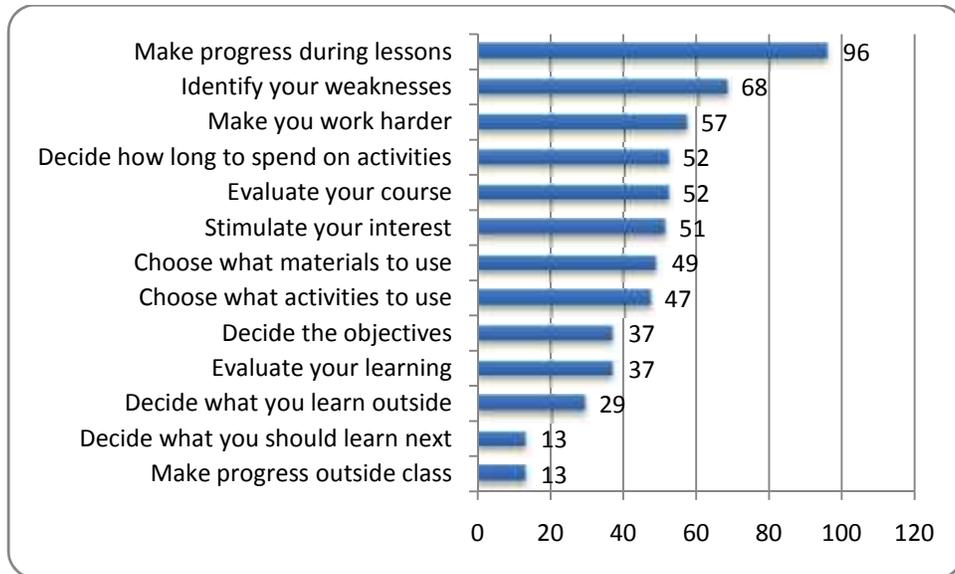


Chart 2: Responsibility ranked by “teacher’s and mine”

96 out of 121 believe making progress in the classroom is both their and teacher’s responsibility. More than half polled also seek teacher’s help to identify their weaknesses for them and nearly half expect teachers to push them to work harder. As discussed above, the claim for self responsibility is quite weak, representing only 20% of the overall responsibility pie as opposed to 80% which goes to teachers or both teachers and students together.

b. Abilities: In the abilities section, 11 of the 13 aspects of learning English from the responsibilities section were listed again, this time asking students how well they think they would do if they had autonomy with respect to those aspects. Table 6 shows the overall results, with numbers out of 121 students:

How well would you do if it was up to you to:	Very Good	Good	OK	Poor	Very Poor
Choose learning activities in class	34	43	37	4	3
Choose learning activities outside	17	28	34	35	7
Choose learning objective in class	29	39	46	6	1
Choose learning objective outside	21	28	41	23	8
Choose learning materials in class	19	54	35	12	1
Choose learning materials outside class	22	41	33	19	6
Evaluate your learning	27	39	51	4	0
Evaluate your course	30	35	38	13	5
Identify your weaknesses	35	39	31	14	2
Decide what you learn next	33	21	36	24	7
Decide how long to spend on activities	37	31	24	20	9

Table 6: Abilities

As seen from the table data, the majority of the respondents have marked “Good” or “OK”, followed by “Very good” and “Poor”. Chart 3 illustrates the division of abilities in percentages:

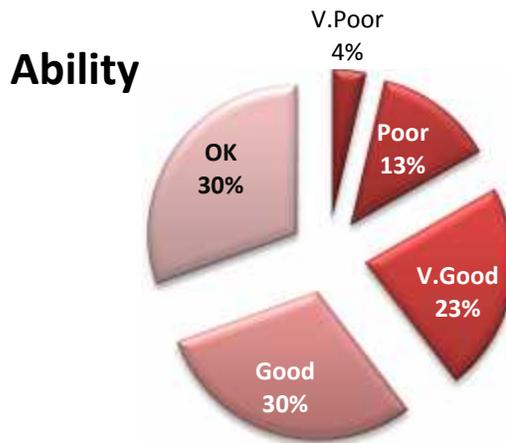


Chart 3: Abilities

As the pie-chart illustrates clearly, 60% of the respondents believe that they would do well or OK being in charge of learning English on their own. 23% of the respondents display high confidence asserting that they would be “Very good” at being in charge of those learning aspects on their own. 17% said they would be “Poor” or “Very poor” being left alone with learning English. Overall, 83% of the students show confidence or enough confidence that they would be willing to take charge of their own learning if they were given a chance as opposed to 17% who said they would not like the idea of being autonomous. The numbers in the abilities section are in obvious contrast with those of the responsibilities section: While 80% want the teachers to be involved in their learning in the responsibilities section; nearly the same percentage of students, 83% are now saying in the abilities section that they would do well being without the teachers. Likewise, while 20% of the students claim responsibility for themselves in the responsibilities section, nearly the same amount, 17% are now saying they would be “Poor” without teacher supervision in the abilities section. There obviously is a discrepancy between the two sections in

this regard. One would expect the trend to be similar in that; if students assert that they would do well being autonomous, then it follows that they should claim full responsibility for their own learning instead of putting them on teachers' shoulders. Or, if they put the responsibility on teachers for their learning, which in this case they do, then they would be expected to express low confidence in terms of their abilities to take charge of their learning as well. On one hand they claim the abilities, on the other hand disown the responsibilities that come with the package. In a nutshell, they are saying, "Yes, I could do it but why don't you do it for me?" This is a major problem afflicting the Saudi students in general: they simply expect somebody else to do things for them rather than taking things into their own hands.

c. Activities: In the activities section a total of 27 English learning activities to be done voluntarily were listed. The list was divided into two sections as the activities done in the classroom and those outside. To measure the frequency of an activity, the students were asked how often they have done a certain English learning activity by themselves since the commencement of the semester in 2012. They were then offered 4 choices to pick from on a Likert scale as "Often", "Sometimes", "Rarely", and "Never". Activities were divided between the "Often" and "Never" spectrum as shown in Chart 4:

Activity Frequency

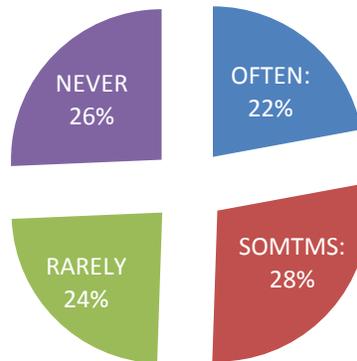


Chart 4: Frequency of Voluntary Activities

As seen in the pie-chart, the frequency of activities are almost evenly divided, with the “Sometimes” slice slightly more than the average with 28%. “Never” follows behind with 26%, followed by “Rarely” with 24%. “Often” frequency received the least votes by 22%. If we were to create an alliance between “Often” and “Sometimes” as opposed to the “Never” and “Rarely” block, then the result would be slightly in the advantage of the “good” side by 2%, as seen in Chart 5:

Often V Never

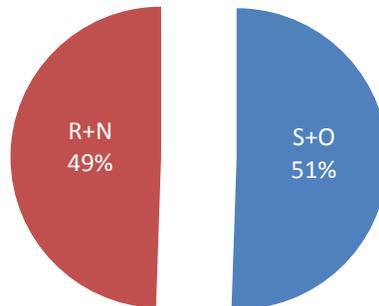


Chart 5: Often versus Never

As the pie-chart above indicates, the autonomous activities are almost evenly divided in terms of their frequency between Often+Sometimes and Rarely+Never, with the former surpassing by 2%. Based on one's view, one would have reason to be both optimistic and pessimistic. One might call it as the glass being half full or half empty. I would be inclined towards the optimistic camp considering the fact that, despite all these years of spoon feeding by their previous educators, and having never been trained on how to work independently or think creatively, these students are still carrying a glimmer of hope which, if kindled and nurtured, promises the light at the end of the tunnel.

Table 7 lists in detail the 27 activities investigated and the responses of the students showing how often they have done those activities since the beginning of the year:

Self Activities	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Read grammar books on your own	11	52	38	20
Done voluntary assignments	5	35	56	25
Noted down new words and their meanings	35	42	26	18
Written English letters to pen-pals	20	40	30	31
Read English signboards	44	40	23	14
Read newspapers in English	9	14	34	64
Sent e-mails in English	13	33	32	43
Read books and magazines in English	7	26	37	51
Watched TV programs in English	38	43	21	19
Listened to radio in English	14	27	41	39
Listened to English songs	48	36	15	22
Talked to foreigners in English	26	52	30	13
Practiced speaking English with pals	25	41	36	19
Done English self-studying in a group	32	36	32	21
Done grammar exercises	30	50	28	13
Watched English movies	68	33	8	12
Written a diary in English	13	11	42	55
Used the Internet in English	35	43	21	22
Done revision not required by teacher	19	20	39	43
Attended self-study center	9	18	24	70
Collected texts articles, brochures, etc. in English	4	14	23	80
Gone to see the teacher about work	10	22	25	64
Asked teacher questions	56	48	10	7
Noted down new information	51	46	16	8
Made suggestion to teacher	20	26	38	37
Taken opportunities to speak in English	42	47	22	10
Discussed learning problems with classmates	37	36	30	18

Table 7: The frequency of activities

The numbers are out of 121 students. For ease of view, the numbers showing high frequency for the “Often” column and those showing low frequency of activities in the “Rarely” and “Never” column were highlighted to see which activities are done the most and which ones are the least or never at all. The average-frequency activities were also highlighted for the “Sometimes” column based on their frequency. When one takes a quick glance in the “Often” column, one would notice which activities are the most favorite amongst the respondents: Watching English movies tops the list as the most frequently done activity outside the class. On a personal observation, I must caution the readers that credit for the high frequency of this activity goes more to the element of self-entertainment rather than to passion for learning English. I must also advice that almost all movies in English are shown with Arabic subtitles here. One implication that can be drawn out of this is perhaps learning activities should be blended with fun activities to make them more attractive to students. The next two most frequently done activities are highlighted as asking the teacher questions and taking down new information, which is encouraging. However, if we remember that 56 out of 121 students have asked their teachers questions and 51 out of 121 have taken down new information; we should realize that these numbers are still less than half the total number of the respondents, and therefore, less than impressive. Other “Often” activities in the 40s include listening to English songs and watching English programs and taking opportunities to speak English. Again, we are seeing that activities which carry an element of fun in them tend to be attractive for students. Activities deprived of fun, and the ones which require actual hard work are dumped in the “Rarely” and “Never” column. It is not very encouraging to notice that 80 out of 121 have never collected or used texts from magazines, brochures, or articles for self-work; 70 have never attended a self-study center

or visited the language lab. More than half have never read English newspapers or gone to see their teachers for consultation.

d. Motivations: As mentioned at the introduction of the chapter, the questions posed to the students are strongly linked to the motivation factor. Williams and Burden (in Harmer, 2007:98) suggest that “motivation is a ‘state of cognitive arousal’ which provokes a ‘decision to act’, as a result of which there is ‘sustained intellectual and/or physical effort’ so that the person can achieve some ‘previously set goal’.” Undoubtedly, becoming autonomous learners necessitates strong intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and self-enthusiasm. In this section the relationship between motivation level of the respondents and responsibilities, abilities and activities are analyzed.

Section 3 of the questionnaire was dedicated to motivation, inquiring the participating students on the degree of their motivation level. They were directed to describe themselves on a five-choice Likert scale from “Highly motivated” to “Not motivated at all”. The responses obtained from the 121 questionnaires show the results in Chart 6:

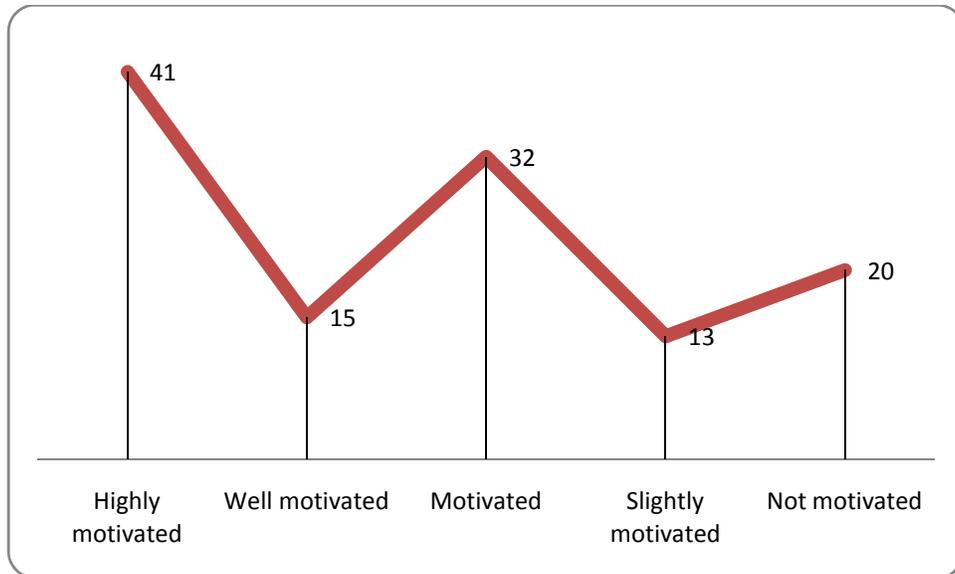


Chart 6: Motivation Levels

These results are puzzling because although 88 students out of 121 (73%) have declared themselves as motivated and above as opposed to 33 students (27%) who said they are less than motivated or not motivated at all, these results did not translate into action in the form of self-directed work as analyzed in the activities section; nor did they help claim most of the responsibilities for language learning as explained in the responsibilities section. The motivation results, however, are quite similar with those of the abilities section where 83% said they would be able to work well independently as opposed to the 17% who said they would not be able. The message that we get out of these numbers is saying this: “Yes, we are motivated and able to do the job; however, somehow we won’t.” There certainly is a discrepancy in this picture which needs to be studied by further research.

It is still possible, however, to detect some positive correlation between the frequency of self-directed activities and the level of motivation when we crunch the numbers, as seen in Table

8. The numbers were obtained by adding up the total number of times “Often”, “Sometimes”, “Rarely”, and “Never” were marked by students in response to the autonomous activities listed in the questionnaire.

How Motivated?	Number of times frequencies marked			
	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Highly M.	409	330	178	133
Well M.	69	133	91	61
Normally M.	155	249	197	229
Slightly M.	44	95	116	71
Not M.	44	72	101	281

Table 8: Motivation-Activity relationship

As the numbers in the table suggest, the number of “Often” done activities are higher in the “Highly motivated” and “Well motivated” rows than “Rarely” and “Never” done ones. The trend is backwards in the “Slightly motivated” and “Not motivated” rows, where the “Rarely” and “Never” frequency is higher than “Often” and “Sometimes”. Chart 7 shows this correlation more graphically:

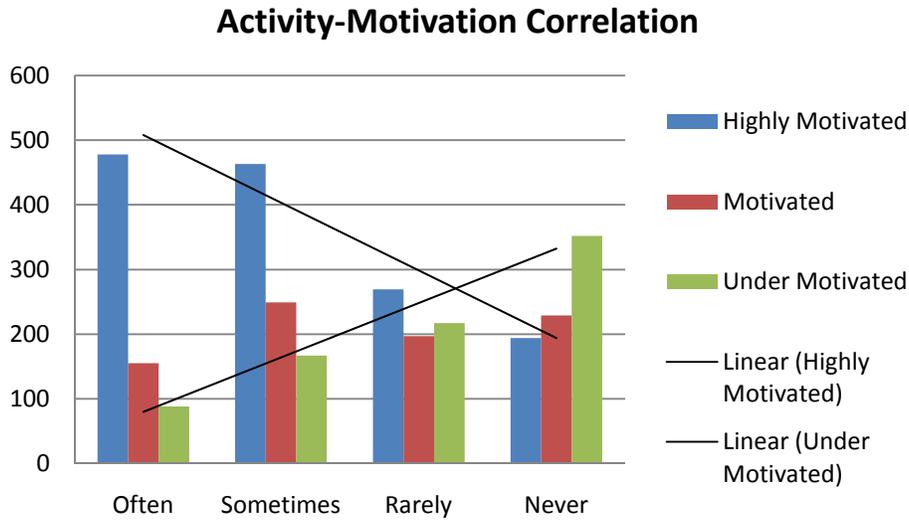


Chart 7: Motivation-Activity relationship

The positive correlation between motivation level and the frequency of self-directed activities are shown by the trend lines, which increase from “Never” to “Often” as the motivation level rises; and decrease from “Never” to “Often” as the motivation level drops. In other words, the higher the motivation levels, the more often the self-directed activities; and the lower the motivation, the less the activities. This does indicate that motivated learners are more independent-prone than those who are not.

A similar correlation exists between the motivation levels and the abilities. Chart 8 shows the relationship between motivation and ability in percentages:

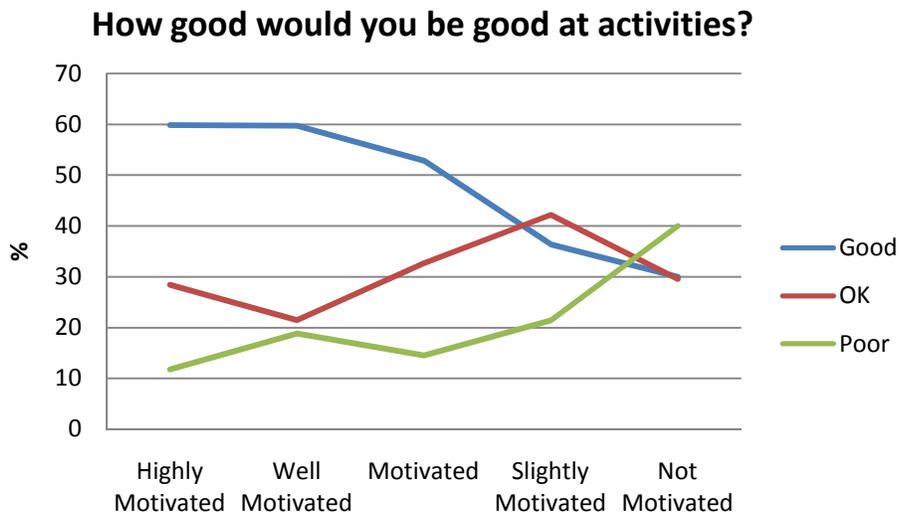


Chart 8: Motivation-Ability relationship

The chart shows the percentage of students who expressed their confidence level in response to the question “If you had the opportunity, how good do you think you would be good at performing activities on your own?” The percentages were calculated by adding up the total number of times students have marked the choices “Very Good”, “Good”, “OK”, “Poor”, and “Very Poor” in the abilities section. As the trend lines indicate, the confidence level drops down from the “Highly Motivated” end of the abilities continuum toward the “Not Motivated” end. The “Poor” trend starts low at the “Highly Motivated” end and gradually rises towards the “Not Motivated” end, indicating that the lower the motivation, the poorer the ability to perform self-directed learning activities.

When it comes to the relationship between motivation levels and responsibilities, however, we do not observe the same correlation as in the motivation-abilities relationship or motivation-activities relationship:

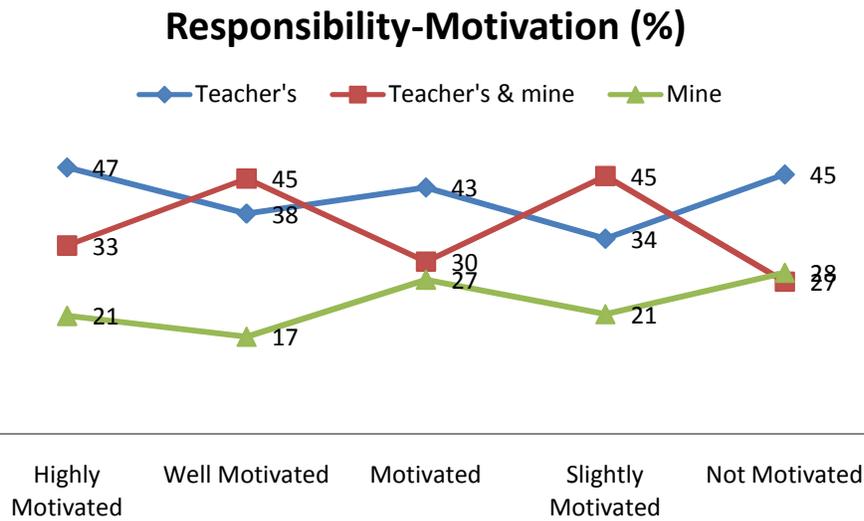


Chart 9: Motivation-Responsibility relationship

As chart 9 illustrates, whether the students are highly motivated or poorly motivated, they put the responsibility on teachers or seek teachers' assistance for work. According to Harmer, "attitudes to self-directed learning are frequently conditioned by the educational culture in which students have studied or are studying" (2007:394). Harmer's view has come into play in the case of our learners here. They all are shaped up and fossilized by a tradition of teacher-controlled schooling where rote learning is the common practice instead of critical thinking; thus rendering the motivation factor useless when it comes to taking responsibility for own learning. There still is hope, however, when we look at the "Mine" trend line which indicates that average 20% of the respondents have claimed responsibility for their own learning in spite of all restrictions.

e. Open-ended question section: At the end of the 4 quantitative sections with questions to be answered by choices on Likert scale, an open ended question was asked to the students:

“Do you have any suggestions to help design more effective English learning programs at the University?” The respondents were encouraged to write down their thoughts in English or in Arabic. 43 students wrote down their suggestions, wishes, complaints, and comments all in Arabic save for 3 students who wrote them in English, albeit in a single, simple sentence. The qualitative data collected from these responses were carefully examined and categorized as shown in Table 9:

Suggestions	Times suggestions mentioned
Reduce long class times	9
Provide extra-curricular activities for more language practice	8
We need more practice in listening and speaking	5
We need more efficient teachers	5
Use authentic materials which relate to real life experiences	5
Eliminate student anxiety of tests	4
We need more practice with vocabulary	3
We would like to be able to go abroad to learn English	3
Highlight the main points and goals of lessons	3
They should relax mandatory attendance policy	3
Make classroom interesting with fun activities	3
Do not allow any Arabic in class	3
We should have our own books customized for our needs	3
We should use more technology in class	2
Maintain class discipline	2
Improve classrooms	2
We should get rid of English altogether	2
I have nothing to say	2

Table 9: Students' suggestions

By Holec's landmark definition of learner autonomy, "To take charge of one's learning is to have the responsibility for *all the decisions* concerning *all aspects of this learning*" (1981:3); students must take part in the decision making process on what to learn and how to learn what they want to learn. Cotterall (in Harmer, 2007:395) says:

The course should reflect the learners' goals in its language, tasks and strategies. This means raising the students' awareness of way of identifying goals, specifying objectives and identifying resources which will help them to realize these goals.

As seen in the table above, students express some compelling demands and suggestions with regard to the course which is imposed on them without their voice in it. 43 students (36%) articulated their willingness in making decisions about their learning, even though 2 of them believe English should be lifted altogether! We must live with the fact that it is also part of the autonomy not to want to learn something. The majority, however, demand reduced class times to prevent boredom, relax the mandatory attendance policy, using more authentic texts and realia to make classes interesting, taking away the anxiety of tests, improved classrooms equipped with technology, more efficient teachers and more practice with speaking and listening in English. In this regard, the qualitative data collected have proven to be very enlightening in terms of seeing students' willingness and readiness for a more autonomous learning environment.

2. The Interviews

No one other than teachers would know their students better. This research would not have been complete without teachers' input on their clients' capacities for becoming autonomous

learners. To look at the question of student autonomy from the teachers' perspective, ten teachers were interviewed in a semi-structured fashion. They were asked nine questions (*see appendix*) to express their views of learner autonomy in general and how their students relate to autonomous learning of English in particular. What did they think were the challenges getting in the way of learner autonomy at the university? Most important of all, did they think that their students had the capacity and the potential to become autonomous learners at all? The interviews were recorded on a mobile phone device, with the consent of the interviewees, and re-played later for taking down their gist. Table 10 displays the summary of the questions and teachers' answers:

1. Teacher's perception of learner autonomy	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make own decisions - Know what to learn and how to learn - Work independently - Take charge own learning - Choose own resources and strategies - Making own assessments - Think critically 	
2. Key characteristics of autonomous learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - highly motivated - independent learners - critical thinkers - responsible - self confident - pro-active - open-minded 	
3. Do you believe autonomous learners would be more successful?		
Yes, because ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - they will be more motivated to learn if they are in charge of their learning 	No, because ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Saudi culture is incompatible with autonomous learning 	It depend on/if ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the level of the learners. The weak ones can't handle autonomy. - they need to be trained for autonomy -exposure to different learning styles and experiences
4. Do you think students at the ELI are autonomous learners?		
Yes, but ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - only a small fraction of them are - they need training for that 	No, because ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - they come from an educational tradition based on rote learning method and teacher dominated classes, and spoon feeding 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the university imposes its own curriculum on students - they are not motivated. - they are all weak, false beginners who need help
5. Do you believe the students have the potential to be autonomous?	
Yes, if ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the conditions are provided - they are trained - they are motivated 	No, because ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the system won't allow it - teachers don't have autonomy themselves to begin with - they come from a long spoon feeding tradition - they are not motivated
6. What are the challenges facing student autonomy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Social, cultural and traditional restrictions - wrong attitude towards English -lack of trained teachers/educators -traditional education system based on rote learning - the system denies autonomy to teachers and students - the social environment does not support autonomy - lack of motivation and purpose (studying to pass tests only) -lack of exposure to EFL
7. Do you give your students opportunities to develop autonomy?	
Yes, I do it by ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - encouraging them to relate what they learn in class to the real world - referring them to on-line resources - teaching them how to use extra materials, dictionaries, language learning software programs, etc. - directing them to extra reading sources, books, and stories interesting to them -encourage them to involve in group activities - initiating oral productions and brainstorming together 	No, because ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I stick to the curriculum and the pacing schedule - the system does not allow teachers and students any flexibility or autonomy - It's risky. You may be reprimanded for straying away from the syllabus.
8. The role teachers play in promoting learner autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teachers as facilitators -teachers as good role models - teachers as motivators - teachers as consultants and advisors

Table 10: Teachers' views on student autonomy

Teachers were divided in their beliefs in the abilities of their students to become autonomous.

Chart 10 shows the percentage of teachers who are pessimistic, optimistic, and have reservations on the issue:

Can they be autonomous?

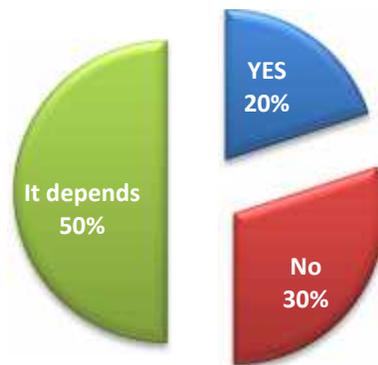


Chart 10: Teachers' view of students' readiness for autonomy

The “No, they can’t” camp’s main contention is that students’ continued exposure to teacher-controlled classrooms and an educational system based on rote learning since early childhood have seriously hindered their capacities to become critical thinkers and autonomous learners. The current educational system, one of the teachers argued, does not tolerate any room for creativity. He said, “If I as a teacher am not autonomous myself, how can I teach my students to become autonomous?” In response to the question if he gave his students any opportunities to develop autonomous skills, another teacher remarked, “Well, to be honest, it’s a risk. You may get reprimanded by your coordinator for straying away from the syllabus, you know? So I stick to the guidelines.” Another teacher cited poor motivation as one of the hurdles getting in the way of student autonomy. “These students are provided with everything already: they have maids who clean their rooms and cook for them; drivers who drive them. They are used to having someone else doing everything for them. So they simply expect the teachers to teach them.”

Two teachers were optimistic. They believe that the students can be up to the challenge if they are provided with the opportunity to take charge of things for themselves. One teacher remarked, “Every learner is a good learner. It’s just a matter of discovering that learner in them.”

Five teachers, who make up the majority in this case, responded with a conditional “Yes, but...” or “It depends ...” phrase. According to these teachers, students can achieve autonomous learning habits if they are trained for it, and that would take time. They also said intrinsic and extrinsic motivation need to be boosted in order for learner autonomy can be achieved. One of the interviewees remarked, “Yes, given the right environment and motivations. For example, Science students seem to have more potential, but this is because they see the importance in learning English in the near future. Art students have the same potential; however, don’t see any reason to learn English as their career of choice doesn’t require it.”

All in all, if we combine the “Yes” group with the “It depends” group, we would have 7 (70%) of the teachers as optimistic, albeit cautiously, against 3 teachers (30%) who are pessimistic about their students readiness for autonomy.

CHAPTER V

Discussion of Findings

1. Restatement of the research question

This study has been made to answer the question: whether, or not, the students on an English Preparatory Program at a Saudi university are ready to take charge of their own learning for autonomous study of English as a foreign language.

The study examines the students' readiness for autonomous learning of English from four perspectives:

- a. from the perspective of responsibilities,
- b. from the perspective of abilities,
- c. from the perspective of motivation, and
- d. from the perspective of self-directed activities.

It also looks at the challenges and obstacles that lie in the way of students' autonomy.

2. Summary of findings

One hundred and twenty-one students attending the English foundation program at the university during December 2012 were surveyed on their perceptions of their responsibilities,

abilities, motivations, and performance of self-directed activities in learning English as a foreign language. The findings are as follows:

a. Responsibilities: In response to the question “In your class, whose responsibility should it be to ...?” followed by 13 cognitive and meta-cognitive aspects of learning English, 42% said “Teacher’s altogether”, 38% said “Teacher’s and mine”, and 20% said “Mine altogether”. To round these percentages up, the students want the teacher to take full or partial responsibility for 80% of those aspects while claiming responsibility for 20% of them. These results indicate that students primarily hold the teacher responsible and want the teacher to share responsibilities with them inside the class while claiming for themselves what is outside. This attitude may be owing to the traditional education system based on teacher domination and spoon feeding starting from early education. In his study on Saudi students, Al-Saadi observes “The previous schooling has regrettably failed to create curious and autonomous learners who are willing and see the need to take control of their own learning, or at least some aspects of their learning such as self-assessment and reflection” (2011:100). As a result, the answer to the research question is negative from the perspective of taking own responsibility for own learning.

b. Abilities: In response to the question “If you had the opportunity, how good do you think you would be good at ...?” followed by 11 cognitive and meta-cognitive aspects of learning English, 30% said “OK”, 30% said “Good”, 23% said “Very Good”, 13% said “Poor”, and 4% said “Very Poor”. Combining “Very Good”, “Good”, and “OK”, which make up 83%, these results show adequate, even strong confidence in abilities to take charge of own learning; however, contrast with the disclaiming of responsibilities at the same time. One possible

explanation for this could be the mismatch between the hypothetical situation and the actual one: students may find it easy to articulate confidence in their abilities from the comfort of their seats without actually being challenged. When they are called to act upon those abilities, however, they show reluctance to deliver the required performance. There is discrepancy between the stated level of abilities and lack of willingness to claim own responsibility and taking initiatives based on those abilities. As far as the students' responses are concerned, however, the answer to the research question is positive from the abilities perspective.

c. Motivations: In response to the question, “How would you describe yourself ...?”, followed by 5 motivation levels to choose from, 34% said “Highly Motivated”, 12% said “Well Motivated”, 26% said “Motivated” 12% said “Slightly Motivated”, and 16% said “Not Motivated”. Thus, 72% are motivated or well-motivated; 28% are less motivated or not motivated. This indicates that adequate motivation exists for readiness for autonomous learning; however, discrepancy arises here once again: declared level of motivation does not accordingly correspond to taking responsibilities or doing voluntary activities in learning English. In this respect, inconsistency exists between high motivation level and the low frequency of self-directed learning activities. The burning question here is, if students are saying that they are equipped with the necessary level of motivation for learning English, then why are they not living up to their responsibilities and performing voluntary activities? This may be attributed, among other factors, to spoon feeding which has become a habit with them ever since early education and turned them into passive learners.

d. Activities: In response to the question, “Since the beginning of the academic year, how often have you ...?” followed by 27 voluntary in-class and out-of-class English learning activities, 22% said “Often”, 28% said “Sometimes”, 24% said “Rarely”, and 26% said “Never”. The frequency of activities has been approximately evenly distributed among the 4 adverbs, slightly in favor of the Often + Sometimes side by 2%. This could be interpreted as either optimistic or pessimistic in terms of learners’ preparedness for autonomy depending on how one looks at it. One could say, for example, that the picture looks encouraging against the backdrop of a student culture based on rote learning, hence, they can be ready to take charge of their own learning with training. On the other hand, one might argue that they are not even in the habit of going to the library or a self-study center; and activities pertaining to voluntary reading and writing are rarely or never done, hence these students are not ready for autonomous learning yet. The low drive for extra class activities can be attributed to students’ over-reliance on teachers, as they have been accustomed to being controlled and instructed by teachers since early education. From the activities perspective, the answer to the research question is between negative and positive, therefore, inconclusive.

e. Responses to the open-ended question: 36% of the students responded to the open-ended question, “Do you have any suggestions to help design more effective English learning programs at the university?” They wrote down, mainly in Arabic, their demands from and comments on the foundation English program. The biggest criticism is directed at long class times and mandatory attendance policy. They would like to have more practice with listening and speaking using authentic materials on topics of interest to them rather than sticking to textbooks with dull, uninteresting subjects. They also ask for more efficient teachers and more

sophisticated use of technology in the classrooms. Autonomous learning requires determining the objectives, defining the contents, selecting the methods and techniques to be used, and evaluating what has been learned. These suggestions, then, are significant in terms of showing students' willingness to get involved in the selection and teaching method of the course materials and the execution of the policies governing their affairs; therefore, are encouraging in terms of their preparedness for autonomous learning.

f. Teacher interviews: 10 teachers were interviewed on their perception of learner autonomy in general and how they think their students relate to learner autonomy in particular. 2 teachers believe that students have the potential to be autonomous; 3 teachers believe they cannot handle autonomous learning as things stand; and 5 teachers believe they can be autonomous depending on some conditions met: They believe that students need to be trained on how to think autonomously and then gradually be burdened with autonomous tasks. They also believe that poor motivation can interfere with the process; therefore, students need to be motivated before they can be given autonomy. This is interesting because students consider themselves adequately motivated, with which the teachers disagree. Motivation is a prerequisite for a successful autonomous learning environment. As Alderman states, "students who have optimum motivation have an edge because they have adaptive attitudes and strategies, such as maintaining intrinsic interest, goal setting, and self-monitoring" (2004:7).

The pessimists cite rote learning tradition and administrative restrictions as the biggest problem interfering with autonomy. They contend that in order for students to be autonomous, teachers should be autonomous as well. They also add that most students coming to the English

program are poor in English skills; therefore need a lot of teacher help. Overall, from the teachers' perspective, the answer to the research question is a cautious yes.

3. Implications of practice

Under the light of these findings, this study suggests two major implications for practice to achieve autonomous learning of English by students: a) learner training, and b) designing the curriculum so as to make it learner autonomy-friendly.

a. Learner training: The journey departing from an institutionalized rote learning tradition to student autonomy will not be without bumps and hurdles. A transitional period is needed during which teachers relinquish their control over to students by training them to become autonomous learners without intimidating them. Little (in Al-Saadi, 2011:96) points out that learner autonomy is the product of an interactive process in which the teacher gradually enlarges the scope of his or her learners' autonomy by gradually allowing them more control of the process and content of their learning. Thus, teachers have a key role to play. Making students aware of their meta-cognitive learning styles and abilities is a crucial part of learner training. Lesson plans and presentations must incorporate strategies geared toward the development of meta-cognitive awareness. According to Sinclair (in Al-Saadi, 2011: 104), learners become aware of the way they learn in three stages:

Largely unaware → Becoming aware → Largely aware

Similarly, Grow (1991) proposes a four-stage approach to attain ultimate autonomy:

Dependent → Interested → Involved → Self-directed

According to what Grow calls the SSDD (Staged Self-Directed Learning) model, students are trained to become self-directed learners advancing through stages, and “teachers can help or hinder that development” (Grow, 1991:125). This emphasizes the vital link between teacher training and learning training. To help students become aware of their meta-cognitive skills, they must be trained to ask themselves critical questions analyzing self-strategies they use for tasks. Dickinson (1993:334) developed a checklist to be utilized to instill meta-cognitive skills into students for autonomous studying, under the acronym GOAL. Students should acquire the habit of checking themselves with four questions about their learning activities using GOAL:

G (Goal) → What is the goal of this task?

O (Objective) → What is the specific objective of this task?

A (Action) → How am I going to reach my goal?

L (Look at the progress) → How have I done?

Similarly, Chamot *et al* suggest that students follow a sequential order in accomplishing tasks: “What do I do before I start? (*Organize/Plan*) What do I do while I am working on the task? (*Manage*) How do I make sure I am doing the task correctly? (*Monitor*) What do I do after I have finished the task? (*Evaluate*)” (2012:7). They illustrate the thoughts going through the mind of an autonomous learner, modeled by the teacher to his/her students:

“I am studying French. I am very frustrated because I cannot understand the radio broadcasts of the news. What can I do to improve my listening? What would help me

understand these broadcasts better? I'll use the learning strategy "Using Resources." I know that the radio station has a website. I can go to the website and listen to the news program more than once. I can also find a transcript of the news program on the website. Using these resources will help me to improve my understanding of news programs" (ibid: 14).

Strategies as exemplified above should be taught to the students so that they first become aware of their learning strategies and eventually reach the stage of learner autonomy by using these strategies.

b. Designing a learner autonomy-friendly curriculum:

Learner training cannot be done without policies and guidelines which promote learner autonomy incorporated into the curriculum. The Curriculum Development Unit in conjunction with the Professional Development Unit should adopt student-centered teaching methods or approaches, such as Task-Based Language Teaching, Community Language Learning, and Experiential Language Learning to promote self-directed learning in the classrooms. Hands-on teacher-training workshops should be held regularly presenting such teaching methods promoting learner autonomy. Teachers should be encouraged to conduct action research in their classrooms, and students should be urged to organize and run extra-curricular activities of their own.

4. Limitations of the study

Student autonomy is relatively a new concept in TESOL and is still being investigated and debated by researchers. As the literature review section suggests, it is not as easy as it appears to define exactly what learner autonomy stands for, given its complex relationship with many external factors such as socio-cultural values, traditions, historical and social dimensions and internal factors such as motivational and psychological aspects.

This research has been limited in its capacity for a number of reasons. Given the significance of student autonomy, a wider-scoped research is needed to reach conclusive results. Such a research should not only be limited to the present circumstances of the university level students in isolation. Rather, it should be widened to include other influential factors such as stages of schools students go through starting from early education, the socio-cultural environment in which they are born and raised, the administrative policies enforced at the educational institutions, the attitudes of teachers and parents towards students.

Other limitations include the narrow scope of data collected. A total of 121 questionnaires were administered to foundation year students attending English preparatory classes at the English Language Institute. The findings and results reflect the responses of participating students' proficiency levels, motivations, feelings, and backgrounds; therefore, cannot be generalized to other contexts. Additionally, student interviews could have been conducted to support the quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires. The participants are all male students who are segregated from the female students who study at a separate campus. It

would have been interesting to include the female learners and compare their aptitudes for autonomous learning with those of their male counterparts. Last but not least, the opinion of the university administration could have been incorporated with this study, as one of the major stakeholders at the university.

CHAPTER VI

Summary and Conclusion

The paradigm is shifting from the mainstream methods of teachers lecturing students to the novel idea of helping students teach themselves in today's world of language learning. Learner autonomy is becoming the new *modus operandi* thanks to the Internet which brings vast resources to people's fingertips where they want it, when they want it. With modern teaching methods and approaches of the 80s and 90s increasingly putting the focus on learners since the early days of Grammar Translation method, dependence on the traditional teacher in the classroom has been dramatically reduced. Cook says:

Autonomous learning takes the learner-centeredness of the humanistic styles a stage further in refusing to prescribe a patent method that all learners have to follow. It is up to the student to decide on goals, methods and assessment. That is what freedom is all about. (2008:269).

The current education system in Saudi Arabia lags far behind all these autonomous developments in teaching English as a foreign language. Saudi students are still being taught in teacher-controlled classrooms where rote learning is the tradition. As a result, they turn into fossilized spoon feeders that depend on teachers for all their learning needs. The current situation as it stands does not conform to the realities of today's world, and is therefore unsustainable. The UK Higher Education Funding Council states in its 2007 report:

Today's graduates need to be able to apply knowledge when working with people, they need to be able to work independently, become efficient problem solvers, engage in self-evaluation, and be able to develop higher order skills to become 'lifelong learners' in an increasingly globalised, technological world. (in Al-Saadi, 2011:101).

Consequently, there is a pressing need to shift from teacher-lecturing and spoon-feeding to students owning their responsibilities to become independent learners. This study has been made to see whether, or not, the students on an English Preparatory Program at a Saudi university are ready to take charge of their learning for autonomous study of English as a foreign language. It measured students' readiness in terms of responsibilities, abilities, motivation, and activities. The students who participated in the study have indicated adequate levels of motivation and ability to take charge of their own learning; however, they fell short when it came to claiming own responsibilities for cognitive and meta-cognitive learning aspects and doing voluntary activities in learning English inside and outside the classroom. As a consequence, the students are expressing willingness for autonomy in words; however, not backing it up with action. The researcher believes that this may be owing to traditional rote learning environment they have been brought up.

The teachers who were interviewed have shown a cautious optimism for students' readiness and aptitude for autonomous learning of English. They cited rote learning tradition, poor motivation (unlike students), and administrative restrictions as the biggest hurdles in the way of student autonomy. They suggested that for learner autonomy to be possible, the university must create an autonomous environment for teachers and learners first. Then students can gradually take charge of their learning with training.

The study, based on the results, has proposed two practical implications: learner training, and curriculum development. The former proposes training both for teachers and students to first create awareness of autonomous learning and gradually handing the responsibility over to students. The latter proposes developing a curriculum which allows and supports an autonomous learning environment for students and teachers.

Recommendations for further research

The study has detected the following areas for further research:

- a. The results of the students' surveys have shown a gap between students' adequate level of motivation/abilities and their reluctance to take responsibility/do voluntary activities to take charge of their own learning. The discrepancy needs to be analyzed by further research.
- b. Similarly, a gap exists between teachers' notion of low student motivation and students' belief in their adequate motivation level. Motivation being the indispensable prerequisite for autonomous learning, the gap needs to be analyzed by further research.
- c. These findings are based on the responses of 121 lower-intermediate foundation level male students and 10 teachers. Further research which targets a wider scope of respondents of various proficiency levels and gender, a higher number of teachers and

professionals, including the university administration is needed for more conclusive results.

APPENDIX

1. The Questionnaire

Dear student:

This research is to find out about your views of the roles of students and teachers in learning English. Could you please give your honest opinion on the following questions? The results will help us understand and serve your needs better. JazakAllahu Kayran for your contribution.

عزيزي الطالب:

إن الهدف من هذا الاستبيان هو معرفة آراءك عن دور كل من المعلم والطالب في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. أرجو منك الإجابة على الفقرات التالية بدقة لأن ذلك سيساعدنا على فهم احتياجاتك ومساعدتك بشكل أفضل. وجزاك الله خيرا

Background Information:

Level: _____ (المستوى) Section: _____ (القسم)

SECTION 1 – RESPONSIBILITIES Please indicate your choice with (✓)

الجزء الأول: المسؤوليات (الرجاء وضع إشارة صح في الخانة التي تختارها)

In your English class, whose RESPONSIBILITY should it be to: من هو المسؤول برأيك (أثناء حصة اللغة الإنجليزية) عن:		Teacher's altogether	Teacher's and mine	Mine altogether
		مسؤولية المعلم	مشتركة بيني وبين المعلم	مسؤوليتي
1	make sure you make progress during lessons? التأكد من تقدمك خلال الدروس.			
2	make sure you make progress outside class? التأكد من تقدمك خارج الفصل.			
3	stimulate your interest in learning English? تحفيز رغبتك لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.			
4	identify your weaknesses in English? التعرف على مواطن الضعف في تعلمك للغة الإنجليزية			
5	make you work harder? دفعك للعمل بجدية أكثر			
6	decide the objectives of your English course? تحديد أهداف المقرر الإنجليزي الذي تدرسه			
7	decide what you should learn next in your English lessons? تحديد الدروس التي ستدرسها في الحصة القادمة			
8	choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons? اختيار الأنشطة التي تساعدك على تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية أثناء الحصة			
9	decide how long to spend on each activity? تحديد الزمن المناسب لكل نشاط			
10	choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lessons? اختيار الأدوات التي تساعدك على تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية أثناء الحصة			
11	evaluate your learning? تقييم مستوى تعلمك للغة.			

12	evaluate your course?	تقييم المقرر الدراسي الذي تدرسه			
13	decide what you learn outside class?	تحديد ماتتعلمه خارج الحصة.			

SECTION 2 – ABILITIES

الجزء الثاني: القدرات

If you have the opportunity, how good do you think you would be at كيف تتوقع أن يكون أداؤك إذا أتاحت لك الفرصة في:		V. Poor ضعيف جدا	Poor ضعيف	OK متوسط	Good جيد	V. Good جيد جدا
14	Choosing learning activities in class? اختيار الأنشطة التعليمية داخل الفصل					
15	Choosing learning activities outside class? اختيار الأنشطة التعليمية خارج الفصل					
16	choosing learning objectives in class? اختيار أهداف التعلم داخل الفصل					
17	Choosing learning objectives outside class? اختيار أهداف التعلم خارج الفصل					
18	Choosing learning materials in class? اختيار أدوات التعلم في الفصل					
19	Choosing learning materials outside class? اختيار أدوات التعلم خارج الفصل					
20	Evaluating your learning? تقييم مستوى التعلم لديك					
21	Evaluating your course? تقييم مقررك الدراسي					
22	Identifying your weakness in English? التعرف على مواطن ضعفك في اللغة الإنجليزية					
23	Deciding what you should learn next in your English lessons? تحديد ما ينبغي تعلمه في الدروس الإنجليزية القادمة					
24	Deciding how long to spend on each activity? تحديد الزمن المناسب لكل نشاط					

SECTION 3 – MOTIVATION

الجزء الثالث: الدافعية

25. How would you describe yourself? (Please pick one choice)

25. كيف تصف نفسك (الرجاء اختيار واحد مما يلي):

- | | |
|--|---|
| a. Highly motivated to learn English | أ. متحمس جدا لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية |
| b. Well motivated to learn English | ب. متحمس بما فيه الكفاية لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية |
| c. Motivated to learn English | ج. متحمس لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية |
| d. Slightly motivated to learn English | د. نوعا ما متحمس لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية |
| e. Not at all motivated to learn English | هـ. لست متحمسا لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية |

SECTION 4 – ACTIVITIES

الجزء الرابع: الأنشطة

Outside class

خارج الفصل

Since the beginning of the academic year, how often have you: منذ بداية العام الدراسي, كم مرة قمت بما يلي:		Often غالباً	Sometimes أحياناً	Rarely نادراً	Never أبداً
26	read grammar books on your own? قراءة كتب قواعد بمفردك؟				
27	done assignments which are not compulsory? إجابة تمارين غير مطلوبة منك؟				
28	noted down new words and their meanings? تسجيل مفردات جديدة ومعانيها؟				
29	written English letters to pen-pals? كتابة رسائل باللغة الإنجليزية لأصدقائك بالمراسلة؟				
30	read English notices around you? قراءة اللوحات الإرشادية باللغة الإنجليزية حولك؟				
31	read newspapers in English? قراءة الصحف اليومية باللغة الإنجليزية؟				
32	sent e-mails in English? إرسال رسائل إلكترونية باللغة الإنجليزية؟				
33	read books or magazines in English? قراءة كتب أو مجلات باللغة الإنجليزية؟				
34	watched English TV programs? شاهدت برامج باللغة الإنجليزية على التلفاز؟				
35	listened to English radio? استمعت إلى برامج باللغة الإنجليزية على المذياع؟				
36	listened to English songs? استمعت إلى أغاني باللغة الإنجليزية؟				
37	talked to foreigners in English? تحدثت إلى أجانب باللغة الإنجليزية؟				
38	practiced using English with friends? تحدثت مع أصدقائك باللغة الإنجليزية؟				
39	done English self-studying in a group? درست اللغة الإنجليزية مع مجموعة؟				
40	done grammar exercises? حللت تمارين قواعد باللغة الإنجليزية؟				
41	watched English movies? شاهدت أفلام باللغة الإنجليزية؟				
42	written a diary in English? كتبت مذكرات باللغة الإنجليزية؟				
43	used the Internet in English? استخدمت الإنترنت باللغة الإنجليزية؟				
44	done revision not required by the teacher? راجعت دروساً لم يطلب منك المعلم مراجعتها؟				
45	attended a self-study center or a CALL lab? حضرت مركزاً للتعلم الذاتي؟				
46	collected texts in English (e.g. articles, brochures, etc)? جمعت مقالات أو نشرات باللغة الإنجليزية؟				
47	gone to see your teacher about your work? عرضت على معلمك الأعمال التي أنجزتها؟				

Since the beginning of the academic year, how often have you: منذ بداية العام الدراسي, كم مرة قمت بما يلي:		Often غالباً	Sometimes أحياناً	Rarely نادراً	Never أبداً
48	asked the teacher questions when you don't understand? سألت معلمك عن أشياء لم تفهمها؟				
49	noted down new information? دونت المعلومات الجديدة				
50	made suggestions to the teacher? اقترحت على معلمك بعض المقترحات؟				
51	taken opportunities to speak in English? انتهزت الفرصة للتحدث باللغة الإنجليزية؟				
52	discussed learning problems with classmates? ناقشت مع زملائك مشاكل التعلم؟				

Do you have any suggestions to help design more effective English learning programs at the University? (Please write down if you have any)

هل لديك أي مقترحات تساعد أن تكون برامج تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بالجامعة أكثر فعالية؟ (الرجاء كتابة مقترحاتك)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you ☺

2. Teacher interview questions

1. What is your perception of learner autonomy?
2. What are the key characteristics of an autonomous learner?
3. Do you believe that learner autonomy would allow the students to learn more effectively?
4. Do you think that students at the ELI are autonomous learners? Why/Why not?
5. Do you believe that students at the ELI have the potential to be autonomous learners?
6. What do you think are the challenges faced by our students to become autonomous?
7. In what ways learner autonomy can be achieved by our students?
8. Do you give your students opportunities to develop learner autonomy? How?
9. What role do you think the teacher plays in promoting learner autonomy?

REFERENCES

- Alderman, M. Kay. (2004) *Motivation for achievement: possibilities for teaching and learning*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Al-Saadi, H. M. (2011) *From Spoon Feeding to Self-Feeding: Helping Learners Take Control of Their Own Learning*. [Online], Available: <http://www.awej.org/?article=62>
- Benson, P. (2008) 'Teachers' and learners' perspectives on autonomy, in Lamb, T. and Reinders, H. (eds.) *Learner and Teacher Autonomy: Concepts, Realities, and Responses*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Benson, P., Chik, A. and Lim, H. (2003) 'Becoming Autonomous in an Asian Context: Autonomy as a Sociocultural Process' in Palfreyman, D. and Smith, R.C. (eds.) *Learner Autonomy across Cultures Language Education Perspectives*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.
- Billing, S. (2009) *Education system failing Saudi jobs initiative*. [Online], Available: <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/education-system-failing-saudi-jobs-initiative--81050.html>
- Borg, S. and Al-Busaidi, S. (2012) *Learner Autonomy: English Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices*, British Council: London. [Online], Available: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/b459%20ELTRP%20Report%20Busaidi_final.pdf
- Chamot, A. U. et al (2012) *Developing Autonomy in Language Learners: Learning Strategies Instruction in Higher Education*, Washington D.C.: National Capital Language Resource Center.
- Cook, V. (2008) *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*, London: Hodder Education.
- Dickinson, L. (1993) *Talking shop: Aspects of autonomous learning, An interview with Leslie Dickinson*. *ELT Journal*, 47 (1), 330-341. [Online], Available: <http://wenku.baidu.com/view/c08a52d333d4b14e85246806.html>
- Dore, R.P. and Sako, M. (1989) *How the Japanese Learn to Work*, London: Routledge.
- Grow, G. O. (1991) *Teaching learners to be self-directed*, *Adult Education Quarterly*, 41, 3, 125–149. [Online], Available: http://alec2.tamu.edu/grad_courses/611/Modules/Module2/Lesson2/Grow01.PDF
- Harmer, J. (2007) *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Holec, H. (1981) *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Lamb, T., and Reinders, H. (eds.) (2008) *Learner and Teacher Autonomy: Concepts, Realities, and Responses*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.

Little, D. [2012] *Learner autonomy and second/foreign language learning*. [Online], Available: <http://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/gpg/1409>

Lozanov, G. (1978) *Suggestology and Outlines of Suggestopedya*, New York: Gordon and Breach.

Macaro, E. (1997) *Target Language, Collaborative Learning and Autonomy*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Murray, G., Gao, X. and Lamb, T. (eds.) (2011) *Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Language Learning*, Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Oxford, R. (1991) *Language learning strategies: what every teacher should know*, New York: Newbury House.

Palfreyman, D. and Smith, R.C. (eds.) (2003) *Learner Autonomy across Cultures Language Education Perspectives*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.

Pierson, H.D. (1996) *Learner culture and learner autonomy in the Hong Kong Chinese context*, In R. Pemberton, E.S.L. Li, W.W.F. Or and H.D. Pierson (eds.), *Taking Control: Autonomy in Language Learning*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Sinclair, B. (2008) 'Multiple voices: Negotiating pathways towards teacher and learner autonomy,' in Lamb, T. and Reinders, H. (eds.) *Learner and Teacher Autonomy: Concepts, Realities, and Responses*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.

Scrivener, J. (1994) *Learning Teaching*, Oxford: Heinemann.

Spratt, M., Humphreys, G. and Chan, V. (2002) *Autonomy and motivation: which comes first?* Language Teaching Research 2002; 6; 245. [Online], Available: <http://ltr.sagepub.com/content/6/3/245.abstract>

Thanasoulas, D. (2000) *What is learner autonomy and how can it be fostered?* [Online], Available: <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Thanasoulas-Autonomy.html>

Vassall-Fall, D. (2011) *Arab Students' Perceptions of Strategies to Reduce Memorization*, [Online], Available: http://www.awej.org/awejfiles/60_8_article3.pdf

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in Society: the Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wenger, E. (2006) *Communities of practice: a brief introduction*. [Online], Available: <http://www.ewenger.com/theory/>

Word count: 15,680