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Preparatory Learners' Perspectives of Learner Autonomy in the Saudi Context

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Abstract
Learner autonomy is a developing concept that has been the focal point of number of research papers investigating language learning. It has been under investigation by number of scholars and researchers over the years, the concept of learner autonomy has been supported by number of researchers, others attempted to prove that it does not fit all learners of different backgrounds. In this research paper, the focus is mainly on learners' perspectives of learner autonomy, what do they know? To what extent the students understand the concept of learner autonomy? Developing autonomous learners is an area that needs to be explained. There are limited studies conducted in the Saudi context therefore, this study investigates Preparatory year female EFL students' perspectives of learner autonomy in the Saudi context. Moreover, it examines whether the learners have the knowledge and the competence to develop their learning. The perspectives and views of 150 learners were collected using a questionnaire. The study follows a mixed methods approach. The reviewed literature showed that implications of learner autonomy reflected positively on learners (Burkert & Schwienhorst. 2008; Han, 2015). The main findings of this study revealed that students participated in this study had negative perspective of learner autonomy.
 Keywords: Autonomous learning, EFL learners' perspective, Learner Autonomy, Saudi context

1.Introduction

It is crucial to develop or select a language learning concept that enables learners to take responsibility of their own learning. Teachers can only be part of the process not a source that learners would depend entirely on. Literature has presented number of pedagogical approaches to help improve the language learning process, however it mostly focused on techniques and strategies that teachers need to adopt or apply. On the other hand, learner autonomy is a concept that shifts the focus towards learners more. It supports the idea that learners should take part and responsibility in their own learning. Holec (1979), is known to be the father of learner autonomy. Holec (1979,1981). was one of the very first researchers to believe in the concept and established number of published work to support and promote learner autonomy.

Constant change in the field of language learning and developing new approaches and concepts have always been the focus of researchers and scholars everywhere. However, the focus has always been on teachers and how can they support learners and improve the language learning process. Learner autonomy shifts this attention and focus toward learners and how much of the learning responsibility are they willing to take upon themselves. It examines learners' knowledge, perspectives and challenges that they may face when adopting such concept. It is based on the notion that language learners develop their abilities individually, therefore they need to put the effort to achieve what they aim to achieve on their own. Researchers believed in the positive effect of adopting a learning concept such as learner autonomy (Little, 1995; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Asmari, 2013).Other studies provided results to support and promote learner autonomy such as (e.g., Camilleri, 1999; Candy, 1991; Al Arabai, 2017).

With all of this support in literature, it is still considered a new concept for Saudi learners as they believe strongly in teachers' role more than their own (Ho & Crookall, 1995). Therefore, there is a gap in literature for this particular context. The problem of thee research study is the limitation in literature in the field of learner autonomy specifically in the Arab context. Therefore, examining learners' perspectives, knowledge and challenges is the main focus of this study. Acknowledging the importance of learners' roles in promoting learner autonomous is the objective of this study, it aims to examine learners' knowledge of learner autonomy in the current situation. It also aims to explores learners' perspectives of learner autonomy and the challenges they may face. Therefore, the research study attempts to answer two questions, what are the. Factors that may. Prevent students from being autonomous learners. Also, what is the learners' knowledge of learner autonomy.

2.Theoretical background

There are number of published studies that investigated learner autonomy such as
(Holec, 1981; Little, 1998; Bensons a& Voller, 2014; Smith, 2008; La Ganza, 2008). Most of these studies attempted to present a clear characteristics of learner autonomy is. The definition of the concept is based entirely on the notion that learners take part in the learning process and become responsible of their own learning. In the late 90s, researchers such as Little attempted to expand the concept of learner autonomy and approach it as a modern language learning method that has a positive effect on learners (Little,1998). Furthermore, in his book Teaching Modern Languages Little explains that in order to help learners become effective communicators and

language speakers they need to develop a certain level of autonomy. It is important for autonomous learners to have self-confidence and a high level of independency.

Learner autonomy is a rising concept in the field of language learning, therefore number of researchers have presented the concept under a variety of terms such as self-direction, self-access, distance learning, self-instruction and out of class learning (Schmenk, 2005&Smith, 2008, La Ganza, 2008) .

2.1Theoretical Basis of Learner Autonomy

The theoretical basis of learner autonomy is summarized under two main theories which are constructivism and socio-cultural theory. Both theories were introduced to establish the fact that learners take part in the language learning process. In fact, both theories indicate that learners should take responsibility of their own language learning. In 1971, John Piaget first introduced the theory of constructivism 60 years ago. Piaget defines the theory as knowledge being constructed therefore, this theory has an adaptive function. Similarly, in the socio-cultural theory Dang (2010) states that "the highest level of learner autonomy should be still described via dialogic negotiations and interactions with the immediate situation. "This occurs normally in social situations where learners engage in number of different situations that enables them to construct linguistic knowledge.

2.2 Resources for implementing autonomous learning in the language classroom

Few of studies have discussed resources that promote learner autonomy to EFL learners. However, finding resources that suit the learner's needs and objectives can help in achieving high levels of autonomy. Therefore, technology is one of the most popular learning sources in recent years. In second language learning field, technology is also a buzz word that was linked to learner autonomy. Since 1999, there was a number of research studies that focused on using technology as a learning resource (Reinders & White, 2016). Reinders and White (2016) investigated the relationship between learner autonomy and technology and how it can improve learner autonomy in language education. In their findings, they revealed that "Technological changes are placing new tools and options in the hands of learners, available to them in the context of their own lives"(p.143). Therefore, it is safe to say that technology plays an important role in enhancing EFL learners' abilities to learn.

There are various technology tools that learners can use in SL/FL learning (Warschauer &Meskill, 2000). Some technologies can provide learners with feedback and self-assessment tools, which can strongly support their autonomous learning abilities. As Moore (1972) suggested, computer-assisted instruction as part of the resources for this section where learners are able to access feedback, interaction and monitor their own progress. Other researchers have focused their studies specifically on the importance of computer-assisted language learning by exploring web 2.0 tools that encourage learner autonomy in language learning. As Lee (2011) states, "the advent of Web 2.0 technologies (wikis, blogs, podcasting) brings new dimensions to online learning. Blogs, for example, [can be] used in various ways depending on their pedagogical purposes" (p. 87). Computer-assisted learning is a portal to many Web 2.0 tools, which can be incorporated into language pedagogy.

2.3 Learners' readiness for autonomous language learning

Research studies have focused on learners' abilities to learn independently (Cubukcu 2009). Benson (2013) believes that by focusing on developing EFL learner's abilities to learn, the autonomous learning takes place first by focusing on developing EFL learner's abilities to learn, autonomous learning naturally. He argues that to acquire a language the learner needs to be attentive in selecting the needed input. Benson (2013) asserts that attention is the pre-condition of acquisition and effective language learning begins with the learner takes control over input and selects what to learn. Therefore, when learners pay attention to input, this is the first step towards autonomous learning. Also, by implementing suitable programs (self-learning and instruction software or a practical program designed for language development), we can help increase EFL learners' autonomous development. EFL learners often lack the knowledge of how and when to use resources (Internet, TV, radio, and books) to improve their language acquisition. Richards (2010) asserts that the internet, technology and the media and the use of English in face-to-face, as well as virtual social networks, provide greater opportunities for meaningful and authentic language use that are available in the classroom.

2.4 Learners' role in learner autonomy

The main purpose of implementing learner autonomy into English learning classrooms is to allow EFL learners more space to take learning initiatives. Most popular teaching method to do so is task-based learning where learners take part in the learning process by completing a given task (Sercu, 2002). Setting the class for autonomous learning to take place is part of the teacher's role. However, previous research studies have shown a number of strategies learners can adapt to develop more as autonomous EFL learners.

According to previous research studies, there are various language learning strategies EFL learners can adopt and practice to achieve high levels of autonomy. Reinders (2010) suggests stages that learners go through to establish learner autonomy. First of all, learners need to start by identifying their learning needs, which can be identified through past experiences and language use difficulties. Another strategy is setting goals; learners need to set learning goals to enhance the learning experience. Selecting resources may be important for learners to achieve better learning results and higher levels of learner autonomy (Phan & Alrashidi, 2016). Language use and experimenting are also highly encouraged to raise the level of learner autonomy. In a research study conducted by Munir (2015) at Saints University in Malaysia, the researcher investigated learners' knowledge of autonomous language learning through interviewing a focus group. Results generated a number of themes from students' comments that represent language learning strategies such as learning using the internet, social learning, entertainment and English materials that involve reading in English and grammar exercises.

I. Learner autonomy and challenges learners may face
In a research study conducted in Thailand, Reinders (2014) explains the difficulties he faced while attempting to encourage autonomous learning among his Thai students. He asserts on a number of factors leading to these challenges, such as limited exposure to the English language, as it is taught as a foreign language. Since students were only exposed to the L2 two hours a week and did not use it outside the classroom, they lacked the desire to engage in autonomous learning activities outside the classroom (Khan, 2011). Another difficulty in adopting autonomous learning

strategies is that learners often depend heavily on the teacher. This dependence means that students do not actively seek other resources for language learning and perceive the teacher as the main - and sometimes the only – resource of knowledge. Dang's (2010) study revealed that students continued to be attached to traditional learning practices such as memorization. He asserts that even when provided with resources and programs such as books, audios, and autonomous learning programs to support them, students continued to seek their teachers' help as the main source of language knowledge.

Methodology
3.1 Participants
The participants of this study were 150 female EFL learners at the English Language Institute (ELI), King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU) in the city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. All participated learners were studying English language at different levels in the foundation year program. The taught levels are introductory, beginner, pre-intermediate and intermediate level. Majority of the female participants are between the ages of 18-22 years old.

3.2 Research Design
This research is deliberately directed utilizing a descriptive research plan that expects to introduce important findings to all the more likely comprehend EFL students' learning, knowledge and difficulties. Likewise, to show an outline of the present circumstance of learner autonomy on language learning.

Therefore, quantitative and qualitative research methods where used to analyze the data attentively. Both methods are important to present valuable and accurate findings (Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge 2009)

3.3 Data Collection Procedures
Main Study
The questionnaire used to collect data from learners was adapted from a research study "Readiness for autonomy: investigating learners" beliefs" conducted by Cotterall (1995) in Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. The data of the questionnaire was automatically exported to a MS® Excel file that was later exported to a SPSS® statistical analysis software.

Instrumentation
The instrument of this study was a survey with a Likert-scale and an open-ended questionnaire. The learners' questionnaire consists of 20 questions, 18 Likert-scale questions categorized into six groups and two open-ended questions. The 18 Likert-scale statements were analyzed using SPSS®. The second part of the questionnaire contained two open-ended questions that were analyzed using thematic analysis.

3.4 Results
What are the factors that may prevent students from being autonomous learners?
For the first research question, which was: What are the factors that may prevent students from being autonomous learners?'
The results are presented in table 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Table 1. Students' responses to the effect of the teacher's role on learner autonomy

Statements	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
A1-I like the teacher to offer help to me	58%	38%	3%	1%	0
A2- I like the teacher to tell me what my difficulties are	58%	36%	3%	1%	2%
A3- I like the teacher to tell me how long I should spend on an activity	34%	47%	11%	6%	2%
A4- The teacher should always explain why we are doing an activity in class	47%	34%	12%	6%	1%
A5- I like the teacher to tell me what to do	49%	44%	3%	2%	2%

   Results of the first section-investigating teachers' role in learner-autonomy showed that majority of the participants rely on their teachers to help them with language learning. Hence, this suggests that learners are not ready to initiate inquiries and perceive the teachers as the main source of language learning. Responses to statements A1 and A2 indicate that there is a strong agreement on finding the teacher's help essential to them to learn the language. Also, the participants revealed that the teacher plays an important role in highlighting their weaknesses and difficulties. Participants are agreeing to statement A2, showing that learners find it difficult to identify their own weaknesses and they are not able to point out their difficulties in language learning on their own. The results are in agreement with the findings of a research study conducted by Huang (2016) at National Chengchi University in Taiwan. In the research findings, the researcher revealed that with the help of a self-assessment/self-feedback task given by the teacher, learners came to discover that their expectation on their performance deviated from their initial expectations and there was an element of surprise. This indicates that EFL learners find it difficult to assess their progress on their own.

        With regards to the responses of statements A3 and A4, the researcher infers that majority of the participating students believe that they need the teacher's instruction and guidance throughout a given activity. Also, the participants' responses revealed that not only do they need the teacher's instruction, but they also need the teacher to specify the time needed to complete that activity. This shows that students are very dependent on the teacher. Therefore, they have a very low level of autonomous language learning. This is in agreement with a research study conducted by Finch in 2000, which emphasized the importance of teacher's roles in providing guidance and help. Similar findings were reported in Alrabai's (2017) research study which was conducted at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia. In his study, Alrabai investigated the level of learner's learning responsibility. In the findings of the research, results reported that only 6.3% of the participants believed it's their sole- responsibility to progress in language learning. However, the majority of students (75.2%) appeared to have a notion of shared responsibility between themselves and their teachers in this regard. In response to the last statements A5, the majority of

students also find it highly important that the teacher tells them what to do throughout the class. This indicates that students might have low self-dependence, language barrier and they would not put the effort to search or seek the information by themselves consequently leading to poor autonomous learning skills.

Table 2. Students' responses to the effect of feedback on learner autonomy

Statements	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
B1- I find it helpful for the teacher to give me regular tests	35%	35%	15%	11%	4%
B2- I need the teacher to tell me how I am progressing	52%	32%	10%	5%	1%
B3- It is important for me to be able to see the progress I make	61%	32%	5%	1%	1%

The results revealed that a large number of students believe that feedback is very important for them to be able to identify their progress. These results are in agreement with other research studies such as Cotterall (2000). In her research, the author highlights feedback as one of the main principles of the language learning process. However, a large number of participant's responses to statements B1 and B2 agreed to the importance of feedback associated with teachers, which is considered an external source of feedback. According to previous literature (Debaere, Wenderoth, Sunaert, Van Hecke, & Swinnen, 2003), there are two main types of feedback internal and external. External feedback is the type that is considered against learner autonomy, due to the fact it occurs with the assistance of the teacher. However, internal feedback is related directly to autonomy. Thus, learners can access internal feedback without the help of the teacher. Participants' response to statement B1 and B2 show that students rely on the teacher for feedback and they lack the knowledge and the training of how to reflect on their own performance. This attributes to a low level of autonomous learning.

On the other hand, statement B3 investigates internal sources of feedback such as computer-assisted feedback, which contributes to learner autonomy (Moore, 1972). Therefore, the statement is more related to the students' role in using feedback. The highest percentage of students' responses (61%) was in statement B3. This is evidence that students are interested in monitoring their own progress, which suggests that students are willing to take responsibility for their own learning. However, the results also suggest that they lack the assistance and guidance to do so.

Table 3. Students' responses to learner independence and its relation to on learner autonomy

Statements	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
C1- I have a clear idea of what I need the English language for	31%	34%	20%	13%	2%

C2- I like trying new learning strategies by myself	24%	32%	26%	17%	1%
C3- Learning a language is very different from learning other subjects	48%	33%	10%	6%	3%

Results show that Saudi learners are to some extent aware of their language needs, which is one of the essential elements of learner autonomy. If learners are able to identify their needs, they will be able to set goals and objectives for their language learning process. These findings are compatible with Wulf, Chiviacowsky and Cardozo (2014) in which allowing learners to make decisions and identifying their needs can affect their learning independence. Majority of the students (65%) agreed to statement C1, suggesting that Saudi learners are able to identify their language needs. Results of statement C2 also reported a large number of students (56%) declaring that they prefer trying new learning strategies on their own. Both statements (C1 and C2) results indicate that Saudi learners are ready to accept learner autonomy as a language learning method or concept. Although a few students disagreed with both statements, however, the majority agreed. This suggests that Saudi learners are accepting the shift of responsibility from teachers to learners. According to previous literature, there is a number of reasons for this acceptance. With time, English language in Saudi Arabia developed certain social and economic benefits. Saudi learners have started to rationalize language learning for similar reasons (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). Realizing that they had to maximize language learning, learners in their answers to this section revealed an interest and positive attitude towards autonomous learning and that learner independent is not considered as a factor that hinders students from adopting autonomous learning skills and strategies. Hence, this also shows that EFL Saudi learners showed more interest in autonomous learning shifting the learning responsibility to learners more than the teachers.

Results of statement C3 reported that Saudi learners are aware that learning the English language is different from learning other subjects. The acknowledgment of English language is different from other subjects suggests that Saudi learners are aware of language learning strategies, which adds to their autonomous language learning knowledge (Oxford, 2008).

Table 4. Students' responses to the effect of learner confidence in study ability

Statements	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
D1- I know how to study languages well	19%	27%	24%	26%	4%
D2- I know how to study another subject well	39%	42%	9%	9%	1%

Comparing the results of statement D1 and D2, it is suggested that a larger number (81%) of Saudi learners showed a high level of certainty of how to study other subjects. However, comparing that to their knowledge of how to study languages, students showed less confidence in their abilities. Munir (2015) also revealed similar results in a research study that investigated

learners' confidence. In the findings the researcher suggested that learners' confidence can improve due to different reasons and under different circumstances. These results indicate that Saudi learners are still in need of learner training to develop their autonomous language learning skills in order from them to take more responsibility for their own learning (Haughton & Dickinson,1988). Teachers play an important role in training students to become more autonomous EFL learners. Al-Asmari (2013) conducted in Taif University a research study, by examining teachers' perspectives of learner autonomy and Saudi learners' current situation. He concluded that by implementing learner autonomy into their classrooms, students become less dependent on the teacher. According to the researcher's findings, teachers can train and develop students' knowledge of how to study language through autonomous learning classwork such as peer work, group work and deciding on learning topics. Therefore, the level of students' knowledge of how to study a language is, in this case, considered a hinder to their autonomous language learning development.

Table 5. Students' responses to the effect of past language learning Experience

Statements	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
E1- I have been successful in language learning in the past	11%	25%	16%	37%	11%
E2- I have my own ways of testing how much I have learned	17%	38%	18%	24%	3%

Results of statement E1 showed that the majority of students (48%) believe that they did not have a successful language learning experience in the past. Learners past experiences indicate how much knowledge of language learning they have accumulated over the years. Developing successful learning experiences can motivate and enhance learners' autonomous learning ability. According to Cotterall (1995) "autonomous learners use their experience of attempting tasks, employing strategies and solving problems to develop their understanding of how language learning works" (p.6). Therefore, developing language learning knowledge from past experiences can help achieve a higher level of autonomy. In this case, the results show otherwise as mentioned above the majority of Saudi learners disagreed with the statement asserting on having unsuccessful language learning experiences in the past.

Results of statement E2 shows that 55% of students believe that they have their own ways of testing how much they have learned. This percentage is not parallel with the results of statement E1, which showed the learners lack of language learning knowledge from past experiences. Therefore, not developing the language learning knowledge needed contributes to the lack of self-assessment knowledge. Both statements are related therefore results of statement E2 are not in alignment with E1 which indicates the possibility of a case confusion.

Table 6. Students' responses to the effect of learners' approach to studying

Statements	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
F1-I study English in the same way as I study other subjects	9%	19%	19%	36%	17%
F2-Talking to the teacher about my progress is embarrassing for me	13%	23%	21%	29%	14%
F3-I monitor my progress regularly	25%	43%	19%	12%	1%

Results show that students' approach to studying is not certain. Responses to statement F1 indicates that majority of students are aware that studying English is different from other subjects. This shows that students understand that language learning knowledge is different and that it acquires specific training. As mentioned before in statements D1and D2, students have shown awareness of the differences between learning English and other subjects. However, this may or may not be linked to learner autonomy learning concept.

In response to statement 2, students revealed a hindrance towards their communication with their teacher. A large number of students found it difficult and embarrassing to talk to the teachers about their language performance. However, in response to statement F3, the majority of students (68%) agreed that they monitor their own progress. This indicates that learners are willing to take the responsibility of monitoring their own progress. However, this does not mean that they fully comprehend how to do so. On the other hand, it is also safe to say that not all autonomous learners communicate easily with their teacher regarding their progress. However, this communication is a necessary component of successful learning behavior.

Table 7. Results of students' response and comment analysis on what they know about learner autonomy

Section	No. of participants	%
(a) Independent learning	57	39 %
(b) Technology and media	21	14%
(c) Group learning	2	1%
(d) Other	68	46%

Results reported that majority of the students (46%), the responses were ambiguous and uncertain of what learner autonomy is. As shown in table 7, these uncertain comments were labeled other. Some participants presented their opinion or a declaration of not knowing what learner autonomy is. This is a high percentage comparing to the other themes generated from students' comments. Participant no.85 stated 'It's better than learning in the university." Another participant

no.103 also stated "I don't know. This high percentage may indicate a low level of learner autonomy among Saudi learners, which also may indicate that learners are not familiar with different learning concepts. The lack of knowledge of different language learning concepts may be attributed to a number of reasons that were mentioned in previous research. In a study conducted by Khan (2011), King Abdul-Aziz University Community College, Jeddah. The researcher reported in the findings that Saudi learners might not seek to learn English language or to improve their learning for a number of possible reasons. First, Saudi learners are not exposed to SL, and another issue is that majority of learners fall into the case of comparing and contrasting the foreign language items with those of their mother-tongue. All which may contribute to the lack of language learning knowledge or motive to learn using different concepts such as learner autonomy.

Also, a satisfying percentage of 39% of the participants referred to learner autonomy as a type of independent learning. Participant no.41 stated "learners depend on themselves in learning a language and learning how to study it and also depend on themselves in seeking information.' Participants no.6 agreed stating "I know that all of the efforts are on the student and the teacher only gives main ideas and the rest is for the learners to understand.' This is in agreement with a research study that was conducted by Macaskill and Denovan (2011). The researchers argue that it is not easy to define autonomous learning. Therefore, some terms were established in the literature referring back to learner autonomy such as self-directed learning, self-access learning, and independent learning. The argument made by the researcher is that learner autonomy may be defined as the learner's capabilities that enable them to become autonomous learners. The researcher also referred to autonomous learning as independent learning to point out that it is not about the method of learning, it is more about the learners' independence in making learning choices and decisions as well as taking responsibility of their own learning.

The second theme generated by learners was that autonomous learning could be developed using technology and media. A total of 14% of the participants agreed that using technology in language learning may help them become autonomous learners. This finding is in agreement with the results of the research study that was conducted by Lai, Shum, and Tian in 2014 which emphasized the role of technology and media in encouraging learner autonomy. Participant no.32 stated 'Learning a language through the internet or watching videos to learn the rules and the English accent. Personally, I try to learn the British accent through autonomous learning.'

This is in agreement with previous literature published by Warschauer and Meskill in 2000. The researchers stated in their book 'Technology and Second Language Teaching,' that " appropriate use of technology allows for a more thorough integration of language, content, and culture than ever before and also provides students unprecedented opportunities for both collaborative and autonomous learning" (p.316). However, the study that was conducted in Saudi Arabia by Alshmrany and Wilkinson in 2014, revealed an underuse of the internet and IT services in the Saudi educational system. This could contribute to the lack of learner independence or learner autonomous awareness to some extent.

The third theme also generated from the students' comments was group learning. A few students mentioned group work in comparison to teachers' comments. Only 1% of the students believe that group work may be related to learner autonomy. Participants no.44 commented

"'Autonomous learning is better for learners if they have the will to learn or with groups.' Another comment, participant no.66 stated "developing oneself in the English language at home and review with the teacher or with my group in terms of pronunciation and writing." This is in disagreement with a study that was conducted by Chan, Sparatt and Humphreys (2002) in Hong Kong University. The researchers reported that students did not show evidence of autonomous learning in teacher assigned group work. The researchers also reported disagreement with previous literature expectations that students learn well autonomously and collaboratively in group work.

These results show that there is no guarantee that Saudi learners will develop and learn autonomously in group work. Learners viewing learner autonomy as group work may not be accurate and applicable to all Saudi learners.

To analyze item 20, a criterion was established, which is the second open-ended question given to the participants "Are you familiar with autonomous learning strategies?". This question provided the learners with a yes or a no option, and the participants were asked to explain their answer. Students' responses were analyzed based on the established criteria to specifically code the results into categories that were generated from the students' responses and comments.
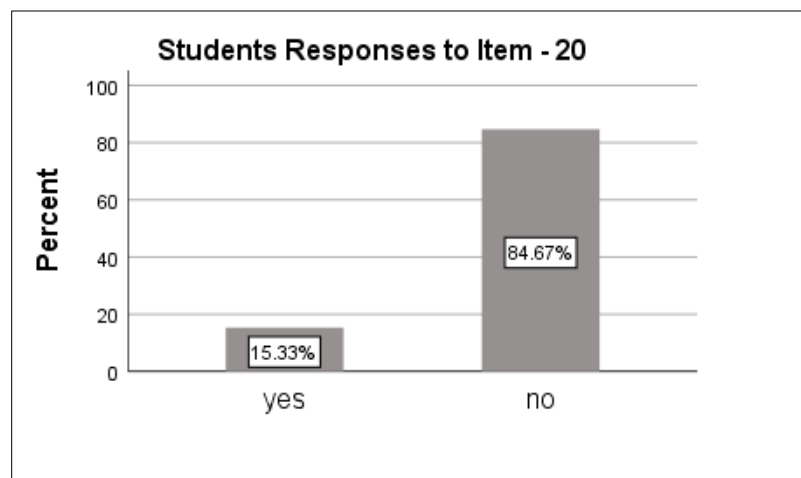

Figure 1. Students' responses to item-20

Table 9. Summary of students' responses to item 20 (Yes/ No)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	23	15.3	15.3	15.3
	no	127	84.7	84.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

4. Analysis

Majority of the participants responded with no. This indicates that a large number of Saudi learners believe that they are not familiar with autonomous learning strategies or how to adopt such a concept. This is in agreement with the findings or a previously mentioned research study by Kumaravadivelu (1991). In his findings, the researcher believed that learners are not ready for autonomous learning for number of reasons such as lack of knowledge and teacher authority. The results are in agreement with a research study that was conducted by Shahsavari, (2014) in the Islamic Azad University, Iran. The researcher examined leaner autonomy perceptions in both teachers and students. In the research findings, the results showed that teachers believe that their students did not understand the importance of autonomous learning to their language development. Therefore, a low level of autonomy was reported, and the students may not have understood the concept or adopted any of the autonomous language learning strategies. In addition, the researcher reported an important notion that may have contributed to the students' resistance, which is that most learners in the Middle East are still attached to the idea that the teacher is the only source of language or knowledge.

Few students mentioned in their comments certain ideas that are relevant to some extent to autonomous learning. Table.10 shows the numbers and percentages in each section including the students' comments.

Table 10. Results of students' response and comment analysis on autonomous learning strategies

Section	N	%
(a) Technology	8	5%
(b) Books	1	1%
(c) Study skills	2	1%
(d) Practice and memorization	3	2%
(e) Other	133	91%

The result of the analysis shows that most students, (147 out of 151) who answered this question, have no knowledge of learner-autonomy strategies or how to use them (see table no.10). For example, participant no.134 commented " yes, it has to be through something I love to do because language is not like any other course it's all about learning the culture" and participant no.126 stated " no I need someone to teach me and motivate me and before everything if I like something I would be good at it". However, only a few students showed some knowledge of learner autonomy. According to a research study conducted by Scott, Furnell, Murphy, and Gulder (2014), in the United Kingdom, advanced learners usually show a high level of learner autonomy. Considering the level of the participants, it is safe to say that a low level of learner autonomy was expected. Therefore, participants showed little knowledge of learner autonomy. Hence, this result indicates that Saudi language learners are in need for further training on autonomous language learning.

Although a few students showed to some extent knowledge of what learner autonomy is, the percentage was very low in generated categories when in comparison to the previous results where the majority (91%) mentioned other irrelative comments. Only 5% mentioned learning through technology as a learner autonomy strategy for example participant no.139 commented: "yes, learning from websites or Twitter and Instagram or YouTube." Also, participant no.129 stated, "Yes, fun programs and videos and movies in English." This is in agreement with the study conducted by Baturay & Yukselturk in 2015. Also, a very low percentage namely, 1% were generated from students' comments for both themes, study skills and learning from books. For example, participant no.130 commented on study skills "yes, listening to English conversations and writing in English" and participant no.70 commented on using books stating" yes, reading and searching and practice, watching movies in English".

Only 2% mentioned practice and memorization as a learner autonomy strategy. For example, participant no.46 commented, "yes, applying the rules, practice, memorize words." Similarly, participant no.56 commented, "Yes, memorize words and then use them in context and understand how to form sentences through grammar." Student's stating that practice and memorization were part of learner autonomy strategy show that Saudi learners are still in favor of traditional learning strategies. Memorization, practice through repetition and drills are more related to grammar translation teaching method, also known as the classical method. Grammar translation method is known for the lack of communicative learning where learners are able to practice what they have learned through communicative situations without actually using the language. According to Al-Seghayer (2014), he states that "English learners receive little exposure to communicative situations which, in turn, leads to poor results of the overall teaching-learning activities." Therefore, the generated theme of memorization and practice may not be classified as a learner autonomy learning strategy

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The primary aim of this research study is to investigate Saudi learners' perspectives of learner autonomy. Specifically, preparatory year EFL learners of all four levels. The study aimed to explore learners' knowledge of learner autonomy as well as the factors that may prevent Saudi learners from being autonomous EFL learners. Also, what are the factors that make it challenging for learners to adopt LA. After reviewing the relevant literature, there are several conclusions which can be drawn. First, it is indicated in the literature that learner autonomy is still considered a rising concept in language learning and teaching field. Although there were successful cases of learner autonomy around the world, there is no evidence of any successful cases in Saudi Arabia. The research study revealed challenging factors that were stated by EFL learners. These factors may have contributed to the low level of autonomous language learning in Saudi Arabia. Looking closely to the research findings of learners' knowledge of learner autonomy, it can be seen that the findings of this study are parallel with the earlier research studies about learner autonomy from the perspective of the learners. Considering the results of this study, it is safe to say that Saudi learners still lack professional training to understand how much responsibility they can take in their own language learning process. Furthermore, some Saudi students showed readiness for autonomous language learning, however, one of the biggest challenges is their understanding of the concept. If we examined the findings closely, we could infer that students still believe that they are very dependent on the teacher, which is not a new finding as it is illustrated in the earlier

literature. Saudi learners still strongly believe that it is the teachers' responsibility and that their role is not of importance.

Second, this study reports a number of challenging factors that were revealed by students. Also, learners revealed that one of their biggest challenges was the knowledge of learner autonomy. Saudi learners stated that they are still very dependent on the teacher even in sitting their learning goals. They also stated that they lack the knowledge of how to study language although they were aware it is different from studying other courses.

Finally, after reviewing the findings, the researcher reveals that Saudi language learners are still in need for professional training to develop as autonomous language learners. Also, learners need to be aware of student role in the learning process as this concept is still ambiguous to them. In conclusion, this research study is an attempt to contribute to add to the field of learner autonomy which is a new language learning concept that is in need of further research specifically in the Saudi context. It is also an attempt to contribute to the international literature in the field of learner autonomy.

6. Limitation of the Study

This study may not be summed up to different countries but rather it could be summed up and connected to neighboring countries which have comparable foundation and culture. It is likewise constrained to female English students in the preparatory year program. Getting to male members' information was troublesome because of the laws and traditions of Saudi Arabia along these lines, this investigation was restricted to female members as it were.

7. Implications of the study and Suggestions for Further Research

The findings of this research study can help expand on the concept of learner autonomy. This study reveals important findings regarding learners and their role in the process of autonomous learning. Most importantly it reveals learners' perspectives as well as the current situation of learner autonomy in Saudi Arabia, which suggests low levels of autonomy among learners. Furthered research is advised to investigate other areas of learner autonomy on different samples such as male participants and varying levels of learners. Finally, further studies on promoting and raising awareness of learner autonomy are highly encouraged.

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A. APPENDIX

Below are a number of statements regarding learner autonomy in language learning, also known as independent learning Please read each one and indicate to what extent you (as a language learner) agree or disagree with each one. Please write your answer for questions 4 and 5.

Learners' Questionnaire

Statements	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
a. I like the teacher to offer help to me					
b. I like the teacher to tell me what my difficulties are					

	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
c. I like the teacher to tell me how long I should spend on an activity					
d. The teacher should always explain why we are doing an activity in class					
e. I like the teacher to tell me what to do					

1.Role of the teacher

2. Role of feedback

Statements	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
a. I find it helpful for the teacher to give me regular tests					
b. I need the teacher to tell me how I am progressing					
c. It is important for me to be able to see the progress I make					

3. Learner independence

Statements	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
a. I have a clear idea of what I need English language for					
b. I like trying new learning strategies by myself					
c. Learning a language is very different from learning other subjects					

4.Learner confidence in study ability

Statements	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
a. I know how to study languages well					
b. I know how to study another subject well					

5.Experience of language learning

Statements	5	4	3	2	1

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Or N/A	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. I study English in the same way as I study other subjects					
b. Talking to the teacher about my progress is embarrassing for me					
c. I monitor my progress regularly					

Statements	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
a. I have been successful in language learning in the past					
b. I have my own ways of testing how much I have learned					

6. Approach to studying

1. What do you know about autonomous language learning?

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

2. Are you familiar with autonomous learning strategies?
   ◯ Yes, explain

…………………………………………………………………………………………….....
   ◯ No

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