Learner Autonomy:Teachers and Learners' Attitudes and Perceptions

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Abstract

Recent reforms in Algerian higher education couple with challenges related to difficult working conditions especially a high student-teacher ratio to requirethat learners assume higher responsibility of their own learning.For reforms that emphasise learner autonomy to succeed, both learners and teachers' attitudes towards autonomy need to be favourable. This research investigated how leaner autonomy is conceived by teachers and students in some Algerian English departments. A survey questionnairewas administered to35 teachers and 130 students.The results seem to indicate that the surveyed teachers and students hold positive attitudes towards learner autonomy and its effects on EFL student academic achievement. Nonetheless, some uncertainty among teachers and learners emerged from the data about the role of the English department and the wider Algerian culture in developing learner autonomy. The researcher attempts to argue that the attitudes and perceptions of stakeholders must be taken into consideration in the preparation and implementation of reforms in education. Some recommendations are madeto support reforms for the promotion of EFL 'learner autonomy'.

1. Introduction

The field of language teaching and learning has in the last three decades seen an increased interest and discussion of the concept of **learner autonomy**. This new or renewed interest in the ability of learners to assume **more** responsibility in planning, executing and assessing their own learning recognizes changes that affected how knowledge is conceived and consequently teaching and learning. For some decades, there has been a paradigm shiftin Algerian higher education, i.e. attempts have been made to depart from predominantly teacher-led classes working in a uniform fashion towards national curricular goals to more individualized and learner-centred learning. New curricula state that university students are expected to exercise and develop more learning autonomy. The present study examines the teachers and learners' perceptions and attitudes towards promoting learner autonomy in Algerian university departments of English. This paper opens with a review of the literature related to autonomous learning, its importance as a goal for education and its underpinning factors. Then, the purpose of the field study and the method used to achieve them are described in details. A section is devoted to the presentation of key data collected. The sixth

section discusses these data and some key findings. Finally, a number of implications are considered for the implementation of reforms in education that aim at 'learner autonomy' for EFL learners.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Definition of 'Learner Autonomy'

Learner autonomy may be arelatively new academic research interest but probably and old human issue of survival; Thousands of years ago, human groupswho independently learnt to harness available resources like taming fire, animals and earth for agriculture, etc. survived and thrived.Autonomy of learners may, in this age of rapid change of knowledge and skills, be critical for success in academia and life at large. The first challenge in a discussion of 'learner autonomy' relates to defining the term. Researchers may use different terms to mean the same construct or slightly different aspects of it (see for example Little 2002). A detailed and in-depth historical discussion of the various definitions given to the concept by researchers is presented by Bensemmane (2008, see also Dam et al. 1990, Little 2007).As the scope of this paper does not allow a discussion of the variety of definitions proposed in the literature, in this work, the term 'learner autonomy' is used in the following sense: **the capacity for and actual practice by learners of the primary responsibility for planning, executing, monitoring and evaluation of their own learning**. This definition can be rephrased using another term used in the literature; i.e. '**self-regulated learning**' or the degree to which the learners are able to manage their learning themselves (with help from environment when deemed effective) especially in defining learning objectives, work procedures and assessment of learning outcomes.

According to Little, there is "broad agreement that autonomous learners understand the purpose of their learning programme, explicitly accept responsibility for their learning, share in the setting of learning goals, take initiatives in planning and executing learning activities, and regularly review their learning and evaluate its effectiveness" (2002). In practice, autonomous learners are able and willing to undertakesuch learning-related tasks as:

1) Setting their own learning objectives
2) Self-assessing their learning achievement
3) Monitoring their performance in learning
4) Motivating themselves for learning
5) Learning from peers and people other than teachers

2.2Developing Learner Autonomy as an Educational Goal

These abilities and dispositions may need to be developed and fostered in learners by education. Developing learner autonomy may actually be the essential mission of education.According to Kenny,"Education is about empowerment and what it empowers is people's autonomy. This allows them opportunities to generate knowledge, as opposed to being passive consumers of it." (1993:431). Education can achieve such mission through clearly stated educational objectives that provide for the development of learner autonomy. These objectives need to be reflected in the practice of teaching and learning via appropriate

syllabi. Cotterallargues that developing learner autonomy is an important objective in language course design (2000).

The latest reforms in Algerian Higher Education seem to underscore the importance of developing students' learner autonomy. New curricula systematically integrate a four-semester study skills module and a two-semester research methodology course. Yet one might still ask a question about the readiness of teachers and learners to shift to a more autonomous learning paradigm. Since human actions tend to be affected by their perceptions and attitudes, do teachers and learners adhere to this paradigm change at least at the level of attitude and concept? Particularly when it comes to the issue of 'learner autonomy', individual and societal factors need to be considered. Little states that research on learner autonomy has been grappling with the question whether learner autonomy is an exclusively Western cultural construct, which makes it foreign to learners in other cultures. The author concludes thatalthough evidence seems to support the position that learner autonomy can be a universal construct, culture always impacts on learning (Little, 2002).

2.3 Factors Underpinning Learning Autonomy

Understanding (how to develop) learner autonomy requires substantive knowledge about this concept. We need first to acknowledge, as Benson noted, that there seems to be disagreement between researchers about what abilities and attitudes compose learner autonomy (2006). Nevertheless, one reasonable way for considering this issue consists of looking at three types of factors:

1. The skill / strategy sphere;

2. The psychological / personality sphere;

3. General culture, educational culture, syllabi, instruction, and teachers.

2.3.1 The Skill / Strategy Sphere

According to our review of the literature, autonomous learning may require learners to be **willing** and **able** to undertake such tasks as:

1. Setting their own learning objectives
2. Planning one's learning and mobilising resources
3. Monitoring and self-assessing their learning achievement
4. Self-Motivating
5. Self-Management Skills (managing time, emotions and staying on task)
6. Collaboratively learning with and from peers and other people
7. Effective communication skills: especially for collaboration and seeking help
8. Conflict resolution skills to tackle tensions that may arise in working with others
9. Critical thinking to assess their and others' decisions about learning goals, materials, tasks, etc., and the flow of input knowledge, one's knowledge

2.3.2 The Affective/Personality Sphere

The skill requirements for autonomous learning that have been discussed in the previous section are probably underpinned by a number of factors that pertain more to the learner's personality / affective sphere. These include:

Learner's Beliefs / Attitudes: There has recently been much discussion of the role of learner's beliefs in strategy use and autonomy (Cotterall 1995, Wenden 1999, White 1999, Carter 2000, Tillema 2000, T. Lamb 2008, Bown and White 2010, Yılmaz 2010, Reinders and Lazaro 2011). T. Lamb, for instance, found that the development of learner autonomy significantly depends on both learners and teachers' beliefs about the roles and responsibilities in teaching and learning (2008). More specifically, Wenden (1991), emphasises two kinds of attitudes "attitudes learners hold about their role in the learning process, and their capability as learners …if learners labour under the misconception that learning is successful only within the context of the "traditional classroom," where the teacher directs, instructs, and manages the learning activity, and students must follow in the teacher's footsteps, they are likely to be impervious or resistant to learner-centred strategies aiming at autonomy" (52, cited in Thanasoulas 2000). Beliefs and attitudes can determine what learners can and will do to learn.A positive learner attitude towards autonomy is necessary to maximise their readiness for undertaking the complex tasks involved in autonomous learning.

Beliefs underlie **motivation** and **self-efficacy**; i.e. if learners believe they cannot do a task, they will not have a go. According to Bandura (1997), learners will not engage in learning and adopt learning goals unless they feel ready for a successful performance (cited in Ponton et al. 2005). Then, it may be expected that self-efficacy should precede autonomous learning (Ponton et al. 2005). This was supported by Weisi and Karimi whose research has shown that personality characteristics such as motivation and self-confidence are good predictors of attitude towards self-assessment (2013:736).

Otherpersonality / affective requirements for learning autonomy include:

1. Motivation to provide impetus to initiate and maintain efforts for learning
2. Resilienceto survive setbacks and obstacles that they are certain to encounter in their learning journey
3. Agency (Take responsibility for and act as agent in one's learning to take initiative in planning, managing and executing learning activities)
4. Self-awareness and Reflectivity

2.3.3 General Culture, Educational Culture, Syllabi, Instruction and Teachers

The third sphere of factors that can impact the development and exercise of learning autonomy consists of factors which generally surround learning. The general culture, the educational culture, syllabi and instruction determine, what can and does happen in the learning process.

2.3.3.1 Learner Autonomy and *General* Culture

Learning takes place in cultural contexts. It is difficult even for the most liberated minds to escape the straps of cultural contexts. There has been a debate over the issue of the impact of culture on learner autonomy. An interesting direction of research explores the role of culture in autonomous learning; in other words, whether different cultures impact the development and practice of learner autonomy in different ways (see for instance Mason 2008; Little 2002; Pierson (1996). Little states that research on learner autonomy has been

grappling with the question whether learner autonomy is an exclusively western cultural construct.The author concludes that although evidence seems to support the position that learner autonomy can be a universal construct, culture always impacts on learning (2002:12). As Pierson (1996) argues, social structure in education is thought to influence learners' propensity for autonomy (Cited in Aoki 2000).

Ahmad and Abdul Majidlooked at the relationship between learners' readiness for autonomy and the Malay cultural values. Theirstudy indicated that culture influenced the development of the respondents' readiness for learner autonomy. It has the capacity to either inhibit or encourage learning autonomy (2010:262-3). "In a collectivist society such as Malaysia…, members of groups do not speak up, or even express a contradictory point of view, instead social harmony is maintained and it is the hidden goal of every communication (Beamer and Varner, 2008)..." (Cited in Ahmad and Abdul Majid 2010:255). Dang studied EFL learner autonomy in Vietnam from a socio-cultural perspective and found out that "…learner autonomy can be either fostered or hindered deliberately within various community constraints" (2010)

Culture 'dictates' the roles learners and teachers can take in educational settings; i.e. their duties and rights in the learning activities; who should do what, when and how. **Probably in all contexts, culture can stifle, allow or promote learner autonomy to the extent that it stifles, allows or promotes the attitudes and skills underpinning learner autonomy (discussed above). In other words, a culture could be considered learner autonomy friendly if it allows, or better, encourages its members to: 1. assume primary responsibility for their lives; 2. Maketheir own decisions; 3. collaborate with others for better performance in tasks, etc.**

2.3.3.2 Learner Autonomy and *Educational* Culture

Educational culture can be defined as a set of beliefs held by and practices of the stakeholders and participants in education especially learners, teachers and managers. It also includes regulations that determine what goals and methods should be used in teaching/learning.Learner autonomy may not be desired or welcome by all people and in every context. "Despite the ever-expanding literature, learner autonomy remains a minority pursuit, perhaps because all forms of 'autonomisation' threaten the power structures of educational culture" (Little 2002). Following a study on teachers' perspectives on innovations in Dutch schools, Könings at al. found out that teachers were reserved about student autonomy (2007:985). In some cultures, autonomous generally younger learners might be perceived by teachers as rebellious and not respectful of their authority of elders. Therefore, we should acknowledge that teachers' readiness for autonomy is affected by their beliefs. Their attitudes toward learner autonomy can be expected to influence whether and how they might seek to develop their learners' learning autonomy. Borg insists that we need to listen to the voices of teachers and tap their beliefs and attitudes (2013) if we wish education to target learner autonomy.

2.3.3.3 Curriculum, Instruction and Teachers

The main component of educational culture is the curriculum, the teachers and how they teach. Traditional curricula usually require that teachers work at a certain pace and use

certain materials (See for instance Snodin 2013:15). A curriculum can make clear provision for the development of learner autonomy, pay lip-service to or overlook it. In many countries in the world especially those ranking high in international classifications (Finland, Canada, United Kingdom, South Korea, etc.), autonomy of learning is explicitly incorporated in curricular objectives. A curriculum that aims to promote students as independent learners should be learner-centred.

With or without educational objectives and syllabi that are favourable for autonomous learning, teachers can generally contribute or impede the development and practice of learning autonomy especially through the type of control they exercise. Teaching may be the strongest element in the learning culture. Teachers' role in promoting students' learner autonomy has become an important venue of research in this field (Little 1995, T. Lamb 2008, Reinders and Lazaro 2011, *Fumin and* Li 2012). Jiménez (2011) underlines here a necessity for reforming educational culture to tolerate and eventually foster learner autonomy. Teachers can encourage autonomous learning by showing willingness to give away some control to learners. Teachers who are usually held accountable for the success or failure of the learners may be expected to show some reluctance to loosen their control over what happens in the classes.

A recent direction in research on learner autonomy consists of exploring teacher autonomy and its links to learner autonomy (Little 1995; Tort-Moloney 1997; T. Lamb 2008; Lamb and Reinders 2008; M. Lamb 2011; *Fumin and* Li 2012). Teachers as autonomous learners and autonomous professionals are probably needed as role models for students. Autonomous teachers always seek ways to improve themselves and impact their learners in a positive way and do not wait for opportunity to be granted to them (self-empowerment). For T. Lamb, a teacher autonomy-learner autonomy relationship requires that:

1. "The teacher learns how to (and has, or claims, the freedom to) develop autonomously as a professional, through critical reflection

2. The teacher has a commitment to empowering his/her learners by creating appropriate learning spaces and developing their capacity for autonomy

3. The teacher introduces interventions which support the principles and values which underpin their own and their learners' autonomy" (2008)

Little maintains that learner autonomy depends on teacher autonomy (1995). He explains that only teachers that are themselves autonomous (Practice in their teaching reflective and self-managing processes) and who know what it is to be an autonomous learner can be expected to foster learner autonomy (2000:45, cited in M. Lamb 2008).

Like the general culture, an educational culture (regulations, curriculum and teaching) can stifle, allow or promote learner autonomy to the extent that it stifles, allows or promotes the perceptions, attitudes and skills underpinning learner autonomy (discussed above). In other words, a culture of learning could be considered learner autonomy friendly if it allows, or better, encourages learners to 1. Assume primary responsibility for their learning; 2. Take decisions concerning their own learning as

much as their expertise allows; 3. Collaborate with peers and teachers for better performance in learning tasks, etc.

3. Background and Purpose of the Study

Changes and reforms to education may not bear expected fruits when the attitudes and perceptions of all the stakeholders are not adequately taken into consideration. Teachers and learners' attitudes in particular can have a positive or negative effect on the implementation of reforms as they are the main actors and beneficiaries of most organizational or curricular changes in education.Learners' and teachers' beliefs about language learning may contribute to or hinder autonomy. Concerning learners, Cotterall (1995) recommends assessing their readiness for autonomous learning before shifting from teacher-centered to learner-centered paradigm in formal education.

Algerian higher education has witnessed since year 2004 significant restructuring known as the LMD (licence/bachelor, master, and doctorate) system. In parallel and for decades, a huge increase in the numbers of students enrolled in higher education has not been matched by the significant evolution of infra-structure (more universities built) and teaching, management and support staff. Increasing numbers of students in classes has meant a significant reduction of the time a learner can hope to obtain to interact and get counsel face-to-face with their teachers. In the same time distant or online teacher-learner interaction has yet to become a standard practice in Algerian education. Learners will therefore have to learn to survive and thrive mostly independently or at least with lesser guidance from their teachers. In other words, they must become increasingly autonomous learners.

The present study aims to explore EFL teachers and learners' perceptual and attitudinal readiness forlearner autonomy.More specifically, the researcher sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are university EFL teachersand learners' beliefs and attitudes towards learner autonomy?
2. Does the Algerian culture promote learner autonomy?
3. Does the Algerian educational culture (educational policies / regulations and organisation, curriculum and teaching) encourage or impede development of learner autonomy?
4. Are there differences in attitudes and perceptions about learner autonomy between senior, junior and pre-service teachers?
5. Are there differences in attitudes and perceptions about learner autonomy between learners at different stages of their learning at the English department (1st, 2nd, 3rd year of the English degree, and Master students)?

4**. Significance of the Study**

Reforms especially when they are far-reaching and national like those instituted in Algerian higher education represent high stakes. Measures must be taken to ensure the success of such endeavours because failure will mean tremendous losses in terms of financial resources but more importantly in terms of human capital. This research attempts to make a small contribution in this effort towards making a comprehensive assessment of the LMD

reform in Algerian education. It is hoped that such assessment will soon indicate any necessary adjustments that might be needed to increase the chances of success of higher education in Algeria.

5. Method

5.1 Data Collection Procedures

This research is a tentative attempt to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of EFL teachers and students towards 'learner autonomy'. A survey questionnaire was used to collect the data from teachers and learners. The teacher questionnaire (See**Appendix 1**) consists of eleven questions, three of which are open-ended, one is of the closed type and sevenitems mix the two types; i.e. invite respondents to explain their answerwhich is selected from four to six set possible answers. The learner questionnaire (See **Appendix 2**) contains eleven mixed-type questions.

The questionnaire items are meant to collect date about university EFL teachers and learners' beliefs and attitudes towards learner autonomy. More specifically, the questions elicit insights about (LQ = Learner Questionnaire; TQ = Teacher Questionnaire)

a. The respondents' views about the effect of developing learner autonomy on the students' academic success (LQ item 1; TQ items 3, and indirectly 4, 8, 9);

b. The respondents' views about the effect on the learners' academic success of the use of some learning strategies (student self-assessment of their own learning, students setting their own learning objectives, etc.) (LQ items 2 through 7);

c. The respondents' perception of the role of culture, environment and family in developing their learner autonomy (LQ items 10 + 11; TQ item 5)

d. The respondents' perception of the role of education in general, teachers and students in developing learner autonomy (LQ items 8, 9; TQ items 4, 6 to 11)

The items of bothquestionnaires are not sequenced in any logical order. Such order is reversed on purpose to break monotony and reduce mechanistic responses. Similar or paraphrased questions are meant to check each other.

5.2 The Participants

A random sample of one hundred and sixty five (165) informants participated in our study: one hundred and thirty (130) students and thirty five(35) teachers. **Table 1, Participants in the Survey Questionnaire,** shows the detailed numbers of each category of participants. Teachers' category falls into three sub-categories: senior teachers (abbreviated ST) have more than five years in EFL teaching, junior teachers (JT) have less than five-year experience in EFL teaching and pre-service teachers (PST). The latter group consists of students in their final year of the Master degree in didactics.Most of the teachers and all of the students who were surveyed come from the Department of English at the University of Blida 2, Algeria (UB).

Table1. Participants in the Survey Questionnaire

					Total Num
Teachers	**ST**	**JT**	**PST (M2)**		**35**
	11 (6 UB)	**7 (5 UB)**	**17 (All UB)**		**28 UB**
Learners	**L1**	**L2**	**L3**	**M2**	**130**
Male	3	5	14		**All UB**
Female	12	45	35		
Total	15	50	49	16	
All Respondents					**165**

The teachers who participated in the survey were randomly approached according to their availability in the premises of the English department at Blida University, Algeria or by email for teachers in other Algerian English departments. As for learners' questionnaire, the randomisation of participants was stratified. The questionnaire was administered to students who attended regular classes at the English department of Blida University, Algeria. A sample was randomly selected from each level of study in the department; i.e. L1: 1st year of the 3-year English degree; L2: 2nd year; L3: 3rd year; and M2: 2nd year of the Master degree.

NB: For some questionnaire item, an additional number of sixteen Master students joined as pre-service teachers.

4.3 Procedure of Data Collection

Questionnaire administration took place in December 2012. Students completed the Learner Questionnaire during regular classes. The researcher offered participants help when needed. As for Teachers' Questionnaires they were sent out by emails or handed over face-to-face. The questionnaire was emailed to one hundred (100) teachers in Algerian English departments in December 2012. Thirty three (35)teacher questionnaireswere completed and returned within due time.

5.4 Data Analysis Procedures

After collecting the questionnaires, for every questionnaire item, responses wereaggregated so as to let emerge trends, if any, from the responses. Responses to teachers' questionnaires were collated for pre-service, junior and senior teachersub-categories (See Appendix 3 for the collation of data collected).Responses to learner questionnaires, however, were aggregated according to level of study (1st, 2nd, 3rd year of the English Bachelor Degree or 2nd year of the Master's degree).

6. Presentation of the Data Collected

Appendix 3 - Data Collectedpresents the responses obtained from the administration of TQ (Teachers' Questionnaire) to eleven STs (senior teachers), seven JTs (junior teachers), and seventeen PSTs (pre-service teachers) and the LQ (Learners' Questionnaire) to fifteen L1 (1st year of the 3-year English degree, fifty L2 (2nd year), forty-nine L3 (3rd year), and sixteen M2 (2nd year of the Master degree) students.

The responses to each questionnaire items have been laid out in tables. The highest line of each table contains the scales or possible responses from which respondents were to select one answer. The second line contains the sub-categories within each major category (teachers or learners). As for the third line, it shows the number of answers for each scaleselected by each sub-category out of the total number of respondents in that sub-category. Those numbers are turned into percentages.

The numbers of responses for every scale (possible answer to a given question) are put side-by-side to allow comparison of the response tendency between sub-categories of respondents; i.e. compare teachers with different professional experience and learners at different levels of study. Finally, a percentage is calculated for the dominant response tendency for learners and for teachers in order to identify any trend in the responses.

7. Key Findings of the Study: DiscussionandInterpretation of the Data

In the following discussion, we shall to use the data collected in this study to attempt to find answers to each question.

7.1The respondents' views about the effect of developing learner autonomy on the students' academic success

All teachers surveyed agree that autonomous learners succeed better in their studies. 87 % of the responses by students share the same attitude. Benefits of autonomy may extend beyond academia to society at large. Indeed, in a similar study with teachers in Algiers University, Algeria, Bensemmane reports that "Teachers believe that university prepares for life in society and agree that an autonomous learner has more chances to adapt to a changing society; 14/15 teachers think that an autonomous learner will become an effective citizen in a democratic society" (2008:257). There is apparently a general agreement about the positive contribution of learner autonomy to academic achievement in Algerian higher education.

7.2 The learners' views about the effect on the learners' academic success of the use of some learning strategies (student self-assessment of their own learning, students setting their own learning objectives, etc.)

Students participating in the present study were asked about the effect of seven strategies relevant to autonomous learning. On average 87 % of the responses stated that those strategies have a positive effect on the academic success of students. The statistics of responses which agree that the effect of the following on students' academic success is positive or very positive came as follows:

1. Making decisions about what they should learn: 99%
2. Self-assessment: 81%
3. Making decisions about what they need to learn especially outside class: 90%

4. Reflecting on what they are doing in class to learn: 87%
5. Reflecting on their own learning strengths and weaknesses: 91.5 %
6. Motivating themselves: 83 %
7. Learning from other people (like friends, etc.) besides teachers: 79 %.

Although globally the vast majority of students are convinced of the benefits of learning autonomously, a few students especially from the third year category hold a negative attitude towards learner autonomy particularly regarding **motivating oneself and learning from other students**. This issue may be ascribed to culture or previous learning experience predominantly controlled by teachers.

7.3 The respondents'*perception* of the role of culture, environment and family in developing their learner autonomy

The issue of the role of culture in fostering or inhibiting the autonomy of individuals is a moot point according to the responses obtained. 60 % of the students surveyed agree that in general, the Algerian culture, society and family do**prepare** students to make their own decisions and be responsible of their lives. But up to 40 % of the respondents said culture does **not** prepare them to autonomous. On a related question, when asked whether Algerian culture, society and family **encourage** students to be autonomous learners, 76% of the teachers surveyed disagreed. As for students however, 70 % of them agree that the Algerian culture, society and family do**encourage** students to make their own decisions. The discrepancy between students' responses to both questions and the responses of the teachers may stem from the former relatively limited life experience and analytical capacity in comparison to teachers. This variance in response can be used to allot more weight in terms of validity to teachers' responses without amounting to an invalidation of data from the students.

One of the questions that could be asked about the relationship between culture and learning autonomy is 'How much freedom does culture allow to its members to take initiatives, make decisions, act differently from the group, etc.?' Cultural contexts can encourage autonomous learning to occur in them to the degree they permit freedom for learners to make their own choices. Cultures with a strong authoritarian tendency may be expected to inhibit individuals making their own decisions and choosing pathways other than those preferred by the community.

7.4 The respondents' *perception* of the role of education in general, teachers and students in developing learner autonomy

If the participants in the present study (students and teachers from an Algerian English department) seem to be convinced of the usefulness of learner autonomy, do they perceivea need for promoting learner autonomy as an educational goal in their EFL departments? When asked about the level of autonomy in their students, 61% of teachers said only some or a few of their students seem to be autonomous learners. Up to 39% reported that **few** of their students seem autonomous.54% of Master students said some or a few of their classmates seem to be autonomous learners. And 36% reported that none or few of their classmates seem autonomous. Insufficient learning autonomy can be ascribed to educational culture. Bensemmane'sresearch points to this explanation; "With respect to the students' earlier educational experience (from primary school to university) … all teachers agree that this

school learning background is likely to impact negatively on the students' attitudes towards learning. They blame the parents and family for supporting and encouraging this form of learning, thereby preventing them or reducing their capacity to become autonomous." (**2008**:257**)**

In the English department at Blida University, 94.5 % of the surveyed students said their teachers do **encourage** them to use strategiesfor autonomous learning. 96% of the teachers from different Algerian EFL departmentsagreed that they **should** seek to develop learner autonomy in their students. In practice, 84% of the teachers said that they usually **seek** to develop their students' learning autonomy. The students go along teachers' responses as 94.5 % of the said that teachersseek to develop students' learning autonomy. Nonetheless, care should be exercised with self-report data. Although the responses obtained from the teachers who participated in this study are very positive about learner autonomy, these data need to be double checked via other research tools like classroom observation. Bensemmane's**research in an Algerian context yielded** suspicion expressed by a few teachers regarding autonomy turning into a non-productive goal in the Algerian context (**2008**:257)

7.5Differences in attitudes and perceptions about learner autonomy between

A - Senior, junior and pre-service teachers?

B - Learners at different stages of their learning at the English department (1st, 2nd, 3rd year of the English degree, 1st and 2nd year of the Master's degree)?

In general, teachers from the three sub-categories tended to share similar attitudes and perception about autonomous learning.A Similarresponse tendency is particularly observable in items 4, 5 and 8 of the teachers' questionnaire.However, a few differences can be underlined. For instance, on item 9, senior teachers appear to be more strongly in favour of the idea that teachers should seek to develop learner autonomy in their students; this attitude is consistent with their response to item 1 (Autonomous learners succeed better in their studies) as most senior teacherschose the 'strongly agree' while most junior counterparts chose 'agree'. The tendency of senior teachers to be more clearly favourable to learner autonomy also appears on their response to item 7; only them (senior teachers) said they **always**(most juniors chose 'usually') seekto develop their students' learning autonomy. In comparison, senior teachers seem more convinced of the utility of learner autonomy than junior colleagues

As for the students surveyed, across the four levels (1st, 2nd, 3rd year of the English degree and MA students), they displayed a similar response tendency for all questionnaire items. Though on item 1 (The effect of students making decisions about what they should learn, how to learn, where, when, etc., on their academic success), L1 & L2 respondents slightly opted more for 'very positive' than L3.

In conclusion to this discussion of the findings of the present study, it is notable that most of the surveyed teachers and students in this research seem to agree to the importance of learner autonomy for academic success. However some of the open-ended responses from both students and teacher underscore the need to train students in using strategies for

autonomous learning. We probably cannot simply assume that because students in EFL classes are sensitized to take responsibility of their own learning, they possess the tools to do so; or that because teachers adhere to learner autonomy, this will fully be reflected in their teaching practice. Nakata (2011) investigated teachers' readiness for promoting learner autonomy among EFL students in Japanese high schools and found that many Japanese EFL teachers, although they understood the importance of autonomy, were not ready to promotetheir learners' autonomy. Although most of them seem to adhere to the importance of learning strategies, they used them much less than would be expected in practice. Nakata (2011) ascribes the mismatch between attitude towards autonomy and actual practice of it to the social/cultural context which sets limits to both learners and teachers' autonomy (p. 900). The larger social culture can socialise both teacher and learners to become indifferent or even opposed to taking initiative and self-regulation.

8. Some Implications

On the basis of insights gained through the review of the literature and the study within the present research, it may be appropriate to consider the following implications:

8.1Further Research: Although attitudes and perceptions expressed by the teachers and students who participated in this study are quite similar, some findings require further investigation. For instance, a clear discrepancy emerged between teachers' and learners' answers to the question "In general, the Algerian culture, society and family encourage students to be autonomous learners"; 61 % of the teachers disagreed while 54 % of students agreed. In another instance, 49 %of the teachers answered the question "Is developing learner autonomy one of the objectives of your department's curriculum?" with 'yes' while 51 % said 'no' or 'Don't Know'. Therefore, more direct measures, such as analysis of the syllabi statements and classroom observation, are needed to investigate the role played by departments of English in fostering learner autonomy. More research is also needed to investigate the adherence of managers, teachers and learners to a learning autonomy based teaching in Algerian departments of English not only in beliefs but especially **in practice**.

8.2 Considering Stakeholders' Attitudes in Reforms: Some student questionnaire respondents said they believe autonomy is not helpful. Reforms for higher learner autonomy can only succeed if measures are taken to change opposing beliefs (See for instance Tillema 2000). These measures need to be informed by further deeper research to understand the reasons behind opposition to learner autonomy from learners as well as teachers. Decision-makers at all levels need to carefully consider the attitudes and perceptions of stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of reforms in education. A good majority of teachers and learners involved in any educational reforms must understand and adhere to them if they are to be successful.

8.3Supporting Stakeholders' to Carry Out Reforms:If educational reforms make higher or new demands on teachers and/or learners, arrangements must be made to prepare them to meet those demands; human beings may resist what they cannot do comfortably because of lack of skills.In Algeria and many other countries, the recenteducational reforms call for higher degrees of autonomy on the part of learners and teachers. The latter need support to

develop the beliefs, understanding and skills that are necessary to assume more responsibilities and act as agents in the learning process.

8.4 Curriculum for Learner Autonomy: The findings of this study seem to indicate that most surveyed teachers and students hold positive attitudes towards learner autonomy. 94% of the teachers support the idea that education **should** aim at developing learner autonomy.Besides,all the teachers said they agree that developing learner autonomy **should** be one of the educational objectives of the English department. These data reflect a strong attitude in favour of an autonomous-learning English department. However, many teachers and learners believe the English department is**not** playing a positive role in developing learner autonomy. 51% of the teachers said that developing learner autonomy is **not** one of the objectives of their English department's curriculum or that they did not know whether it is an objective. Not knowing is similar, though definitely not the same, to believing their department does not consider learner autonomy as an educational goal. Therefore, some work need to be done especially at level of curriculum and teaching to address this possible weakness. Besides, the data presented in this paper seem to suggest that many EFL students may not be autonomous enough, which calls for intervention in the form of training to foster learner autonomy among students.

8.5 Teachers' Role in Fostering Learner Autonomy: With or without educational objectives and syllabi favourable for autonomous learning, the role of teachers in developing learner autonomy may be the most critical.Teaching that fosters learner autonomy makes some requirements. Pedagogy for autonomy in Jiménez' words, "requires a re-conceptualisation of the teaching-learning process. When teachers are encouraged to foster learner autonomy … they are asked to have different understandings of their role as modern language teachers, to create a different relationship with their students" (2011:159). These may be requirements for teachers' readiness to teach towards higher autonomy of the learners.

Finally, t**he educational c**ontext in Algeria seems to inhibit autonomy in managing learning for both learners and teachers. Most decisions relating to the management of learning like setting learning objectives, syllabus, examinations are taken by top managers. Such **context may not allow teachers enough freedom to foster autonomous learning especially under the pressure of tight requirements for completion of the national syllabi. Political and educational leaders must allow more agency to local educational managers, teachers and hence learners to partake in the decision making process, hence to exercise and develop teachers, learners and local managers' autonomy.**

9. Conclusion

Sometimes educational changes, despite good design, struggle to have the desired outcomes because of a failure to prepare the field they target to reform before implementation. Algerian higher education has witnessed fundamental organisational changes which seem to call for higher autonomy from learners as well asmanagers and teachers. The purpose of the present study was to explore the readiness of Algerian EFL students and teachers for promoting learner autonomy. 130 learners and 35 teachers were surveyed about their perceptions and attitudes concerning the roles of teachers, EFL departments and society at large in fostering learner autonomy. The survey yielded data that seem to say a number of

useful things. First, although all teachers and the majority of students surveyed are convinced by the idea that autonomous learners succeed better in their studies, there seems to exist some uncertainty about the role of the EFL department in promoting learner autonomy.Some confusion also appears as some students expressed a negative attitude towards the use of some strategies related to autonomous learning. Therefore, this paper makes some recommendations to address such issues and, at a larger scale, increase the chances of success for educational reforms. Support for teachers and learners particularly in terms of awareness raising, inclusion in decision-making and training in skillsmay ensure a clear adherence by the majority of teachers and students who are called to embrace more autonomous learning.

The present research represents a tentative attempt to investigate learners and teachers' readiness for promoting learner autonomy. Any conclusions from this study remain tentative. Therefore, further research is needed to investigate whether teachers and learners in Algerian departments of English are in **practice** adhering to learning autonomy.What also remains to be seen is whether both have tools to engage in autonomous learning. In the meantime, what can be said with reasonable confidence is the importance of being aware of the potential or actual obstacles to any projected reforms so as to make necessary arrangement to overcome or reduce their negative impact on the desired outcomes.

In fact, this research underscores the need to understand learners and teachers' readiness, educational contexts and working conditions before educational reforms are implemented to increase their chances of success.Changes and reforms to education may not bear expected fruits when the attitudes and perceptions of all the stakeholders are not adequately taken into consideration. Teachers and learners' attitudes in particular can have a positive or negative effect on reforms as they are the main actors and beneficiaries of most organizational or curricular changes in education.

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