



# The Factors Fostering Autonomous Learning: The Case of the Algerian Secondary Education Year One EFL Learners

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## Abstract

### Keywords

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The introduction of the Competency-based Approach (CBA) in the Algerian Education system has brought a new view to how languages are taught. Indeed, the implementation of this approach in (2003) paved the way to changes in classroom practices where the learner became the centre around which all learning processes rotate. The Algerian Ministry of Education has set some objectives in relation to how learners should learn, what skills and competences they should develop, how they should react towards other cultures, and most importantly in our study how they can become autonomous learners. Yet, becoming an autonomous learner is not easy objective to achieve if teachers and learners' beliefs and attitudes towards autonomous learning are not positive despite their awareness about the existence of the factors mediating autonomous learning throughout the Secondary Education Year One (SE1) ELT textbook *At The Crossroads*. To carry on this study, a questionnaire was handed to (SE1) EFL teachers and another one was given to (SE1) EFL learners. It was revealed that teachers and learners are not knowledgeable about the existence of the factors mediating autonomous learning in the textbook and that their beliefs and attitudes towards learner autonomy have greatly affected the teaching /learning processes inside and outside the classroom.

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## 1. Introduction

Theories about language learning have been in a constant evolution since many years now. They have always tried to show and bring insights about how human beings learn and construct knowledge about themselves and about the world around them. These theories have been the backbone of teaching languages in schools and as such syllabus designers have always relied on those theories' most basic principles to design school text books. Yet, if one takes a deep look into the different methods and approaches to teaching English as a Foreign Language that have been in use so far, he would notice that there are two main stream thoughts to language teaching/learning that have governed English language teaching (ELT) in Algerian schools throughout the past decades; these are formalism and activism. Classroom teaching practices have often been shaped by such views to language learning, and in some situations have co-existed in the same language (ELT) classroom, and proponents to each learning trend have always tried to sustain their choice for one and not the other by putting forward their conceptions to how best a language is taught/learnt. Thus, we can summarise that formalists' classrooms are places where teachers are the ones who hold the responsibility of teaching over their shoulders by playing the role of knowledge holders and transmitters, where learners are constrained to passive roles, most often that of quiet good listeners. While activists' classrooms are places where teachers are not at the centre of learning but learners are encouraged to take their learning at hand through discovery learning, collaboration, negotiation of meaning, self and peer evaluation and so on. Learners, here, are given more active roles and the teacher acts just as a facilitator, a counselor and a co-learner. This activist consideration to language learning can be part of some approaches to language learning such is the case with the Competency based approach. Nevertheless, the learner within this approach, as is the case with the Algerian learner, is expected to hold more complex roles than that of being an active one, such as : learning, discovering language, constructing knowledge, reflecting on what has been learnt, monitoring ones' own

progress, setting objectives, making plans to reach those objectives, collaborating, negotiating meaning ...etc. To sum it up, the learner is put in situations where he should develop social, affective, metacognitive and cognitive skills that will enable him /her to take more responsibility for his own learning and consequently will help him become an autonomous learner.

Yet, to be accomplished, these new roles do not involve only the learner, but also teachers in presenting and implementing them through classroom and beyond school walls tasks, syllabus designers in finding ways how to introduce them as they design English language text-books, and over all language policy makers, by supplying means to make those objectives realizable. Thus, this study tries to find out whether or not SE1 EFL teachers are knowledgeable about the existence of such factors in the (SE1) ELT Textbook At The Crossroads and what their attitude and belief and that of their learners' towards autonomous learning is. To find out, a questionnaire had been handed to (SE1) learners and another one was given to their teachers. The research questions put forward to carry on this study are as follow:

RQ1: How far do pupils and teachers make use of the tasks existing within the (SE1) ELT Textbook At the Crossroads that foster the cognitive, metacognitive, social and the affective factors so important to mediate autonomous learning?

RQ2: What kind of attitudes and beliefs do teachers and learners have towards learner autonomy?

H1: The text book is conceived in such a way to fit one of the most basic aims of the Competency –based Approach, autonomous learning, but neither teachers nor learners are aware of the existence of such factors present in the text-book and thus do not give much importance to the activities and the tasks included in the text-book that boost autonomous learning.

H2: Teachers and learners' beliefs and attitudes towards learner autonomy make it that they very often swing to traditional teaching/learning approaches that hinder the development of this type of learning.

## 2. Learner Autonomy Defined

Autonomous learning is a concept that has lately been put under focus by many researchers and has

become in vogue in educational contexts. Scholars such as (Benson, 1997; Dam, 1995; Holec, 1981; Little et al., 2002) have been engaged in its study and have attempted to find ways leading to its application in school context with language learners. In fact this new learning philosophy is on one hand due to the results left by the writings of Piaget (1952) and Vygotsky (1978), and on the other hand because of the shift in the attitude and the conception of the individual's role in society. There has been a move from "man as product of his society" to "man as a producer of his society" (Holec, 1981, p.1). From the very beginning of the appearance of this concept and its implementation in the domain of education and more precisely in language learning, many scholars have tried to define it; and perhaps one of the most quoted and influential definitions was Holec's (1981) mentioned below. Nevertheless, scholars are unable to come out with one agreed upon definition that unites them all. Yet, Lap (2005) sees that very basic to defining learner autonomy are learners' (1) cognitive factors (ability or capacity), (2) affective factors (attitudes, willingness, readiness, self-confidence), (3) meta-cognitive factors (setting learning goals, choosing learning materials, planning activities to work on, monitoring and self-evaluating progress), and (4) social factors (collaborating with others so as to encourage interactions and scaffolds, a condition for enhancing one's independent problem-solving skills.

### 2.1 Cognitive Factors

Some definitions about the concept that relate to the cognitive factors are those put forward by (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Benson, 2001; Vanijdee, 2003 as cited in Lap 2005) which take learners' ability or capacity into account. For Holec, to say of a learner that he is autonomous is...to say that "he is capable of taking charge of his own learning and nothing more..." (1981, p.3). To take charge of one's learning is to have and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning. (ibid)

Vanijdee (2003, cited in Lap 2005) extends the concept of learner autonomy as a capacity of learners to take more responsibility for their own learning. In Little's (1991) definition, autonomy is a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent actions. In addition to the common points with Holec, Little's definition states the fact that the learner is aware

about what he is learning. This awareness is the effect of the learners' reflection on his own learning (Lap, 2005). To sum it up, cognitively speaking, autonomous learning is the ability to take charge of one's own learning with some degree of awareness.

### 2.2 Affective Factors

Definitions which treated the concept taking into consideration the affective side are as important and considerable as the ones stated before. These definitions, as cited in Lap (2005) most importantly put under focus learners' affective traits such as their willingness to learn, their readiness, their attitudes and self-confidence. For Wenden (1987), autonomous learners show their will to take their own learning under their responsibility. They see themselves as having a crucial role in their own learning. They are self-confident learners with strong beliefs in their capacity to learn, to self-direct and to manage their learning. Chan (2001) adds the quality of readiness to learn autonomously to describe autonomous learners. Ho & Crookall (1995) view learner attitude as one of the variables to define learner autonomy besides what they label as self-knowledge (i.e., what one needs to learn), skills and knowledge about the learning process and the nature of language.

### 2.3 Meta- Cognitive Factors

Nowadays, according to Williams (2003), pedagogy is making an increasing move towards the idea that the learner should be aware of his own thought processes, and that it is a must for the pedagogical theorist and teacher alike to guide him become more meta-cognitively oriented, to be as aware of how he learns and thinks as he is about the subject matter he is studying. Thus, the meaning of "taking charge of" or "taking responsibility for one's own learning" needs to be clearly explained. Learner autonomy is considered as the "ability or capacity to take control (rather than responsibility) over the management of one's learning (i.e., learning processes, resources and language use). This control over learning denotes '...learner's involvement in setting goals, defining content and working out evaluation mechanism for assessing achievement and progress' (Little, 1991, p.91). The level to which learners show their control over learning is manifested through their ability to use some learning strategies such as

setting objectives, selecting material and tasks to be studied, thinking about practicing opportunities, monitoring and evaluating progress (Cotterall, 1995 cited in Lap 2005, p.24). Dam (1995) puts forward learners' needs and purposes, reflected in learning goals set by learners themselves. Definitions taking meta-cognitive factors into consideration value learners' self-regulation skills among which are: Planning, monitoring and evaluating, the required qualities to be communicatively competent language learners. According to (Moyles in Williams, 2003, p. xiii) real autonomous learning pedagogy requires teachers to recognise learners' potential for responsibility. He states that even the youngest school learners can operate in ways which challenge them cognitively, through play and other activities, without continual adult intervention.

#### **2.4 Social Factors**

Dam (1995) believes that social skills are primordial to work in cooperation with others as a socially responsible person and she argues that this is a quality required from an autonomous learner. Benson asserts that greater control of learning processes, learning resources and language use cannot be achieved by each individual acting alone according to their own preferences. Thus, instead of being a question of individual choice, control is rather a matter of decisions made by the whole group (1996, p33). This view is congruent with situations where foreign languages are learnt. Little (1991) strongly supports the claim that proper and in-time scaffolds support learners' active involvement and stimulate their autonomous learning. Social interactions manifested in these scaffolds mediate learning. Moreover, cooperation in assisting each other to reflect on task execution and language learning is necessary for developing meta-cognition.

To sum it up, the concept of learner autonomy has been linked with four factors: Cognitive, affective, social and meta-cognitive. These factors are going to shape this research in addition to the two psychological variables which are teachers' and learners' attitudes and beliefs.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Sampling**

Within this study the researcher has called upon a number of informant teachers who have been or are in charge of teaching first year secondary

school learners. Their total number is seventy-four (74). The learners who have taken part in this study are first year secondary school pupils. Their age ranges between fourteen and twenty-one years old. The streams that were used as sample population had not been chosen purposefully but randomly. Thus, we have had literary stream pupils and experimental sciences ones. The learners are from different schools and their number is two hundreds and four (204) representing eight classrooms from eight different secondary schools.

#### **3.2 Research Instruments**

The research instruments used to collect the data for this research are a questionnaire for the teachers and another one for the learners. Quantitative data had been gathered through these questionnaires and had been treated by the Statistical software (SPSS).

##### **3.2.1 Learners' Questionnaire**

The purpose of the questionnaire administered to the learners was to collect data about the learners' language learning practices both inside and outside the classroom. It also, and most importantly, attempts to know how the learners use the text-book, what they think about its different constituents, and how they react towards the tasks proposed to them in the textbook.

The questionnaire consists of different sections holding questions that are meant for cross checking both the findings set in the referential about the factors mediating autonomous learning in the text-book and the findings related to the teachers' classroom practices and usage of the textbook.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of the confidentiality declaration. The second part is about the bio-data of the respondents. However, the third and the main part of it contains questions mostly designed following the 'Likert rating scale model', and contained questions that were supposed to provide data that would enable the researcher answer the research questions and test the hypotheses put forward at the opening of this study.

##### **3.2.2 Teachers' Questionnaire**

Just as learners' questionnaire, that of the teachers was designed in such a way to gather data that would enable the researcher crosscheck its findings with those of the learners.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts: the confidentiality declaration, the respondents' bio-

data, and the questions meant to bring answers to the research questions and their respective hypotheses. The questions within the questionnaire were mainly multiple choice ones designed mostly following the Likert scale rating model.

### 3.3 Nature of the collected Data

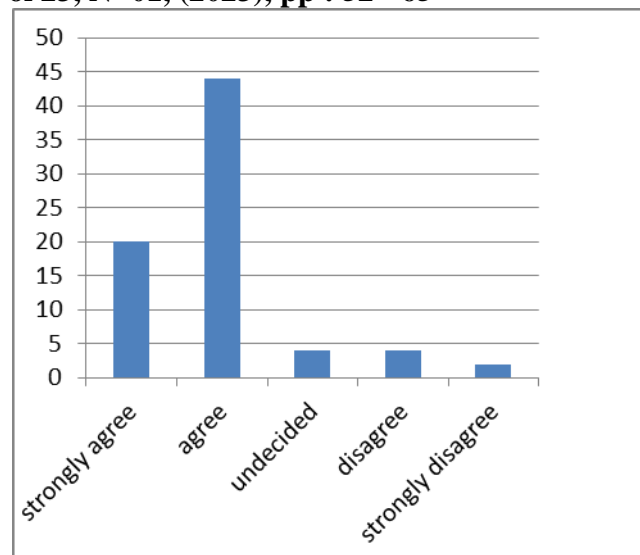
The data collected through these research instruments were of a mixed method nature to a certain extent. The two questionnaires were mainly designed with items asking about specific pieces of information through various response options for the respondents to choose from so as to generate quantitative data easy to treat and analyse through the statistical software SPSS. Open ended questions were avoided firstly because of the nature of the study which is not meant to collect qualitative data about the teachers' or the learners' comments and suggestions on the textbook and how to bring improvements on it, but rather wanted to check their beliefs, attitudes, and classroom practices that would provide appropriate data to help test the hypotheses put forward for this research. Secondly, the open ended items as Sudan and Bradburn (1983) assert, 'requests for long responses often lead to refusals to answer the question or the entire questionnaire, and even if we get longer written answers, many of these will need to be discarded because they are uncodable or inappropriate' (cited in Dornyei, 2003, p.13).

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Within this part of the study we are going to simultaneously analyse teachers' and learners' questionnaires since in a way or another same questions have been asked to the respondents. Information about the age, locations and teaching experience will not be displayed in this part of the text as these have no impact on the results of our study.

**Item One:** 'The book map' on page two of *At the Crossroads* is of great importance to teachers.

The ELT Textbook *At the Cross Roads* holds a Book Map at its entrance that displays the whole program and the language points the pupils will go through while using it. The extent to which teachers value its importance gives answers about whether or not they refer to it for their own lessons preparation as well as for making their learners aware about its existence to involve them in the learning process.

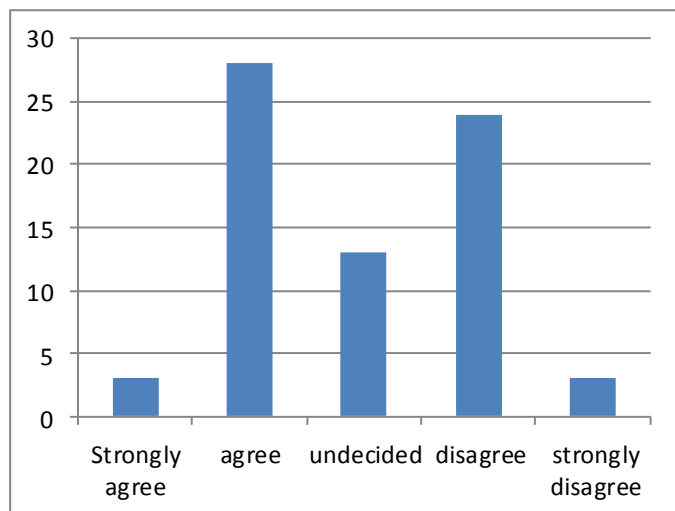


**Figure 1: Teachers' Attitude towards the Use of the Book Map**

The table above shows that (27%) of the respondents strongly agree, and (59%) do agree about the importance of the use of the book map. However, a restricted minority had a negative attitude towards it and their rate was (3%) for those who strongly disagree and (5, 5%) for the ones who disagree. The remaining informants (5, 5%) were undecided about this question.

Item Two: 'The book map' on page two of *At the Crossroads* is of great importance to learners.

This item's aim is to check whether or not teachers consider the book map as being important to their learners to read, the data collected here will tell us if teachers involve their learners in the process of learning from the very beginning of the school year.

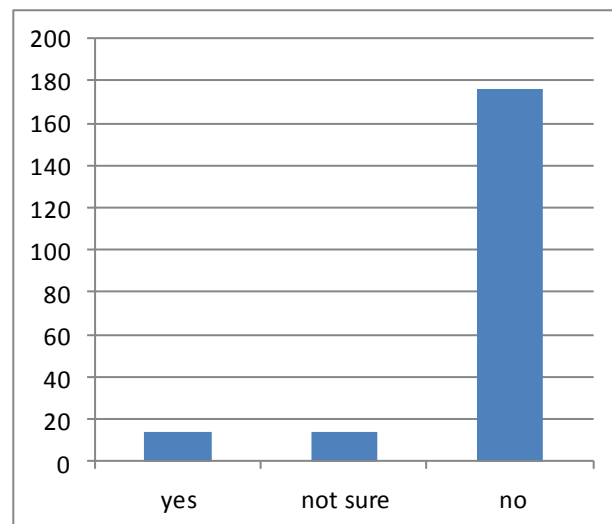


**Figure 2: Teachers Beliefs about the Importance of the Book Map for learners**

The figure above shows that less than half of the informants think that the book map is important to the pupils, (17, 6%) are undecided about the question and (36,5%) think that the book map is not important for the learners. It is to mention that the same question had nearly a total negative feedback from the learners when asked about whether they read the content of ‘the book map’ on page two of At the Crossroads or not. The results came as follow: (86, 3%) of the informants admit to have never read this part of the textbook, and (6, 9%) say that they do. The figure below represents the findings concerning learners’ answers to this item.

Item Three: Have you ever read the content of ‘the book map’ on page two of At the Crossroads?

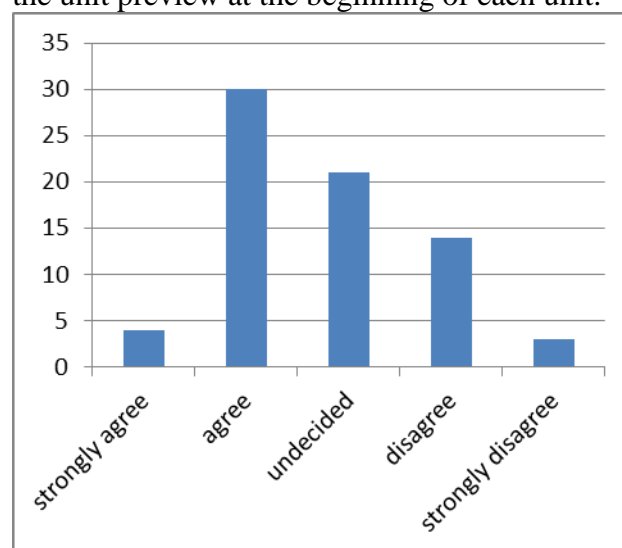
Taking responsibility over one’s own learning entails being knowledgeable about the content of learning. One way of presenting the syllabus to the learners in At the Crossroads is the book map on page two. But, do pupils refer to this part of the course-book so as to have an idea about what they are going to learn? This is what the data in the table below try to shed some light on.



**Figure 3: Learners’ Reference to the Book Map**

The data gathered in this table show that (86, 3%) of the informants admit to have never read this part of the textbook, and (6, 9%) say that they do. Item four: Learners should carefully read the ‘Unit Preview’ at the beginning of each unit.

Like the book map, the unit preview displays the language content that should be presented to learners in the unit in addition to the objectives of the different sequences. Thus, teachers and learners alike should be aware of its existence and should refer to it to know what they are learning, what they should learn next and why they are learning a given language point. So, the data that gathered through this item is meant to tell us whether or not teachers tell their learners to read the unit preview at the beginning of each unit.



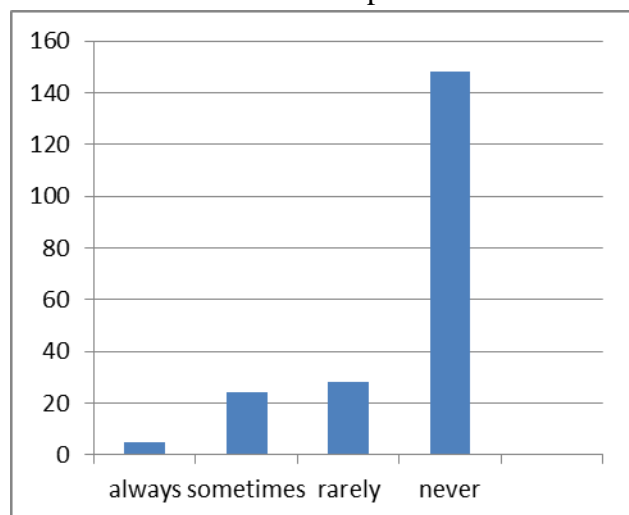
**Figure4: Teachers Beliefs about the Importance of Unit Preview for Learners.**

The figure above shows that (45, 9%) of the respondents do have a positive attitude towards this tool and agree about the importance of consulting it before starting to study the unit. However, the remaining informants, nearly (55%), are either undecided about answering this question, strongly disagree about it, or disagree that their learners need to have an idea about the language content displayed in this part of the textbook. It is to be mentioned that (2, 7%) of the respondents did not answer this question at all.

Yet, while the same question was asked to the learners, the answers came totally different from those of the teachers since (72, 1%) of the informants recognize that they never read the unit preview.

**Item five: Do you read the ‘Unit Preview’ at the beginning of each unit?**

The aim behind the unit preview is nearly the same as that of the book map.



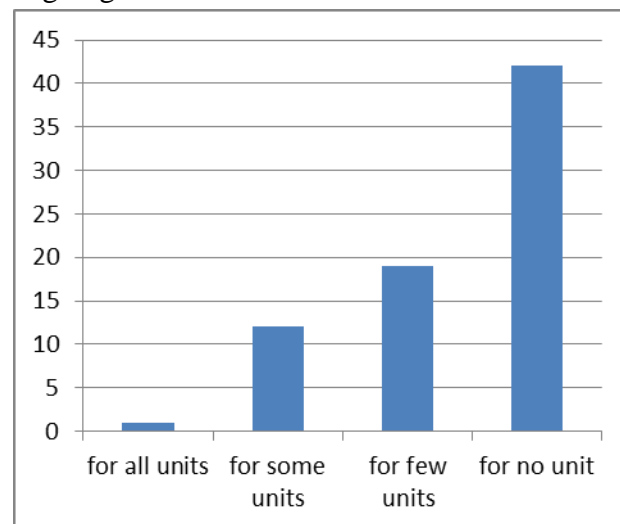
**Figure5: Learners’ Reference to the Unit Preview.**

The information in this table show that (72, 1%) of the informants never read the unit preview, and (13, 7%) rarely do. However, (11, 8%) say they sometimes do and a very limited number of pupils (2, 5%) say they always do.

**Item Six: How often do you tell your pupils to fill in the ‘check your progress portfolio’ that is by the end of each unit?**

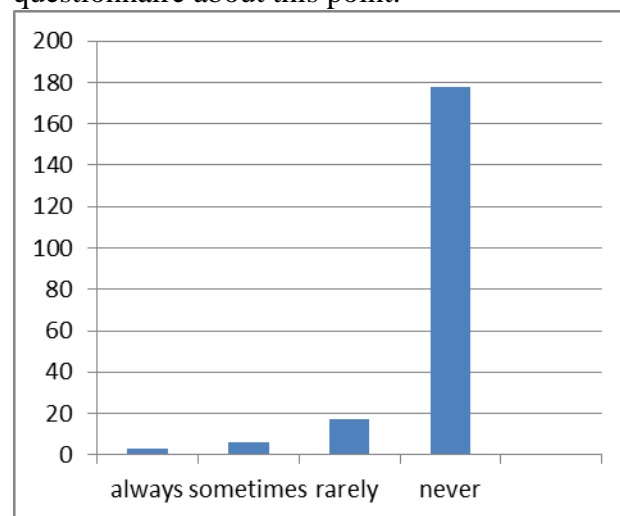
The check your progress portfolio is a self - evaluation tool that learners are supposed to fill in

whenever they finish studying a unit. This is what is going to be checked here.



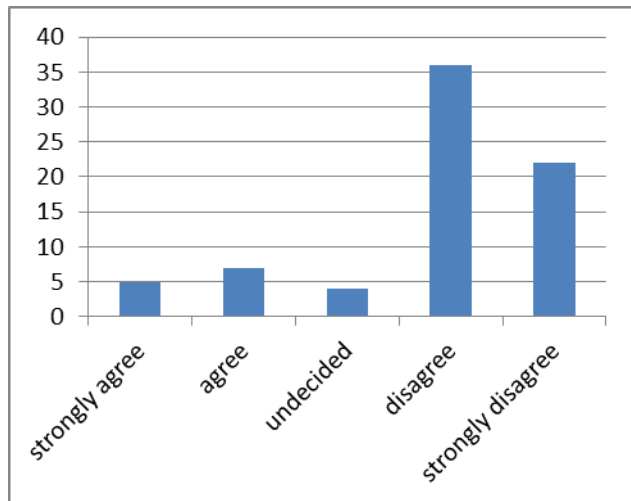
**Figure 6: Check your Progress Portfolio Assignment**

The figure above shows that only (1, 4%) of the informant teachers do order their pupils to fill in the check your progress portfolio for all units, and (16, 2%) say they assign it for some units. However, (25, 7%) of the informants say that they assign this activity for few units, and the majority (56, 8%) admit that they do not tell their pupils to do it at all. It is worth mentioning that nearly the same results and sometimes higher ones have been found with the informant learners when asked how often they filled in the ‘check your progress portfolio’ that is by the end of each unit, as the majority of them (87, 3%) recognize to have never filled in such a grid, and only (4, 4%) say they do. Here are the results obtained from the learners’ questionnaire about this point.



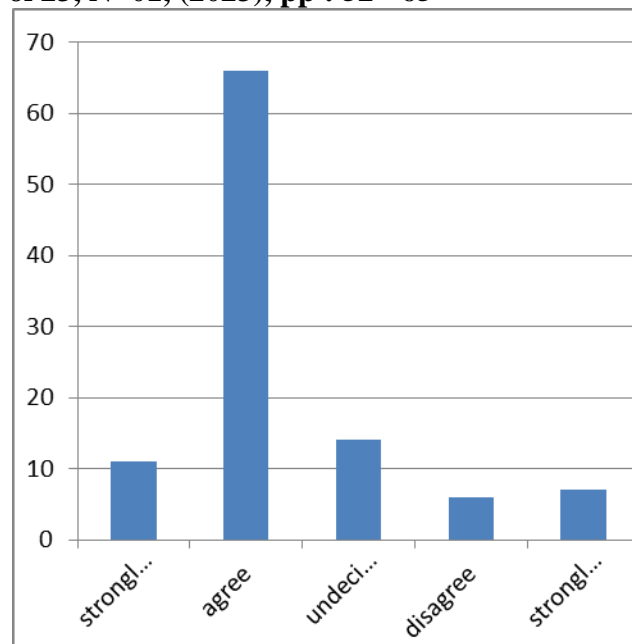
**Figure 7: Check your Progress Completion by Learners**

Item Seven: There are some scholars who believe that pupils should take responsibility over their own language learning. What do you think? Autonomous learning entails learners to be aware of their responsibility towards their own learning. So, here we are going to see what teachers believe about this.



**Figure 8: Teachers Beliefs about Learners Responsibility over their Learning**

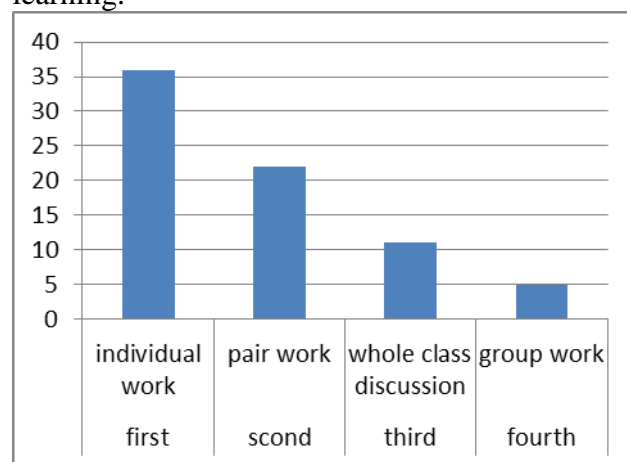
This figure represents teachers' beliefs about pupils' responsibility over their own learning. Statistics show that (16, 2%) share the scholars' view, and (78, 3%) do not. Yet, while learners were asked whether their teachers should be responsible over their learning, identical results had been found since (86, 8%) of the learners believe that teachers are the ones responsible for their learning, however (6, 3%) do not think so. The rest of the respondents (6, 9%) were undecided about this question. Below is a figure which illustrates these findings.



**Figure 9: Learners' beliefs about Teachers' Responsibility over their Learning**

**Item Eight:** Which of the following classroom learning situations are your pupils mostly faced with? Rank them from the most to the least frequent one using numbers (1 for the most frequent and 4 for the least frequent).

Interactive learning is an essential element in the social factors mediating learning autonomy, thus group work is a very important classroom learning practice that should dominate the scene in classrooms claiming to reach autonomous learning.



**Figure 10: Dominant Classroom Learning Situations According to Teachers**

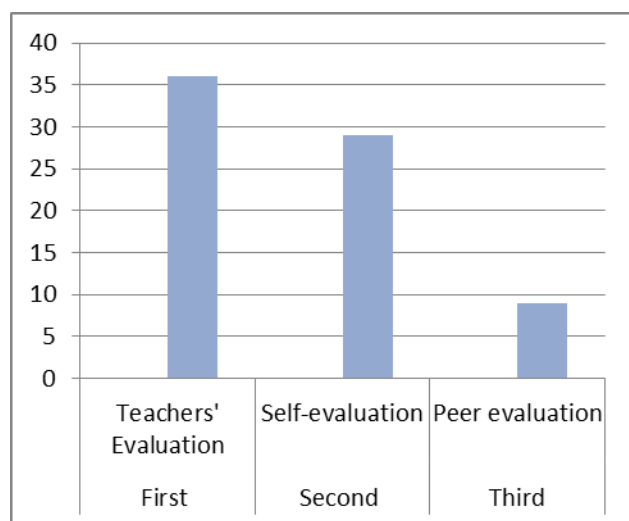
The figure above shows that individual work ranks first with (48,6%) as a learning situation to which learners are exposed. Pair work (29, 7%) comes second, and whole class topic discussion



third with (14, 9%). However, what is supposed to rank first comes in the fourth position with only (6, 8%). This is what was also confirmed by the informant learners while they were asked about the learning situation they usually face while learning English in the classroom. The results show that (39, 2%) rank individual work in the first position, and (36, 8%) put pair work in the second one. However, group work which normally should dominate in the approach is ranked third with (15, 2%), and whole class work ranks fourth with (8, 8%).

Item Nine: Which kind of evaluation is, according to you, most beneficial to learners' individual development? Rank them from the most to the least valuable. (1 for most and 4 for least).

Self-regulated learning, which is a meta-cognitive factor that mediates autonomous learning, entails learners to continually evaluate their knowledge so as to spot their weaknesses, set objectives and make plans to achieve those objectives. Thus, through this question we aim to find out teachers' beliefs towards the kind of evaluation which is most beneficial to the development of learners.

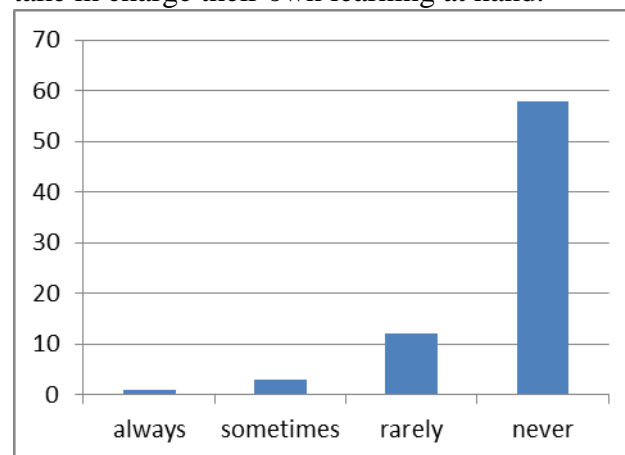


**Figure 11: Teachers' Most Favourite Types of Evaluation**

The data presented here show that a considerable number of informants (48, 6%) believe that teachers' evaluation to their learners is most beneficial to them, and (39, 2%) see that it is rather self-evaluation. However, the remaining minority (12, 2%) ranks peer evaluation in the third position.

Item Ten: Do you give your pupils a project evaluation grid?

Learners are given a collaborative project to realise for each unit. Project evaluation grids are supposed to be handed to learners so as to help them assess themselves when working together with their partners on their topic. It will also give them an idea about what to focus on while preparing the project, and how they will be graded by their teacher. Thus, the grid becomes an element that helps shifting responsibilities from teachers to learners, and paves learners' way to take in charge their own learning at hand.

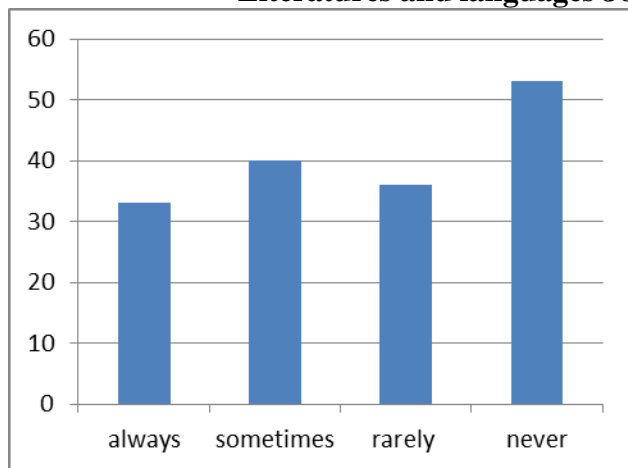


**Figure 12: Project Evaluation Grid**

The figure above shows that most teachers (78, 4%) never give such a grid to their pupils, and (16, 2%) rarely do. The rest of the informants (5, 4%) say they give their learners this grid before starting to work on the project.

Item Eleven: Do you and your group members talk about the positive and the negative sides of the project after you present it?

When learners evaluate their own work, they tend to be more aware about their own role in learning in general, and realizing future projects in particular in addition to the fact that it raises their self-esteem, a variable, so important to engage learners in future learning activities where they avoid the mistakes they did in their previous collaborative work. The results to this item are displayed in the figure below.

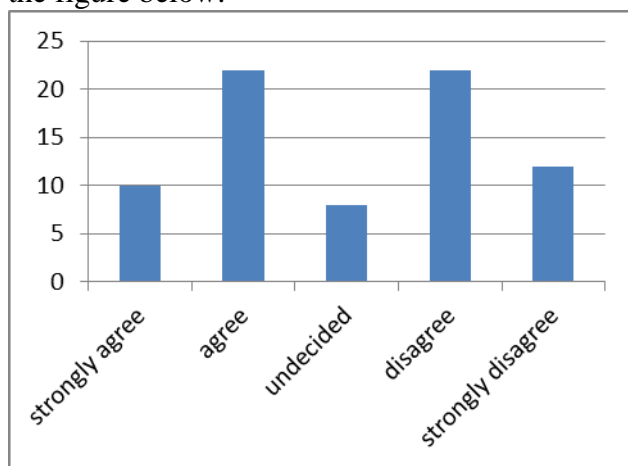


**Figure 13: Evaluation of the Project by the Members of the Same Group**

The figure above shows that (16, 2%) of the informants always discuss with their group members their projects and that (19, 6%) admit they sometimes do. However, (26, 0%) recognize that they never discuss the positive and the negative sides of their projects, and (17, 2%) say they rarely do.

**Item Twelve:** A teacher is one who makes himself progressively unnecessary. What do you think?

Teachers' attitude towards learner autonomy is a factor that shapes classroom practices and thus encourages or impedes learner centeredness. Hence, through this question we tried to collect data in this vein, and this is what is presented in the figure below.



**Figure 14: Teachers' Attitude towards Learner Autonomy**

The figure above shows that (43, 2%) of the informants have a positive attitude towards autonomous learning, and nearly the same number (45, 9%) have a negative one. It is to be

mentioned, however, that (10, 8 %) of the respondents were undecided about this question.

#### 4. Discussion

Some very basic and essential elements that should be manifested in autonomous learners are those related to the four factors mentioned above. Scholars such as (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Benson, 2001) put forward cognitive processes like defining the content of learning and progression, evaluating what had been learnt, taking responsibility over one's learning, critical reflection, decision making, independent action, and awareness resulting from critical reflection.

Thus, to consider At the Crossroads as a learning material that helps foster autonomous learning, it should embody within its pages the above mentioned cognitive factors; in addition to that, the users of the text book should be aware of their existence and their usefulness. This is what the headings below are going to uncover through the interpretation of the results drawn from the data collected through the research instruments used in this study.

#### 4.1 Cognitive factors

Cognitive factors fostering autonomous learning are manifested through teachers' and learners' classroom practices that we are going explain in the phase below.

##### 4.1.1 Shifting Responsibility

The first reference under the cognitive factor that states that the textbook facilitates the transfer of responsibility from teachers to learners shows that indeed some criteria for such a reference do exist but others do not. The textbook holds within its pages the language content that the pupils are supposed to learn during the whole year and also within each unit and each sequence. So, if the learners want to have an idea about the syllabus for self- study or to get ready for it beforehand, they can consult the book map. The other important criterion, essential in shifting the responsibility from teachers to learners, is that the aim behind each sequence is well mentioned in the unit preview, that is at the entrance of each unit in the text-book.

In spite of the fact that the textbook holds within its pages some criteria that help the transfer of responsibility from teachers to learners, this does not seem to be the case with teachers and learners' classroom practices and their beliefs towards such factors. It is to be mentioned, however, that a large number of learners (86,3%) recognized that

they never read the 'book map' which is at the entrance of the book and which holds the yearly language content to be studied, though (59,5%) of the teachers considered this document as an important tool both for them and for their learners. Moreover, (72, 1%) of the learners say that they never consult the unit preview so as to know what the content of the unit is, in spite of the fact that (73,00%) of the teachers do agree that pupils should be aware of the unit content before starting to study it, and (47,2%) of them believe it to be an important tool that learners should consult regularly.

#### 4.1.2 Tasks Raising Learners' Awareness

A second cognitive factor so crucial in the transfer of responsibility from teachers to learners is raising learners' awareness about taking in charge their own learning. This factor is presented in At the Crossroads through tasks and activities that encourage critical reflection and put the learner in situations where he performs tasks and then checks his knowledge about his own learning in reference to a listening script or a reading passage. Taking responsibility generates some kind of behaviour on the side of the learner such as taking decisions about what to learn and evaluating one's progress. For such a matter, one of the most important tools for raising learners' awareness about their own learning is the existence of self-evaluation portfolios at the end of each unit that the learners are supposed to fill in so as to know how well they do about what they have learnt in class, and hand a copy of it to their teachers. These progress portfolios will give evidence to the teacher about his learners' common failures in relation to which he will present remedial work for the whole class. In addition to that, this will also enable individual learners to spot their own learning weaknesses and think about ways how to bring improvements on them by doing individual specific extra exercises. Unfortunately, (56,8 %) of the teachers recognize that they never told their pupils to fill in that progress portfolio and only (1,4%) of them say they assign this activity to their pupils for all the units. This is in reality a bit quite different from the data collected in the learners questionnaire which reveals that (87, 3%) of the informants say that they never fill in the progress portfolio.

#### 4.2 Meta-cognitive Factors

Nowadays conceptions to education tend to notice a shift towards making the learner aware of his

own thinking processes, as in how he is learning and thinking, just in the same way he is made aware about the subject matter he is studying. This means that he is being led to become more meta-cognitively oriented (Williams, 2003). This shift in learning conception entails taking control over one's learning, which denotes that the 'learner is involved in setting goals, defining content and working out evaluation mechanisms for assessing achievement and progress' (Little, 1991, p.91). Dam (1995) came out with some meta-cognitive qualities required for autonomous learning such as self-regulation skills: planning, monitoring, and evaluating.

#### 4.2.1 Learners' Control over their own Learning

The first reference in the meta-cognitive domain is that of learners taking control over their own learning. So as to be meta-cognitively engaged, learners should be accustomed to do some tasks such as spotting one's weaknesses, making plans for remediation and knowing where to search for material to improve their language learning level. Unfortunately, the data gathered through the questionnaires uncovered that (87, 3%) of the respondent learners admitted that they had never filled in the progress portfolio that was by the end of each unit. Hence, this can give us insights about the rest of the metacognitive processes that learners should go through if they filled in the progress portfolio, such as spotting one's weaknesses, setting objectives and making plans to reach those objectives.

This was confirmed through the data provided in both questionnaires where it was shown that (78, 4%) of the teachers recognized the fact that they never provided their learners with project evaluation grids, and (89, 5%) of the pupils said they never received such a grid from their teachers to guide them work on their project and have an idea about what to spend more time on and what to give more importance to. The project is an opportunity for learners to reinvest what they have learnt in classroom to produce a collaborative work with their partners. So, if this grid is given to the learners while the project is launched, it will have two functions. The first one is that it will make learners aware about what is happening in classroom in terms of the language points dealt with and the competencies acquired. The second one is that it will help them know what to include in the project and what to focus on while working

on it as grading will take into consideration all of these mentioned elements.

#### 4.3 Social Factors

According to Dam (1995) an autonomous learner necessitates to develop some social skills to work with others as a responsible member within the social context he is in. In the same line of thought, Benson (1996) asserts that the control of the learning process, the learning resources and language use cannot be done by individual learners each one on his side but it is a question of collective decision making. The more social interaction with negotiations of meaning are observed, the more language learning through language use may take place. Researchers in the field of socio-cultural theory came out with the view that appropriate and in-time scaffolds support learners' active involvement and stimulate their autonomous learning (Little, 1991). Social interactions manifested in these scaffolds mediate learning. Nonetheless, cooperation in assisting each other to reflect on task execution and language learning is necessary for developing meta-cognition, which in its turn is a required factor mediating autonomous learning.

Thus, considering what has been said in theory about the social factors that mediate learner autonomy, teachers' classroom practices need to favour tasks and activities that encourage collaboration, interaction, negotiation of meaning and scaffolding. Yet, the data gathered in both questionnaires do not seem to show such behaviours since while asked to rank the learning situation their pupils were mostly faced with while performing tasks in the classroom, teachers ranked individual work in first position with (48,6%), pair work with (29,7%) came in the second position, and whole class topic discussion was third with (14,9%). However, what was supposed to rank first was at the fourth position with only (6,8%). As for the learners who participated in this study (39,2%) ranked individual work in the first position, and (36,8%) put pair work in the second place. However, group work which normally should dominate in the approach was ranked in the third place with (15, 2%), and whole class work ranked fourth with (8, 8%). These results show that the learners are not put in interactive situations which enable them to scaffold one another's learning and construct knowledge.

#### 4.4 Affective Factors

Reflection on the learning process involves learners to express themselves about their learning experiences putting more stress on how well or how badly they worked on a task. It also allows them to speak about the reasons that helped or hindered their learning while working alone or together on a language task or any other activity. Unfortunately, teachers did not even seem to value the fact that learners could evaluate their own learning and that of their peers in such a way to raise their awareness about them being responsible of the development of their own language learning. Indeed, the data gathered in the teachers questionnaire where they were asked about the kind of evaluation that was most beneficial to their learners' individual development, (48, 6 %) believe that teachers' evaluation to their learners was most beneficial to them, and (39, 2%) saw that it is rather self-evaluation. However, the remaining minority (12, 2%) ranked peer evaluation in the third position. This gives an idea about teachers' beliefs on the learners' self and peer evaluation and its role in developing their meta-cognition so essential in the learner empowerment and transfer of responsibility from teachers to learners. Even the learners admitted that only (16, 2%) of them always evaluate their projects with their partners, and that (19,6%) admitted that they sometimes do. However, (26, 0%) admitted that they never discuss the positive and the negative sides of their projects, and (17, 2%) said they rarely do.

Thus, it can be concluded that the affective side of the learners is not taken into account as the learners are not encouraged to reflect on their learning processes through portfolios in which they express their feelings about how well/badly they have worked, or why the group liked/did not like a task or a project; what made them happy or unhappy about the work at hand, and what they would do to avoid such inconveniences for future projects. Hence, learners are not given room to express themselves about the specific quality of a learning experience that gave rise to positive or negative feelings.

#### 4.5 Attitudes and Beliefs

The questionnaires used in this study contained many questions through which teachers and learners' attitudes and beliefs were measured. If we check the first items, we will notice that teachers' attitudes towards the 'Book Map' and the 'Unit Preview' were rather positive; even their

beliefs towards the importance of such tools for their learners were also positive and most of them claimed that the learners should read them before starting to study the unit. However, when it came to analysing learners' classroom practices, a large majority (86,3%) of the informants admitted to have never read Book Map and that (72, 1%) of the informants recognized that they never read the unit preview . Another very important remark is that the teachers were not knowledgeable about the importance of the progress portfolio and its role in improving learners' level and fostering their autonomy. The data collected shows that the majority of teachers did not tell their pupils to fill in the progress portfolio and the learners themselves confirmed that they generally did not. Thus, if teachers did not tell their pupils to perform this task, this can be interpreted as a lack of teachers' awareness about its importance. The learners too, would certainly be ignorant about their usefulness, otherwise they would use it without being asked by their teachers to fill in it, and would eventually try to spot their weaknesses, set objectives to improve their level and make plans to fulfil those objectives.

Another very striking attitude of the teachers towards their learners responsibility over their learning is that (78, 3%) of them believed that learners should not be responsible of their learning, but teachers should be. Not only that, but when asked about their opinion on the view that considers that the teacher is the one who makes himself progressively unnecessary, most of the respondents showed their disagreement about it. Therefore, these beliefs and attitudes, might have detrimental side effects on the application of the teaching method suitable to the CBA, and would consequently hinder mediating autonomous learning meant to be achieved by the factors provided in the textbook.

## 5. Conclusion

The tasks and activities present in the text book are normally there to facilitate the transfer of learning from teachers to learners, and also to raise learners' awareness to take in charge their own learning. However, as it is shown through the data gathered in both questionnaires, teachers' classroom practices, their beliefs and attitudes towards such newly implemented types of learning do sometimes flow against the tide of change and thus hinder the realization of some of

the most principal objectives targeted by the CBA, inter alia, learner autonomy.

This is documented by the fact that even though teachers do think that the book map and the unit preview are two important instruments that learners should regularly consult, this is not proved by the data collected in the learners' questionnaire. The latter shows that (86,3%) of them had never read the unit preview and that (70,1%) of them never tried to know what the content of the unit was before they start to study it and that was also confirmed by the fact that (72,1%) of the informants recognized they never read the unit previews designated for each single unit.

Most noticeable is the progress portfolio that the learners are supposed to fill in after the completion of each unit. This self-evaluation tool is nearly totally neglected as (56%) of the teachers said they never told their pupils to fill in it, and (87,3%) of the learners admitted to have never done it. This shows the degree to which both teachers and learners were unaware about the importance of such evaluation tools in the learning process both inside and outside the school, and mainly for learners supposed to take in charge their own learning.

Another very recommended meta-cognitive skill which is a sine qua non to facilitating the transfer of learning from teachers to learners is self-regulated learning. This kind of learning entails learners, among other things, to evaluate their own learning. At the Cross Roads provides a progress portfolio for each unit that the pupils should fill in so as to monitor their progress. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, most teachers (56, 8%) recognize to never tell their pupils to fill in this self-evaluation tool, and a more considerable number of pupils (87, 3%) confirmed that they never do it. This is to show that the learners were not meta-cognitively engaged in their learning and their teachers did not help them towards that.

The Competency-based Approach is rooted in the socio- constructivist learning theory and thus one of the predominant learning situations that should prevail in classroom and should be represented in the text-book is interactive learning through pair or group work. The analysis of the data in both questionnaires show that (48,6%) of the teachers had ranked individual work as the prevailing learning condition in their classrooms, and only

(6,8 %) said group work was the one which dominated in their classrooms. The same data were collected in the learners' questionnaire where they ranked individual work, pair work, group work, whole class topic discussions simultaneously. This gives us an idea about classroom learning and teaching practices that do not encourage collaborative learning which is the basis of the socio-constructivist learning theory in which autonomous learning is deeply rooted.

In addition to all what has been said about the existence of the factors mediating learner autonomy in the text book and the mismatches of the practices that often happen in class and out of it, there are some other facts about teachers' and the learners' beliefs and attitudes towards learner autonomy which directly affect the natural unfolding of the lessons in such a way to be congruent with the CBA principles and objectives. For instance, while asked about their beliefs about their learners' responsibility to take in charge their own learning. The statistics show that (78, 3%) of the teachers believe that learners should not take in charge their own learning and nearly the same number (65, 3%) of teachers believe that teachers were the ones responsible of their learners learning. In the same line of thought, teachers' attitude towards learner autonomy is a factor that shapes classroom practices and thus encourages or impedes learner centeredness. Indeed, while asked about the teacher as being the one who makes himself progressively unnecessary, (43, 2%) of the informant teachers showed a positive attitude towards autonomous learning, and a slightly higher number (45, 9%) had a negative one. This might give us insights about teachers attitudes towards wanting to leave room to learners to learn by themselves and thus help them become autonomous learners.

To sum it up, one can deduce that that both hypotheses put forward in this study are to a large extent validated since the factors mediating autonomous learning are not put into practice by teachers and learners alike and that the teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards learner centeredness represent a real barrier to fostering learning autonomy.

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