

Teachers' Readiness for Learner Autonomy in Teaching/Learning English as a Foreign Language in the Algerian Context

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Abstract:

This paper enquires into Algerian teachers' readiness for promoting learner autonomy in teaching English as a foreign language. To this end, data were gathered by means of a questionnaire adapted from Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012) and Nakata (2011) in addition to a semi structured interview. The questionnaire was completed by 76 EFL teachers while interviews were organized with 06 teachers.

Findings show that participating teachers work towards their own autonomy but do not seem to be ready to develop learner autonomy. This inconsistency is interpretable in terms of socio-cultural and institutional pressures in addition to traditional teacher training philosophies. All this has led to the conclusion that although Algerian EFL teachers have situational readiness, they are still behaviorally unprepared.

Keywords: Algerian context; English as foreign language; learners' readiness for autonomy; teacher autonomy.

Jel Classification Codes: XN1, XN2.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of the communicative language teaching (CLT), learner autonomy; henceforth (LA), has been one of its underlying tenets. As such, (Benson, 2011) states, “as the theory and practice of language teaching enters a new century, the importance of helping students’ become autonomous in their learning has become one of its prominent themes” (p. 1). He subsequently adds that in defining autonomy which is in essence multidimensional; many conceptual and terminological issues arouse. The aforementioned are reminiscent of the contextual fit of the concept of learner autonomy and its feasibility in practice. However, an inclusive definition suggests that LA is above all learners’ capacity to take control of their own learning (Benson, 2001). In the context of foreign language education, LA stands for the conscious steps that an EFL learner takes to achieve particular ends in language learning; this has been referred to as agency in the educational literature (Little, 1995).

In accordance with the myriad definitions of LA and its growing importance, Lamb (2017) construes its significance and growth in second and foreign language education. He therefore refers to the implications of teachers’ and learners’ roles which have been brought to the forefront with the constructivists approaches to language leaning. Most leading figures in LA e.g., little, Nunan and Lamb (1991, 2003, 2017 respectively) stress that leaner autonomy is basically centered around attitudes, reflection and action; key words that altogether refer to the pervasiveness of affective, cognitive and metacognitive strategies like motivation, decision making, problem solving up to the practical implementation of these in actual learning situations. However, situating the gap between the theoretical notion of LA and practice is what research on learner autonomy actually targets.

With regard to the Algerian context, there has been a notable shift in the higher education system in the year 2004 through the introduction of the Bologna process whose aim is to revolutionize the traditional modes of teaching and learning. Autonomy in Algeria is still striving between theory, research and practice. Mainstream research on LA is still looking for a context sensitive definition of the concept; one which bears the particularities of the Algerian EFL culture. Even when efforts are led in this direction, researchers need to explore affordances and challenges that shatter ideals and realities. Raya and Vieira (2018) align with this perspective and state, “the quarrel resides between theory and practice, between idea and experience and between the normative ideal and achievable real” (p. 2).

Teachers are deemed as fundamental leading figures in the learner autonomy practice. Thus, learner autonomy does not mean independence from the teacher; it rather focuses on interdependence. Interdependence in this sense implies that the development of learner autonomy passes through the development of teacher autonomy (TA) (Little, 1995). Said in other words, Nakata (2011) posits that the teacher needs not to teach students the target language but should rather teach them how to take steps towards learning the target language autonomously.

Sometimes, EFL teachers cannot provide students with the required opportunities, skills and spaces of maneuver to be autonomous for the reason that they themselves lack teaching autonomy which is defined as professional freedom to go over pedagogical constraints. Another reason might be the teachers’ lack of readiness for an autonomous supportive pedagogy. In overlooking the teacher’s own contribution to the promotion of learner autonomy, learners end up having less opportunities to learn how to learn the target language. It is then fair to assume that teacher

autonomy and learner autonomy are two interdependent entities that altogether guarantee a better operationalization of agentive foreign language learning. In this mainstream, Smith and Vieira (2009) endeavored with what teachers do and what they believe they actually should do in the classroom for promoting their students' autonomy.

Accordingly, this study aims at questioning the nature of teacher autonomy, its relation to learner autonomy, and the barriers that might hinder the reciprocity amongst both entities. Thus, the central research enquiry is the following:

Are Algerian EFL teachers ready to support EFL learning autonomy through a constant process of teacher self-development vis-à-vis teaching, learning and situational constraints?

2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The attention given to learner autonomy starting from the turn of the century is considered a significant shift from the previous teacher centered paradigm. Benson and Huang (2008) addressed the propensity of this construct and adhere to the universal acknowledgement of LA as a determiner for successful foreign language learning. In this vein, they claim, "the concept instigates its legacy from the increasingly accepted view that high degrees of foreign language proficiency cannot be achieved through classroom instruction alone" (p. 424). Contrarily Nakata (2011) posits that the development of learner autonomy goes through teachers' ability to teach their students to learn autonomously. Herein, the learner autonomy paradox arises, and research started to call teachers to stop teaching students; a rather different but complementary view addresses teachers' role in the process of educating autonomous language learners (Sakai et al., 2008).

Promoting LA goes through three major stages; to well understand the concept in theory, nurture positive attitudes towards it and adhere to autonomous behaviors in practice. With regard to teachers, their contribution to the development of LA is deemed important; to this end, teachers need to hold positive attitudes towards the promotion of LA and should also adhere to it in practice. It is on this basis that Little (1995) has evoked the notion of teacher autonomy which he believes is conducive to learner autonomy. Recently, teacher autonomy is yielding significance in the agenda of foreign language learning; this concept has been first introduced into foreign language education by Little in his article written in (1995). It is then fair to claim that the teacher is pioneering in the course of LA development, each attempt to promote learners' personal agency systematically relates to teachers' professional agency i.e. the teachers are the classroom models who by their professional development can lead to a sound framework for the development of LA. Accordingly, Nakata (1997) states, "there are sufficient grounds to assume that teacher autonomy in the field of language education equates to language teachers' readiness in educational practice, professional development and professional life for promoting learner autonomy in a given environment" (p. 902).

In defining teacher autonomy, the focus is drawn on post-positivistic proposals of the late 20th Century which focus on 'reflective teacher education that describes teachers as critical inquirers (Raya and Vieira, 2018). Given that the concept of autonomy is ideological in nature and bound to the context where it operates, Vieira (2009) sees that teacher autonomy should in part be focused on a pedagogy of experience that enhances teachers' ability to overcome constraints and find spaces of maneuver to promote practices that are locally valid and socially

relevant; this is further reinforced by (Long, 2014) who declares that knowledge of learner and teacher readiness can give insights into aspects of learning and teaching that will contribute to the development of learner autonomy in specific cultural contexts.

Little (1995) defines teacher autonomy as having a strong sense of personal responsibility for teaching, exercised by a continuous reflection and analysis, cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploring freedom from control by others. Following Little's line of reasoning, teacher autonomy is analogous to learner autonomy in implying self-direction and independence from external constraints and both involve relevant attitudes, ability and behavior. It is worth noting that the relationship between LA and TA is easier to conceptualize in theory than to realize in practice; but the conception of teacher autonomy should imply the development of learner autonomy otherwise the concept would be merely theoretical and would drift from its essence.

Additionally, teachers aspiring to contribute to the promotion of LA should have a vision of interpersonal empowerment in which teaching is directly conducive to learning. Teachers should assume a more active role in their teaching; this goes through creating a third space between reality and expectations, one which should bear reality (what education is), and ideals (what education should be) and an exploration of future possibilities (what we believe education can be) (Raya et al., 2017). The latter also call this rotating cycle of innovation as educational growth which consists in combining past experiences with present ones in order to receive and understand future experiences.

Nakata (2011) evokes the notion of personal agency that pervades current trends on teacher autonomy; in this sense, teachers are supposed to have a sense of personal empowerment. This capacity entails the identification of one's goals and what it takes to achieve them; consequently, teachers need not to teach students the target language but they have rather to train them to identify their own goals, strength and weaknesses and work accordingly. The former extends the discussion to cover the three dimensions by which teacher autonomy could be assessed; these are the psychological dimension, the situational dimension in addition to the behavioral dimension.

Teacher readiness is a strong indicator of whether autonomy would be favored or not. In this vein, Benson and Huang (2008) claim, "teachers may be more or less in favor of learner autonomy and more or less skilled in helping their students develop learner autonomy". (p. 425). This is also likely to be related to their own experiences of language learning and teacher education and development. It seems that teachers' efforts to promote learner autonomy is relevant to their experiences with learning, teaching and professional development.

The broader social, cultural and educational atmosphere is also of significance as to teachers' readiness. The teacher professional development programs are of paramount importance in shaping attitudes and in adopting the relevant behaviors in favor of LA. However, the idea of teachers' readiness to promote LA is faced with many queries like "how would teachers' trained in more traditional modes of teaching adjust to these new expectations?" Benson & Huang (2008, p. 427). It is in this sense that teacher education should be directed; teachers basically need to promote positive attitudes towards learner autonomy.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Participants

The participants of this study covered 76 Algerian EFL teachers from different Algerian Universities. Participating teachers represented a wide range of EFL teaching experience; the sample consisted of novice teachers (12%), medium experienced teachers (46.33%) and highly experienced ones (41.67%). The sample selection was made randomly based on teachers who volunteered to respond to the online survey questionnaire.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. The questionnaire

For the sake of answering to the research central query; the data was gathered by means of an online survey questionnaire which is adapted from Nakata (2011) and Borg and Busaidi (2012). The questionnaire consists of four sections; section one seeks background information. Section two which is entitled “Teachers’ Perceptions of LA” is made up of ten items inspecting teachers’ perceptions of what learner autonomy is; indeed, teachers’ perspectives on LA are an integral part of their readiness. Most items in this section revolve around the essence of learning autonomously with regard to learning opportunities, teachers’ role, autonomy as independence and interdependence and classroom management and policy. Section three “EFL teachers’ reflection on the desirability and feasibility of LA in the Algerian context”; contains two Likert scales, the first one is a four point Likert scale ranging from desirable to undesirable contains seven items which stand for some fundamental aspects of learning autonomously and therefore seeks to measure the extent to which each aspect is desirable by EFL teachers. The second four point Likert scale, involves the same items but looks at the extent to which EFL teachers perceive them to be feasible in the Algerian context. The rationale behind measuring the desirability and the feasibility lies in the fact that the degree to which teachers perceive certain aspects of LA to be desirable and feasible in their context is reminiscent of how ready they are at both the psychological and the situational level to autonomous practices. The last section is called “Strategies for Promoting Professional autonomy” and it is concerned with behavioral strategies that teachers tend to employ to boost their own autonomous practices for professional development; it is made of a five-point frequency scale and the items revolve generally around the development of language proficiency for teaching purposes, self-direction in the development of their teaching as well as negotiation and cooperation with other teachers. In so doing, we aspire to see the extent to which teachers attribute attention to their own development which is undeniably a fundamental part in sustaining learner autonomy.

3.2.2. The Interview

The researchers have opted for semi structured interviews to get in depth data from participants and to better clarify areas of focus within the topic. The interviewees were six EFL teachers affiliated to different Universities and we have spent a period of three weeks to fulfill the six interviews. We have sought to meet our interviewees face to face and record their feedback using an audio recorder. Conforming to ethical considerations, we have informed our participants about the aim of our study and have supplied them with necessary information upon request. In addition, in the process of coding our data, we have referred to the interviewees by symbols to keep their identity anonymous.

3.2.3. Data Analysis Procedure

With reference to the data collection methods which were quantitative (an online survey questionnaire) and qualitative (a semi-structured interview) the data analysis relies simultaneously on SPSS with the aim of simplifying the quantitative data set and the results by means of percentages and frequencies in addition to thematic analysis to codify and interpret interview data. Our choice of the quantitative method is underpinned by the need to gather data from geographically dispersed participants. Additionally, probing teacher readiness for promoting the development of LA requires a variety of views and perspectives that can solely be revealed through the quantification of views. Not to deny, the descriptive statistics herein the percentages provide a comprehensive account of teachers' position towards LA by showing the frequency of the ranges of a particular item. As for the qualitative data, it is meant to reinforce the data gathered by means of the questionnaire and to shed light on additional aspects.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Questionnaire Results

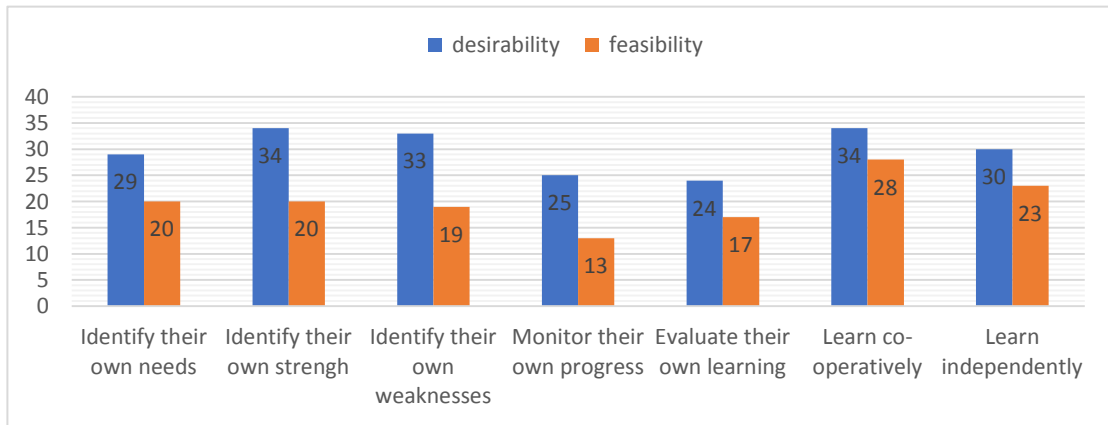
The table below probes EFL teachers' theoretical perspectives on learner autonomy; this is done with the aim of situating the conceptual framework of LA from the lens of Algerian EFL teachers.

Table 1. Teachers' theoretical perspectives on learner autonomy

Items	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (U)	4 (A)	5 (SA)
1. Learner autonomy means learners having regular opportunities to complete tasks alone	(N) 4 % 5.3	6 7.9	7 9.2	48 63.2	11 14.5
2. Learner autonomy is about involving learners in decisions about what to learn	2 2.6	10 13.2	12 15.8	37 48.7	15 19.7
3. Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher	22 28.9	30 39.5	6 7.9	14 18.4	4 5.3
4. Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would	5 6.6	6 7.9	8 10.5	41 53.9	16 21.1
5. Learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all cultural backgrounds	6 7.9	5 6.6	9 11.8	40 52.6	16 21.1
6. The teacher has an important role to play in supporting learner autonomy	4 5.3	/	2 2.6	24 31.6	46 60.5
7. To become autonomous means to develop the ability to evaluate one's own learning	3 3.9	41 5.3	4 5.3	41 53.9	24 31.6
8. Learner autonomy is a concept which is not suited to non-western cultures	31 40.8	19 25	19 25	5 6.6	2 2.6
9. Learner autonomy is restricted to learning outside the classroom	26 34.2	45 59.2	2 2.6	2 2.6	1 1.3
10. Learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together	6 7.9	3 3.9	10 13.2	39 51.3	18 23.7

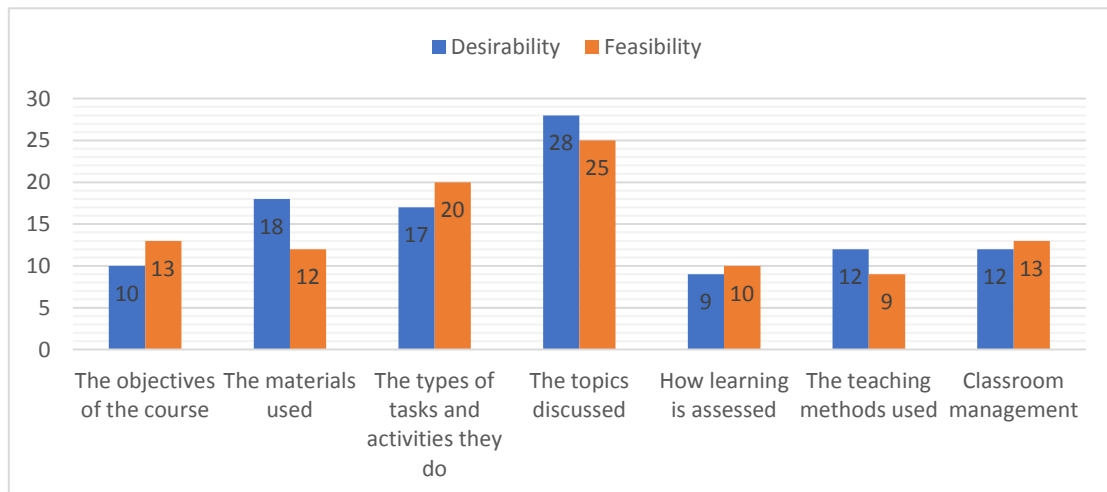
The ten items constituting this section are not an exhaustive list of the learning autonomy aspects but are the core of its definition. Most of the participating teachers approve the view that autonomous learning is related to aspects like the pace for independent learning opportunities and execution, decision making on the learning content, evaluating one’s own progression but it does not necessarily refer to out of class learning. They also tend to reject the fact that learners immersed in non-western cultures have no ability to become autonomous in their learning; the results also reveal that although autonomy is a western tailored concept but it does not deny its potential existence in non-western context. In referring back to their roles in this pedagogy, participants agree that the teacher is a significant asset in encouraging learner autonomy and the latter does not mean the absence of a teacher. Above all, they accredit the significance of cooperative learning in promoting learners’ autonomy and agency.

Fig.1. The desirability and the feasibility of aspects of learner autonomy in the Algerian EFL context



In enquiring into the desirability and the feasibility of aspects of autonomous learning, it seems that a negative correlation between the theory and the practice of LA would appear. As we can see from the graph, teachers feel mostly at ease with aspects of learning related to learners themselves and are quite less comfortable with aspects related to evaluation for instance. On the overall, teachers grasp the essence of autonomous learning and would want their students to get into it; however, at the practical level, they seem to have less trust on the feasibility of autonomy in their respective context.

Fig.2. The desirability and the feasibility of learner autonomy



Teachers have different perspectives on the desirability of having their learners intervening in some other aspects of learning. For instance, EFL teachers do not have a high desirability level towards involving their students in classroom management, the choice of the teaching methods and decisions about the course objectives. They quite accept having students discuss topics to involve in the course and they appreciate to a lesser extent allowing students to choose the types of tasks and activities they do in addition to the materials to be used. As for feasibility, apart from the choice of the topics of discussion in the classroom and the activities which seem to be quite feasible in the Algerian context, teachers agree that it is not feasible to deal with the other aspects.

Table 2. Teachers' Professional Development

Items	1 Never	2 Some times	3 Often	4 Very Often	Alw ays	No answer
11. As an EFL teacher, I identify my strength and weaknesses	(N) 2 % 2.6	6 7.9	16 21.1	28 36.8	20 26.3	4 5.3
12. As an EFL teacher, I evaluate my own progress	/	5 6.6	21 27.6	24 31.6	24 31.6	/
13. As an EFL teacher, I stimulate my interest in learning English further	/	4 5.3	13 17.1	30 39.5	30 39.5	/
14. As an EFL teacher, I motivate myself in improving teaching skills required for English teachers.	/	5 6.5	13 17.1	26 34.2	28 36.8	4 5.3
15. As an EFL teacher, I motivate myself in improving English proficiency required for English teachers	/	3 3.9	13 17.1	27 35.5	29 38.2	4 5.3
16. As an EFL teacher, I learn from colleagues at University and outside the University	3 3.9	18 23.7	16 21.1	15 19.7	22 28.9	2 2.6
17. As an EFL teacher, I become more self-directed in improving my teaching	/	9 11.8	13 17.1	25 32.9	26 34.2	3 3.9
18. As an EFL teacher, I become more self-directed in improving English proficiency	/	5 6.6	9 11.8	40 52.6	20 26.3	2 2.6
19. As an EFL teacher, I exchange opinions about the content with other teachers	3 3.9	20 26.3	9 11.8	22 28.9	21 27.6	1 1.3
20. As an EFL teacher, I listen to learner' voices and learn from them	1 1.3	6 7.9	13 17.1	28 36.8	26 34.2	2 2.6

The table above refers to teachers' professional development; it consists of a set of items that revolve around some aspects of teacher autonomy. EFL teachers were asked to state how often they engage in some initiatives to develop their autonomy which is a serious step in their readiness for supporting the development of learner autonomy. The results show that participating teachers identify their own strengths and weaknesses very often. Regarding their progression in their teaching, 31.6% very often engage with this aspect; similarly, 31.6% do it always. As for EFL teachers' interest in learning English further, 39.5% stated that they always work on their

language competence while 36.8% very often do that. Concerning EFL teachers interest in improving teaching skills required for EFL teacher, the results show that 36.8% of them always make a deal of efforts in this regard, while 34.2% get themselves to this area very often. It can also be observed from the table that regarding English proficiency required for English teachers, 38.2% of the teachers always seek to improve their linguistic skills, and 35.5% work on that very often. As far as interdependence amongst EFL teachers is concerned, the responses display that 28.9% always learn from colleagues either at University or outside, whereas 23.7% do it sometimes, and 21.1% do it often. When they were asked about self-direction in improving one's own professional learning, results have revealed that 34.2% of the teachers always rely on their personal initiatives to innovate in their methods; in a similar vein, 32.9% of them do it very often. Regarding, teacher self-direction in improving their English proficiency, 52.6% state that they very often work on their proficiency by themselves. As for the content of learning and how often do teachers negotiate this aspect with other teachers, 28.9% of the teachers engage in a process of cooperation with colleagues, 26.3% are sometimes getting themselves into this process of negotiation. Finally, in evoking the pace given to learners' voices 36.8% of the teachers said that they very often consider their learners' and get to learn from them; 34.2% consider that they always provide a space for learners in the classroom.

4.2. Interview Results

How do teachers view teacher autonomy and how does it relate to learner autonomy? what do they do to sustain the development of learner autonomy? and how do they perceive teacher training and its effectiveness to both TA and LA?

To clarify and respond to the aforementioned questions, a semi structured interview has been conducted with six Algerian EFL teachers from four different universities. For matters of confidentiality and anonymity, I will be using the following labels (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6). The thematic analysis has been employed to code the data and to extract themes from the responses. Accordingly, four major areas have emerged:

(a). Teacher Autonomy and Learner Autonomy: Two Facets for the Same Coin

The concept teacher autonomy is a relatively new idea in the Algerian EFL context because focus is mostly drawn on learners and how their autonomy could at best be supported.

P1 states that teacher autonomy has to do with auto evaluation and professional development:

“As an EFL teacher, I describe the concept ‘teacher autonomy’ as the quality and skill of being able to take control of one’s own teaching through strategic planning, decision-making, self-evaluation, auto-controlled professional development, teacher-student relationships and more”.

P2 reinforces this idea and perceives TA as breakdown with old fashioned methods, old fashioned beliefs and initial practices. She therefore claims:

“Teacher autonomy is a constant process of self-improvement; an autonomous teacher is one who engages himself in improving his teaching to respond to students’ needs”.

P6 adheres to the same view and he states that:

“Teacher autonomy is to be able to teach your learners what meets their needs and in the way you see it adequate to their learning styles”.

P2 also refers to a significant point which is overcoming institutional constraints. He consequently states:

"Teacher autonomy has to do with all the efforts a teacher does to overcome institutional barriers and innovate in terms of curriculum, teaching methods and classroom management".

P3 joins the aforementioned perspectives and adds:

"I define TA as teacher's ability to hold responsibility for their own teaching and the ability to overcome institutional constraints as well as teacher professional development".

P4 describes teacher autonomy in an analogous way to learner autonomy and summarizes it in terms of independence:

"Teacher autonomy means teacher's independence and freedom in decision making concerning the teaching process, the course design & contents and classroom management".

At this point arises a serious issue, does independence in this respect mean independence from constraints or does it mean monopoly in the classroom?

In this vein, **P5** seem to believe that teacher autonomy is quite contradictory to learner autonomy i.e., the presence of teacher autonomy conceals learner autonomy:

"TA as a concept describes independence in autonomous decision making and execution in the classroom".

(b). Teachers' Contribution to Learner Autonomy

While asking teachers to report on their actions to promote the development of LA amongst their students; they seem to be inclined in developing LA at different levels and are involved in this process at varying degrees:

P1 seems to have a quite good experience with LA because he deeply explained the procedures he follows, in this regard, he claims:

"Fostering LA goes through many steps, I for instance focus on different processes like setting learner autonomy implementation plans, raising students' awareness, develop my own autonomy, adapting the course, curriculum and goals to appeal to students' needs and wants".

P2 however, claims that she is not doing enough in favor of LA because this process requires thoughtful steps and a lot of affordances as well:

"I am trying to well understand the concept of learner autonomy and compare it to what we actually have (beliefs and affordances) in the local context and therefore I try to do my best to get a way of mediation that would probably help to serve the development of learners' agency in foreign language learning".

P3 states that dialogue is a prerequisite to encouraging LA because it allows the teacher to know his students' skills, weaknesses and learning preferences. She also refers to the notion of space which is afforded through students' centered activities like project-based learning.

P4 believes that small steps in the classroom could be conducive to LA in practice, he thus states:

"To encourage autonomy, I usually encourage classroom participation and discussion in all my classes. I always provide positive feedback. I give the space to students' to critically discuss the subject matters and I also arise their problem-solving skills by confronting"

them to challenging activities; in addition, I encourage both individual and collective work in the classroom”.

P5 focuses rather on curriculum and to him sustaining the development of learner autonomy goes through considering every stage of learning where learners’ opinions on how they want to learn should be taken into consideration.

P6 refers to three major factors worth considering in the course of getting learners to learn by themselves, he stresses that teachers should initially work on the psychological and the attitudinal aspects:

“As a teacher I should ensure a soft and systematic shift of responsibility by trying to get them socially, affectively and meta-cognitively ready”.

(c). Society, Institution and Learner Autonomy

Culture has been attested as a significant factor that may afford or constrain the correct operationalization of LA. **P1** overtly refers to the negative influence of the Algerian culture with regard to LA, he states:

“Students who brought up in a family who lacks autonomy and depends heavily on the father or mother, in terms of decision-making, evolution, self-direction, problem-solving and critical thinking (personal views and idiosyncrasies), are not likely to be autonomous and would not accept autonomy easily and quickly. Likewise, students who were taught in traditional classrooms in which a teacher is in total control and is considered a supreme source of knowledge (i.e., the all-knowing and the owner of learning/teaching), are not expected to show any autonomy”.

Similarly, **P2** strongly agrees on the fact that the local as well as the institutional cultures are a true hindrance while trying to shift towards an autonomy-based pedagogy, she thus acknowledges:

“I strongly believe that autonomy could be accomplished in all cultures if students and teachers accept to leave their comfort zone and look for ways of mediation between the theoretical ideal and the available realities. In our context, we can hardly ever overcome who we are and how we have learnt to do things; to me, that’s the ultimate hindrance towards change”.

P3 hints at an interesting dimension of the social and the institutional influence, she believes that the norms by which Algerian EFL students were raised turns them anxious:

“I generally find it quite challenging to introduce students to work on their own or within small groups, they all the time feel anxious and I give up on the idea”.

P4 also attests the influence of culture but refers to the individual dimension of LA:

“Well, it’s true that culture has an influence on knowledge in general and on attitudes in particular but I believe that we still have individual differences. Within the same conditions, we may have autonomous learners as we may have learners who are in need of guidance and supervision”.

Another view by **P5** supposes that culture identifies teachers’ and learners’ views:

“Cultural backgrounds of both actors can cause changes in learning duties, rights, contents and time”.

Not away from the aforementioned views, **P6** acknowledges:

“Learning cultures influence students’ attitudes and readiness towards any kind of different learning, among which is autonomous learning. If a learner is used to rote learning, or to receiving knowledge directly from his teacher; I hardly see how this kind of student would adapt to a new learning culture”.

(d). Is Teacher Training the Solution?

Teacher training is deemed as an important aspect of pedagogy as it works on teacher readiness for teaching and professional development.

In this sense, **P1** states that teacher training raises awareness and promotes collaboration amongst colleagues and reinforces the pedagogical discourse to serve the development of teacher autonomy which might be conducive to learner autonomy.

P2 refers to the role of teacher training but claims that without systematic planning, it could not be enough alone; focus should be drawn on what teacher training has to foreground. She adds that teacher training should not be supervised by those teachers who have been immersed in a teacher centered pedagogy. She also suggests that openness to others’ experiences in this mainstream could be of outmost benefit.

P3 believes that teacher training is a major step towards developing TA and LA at the meantime because its major aim is to provide teachers with strategies on how to confront the experience of teaching with ample strategies to better teaching and learning as well.

P4 aligns to this view and claims:

“Teacher training is effective in helping teacher better frame the course content and its evaluation. It also guides teachers in a way to select effective methods and techniques in the classroom”.

P5 adds:

“Teachers’ beliefs and practices contribute to fostering learner autonomy. As for the trainings, they are ways to raise teachers’ awareness about autonomy and to engage them more in the autonomy promotion phase either for learners or for themselves”.

P6 however does not perceive the significance of teacher training if autonomy is not supported by curriculum ideology of either the department, faculty, University or the ministry; otherwise, teacher training will be an obstacle in developing both teacher autonomy and subsequently learner autonomy.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Questionnaire Results

The present study enquires into Algerian EFL teacher’s readiness for professional autonomy (i.e., the development of their own autonomy as EFL teachers) and their readiness for teaching autonomy (i.e., efforts to promote EFL learning autonomy). To this end, EFL teachers’ perspectives about the concept learner autonomy are of paramount importance. The findings highlight that teachers have a good level of understanding concerning learner autonomy; they perceive autonomy in terms of the learning pace afforded to students. This pace is represented by aspects like independent decision making about the content of learning, evaluating one’s own learning, and cooperation. It is interesting that teachers argue that these aspects are possible to peruse with learners of different cultural backgrounds; a view which goes with (Little,1995; Chik, et al., 2003) and is contradictory to researchers like Palfrayman (2003, 2014); and Littlewood (1999) who have found out that culture influences the degree to which aspects of autonomy are to

be found in different cultural contexts. Teachers also recognize their role in supporting this move in pedagogy as they highlight that learner autonomy does not mean a detachment from the teacher and it does not exclusively refer to out of class learning; these findings are consistent with (Dam, 1995; Benson, 2001; Benson, 2011; Palfrayman & Smith, 2003; Little, 2009; Vasquez, 2016; Alrabai, 2017; Yasmin et al., 2017; Yasmin & Sohail; 2018c).

The desirability and the feasibility of LA in the Algerian EFL context present an interesting set of findings. It is clear that there is a higher level of desirability than feasibility which is plausible enough. Almost all the aspects of autonomous learning are said to be desirable by Algerian EFL teachers except for the following: classroom management, the selection of the methods, the selection of materials, decisions about the course objectives and assessment. However, teachers want their students to get involved in aspects of learning that have a direct relation to the learner himself. So, within the Algerian EFL context, the learner is invited to identify his own needs, strength and weaknesses, monitor and evaluate his own progress and work cooperatively. At this juncture a couple of issues come to the surface, it is contradictory that EFL teachers for instance want their learners to identify their needs and weaknesses and feel reluctant towards getting them to decide on the course objectives and relevant materials. It is also implausible that teachers have a quite good level of desirability for independent learning but are at the same time not ready to get them into the choice of the teaching method. In my view, the most compelling explanation for the present set of findings is that there is a clear gap between learner autonomy as perceived in theory and the relative readiness for it in practice. This pattern of results is consistent with the previous literature (Al-Busaidi & Maamri, 2014). This provides evidence for the complex relationship that holds between desirability and feasibility.

Results on the professional autonomy development are surprising especially for the Algerian context; Algerian EFL teachers have shown high commitment to professional development initiatives. They claim that they work regularly on their English language competence and proficiency, their teaching skills, and engage in self-evaluation processes. This is indeed a serious step towards professional autonomy and subsequently teaching autonomy. The idea is further supported by teachers' consideration of their learners' voices; indeed, this finding contradicts Nakata (2011) who reports that in the Japanese EFL context, teachers do not involve students in negotiating plans and are not ready to allow chances for their learners to utter their opinions. Again, it seems that Algerian EFL teachers venture with theory because it seems implausible to allow learners' voices without taking their opinions into actual practice.

Cooperation amongst colleagues is undeniably of paramount importance to boosting professional skills and teaching autonomy; however, this strategy seems to be the underutilized amongst Algerian teachers; this is consistent with Nakata (2011) who refers to the lack of collegiality between Japanese EFL teachers.

5.2. Interview Results

To better account for the results provided in the questionnaire section and to extend the discussion on teacher readiness, the interview sheds considerable attention on teacher autonomy; this is done with the aim of exploring the correlation between theoretical claims and practical behaviors and what determines this correlation. According to the participants, teacher autonomy revolves around the skill and ability to abandon traditional modes of instruction and break with

the institutional barriers that hinder the operationalization of LA (Allwright, 1988; Tudor, 1993; Joshi, 2011). Part of the readiness of Algerian EFL teachers for LA is also shown by the efforts they invest so as to bring the idea into actual practice. However, they state that they are faced with students' resistance; teachers are ultimately working towards raising students' awareness but cannot move beyond. This fragmentation between ideal and real could be interpreted in sociocultural and institutional pressures. Learners are accustomed to the predetermined power hierarchies and are used to receiving only.

At this point, we can state that there is an apparent divide between beliefs and practices; if EFL teachers were fully ready for this move; they would have overcome the constraints in practice and would have attempted to create a third space between ideal and real. Most of the teachers attest that dominating family background where debate and decision making are monopolized produces a generation of reluctant students. This reluctance is further reinforced by the lengthy years that students spend in a teacher fronted education before attending University. The interview also sheds light on students' attitudes which are not that positive say teachers; this is conceivable if we consider that when learners grow up following some patterns of learning; they will eventually end up having negative attitudes towards any different kind of education. Undeniably, teachers themselves regardless of the professional autonomy strategies they adopt find it hard to endeavor with learner autonomy because the latter is not part of the institutions' ideology.

In evoking teacher training, teachers argue that it only serves raising teachers' awareness. They add that teachers should not be driven to the trick of attending training programs supervised by proponents of the teacher-centered pedagogy. Unless autonomy gets integrated as a fundamental philosophy in the broader institutional culture; teacher training will only reinforce the theory on LA but would not serve its application.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored Algerian EFL teachers' culture of learning and their readiness for professional and teaching autonomy. It is obvious that EFL teachers can work towards a learning autonomy pedagogy if they know their own readiness for their professional autonomy (ability to monitor the teaching process regardless of external constraints like the institutional barriers) in addition to their readiness to engage in the development of their students' autonomy.

In terms of professional autonomy, it was found out that Algerian EFL teachers consider themselves highly engaged with professional development strategies as they are committing themselves to improving their language and teaching skills required for English teachers. However, they are still not getting themselves into collegial negotiations. It is fair to say that teachers have satisfactory degrees of professional autonomy.

As for teaching autonomy which consists of applying the same strategies of professional development to students, it seems that teachers are aware of learner autonomy as a concept. At the practical level however, the operationalization of LA seems to be unsatisfactory. On the one hand, teachers are aware of the importance of involving students in decisions and processes regarding their own learning but on the other hand, they perceive its feasibility to be very low. Indeed, Algerian EFL teachers limit the feasibility of LA to a restricted set of aspects that are in direct relation to the learner himself but do not seem to be ready to handle aspects like classroom management, teaching methods and assessment. Taken as a whole, this reveals that Algerian EFL

teachers deal with theory and that regardless the set of efforts they do in favor of promoting their students' autonomy; they tend to give up for two major reasons: their own reluctance towards a concrete shift of focus in the classroom in addition to a bulk of external factors that might be behind teachers and students reluctance likewise. These constraints we assume are related to the institutional policies, the curriculum and the evaluation procedures. At this point, we can also say that although teachers work towards their professional autonomy but they do not exercise this development in concrete ways and that like learner autonomy, teacher autonomy is a mere print on manuscript. If teacher autonomy means connecting professional autonomy (the characteristics of the teacher feeling or acting autonomous) to teaching autonomy as conceptualized by Nakata (2011) then Algerian EFL teachers are only partially autonomous. It's true that they are working towards their own development as EFL teachers in an autonomous way but they are not actually applying the same reflective and self-managing process to their learners. In sum, it seems that EFL teachers in Algeria revealed by the present study have situational readiness for learning autonomy because they have shown a good level of understanding of the concept and have also referred to some strategies that they tend to employ in their EFL classes. It seems also that they have to a given extent psychological readiness as they are not highly determined towards the feasibility of learner autonomy in their context while they lack behavioral readiness which is the actual realization of the aforementioned. We have concluded that Algerian EFL teachers lack behavioral autonomy because they have failed to establish a practical ground between professional autonomy and teaching autonomy.

The findings imply a set of recommendations to backup teachers' readiness beyond theory. First of all, we believe that there should be a total breakdown between the societal culture and the institutional culture and that the latter should build on past experiences to review the status quo of LA in the Algerian context. The institutional policies should be revolutionized; there should be a total detachment with old beliefs on what education and roles should be in the classroom. This detachment between the two types of cultures should be initiated at high school and could be subtly introduced through an intervention at the level of curricula and teaching methods. In addition, the idea of self-access centers is actually a way to developing learners self-directed language learning through programs that aim at supporting the development of language skills and interpersonal empowerment. Moreover, teacher training should move from its traditional boundaries and ideologies; teachers would better benefit from trainings abroad so as to confront successful experiences of learner autonomy practice; this conforms to teachers' beliefs that autonomy is culturally boundless. Last but not least, learners should be involved in organizing conferences, workshops and study days which is a serious step towards students' agency.

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8. APPENDIX : Teacher Interview Questions

1. Good morning/ afternoon/ Sir / Madame, would you mind telling us what teacher autonomy means to you as an EFL teacher?
2. What do you do in order to sustain the development of learner autonomy?
3. Do you believe that the cultural background of your society and the culture of your institution influence your attitudes and readiness for LA, if yes how?

4. To what extent do you believe that classroom discourse could be part of teacher autonomy as it helps teachers free themselves from the prevailing views about the traditional roles of the teacher?
5. What do you think is the role of teacher training in promoting teacher autonomy?