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A Gender-based Investigation of the Perception of English Language Teachers at Saudi Universities Regarding the Factors Influencing Learner Autonomy

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Abstract
Learner autonomy has been a focus of attention in the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT) research nowadays and the study in hand is an attempt to investigate learner autonomy in theory and practice from the perspective of English language teachers. It aims to identify gender-based perceptions of English language teachers from a Saudi university regarding the role of the textbooks, study material, support of English language teachers, the students' learning strategies, students' motivation and self-evaluation in enhancing learner autonomy. This empirical survey has involved 30 male and 30 female (n=60) English language teachers from English language center of Taif University, Saudi Arabia to record their insights and views about their perceptions and prospects of these pedagogical constructs in their teaching practices. The participants of the study responded to a 35-point Likert-scale modified questionnaire to generate data. Independent-samples T-test has been run to calculate percentages of their responses as well as to identify any statistically significant gender-based differences. The results revealed that only six items out of the total 35 have shown significant gender-based differences in the perceptions of the participants of the survey. The findings have revealed that the participants of this study bear extremely positive attitudes towards the pedagogical significance of learner autonomy and have exhibited encouraging trends about the implementation of this construct in the classrooms. Recommendations have been forwarded based on the results of this survey.
Keywords: English language teachers, gender-based differences, learner autonomy, perceptions

Introduction

The brave new world poses a special emphasis on human capital and provides opportunities to individuals who are more competitive. Research informs us that such individuals are the ones who are "innovative, creative, proactive, motivated, highly skilled, flexible, available, and most important to have complex and critical thinking" (Melor, Yunus, & Arshad, 2015, p. 41). Research also reports that such traits of competitive human beings can be developed by practicing learner autonomy (LA) (Bullock, 2011; Yoshiyuki, 2011). Review of relevant studies transpires that LA has been a focus of international discourse amongst scholars as well as practitioners in the field of pedagogy (Al-Busaidi, & Al-Maamari, 2014). LA is conceived as a process of empowering learners and making them responsible for their learning process through active participation in the process. A growing mass of research is produced about this concept since the groundbreaking work by the Council of Europe in 1980s and pioneering work of Holec in 1981.

Literature Review

Review of relevant literature reveals that there exist several definitions for LA which "differ depending on the writer and the context where the term is used (Al-Busaidi, & Al-Maamari, 2014, p. 2051). A broader definition of LA can be summed as learners' ability to take decisions about their own learning. Among the pioneering definitions, Holec (1981, p. 3) considers LA as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning… to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning". While elaborating his definition, Holec (1981) states that this autonomy lies in learners' ability to determine the learning objectives, identify the content, choose appropriate learning techniques, monitor the learning process and evaluate what is learned. Little (1991) identifies LA as "essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning. It is to be found in a wide variety of behaviors as a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action" (p. 4). Littlewood (1996) defines LA as "learners' ability and willingness to make choices independently" (p. 97). Benson (2001) defines "autonomy as the capacity to take control of one's own learning, largely because the construct of 'control' appears to be more open to investigation than the construct of 'charge' or 'responsibility'" (p. 47). LA is also "described as a capacity … because various kinds of abilities can be involved in control over learning. ………….the most important abilities are those that allow learners to plan their own learning activities, monitor their progress and evaluate their outcomes" (Benson, 2003, p. 290).

Following the definition of Holec (1981), the linguistics have used several terms for LA such as, 'ability' by Benson, 2006, 'capacity' by Little, 1991, 'take responsibility', and 'take control' as reported by Al-Busaidi, & Al-Maamari, (2014). According to Benson and Voller (1997), the term LA has been applied to the following five learning modes; 1) situations where learners control their own learning, b) self-directed learning skills, c) an inborn capacity that is suppressed by formal education, d) demonstration of learners' responsibility towards self-learning and e) learners' freedom to decide about the learning dynamics of their learning.

Cherrington (2000) has reported that it was after the second world war era, because of several economic and political exigencies, "…ELT[English Language Teaching] became a large and expanding business, supported by academic and linguistic developments and also by governments and their agencies" (p. 361). In addition to that, rapid developments in the field of

applied linguistics and ELT pedagogy and research has initiated an era of increased interest in language learners as well. English language practitioners have started to consider LA as a determiner for effective ELT. It has been stated that "the current processes of upheaval and change constrain most of us to lifelong learning, which is at least partly synonymous with autonomous learning" (De Florio-Hansen, 2007, p. 30). Benson (1996) has emphasized that LA is directly related to the psychological or internal abilitis of a language learner which include their learning styles, aptitudes, motivational orientations, attitudes etc. The main objective in this regard should be to enhance the learners' responsibility of their learning process. Gardner and Miller (2002) have detailed the historical perspective of LA in his book and elaborated various terms related to it. They have further stated that LA has been closely related to the concept of life-long learning skills. It has been suggested that the following three pedagogical aspects, namely learner empowerment, learner reflection and appropriate target language use, are the main prerequisites of successful LA (Little, 1991). A growing mass of research has offered insights into the fact that LS inculcates enhanced motivation among learners when they hold the responsibility regarding the development of their learning process (Al Asmari, 2013; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). It is also suggested that "motivation should enhance the sense of responsibility among the learners in conducting their language learning process" (Melor, Yunus, & Arshad, 2015, p. 41). The relevant literature also warns that LA does not work well if the learners do not have clear and achievable learning objectives in front of them to guide them take appropriate initiatives for their learning process (Melor, Yunus, & Arshad, 2015). Benson (2001) has also reported that LA is closely related to the learners' capacity to learn in terms of personal goals. Therefore, it seems imperative that language teachers should interact with their students to form measurable and achievable learning objectives (Schunk, 2005; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012).

Traditionally the emphasis of LA research has been on the learners and the "researchers have tried to identify the traits that characterize autonomous learners" (Al-Busaidi, & Al-Maamari, 2014, p. 2051). The recent years have seen a shift in this regard as a growing mass of LA studies have been conducted to investigate language teachers' beliefs related to LA. It seems logical and "equally important to explore the teacher dimension of LA, considering the impact teachers' beliefs can have on the learning process. The extent of teachers' support for LA is based on their own learning and understanding" (Al-Busaidi, & Al-Maamari, 2014, p. 2051). The same has been emphasized by Edelhoff (1984, p. 189) who has stated that "teachers will hardly be prepared or able to administer autonomous learning processes in their students if their own learning is not geared to the same principles". Much research has reported that teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards various pedagogical concepts, teaching methodologies and approaches determine their teaching practices (Isenberg, 1990; Hedge and Cassidy, 2009). Thus, it is important "to build a design or adapting activities in promoting autonomous learning, it is vital to understand teachers' perceptions, practices and beliefs toward the notion of learner autonomy" (Melor, Yunus, & Arshad, 2015, P. 42).

During the last decade a host of studies has been conducted in various English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts to investigate English language teachers' beliefs about LA. The study of Balçıkanlı (2010) involved 112 student teachers from a Turkish university who were investigated by using semi-structured interviews. The researcher has conducted multiple interview session with the participants to seek their responses towards the use and productivity of LA. The investigation

of Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) was conducted in the setting of higher education in Oman. The researchers have investigated 61 teachers' attitudes and practices towards LA in an Omani university language center. A closed-ended questionnaire was used to elicit the participants' responses and descriptive analyses were run to present the results. The results indicate that the participants understand the role of pedagogical significance of LA in successful language teaching; though they were not very confident in inculcating this quality among their Omani students. The results have also pointed out that the participants of this survey questionnaire have considered learner-related factors such as low motivation among the students and teacher-related factor like lack of confidence in their students and the institutional factor such as heavy syllabus the main reasons behind their inability to inculcate LA. Al Asmari (2013) investigated male and female English language teachers from the context of higher education in a Saudi university. A Likert-scale questionnaire was administered to the participants of the study to generate data related to their perceptions about LA. It was also found out that a vast majority of the participants bear a strong liking for LA and they supported the belief that AL provides wide opportunities for enhanced learning to the students because of their active and positive role in the process of learning. It was also learnt that the participants favored the strategies of 'teaching communicative skills' and 'group discussions' as important strategies to promote LA. Duong (2014) has investigated Thai EFL faculty members' perceptions regarding the promotion of LA of their students in the context of Thai higher education. A closed-ended questionnaire was exploited to elicit thirty participants' responses who were English language teachers. The results have revealed that the majority could perceive the concept of LA and the subsequent role of English language teachers but most of them reported that it was difficult for them to implement LA practices in the Thai context. The study of Salimi and Ansari (2015*)* meant to investigate the beliefs and attitudes of Iranian English language teachers towards LA. The study engaged 35 participants who were selected randomly from the English department of university of Maragheh, Iran who responded to a Likert-scale questionnaire. The responses were manually coded and descriptive analyses were run to present the findings of this survey. The findings have exhibited that Iranian teachers had a fair idea of LA and they believe that it plays an important role in successful language learning as well as to prepare their students to look after their learning in future as well. Yunus and Arshad (2015) have investigated Malaysian EFL teachers' perceptions towards the prospects and practices of LA in the Malaysian public secondary schools. The study was conducted in relation to the latest emphasis of Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB 2013-2025) towards the usage of LA as a desirable teaching/learning approach. The study involved 35 in-service English language teachers teaching to seek their attitudes related to their perceptions, practices and possibilities of implementing LA. The findings have revealed that major traits of LA were missing in the ELT practices in Malaysian universities because of an overemphasis on final exam preparations. It also transpired that the participants had favorable attitudes towards this construct despite the difficult situation in Malaysian schools. The study of Al-Onaizi (2017) intended to investigate the role of English language faculty in incorporating LA in the academic context of Saudi secondary school. It aimed at finding out the roles of English language teachers as managers, facilitators, counselors and resource. The study involved 60 English language teachers who responded to a questionnaire. The results have exhibited that LA is usually encouraged though the process is not very effective as many teachers at Saudi secondary schools lack proper strategies to activate learners' LA. Furthermore, the students are also not skilled for this kind of learning mode because they are seldom exposed to it. It has been recommended that teachers' continuous assessment and

contemplation of their teaching practices, availability of professional development sessions to them and relaxation of administrative restrictions should be exercised to improve LA at Saudi schools. Al-Rabai (2017) has conducted a mixed-method study to investigate 136 English language teachers from a Saudi university to understand their perceptions related to LA. The participants of the study were investigated through a survey and interviews to elicit their responses towards the concept of LA and its role in language learning process. The study also aimed to collect data about the role of English language faculty in helping their students to become autonomous learners, their assessment of the autonomy their students have, and the challenges faced by the faculty in enhancing LA among their students. The results generated from the descriptive analyses have informed that English language teachers consider psychological orientation as the most closely related to LA from the four constructs of learner autonomy namely technical, psychological, social, and political orientations. The participants have emphasized that it is their duty as English language teachers to promote LA among their students but it becomes challenging because of their students who are relatively passive, usually depend on their teachers and lack initiative.

Research questions
1. What is the perception of male and female English language teachers at Saudi universities about the role of the textbooks and study material in enhancing LA?
2. What is the perception of male and female English language teachers at Saudi universities about the role and support of English language teachers in enhancing LA?
3. What is the perception of male and female English language teachers at Saudi universities about the role of the students' learning strategies in enhancing LA?
4. What is the perception of male and female English language teachers at Saudi universities about the role of the students' motivation and self-evaluation in enhancing LA?
5.

Null hypotheses
1. There does not exist any gender-based statistically significant differences in the perception of male and female English language teachers at Saudi universities about the role of the textbooks and study material in enhancing LA?
2. There does not exist any gender-based statistically significant differences in the perception of male and female English language teachers at Saudi universities about the role and support of English language teachers in enhancing LA?
3. There does not exist any gender-based statistically significant differences in the perception of male and female English language teachers at Saudi universities about the role of the students' learning strategies in enhancing LA?
4. There does not exist any gender-based statistically significant differences in the perception of male and female English language teachers at Saudi universities about the role of the students' motivation and self-evaluation in enhancing LA?

Method
Participants of the Study
The participants of this survey report have been male and female English language teachers serving in the English language center of a Saudi university at Taif. English language center caters for the English language needs of Saudi students who join the university. Intensive skills courses ranging from six hours to 15 hours coaching each week are taken by the students during their first

year according to their major areas of study. English for specific purposes courses are taught during their second and third year of study at the university. Majority of male and female English language teachers hold MA degrees and belong to various nationalities.

The Instrumentation

A Likert-scale adopted questionnaire has been used by the researcher to collect data from male and female English language teachers. Several relevant studies which have been published during the last 10 years to investigate faculty members responses towards LA have been consulted to develop the instrument for this study (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Al-Asmari, 2013; Al-Busaidi & Al-Maamari, 2014; Salimi & Ansari, 2015; Yunus & Arshad, 2015; Alonazi, 2017 etc.) The questionnaire has been divided into four sections to seek the participants' beliefs about four areas related to LA as set in the research questions and the hypotheses. The first section was meant to elicit the participants' perceived beliefs about the role of the textbooks and study material in enhancing LA and this section contained nine items. The second section also contained nine items which were related to the role and support of English language teachers in enhancing LA. The next section comprised of eight item which were included in the instrument to seek their perceptions about the role of the students' learning strategies in enhancing LA. The last section also had 9 items which were meant to collect data related to the participants' perceived beliefs about the role of the students' motivation and self-evaluation in enhancing LA. The questionnaire had 35 items in Likert-scale format and the participants were supposed to respond to each one of them with the scale of 'strongly agree' to strongly disagree.

Reliability and Validity

After reviewing the previous studies, an initial version of the questionnaire was developed by the researcher according to identify the participants' beliefs about the four areas narrowed down in the research questions. That initial version was sent to three experts in the field and their suggestions were incorporated to achieve face validity. The questionnaire was then pilot tested with 17 English language teachers from the same context. The data generated through the pilot test was entered manually and Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was run to determine the reliability of the instrument. The results have indicated an acceptable level of reliability of .769. The final version of the questionnaire was generalized to the participants to present the results and findings.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. *Textbooks and Study Materials*

	Statements	Group	N	M	df	p value	
1	The students should discuss their views with the teacher on what to learn in the classroom.	Male	30	4.0000	58	p > 0.05	No
		Female	30	3.9000	56.751	.711	
2	The students should offer opinions on learning materials.	Male	30	3.7333	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	3.5667	57.287	.551	
3	The students should assist the teacher in setting up the equipment in the classroom.	male	30	3.8667	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.0333	51.497	.474	
4	The students should have a say in the choice of materials to use.	male	30	3.1000	58	p > 0.05	No

		female	30	3.1000	56.067	1.000	
5	The textbook should have multimedia support.	male	30	4.7333	58	$p > 0.05$	No
		female	30	4.7000	51.537	.818	
6	The textbooks should be based on students' interests and needs.	male	30	4.6667	58	$p > 0.05$	No
		female	30	4.7333	53.767	.650	
7	The study material and activities should be according to the prior experience of students.	male	30	3.7333	58	$p < 0.05$	Yes
		female	30	4.5667	48.851	.003	
8	The classroom activities should encourage self-learning among students.	male	30	4.7333	58	$p > 0.05$	No
		female	30	4.8000	57.687	.583	
9	The study material should encourage students to use English in real-life situations.	male	30	4.6333	58	$p > 0.05$	No
		female	30	4.8333	57.786	.109	

The table 1 details the descriptive statistics of the responses of male and female participants of the survey regarding the role of the textbooks and study material in enhancing LA. This section contains 9 items in total and 4 items have been assigned higher mean values of more than 4, only two items have been allocated less than 4 whereas the remaining items were given medium high mean values. The participants have favored the item 'The classroom activities should encourage self-learning among students' the most with extremely high mean values of 4.73 by male participants and 4.8 by their female counterparts. The second highest mean was assigned to 'The study material should encourage students to use English in real-life situations' with extremely high mean of 4.63 and 4.83 by male and female cohort respectively. The next two most favored items were related to the textbooks and study materials and the participants have emphasized that LA can be achieved successfully if the textbooks have multimedia support and they are tailor made indigenously according to the students' interests and needs. An interesting finding is that the participants of this survey have allocated extremely low mean value of only 3.1, both by male and female cohort, to the belief that the students should have a say in the choice of materials to be taught to them. The same has been emphasized by the their second least preferred item which states that the students should offer opinions on learning materials. Thus, the participants of the survey strongly believe that textbooks should be developed indigenously based on the needs of the students and only that material should be included in the textbooks which are according to the interest of the students. Similarly, it is also evident that the findings support that classroom activities are quite instrumental in promoting LA if they are according to the interest of the students, align with their previous learning experiences, encourage the learners to use the target language in real life situations and provide them practice to become autonomous learners.

The finding strongly coincides with the results of Farooq (2013) who has also revealed that English language teachers teaching at university level strongly agree that to enhance LA it is necessary that the textbooks should be based on students' interest and needs as well as encourage students to use English in real-life situations. The results of two highest ranking items of this category suggesting multimedia support to textbooks and conducting activities which promote self-learning of this empirical survey received partial support from the cohort of Farooq (2013)

who have assigned medium high values to these items. The overall results of the questionnaire items which elicited the participants' responses related to the involvement of the students in selecting textbooks and study materials seem to suggest that for effective ELT, autonomy should be provided to EFL learners confirming the a growing mass of research in the field which indicates that mutual coordination and consultation is important by English language teachers and learners to ensure positive results (Al-Rabai, 2017; Melor, Yunus, & Arshad, 2015; Al Asmari, 2013; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Therefore, it seems unavoidable for English language teachers in the KSA to involve their students in various classroom proceedings to help enhance their language learning abilities. Melor, Yunus and Arshad, (2015) has reported that English language teachers from a Malaysian public school have assigned reasonably high preference to the items which sought their responses about providing training and facilitating them to become autonomous learners. Same has been emphasized by Melor, Yunus and Arshad (2015) who has reported that most of the participants "agree and strongly agree that giving the learners opportunities to make decisions about their own learning process is an important factor in promoting learner autonomy" (p. 1112). He has further emphasized that the teachers' role is extremely important in developing and promoting learner autonomy.

Table 2. *Teachers' Role and Support in Learning*

	Statements	Group	N	M	Df	p value	
10	EFL teachers should be facilitators and helpers in the classroom.	Male	30	4.9000	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.8667	57.117	.694	
11	EFL teachers should treat all the students equally in the classroom.	Male	30	4.8333	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.8000	54.838	.768	
12	EFL teachers should encourage students to ask questions whenever there is a problem.	male	30	4.7000	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.9333	37.604	.075	
13	EFL teachers should encourage students to participate in the classroom activities.	male	30	4.9000	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.9333	56.131	.647	
14	EFL teachers should give real-life examples and assignments to the students.	male	30	4.7000	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.9000	50.000	.055	
15	EFL teachers should give proper feedback on each assignment as it helps students in their learning.	male	30	4.7000	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.8000	56.960	.380	
16	EFL teachers should encourage creativity among students in language use.	male	30	4.8000	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.7667	55.529	.779	
17	EFL teachers should use appropriate technology in the classroom to make learning interesting.	male	30	4.7333	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.7667	57.264	.788	
18	EFL teachers should assign home-based language tasks and projects to the students.	male	30	4.3333	58	p < 0.05	Yes
		female	30	4.6667	58.000	.009	

Table 2 contains the data related to the male and female participants of this study towards the role and support of English language teachers in enhancing LA. The descriptive analyses have shown the extremely high preference of the participants about the role of English language teachers as evident by extremely high mean values of more than 4.5 assigned to all items of this category. The highest means of 4.9 and 4.93 have been calculated by their belief that EFL teachers should encourage students to participate in the classroom activities to maximize the possibility of enhancing LA. The second highest means have been reported by male and female participants to the belief that to increase LA, the role of EFL teachers as facilitators and helpers in the classroom is extremely instrumental. It was also favored unanimously by all the participants that the teachers should treat all their students equally and should not favor anyone in any respect. In a similar manner, extremely high mean has been allocated to the item that sought their responses towards EFL teachers' efforts to encourage their students to ask questions whenever there is a problem. As it has been mentioned earlier that all items of this category were given extremely high mean values. The least preferred items included 'EFL teachers' assigning home-based language tasks and projects to the students' and 'EFL teachers use appropriate technology in the classroom to make learning interesting'.

The results of this survey have highlighted one point clearly that both male and female English language teachers believe that their role is extremely instrumental in achieving the goal of inculcating LA among their students. The findings have emphasized that English language teachers should ensure a communicative atmosphere in their classes where they act as facilitators and motivators by bringing the real-world situation in their classroom settings through exploiting authentic teaching materials that keep the students motivation and interest intact and high. The role of timely feedback, use of appropriate technology and attempts to develop creativity among the students have also been emphasized.

The results of the highest-ranking questionnaire item of this category is partially in line with the findings of Farooq (2013) who has indicated that the participants from a similar academic context have allocated medium high mean to this factor. The second most preferred item confirms the findings of Melor, Yunus and Arshad, (2015) stating that teachers should "be more like facilitators and classroom managers as well as encouraging learners to engage with outside of classroom learning" (p. 45) to enhance LA. The findings are similar to Javid (2014) who has investigated Saudi university undergraduates and reported that the most preferred English language teachers are those who motivate and encourage their students effectively. The same has been reported by Al-Asmari (2013) as well. The results of items 12, 14 and 16 are in line with Al-Onazi (2017) who has stated that Saudi secondary teachers have allocated medium high preferences to these items as well indicating that English language teachers should encourage their students to have their own learning goals, exercise creativity in learning activities and interact with their teachers to find solutions to their academic issues to ensure independent learning. Encouraging students to participate in the classroom activities remained the most favored item partially confirming the findings of Farooq (2013) who reported medium high liking by the participants. The third most preferred items of this category is also in line with the results of Javid (2014) who has reported that Saudi students like those teacher who treat them equally and provide their learners with equal opportunities.

Table 3. *Students' Learning Strategies*

	Statements	Group	N	M	df	p value (Significance)	
19	Working in pairs in the English class provides a chance to students to discuss.	male	30	4.3667	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.6667	52.496	.086	
20	Individual work is better in the English class.	male	30	2.4333	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	2.7333	48.851	.264	
21	Group work is a better strategy in learning English.	male	30	3.8667	58	p < 0.05	Yes
		female	30	4.6000	43.097	.002	
22	Taking part in classroom activities increases confidence in students.	male	30	4.8000	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.6333	47.883	.249	
23	Students' competencies and attitudes can be assessed in group work.	male	30	4.3333	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.1000	50.425	.290	
24	Students learn from their peers, not just from the teacher.	male	30	4.7000	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.7000	56.932	1.000	
25	A sense of harmony can be developed while working in a group.	male	30	3.4000	58	p < 0.05	Yes
		female	30	4.1667	53.301	.004	
26	Motivation is enhanced when their own success contributes to the goals of a group.	male	30	4.2333	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.2000	57.984	.867	

The table 3 contains descriptive analyses of the statements about the role of the students' learning strategies in enhancing LA as perceived by Saudi male and female English language teachers. Majority of the items in this category have been assigned reasonably high mean values as there is only one item with less than 3 mean, 5 items have been given mean higher than 4 whereas the remaining 2 have been assigned medium high values. An extremely high mean of 4.8 was recorded by the male cohort to the item which states that 'taking part in classroom activities increases confidence in students which is instrumental in developing LA. The female cohort has allocated 4.63 to this item. Same high value of 4.7 ha been assigned unanimously to the assumption that language learners learn from their peers as well and not just from their teachers. High mean has been reported for the belief that pair work contributes significantly in providing the learners with the opportunities to communicate. 'Individual work is better in the English class' is the only statement which was assigned lowest mean of only 2.43 and 2.73 by males and females respectively. All the remaining statement received medium high mean values by both groups.

The highest-ranking item of this category partially coincides with the results of Farooq (2013) who has reported medium high mean to the item stating that participation in classroom activities is instrumental in inculcating confidence in English language learners. The findings of Melor, Yunus and Arshad, (2015) have reported that English language teachers from a Malaysian public school strongly believe that group discussion creates interest in English language learners

confirming the liking of the cohort of this empirical study to this aspect. The findings also confirm the findings of Javid (2011) who has also revealed that Saudi EFL learners from the same context believe that pair and group work is instrumental in their English language studies.

Table 4. *Motivation and Self-evaluation*

	Statements	Group	N	M	df	p value	
27	Saudi EFL students enjoy learning English.	male	30	3.7000	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.0000	57.104	.217	
28	Saudi EFL students stimulate their own interest in learning English.	Male	30	3.3000	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	3.5000	57.116	.365	
29	Saudi EFL students set up their own learning goals.	Male	30	2.6333	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	3.1000	50.405	.100	
30	Saudi EFL students identify their own strengths and weaknesses.	Male	30	2.7667	58	p < 0.05	Yes
		female	30	3.3333	57.817	.019	
31	Saudi EFL students know learning English better will enable them to get a well-paid job.	Male	30	4.1000	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	4.0667	46.563	.850	
32	Saudi EFL students want to be the best in the English class.	Male	30	2.9000	58	p < 0.05	Yes
		female	30	3.5000	56.659	.010	
33	Saudi EFL students always come to the class on-time.	Male	30	3.2000	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	3.5000	57.897	.321	
34	Saudi EFL students hand in assignment to the teacher on-time.	Male	30	3.1667	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	3.6333	52.856	.069	
35	Saudi EFL students access internet for online English language learning activities.	Male	30	3.1333	58	p > 0.05	No
		female	30	3.1333	56.137	1.000	

The last nine items have been included in the questionnaire to elicit the participants' responses about the role of the students' motivation and self-evaluation in enhancing LA. As compared to other factors, this one has received lower ranking by the participants. Only 1 item was assigned more than 4, 5 items were allocated less than 4 whereas the remining 3 were allotted quite low mean. In this category, the item 'Saudi EFL students know learning English better will enable them to get a well-paid job' has received the highest favor by the participants as indicated by high mean values of 4.1 and 4.06. The participants have also assigned reasonably high mean to the assumption that 'Saudi EFL students enjoy learning English'. The male and female participants of this survey have not reacted positively to the statement that 'Saudi EFL students set up their own learning goals as indicated by the lowest mean of only 2.63 by the males and 3.1 by the females. The second lowest set of mean has remained for 'Saudi EFL students identify their own strengths and weaknesses'. The results also indicate that Saudi EFL students do not bear very competitive attitude to remain at the top position in their classes.

The medium high mean values reported by the cohort of this empirical study about enjoying learning English and stimulating their own interest in learning coincides with Melor, Yunus, & Arshad (2015) who has also presented the same findings by English language teachers from a Malaysian public school. The findings related to these items partially confirms the findings of Farooq (2013) who has reported that the participants of his study from a similar context have assigned comparatively higher mean to these items. A growing mass of research has suggested that motivation is an important factor in inculcating urge among EFL learners to work hard inside as well as outside the classroom to learn the target language (Dornyei, 2006; Javid, Asmari & Farooq, 2012). Though research has also reported that extrinsic goals such as scoring high marks and task completion overshadow intrinsic motivation among EFL learners (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; NST, 2012; Javid, Asmari, & Farooq, 2012). Therefore, it is also important for EFL teachers to try to keep intrinsic motivation high. The highest mean is reported for the extrinsic motivation of securing a better job in future is in line with the findings of Javid, Asmari and Farooq (2012) who has also reported that Saudi EFL learners want to learn English mainly for the instrumental factor of achieving higher salary and better status in society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present survey attempts to explore gender-based perceptions of Saudi EFL teachers in inculcating LA as there has been a major emphasis to a more learner-centered teaching. The results indicate that to enhance LA, it is important to understand that EFL teachers are no longer provider of knowledge only, rather they have to act as learning resource, facilitators and counselors. The result generated by the data analyses highlight the best strategies which are instrumental in promoting learner autonomy. It has been emphasized that textbooks and study material should be finalized after consulting the faculty members, assessing the students' preferences and analyzing the learners' academic needs. The textbooks should have multimedia support to ensure LA. The role of EFL faculty is imperative in promoting autonomous learning and the learners should be provided with the opportunities to reflect on their individual learning process, assess their progress and take their own decision regarding their learning. The findings reveal that pair/group work and classroom activities promote learning possibilities among EFL learners. The null hypotheses set for this study were rejected as the results of independent-samples t-test has not shown any significant differences along gender-lines.

Considering the fact that largely EFL culture in the KSA depends on teacher-centered pedagogy, EFL faculty should exert to inculcate greater motivation, interact with their students to help them make own learning decisions, respect individual difference, and encourage them to become life-long learners. It is recommended that there should be continuous professional development programs for the faculty related to autonomy-oriented education. The teachers should ensure a cooperative learning environment in classes to encourage LA among their students. The students should be encouraged to set learning goals for themselves, share their strengths and weakness in language learning with their teachers and discuss feedback on their language tasks, assignments or projects as well. It is also suggested that LA is a much-sought after goal which cannot be materialized without a close coordination of EFL faculty, learners, supervisors and the administration. Traditionally Saudi EFL culture heavily depends on pre-deigned teaching materials, therefore, it is also extremely important to choose material which ensure LA through various scenarios and activities which enhance the learner's development of skills in this regard.

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