English as a Second Language Teachers and Students Beliefs about Learner Autonomy at Tertiary Level in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study is an endeavour to explore the language learning beliefs and activities of the teachers and the students at the tertiary level to become autonomous. This study used a descriptive survey method to collect the data from 250 students and 25 teachers from the University of Central Punjab Lahore, Pakistan. A snowball and convenience sampling method was used to collect data from three undergraduate programmes learning the English Language teachers and students. The descriptive results show that teachers believe autonomy is a western concept, and students believe autonomy means having the freedom to make choices in language learning. The study reveals that students have more autonomy in choosing material and methods of learning. Evaluation of learning and developing autonomy is the responsibility of the students. Students prefer learning alone in the library, and teachers want to involve the students in decision-making and prefer classes student-centred. Teachers also believe learner autonomy is desirable for class management and choosing topics for discussions. Moreover, teachers view that learner autonomy is feasible for the students to identify their weaknesses and strengths and monitor their progress. The results of the study have implications for the university teachers, adult language learners, trainers, and syllabus designers to improve the teaching and learning of language at the higher education level.

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1.   Introduction

English is seen as a passport to travel and mix with people worldwide, a tool for higher education and a guarantee to a successful career. Nowadays, language competence decides the way a person lives and moves around the world. Education aims to prepare students better to assume their roles in society confidently (Bhatti, 2012). While a student may be capable of doing routine tasks, knowing "how to learn" is a separate matter (Sarwar, Bashir, Khan, & Khan, 2009). Students that are not fulfilled with their communication demands have no motivation (Jurik, Gröschner, & Seidel, 2014; Shahid, Tek, Teck, & Perveen, 2019). They seek a feeling of belonging, and their success is hindered if they have no role in the class. Its development of competence and their connection to classroom activities are significant (Doménech-Betoret & Gómez-Artiga, 2014). The idea of learner autonomy should indeed be incorporated in language courses to include the students and assist them perform their responsibilities successfully and responsibly. Students' skills can be promoted by providing interpersonal and physical space to learn the target language.

Although there is an important link between learner autonomy and communication competence (Littlewood, 1999; Oxford, 2003), independent learners are competent and achieve high academic achievement and have greater job prospects (Benson, 2001; Boud,

2012). When students are in charge of their own learning, they become more accountable, self-aware, and capable of identifying their own learning's strengths and faults. It is an ability to govern learning, a capability for independence, decision-making, and dissociation (Holec, 1981). Learner autonomy is primarily related to the students' characteristics. It can be affected by the teaching environment and teaching process (Fotiadou, Angelaki, & Mavroidis, 2017). Interpersonal, emotional, and cultural aspects have a greater impact on the learning environment than do cognitive ones connected with traditional classroom teaching (Wang & Wang, 2016). A teacher who has learned independently supports it by adopting the position of facilitator as a distributor of information. The essential to offering a model for developing learner autonomy is teachers' knowledge and expertise in language teaching practises (Cakici, 2015).

Establishing learner autonomy with Pakistani language teachers is essential (Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). There is a dire need to prepare learners for learning purpose. they should be aware with new learning strategies and change their perceptions (Cakici, 2015). This problem can be overcome by such teachers who have an expert level competence in English language teaching to motivate the learners (Haddad, 2016).   Less research has been done on the autonomy of language learners, and more research is needed to better understand how students grow and how autonomous language instruction differs from traditional methods (Ou, 2017). According to Nyinondi, Mhandeni, and Mohamed (2016), additional research focused on historical language teaching techniques and learning patterns. Teachers' expertise level, autonomy, new instructional methods, and learning assessment in CLT are the area that needs studies in language teaching and learning to fill the research gap (Manan, David, Dumanig, & Naqeebullah, 2015). Benson (2001) notes that educator and teachers cannot teach students to become autonomous. However, the teachers may develop such atmosphere and surroundings in which they will be pushed to grow up autonomy.

The foremost objective of this study is to explore the views of the teachers and students at the tertiary level in Pakistan to know about their beliefs about learner autonomy, their autonomy level in choosing class activities, their responsibilities in becoming autonomous. Teachers' beliefs of desirability and feasibility of learner autonomy are another objective of the study. Following are the questions for this study.

Q1:   What are the self-perceived beliefs of the teachers and the student about learner autonomy and autonomous practices at the tertiary level in Pakistan?
Q2:   What are the students' self-perceived responsibilities to become autonomous in language learning at the university level?
Q3:   What are the activities that students and teachers self-perceive as helpful in and outside the   class, to develop learner autonomy at the tertiary level?
Q4:   To what extent learner autonomy is feasible and desirable for the students at the tertiary level according to the perceptions of the university language teachers?

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2013) study, conventional university education does not assure communication skills, self-directedness, and critical thinking. Lifelong talents include the ability to communicate and the ability to learn on one's own. Skills like these, as well as others such as technical mastery, numerical proficiency, literate decision-making, self-assurance, and the ability to motivate others should be nurtured (Knapper, 1988; OECD, 2007, 2016). According to Littlewood (1999), if we define autonomy in educational terms as students' ability to utilise their learning independently of teachers, then autonomy seems to be an indisputable objective for learners everywhere, since it is evident that no pupils, anywhere, would have their teachers follow them throughout life.

In addition, communication competence and autonomy benefit learners throughout their lives (Knapper, 1988; Mushtaque, Rizwan, et al., 2021), and as a result of the Industrial Revolution and globalisation, these abilities are now considered essential in the business world (Phil Benson, 2011). Increasing worldwide acceptance of the English language has made effective independent communication skills a must for pursuing higher education, establishing a company, or working in the professional field of your choice (Block & Cameron, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

2.   Literature Review

Autonomy is a slippery thought that is to some degree hard to get hold of it. Along these lines, it is an issue of social reliance. As per D. G. Little (1991), autonomy is a "limit with regards to separation, basic reflection, basic leadership, a free activity". The term autonomy is utilized in five different ways as pursue (Philip Benson & Voller, 1997):

- situations in which students think about ultimately all alone,
- a character limit which is muffled by institutional instruction,
- a set of attitudes that can be learned and connected in self-coordinated learning,
- the direction of students to decide the bearing of their learning,
- the exercise of students' obligation regarding their very own learning.

To enhance language learning, D. G. Little (1991) believes that students ought to have authority over the objectives and substance of the learning they are associated with. Students with a high meta-subjective awareness, which is an absolute necessity in encouraging student autonomy, can effectively address their more fragile focuses and avoid potential risk as needs be in an increasingly fruitful manner. Autonomous learners construct knowledge from direct experience rather than responding to someone's instructions (Benson, 2001; Mushtaque, Dasti, Mushtaq, & Ali, 2021).

The idea of autonomy is taken from philosophy through the study of psychology (Phil Benson, 2009). Earlier, the theories of language learning were taken from applied linguistics, and in 1960 much emphasis was put on the idea of learner autonomy. It drew the attention of the researchers. Reactions against the minority rights, medicine related to behaviorism, music, and politics give rise to autonomy (Gremmo & Riley, 1995). Different needs of the adult learners and commercial aspects of language learning give way to new education theories that became the reason behind the development of autonomy (Ahmad, Hashmi, Shehzadi, & Nawaz, 2021; Finch, 2002). All learners have the right to equal learning opportunities, and thus Benson (2001) finds autonomy as one of the human rights.

Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, and Todesco (1978) found that autonomous learners are productive. Waite (1994) asserts that it is the responsibility of the learners to take control of their learning. According to Jones (1995), learner autonomy has become one of the educational goals, and autonomy has a strong bonding with practical learning. There are issues with the concept of autonomy; for starters, its definition varies according to the age of the learner, the extent to which their learning has advanced, and their perception of their present learning requirements (D. G. Little, 1991). Nation (2001) asserts that autonomous learners assume control and accountability for their own learning. Autonomous learners need knowledge about what to learn, how to learn, and when to learn. Autonomy is a multifaceted characteristic that manifests differently in various persons and even in the same individual in different circumstances or periods (Benson, 2001). Autonomy is influenced by a variety of elements, including attitude, learning methodologies, activities, self-assessment, and collaboration (Gholami, 2016). Gardner and Miller (1999) discovered that self-assessment is a critical component in monitoring learning, and Tholin (2008) feels that it provides motivations for learners and make them more aware of their learning.

Researchers in Pakistan (Mushtaque, Rizwan, et al., 2021; Rahman, 2002; Shehzadi, 2018; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018) determined that although the concept of learner autonomy is novel to teachers and students in Pakistan, it is critical for preparing them to be self-sufficient and accountable for their learning. There is a need to help teachers and undertake further study in this area to determine how to best implement this concept. Unfortunately, language is taught as a topic in Pakistan's schools, institutions, and universities and efforts are required to enhance students' language competency adequately. There is a need to overcome these obstacles and provide students with the tools necessary to succeed in the contemporary world. Benek-Rivera and Mathews (2004) assert that an innovative technique draws and engages students in learning. Additionally, Brown and Carasso (2013) believe that teachers and their effective teaching approaches are critical components of higher education. It is stated that only professionally qualified teachers are capable of imparting lifelong education via the use of creative approaches and new techniques. Motivating and involving students enables the

development of a more effective teaching technique (Kashif, Shehzadi, & Arshad, 2020; Tomcho & Foels, 2008). It is believed that teachers ought to be innovative at the higher education level, which will help their students have different learning experiences.

Learner autonomy research may assist instructors and students in putting theory into practise in the classroom (Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). Because autonomy research is restricted to theoretical knowledge, it is not evident. The majority of kids place their whole trust in their professors (Mushtaque, Raza, Khan, & Jafri, 2021; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). Additional research on learner autonomy at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels is necessary to compare findings across settings (Fotiadou et al., 2017; Rizwan et al., 2021).

Parallel to this, Lee (1998) contends that people are brought into the world with independence. Additionally, autonomy is normally acknowledged as suggesting specific abilities, practices, and techniques for sorting out the teaching and learning process. Autonomy is considered a multidimensional idea that takes a distinctive set of learning. Benson (2001) reprimands these methodologies since they make the term more befuddling and complex and recommend that autonomy is not a technique for adapting. However, attribute of student's way to deal with the learning procedure.

As English is being taught and learned in all countries of the world and graduates who have weak foundations in English have problems in academics and getting a job later failed to secure jobs because of their lack of competence in the English language, evident particularly during interviews (Hernandez, 2011). Most employers seek good team players, independent, decision-makers, adaptable, confident, and have strong communication skills (Suastra, 2017).

Statistical results from the research by Omar, Manaf, Mohd, Kassim, and Abd Aziz (2012) reflect that the unemployment rate will further increase if higher education institutes are not going to redesign their courses and take remedial measures to help the graduates in the professional degree programs to impart them the skills needed for their interpersonal and professional needs. From the above literature review, much research has been done on the teachers' views on learner autonomy. Little has been explored related to learners' beliefs about learner autonomy in language learning at the tertiary level in Pakistan.

3. Methodology
3.1. Participants and sampling
The research has used a descriptive survey design in this study. According to Williams (2007) the descriptive method supports the researcher in understanding the phenomena and the participants' beliefs. The University of Central Punjab was selected for this study, and students from three different faculties were approached from the undergraduate programmes. The participants for this study were selected using snowball and convenience sampling techniques. In inconvenience sampling, participants are available and eager to be part of the study. They are chosen as participants (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2006). Altogether 250 students from the three faculties: BS Computer science, Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Business Administration 50 from each faculty were selected. Twenty-five English teachers with relevant experience and qualifications teaching English at a tertiary level were selected for the teachers' questionnaire. The researcher has made a possible effort to unequal representation of the male and female participants from teachers and students' sides.

Table 1: Demographic details of the Participants

	Students	Teachers
No. of Participants	250	25
Gender	123 Male, 127 Female	11 Male, 14 Female
Degree Programs	B.Sc computer Science, Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Business Administration	English Language Teaching Department
Background	Rural 111 Urban 139	Rural 15 Urban 10
University	University of Central Punjab Lahore	University of Central Punjab Lahore

3.2. Instruments

To collect the data from teachers and students, two sets of questionnaires were used. The questionnaires were adapted from Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012). The questionnaire has three sections and 27 items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The first section is related to the demographic information of teachers and students. The second is related to beliefs about learning activities to develop autonomy 10 items. In the third section, for the teacher, there are 7 items for feasibility and 6 items desirability and the students' responsibility 7 items and for independence 6 items to develop learner autonomy at tertiary level. The field experts determined the validity of the students and teachers' instruments, and their suggestions helped improve the instruments. The reliability of both instruments was determined. Students' questionnaire Cronbach's Alpha 0.82 and teachers' questionnaire Cronbach's alpha 0.84 suggest the high degree of relativity among the items on both the scales.

Table 2: Crobach's Alpha values of the scales

| Reliability Statistics Teachers' Scale			Reliability Statistics of students' Scale		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items
0.844	0.847	27	.820	.823	27

4. Analysis and Results

Q1: What are the self-perceived beliefs of the teachers and the student about learner autonomy and autonomous practices at the tertiary level in Pakistan?

The means ranging from 1 to 2.49 show low learner autonomy, from 2.50 to 3.49 moderate level, and 3.50 to 5 considered a high level (Özdere, 2005). According to the students' responses, the definition of learner autonomy that has received the highest response has choices in learning with a mean score of 3.81. The lowest response of the learners is towards learning independent of the teacher, with a mean score of 3.41. Learning without teachers has a 3.51 mean score, and Learner autonomy, a western concept, has a 3.46 mean score.

According to teachers, learner autonomy is a western concept with a mean score of 4.00 and learning without a teacher and learning independently has a mean score of 3.96. In the area of giving choices to the students, teachers are not in favour of this idea. When defining a concept, definitions come from the researchers and scholars considered experienced and knowledgeable in their respective fields. Complex terms may mislead the learners to understand, or the concept is too abstract to be familiarized. When learners are asked to find the appropriate definition of a concept, they show how much they have understood it (Atkinson, 1999). A definition also shows the surface and deep meaning of the concept evaluated by the participants.

Figure 1: Learner Autonomy Definition of Students and Teachers
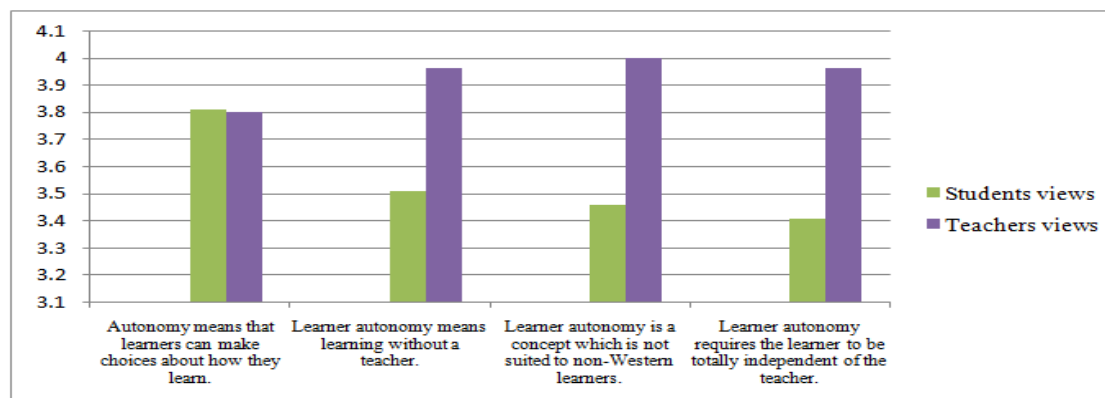
Teachers' views on the definition of learner autonomy differ significantly from the students. As teachers' perceptions show, they believe it is a western concept and students should learn without teachers, and there is no need for teacher supervision to monitor them.

Students have responded positively to have choices in the material used, teaching method, and the topic discussed in the class with a mean score of 4.19 and 4.16, respectively. In classroom management, learning independently and cooperatively, they have a mean score of 4.08 to 4.11. Students who have the least score in choosing the objective of the score i.e. 3.99, the teachers play an important role. In evaluating their learning and how learning is assessed, they have a mean score of 3.99.

Figure 2: Mean Score of Students' autonomous Practices

Mean Score students about their independence to choose tasks in the class
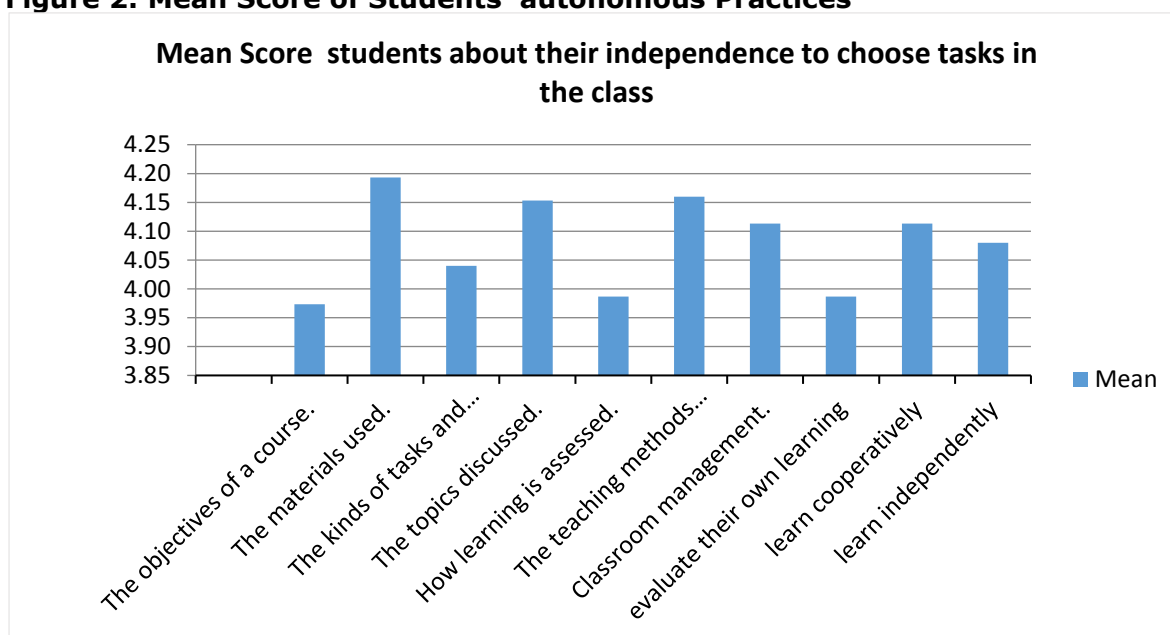
Q2: What are the responsibilities of the students to become autonomous in language learning at the university level?

Regarding responsibilities in language learning, students believe in evaluating their learning, learning cooperatively and independently; their mean score is from 3.65 to 3.61. In identifying their needs, they have the least score of 3.20; in terms of finding their strengths and weaknesses, they have 3.31 and 3.36 mean. A mean score of 3.53 indicates that it is the responsibility of the students to monitor their progress.

Figure 3: Mean score of Students' Responsibilities

Mean score of Students Responsibilities to become autonomous
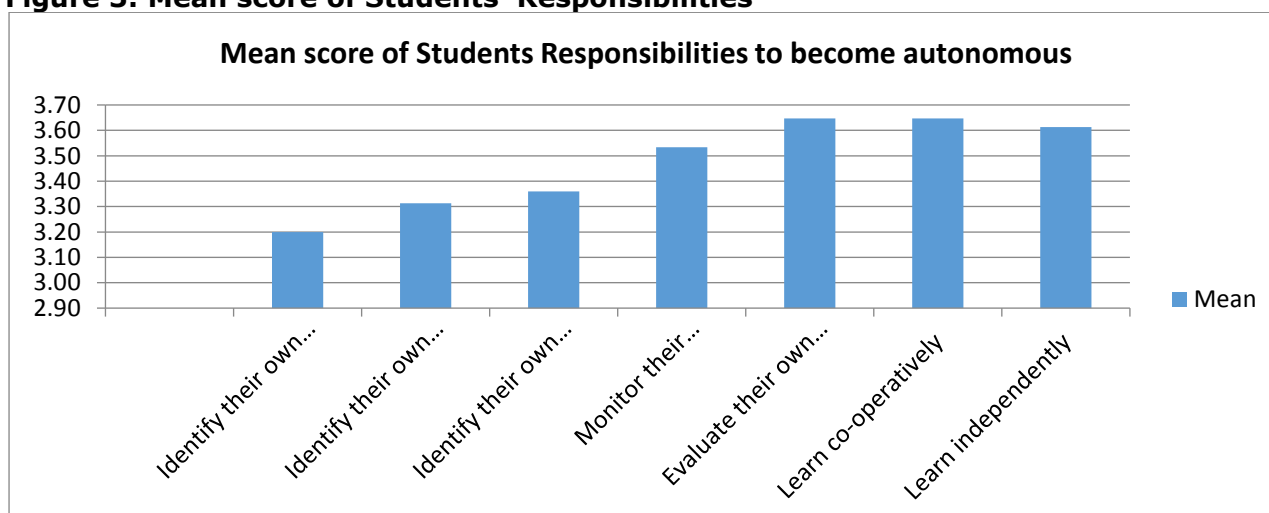
Q3: What activities do students and teachers perceive helpful in and outside the class to develop learner autonomy at the tertiary level?

Students have a high response to studying independently in the library mean score of 4.09 and completing tasks alone 3.97 and learner-centred teaching 3.85. Choosing the learning material, monitoring own learning, learning outside the class, and cooperative learning have the same response mean score of 3.70.

Teachers have the highest mean score of 3.96 to involve learners in decision-making and learner-centred classes. Out-class tasks that required technology and monitoring own learning have a score of 3.92. Teachers believe students have the least interest in group work and choosing their material for learning similar to the average mean of students' responses. There are no differences in teachers and students' responses towards group work and choosing material for class activities. The emphasis on pair or group work and problem solving allow for differences (Dudley-Evans, St John, & Saint John, 2000). From the overall results, we can conclude that teachers and students have no significant differences in their perceptions of class activities.

Figure 4:   **Comparison of Teachers and Students perceptions on Activities for Learner Autonomy**
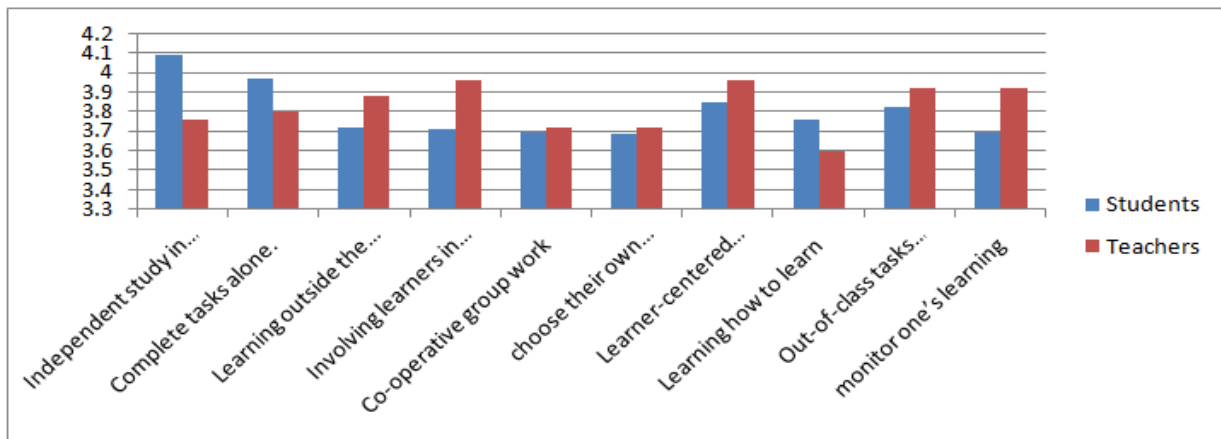

Q4:   **To what extent Learner autonomy is feasible and desirable for the students at tertiary level according to the beliefs of the university teachers?**

According to the teachers, it is highly desirable to have autonomy for the learners in topics discussed in the class, classroom management and assessment of the learning with a respective mean score of 4.2, 4.1 and 4.0. Teachers believe the course's objectives are the teachers' area where students have no right to interfere with a minimum mean score of 3.7.

Figure 5: Mean score of learner Desirability
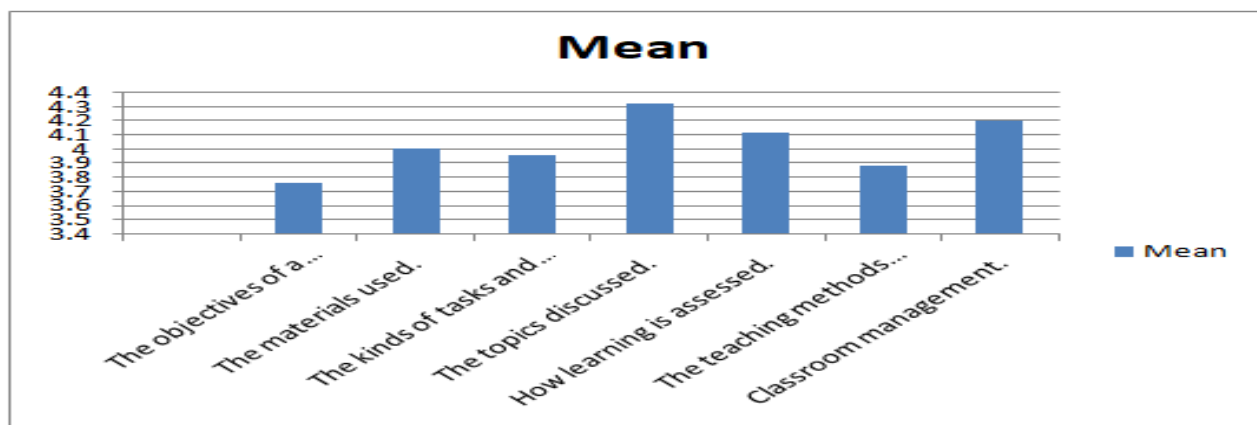
Figure 6: Mean score of learner Feasibility
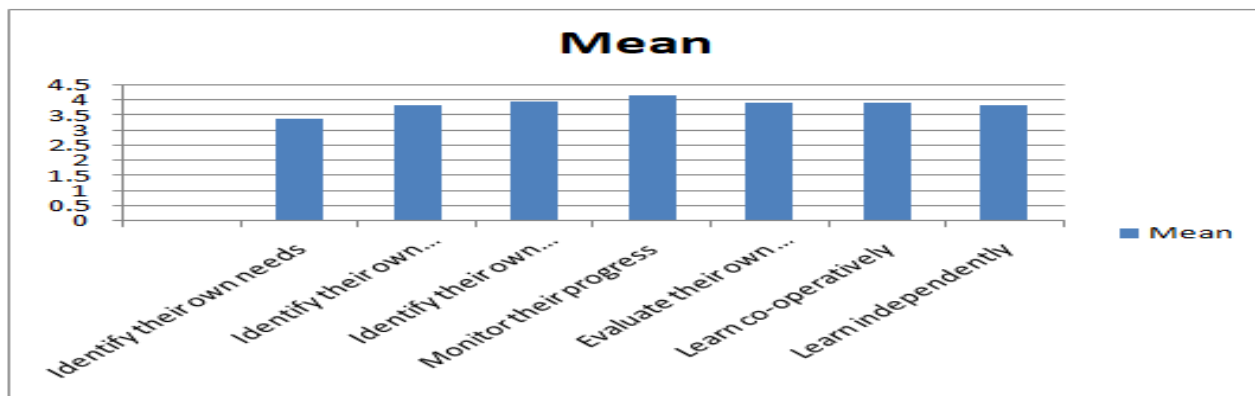
As far as the feasibility of the learner autonomy is concerned, teachers believe the student should monitor their progress (mean score 4.0) and identify their weaknesses (mean score 3.8). Students need to understand more about the area of their needs. According to the teachers, A has a low mean score of 3.4, which indicates learner autonomy may not help students identify their needs.

5.   Discussion

English teachers always try to make their learners self-sufficient and self-directed. The development of autonomy and self-sufficiency may be desirable ends (Dickinson, 1994). The teacher is considered as the primary source of learning in the class. Teachers can develop learner autonomy by making their learners independent by giving them authority in some ways. A study by Chan (2003) in Hong Kong revealed that teachers felt they had more responsibilities toward the methods used in the class. Al-Shaqsi (2009) conducted a study in Oman to know the characteristics of autonomous learners, classroom tasks, learners' ability and promotion of autonomy. Bullock (2011), in the small study, found a gap in the teachers' beliefs of autonomy and their practice in the class. Nakata (2010) also found that the same gap existed between what teachers believe and do. This study also found a significant difference in the views of the teachers and the students in defining learner autonomy and activities in the classroom. According to Benson (2001), the role of teachers has become prominent in promoting autonomy in recent years. Two things are important in the classroom to develop autonomy. First, teachers know the concept of autonomy and use self-reflected methods to foster it (D. Little, 1995; Rizwan et al., 2021). Teachers learn how to develop learner autonomy through criticism about their teaching (Lamb & Reinders, 2008). This study shows that learner autonomy is familiar to the teachers, but they found it a western way of learning that affects their choice of teaching methods and activities in the class.

According to Leathwood (2006), learners want more autonomy at the tertiary level though students are ready to take the responsibilities; support from the teachers is not there. Teachers believe that there should be a high level of responsibility from the student side to become autonomous learners (Tanyeli & Kuter, 2013) in language learning. Working in groups will allow them to gain greater autonomy and self-direction. On the other hand, teachers are unwilling to delegate responsibility to students because they fear losing their control and influence in the classroom. The given study shows that learners have a great interest in becoming autonomous and ing responsibility for their learning. When students largely depend on their teachers, they cannot develop their autonomy and make male and female students responsible for their learning. Awareness related to autonomy is essential. Otherwise, unaware learners will depend on their teachers (Chan, Spratt, & Humphreys, 2002). Servilio (2009) argues that learners can evaluate, select, and decide on what learning material and which activities are good for them. However, they want their teachers to decide on this and do not want the responsibility. In support of this argument, students believe teachers are well experienced and can make better decisions even though these students very well understand the concept of autonomy. This study has shown that students believe it is their responsibility to monitor their learning progress and evaluate learning in the class. The results further show that students perceive it is their responsibility to learn cooperatively and independently to become self-reliant.

Learner autonomy is defined as acting independently and getting power over the learning process. In order to know the learning needs and have choices and in all this process, the support of the teachers is essential to promote autonomy (Tanyeli & Kuter, 2013). In the given study, teachers believe that learner autonomy is a western concept, and students believe it is about making choices in learning. A study by Collins et al. (2006) has shown that 76 percent of teachers believe in giving responsibility to the learners so they can find better ways to learn the language. Tanyeli and Kuter (2013) believe that when learners take responsibility for their learning, teachers should support this action of the learners. A strong bond between the teachers and students is mandatory, and without it, learners cannot be autonomous (Arshiyan & Pishkar, 2015). The study found that teachers have positive beliefs about the desirability of autonomy in classroom topics and management. They also find autonomy feasible for learners to monitor their progress and know about their weaknesses.

Ceylan (2015) conducted a study that focused on training learners to be autonomous in language learning and found learners' interest in becoming autonomous. In another study by Chan et al. (2002), they argue that students consider their teachers' authority in class and their experience in teaching is far-reaching, and their decision in teaching is always going to benefit them. Arshiyan and Pishkar (2015) say 80 percent of the learners believe in self-evaluation to learn the target language better. This will help them check on their learning to achieve their goals. Self-evaluation and monitoring are the cornerstones of language learning and developing learning autonomy. According to a study by Ahmadzadeh and Zabardast (2014), the choice of activities in the class is concerned learners are in favour of those activities that help them become more fluent and interactive in the class. The learner and teachers highly appreciate videos and audios of the native speaker should give chances to the learners to use their learning experience in the class.

Various studies have shown a major shift from teacher-centred to student-centred learning in language in the internet age (Lamb & Reinders, 2008; Mushtaque, Waqas, & Awais-E-Yazdan, 2021; Reinders & White, 2016). The learners' responses in this study also indicate their interest in becoming responsible and using technology-related activities that promote their autonomy. Autonomous learners can best utilize the technology to reach their goals. Statistics from Mutlu and Eroz-Tuga (2013) verify that technology promotes learner autonomy. This study also shows the inclination of teachers and the students towards the use of technology for class activities to promote autonomy.

A secured and comfortable classroom environment emerges from the affection between teachers and students. Their trust level further boosts the confidence of the learners to have more freedom in language learning (Voller, 2014). Effective teaching is not a guarantee of effective learning, since it is the learner's behaviour that determines whether or not he learns (MacKey, 1965). When learners have autonomy, they take ownership of their language learning and demonstrate increased excitement for the learning (Little, 2006). All learners do not have the same goals. There is the possibility of using various strategies and styles in language learning. Teachers should make sure their learners learn at their own pace and have equal opportunities to develop their learner autonomy and communicative abilities in the classroom. This study has shown that the students' perceptions of autonomy and independence in learning are optimistic and believe in taking responsibility for their learning. In order to have a say in the direction their course takes, students desire and appreciate the ability to do so (Davies, 2006). Now it all depends on the teachers how positively they contribute towards developing the learners' autonomy at the tertiary level in Pakistan.

6. Conclusion

The English language connects the people in the culturally and linguistically divided world. Language proficiency helps people socially engage and share their thoughts and feelings beyond geographic boundaries. Students' autonomy in language learning is essential to become confident users of the target language. A country's social and Economic development largely depends on the quality of its human resource, and higher education is regarded as a key factor in shaping and developing the human resource based on an effective teaching system to build the autonomous skills of the learners. The study results have shown that teachers have different beliefs about the definition of autonomy. They considered autonomy a Western concept whereas, students believe that autonomy is about making

choices. The results further show that students' autonomy in choosing material and learning methods is higher than the teachers.

Students believe that it is their responsibility to evaluate their learning and enhance autonomy. In tasks and activities, students prefer learning alone in the library. On the other hand, their teachers want the students' involvement in learning and make their classes student-centred. Teachers find that learner autonomy is desirable in class management, and students should choose topics for discussions. For students, learner autonomy is feasible to identify their weaknesses, find strengths and monitor their progress in language learning. Language learning theories are useful frameworks for analysing and in some instances modifying teacher-student interaction patterns. Teachers might reflect on their own assumptions about how well their kids learn. They may also assess the pupils' performance on the assignments assigned by the professors. Using this information, instructors may make adjustments to their assignments, classroom surroundings, and verbal interactions with pupils if required. There are ways that teachers may create learning communities that reward students for their effort and place a high priority on academic performance. It is possible for teachers to encourage students to set learning objectives rather than performance goals, and to put in the effort to achieve them. Pakistan's universities need to investigate language education at the tertiary level in order to pave the way for a shift in teaching approaches and foster student autonomy. Further research in learner autonomy at the tertiary level in Pakistan can enhance the awareness and help teachers, learners, trainers, and policymakers to devise syllabus and teaching methods that practically implement the concept of autonomy in higher education.

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