Teachers´ Attitudes Towards Learners´Autonomy

Fouzia Lamkhanter

Doctorate, University Hassan II, Morocco
lamkhanterfouzia@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In order to be successful in higher education, a balanced cooperation between teachers and students is crucial; Involving students in evaluating and making decisions about their learning is important to foster their autonomy. The present study seeks to examine learner autonomy from teachers´ perspectives with the aim of helping the latter reflect on their practices and find out ways to help enhance students´ academic performance and accompany them on their journey towards autonomy. It builds on previous research into learner autonomy from students' perspectives, which revealed a great awareness of the importance of learner autonomy among Moroccan university students. The article yielded evidence of very promising ground upon which can be built a culture of autonomy in Moroccan higher education. A mixed method approach was adopted to gather data. First, a questionnaire was conducted among 74 university teachers so as to discover 1) how–and if–teachers fostered autonomous learning behaviour in classes; and 2) what their attitudes toward learner autonomy were. Later, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 teachers to consider ways to give learners control over their own learning. The findings have confirmed that teachers play important roles in developing learner autonomy. They need to be facilitators of the learning process so that they can support their students emotionally and prepare them to become responsible for their own learning**.**Therefore, teachers have to reconsider the multiple roles they might play in order to foster their learners´autonomy.

Keywords: learner autonomy, teachers perceptions, learner responsibility, teachers´roles

1. Introduction

This article scrutinizes the various roles that teachers adapt to facilitate the effective implementation of their students´autonomy. It contributes to understanding the critical role of ´learner autonomy´ by sharing the perspectives and practices of teachers in the Moroccan higher education context with the goal of identifying areas of teacher development that need enhancement so as to support students´ autonomy. Learner autonomy is recognized worldwide as a significant and ultimate instructional goal (Wenden, 1987; Boonma, 2018; Yu, 2020). A teacher-centered approach will never help students take responsibility for their learning. Undoubtedly, learner autonomy presupposes that learners accept the responsibility for their learning and act accordingly. As stated by Little, Dam, and Legauhausen (2017, p. 75), "it is impossible to take charge of one's learning without at the same time accepting responsibility for it, at least implicitly."

Learners are to be the core of the learning process; arousing their awareness to the importance of developing their autonomy will involve them in the learning process and will pave the way to an effective learning experience (Holec, 1981, Cotteral, 1995; Benson, 2001; Florian and Black Hawkins, 2011; Imenez and Vieira, 2015; Little, Dam and Legauhausen, 2017). We as teachers have to recognize that "as learners become progressively involved in their own learning, it is expected that they will develop a sense of agency that operates beyond schooling and permeates their life" (Jimenez & Vieira, 2015, p. 37). Equally, we have to keep in mind

that if teachers are not aware of the appropriate ways to implement learner autonomy effectively, they can be a hindrance to its development among their students (Swatevacharkul, 2009; Swatervacharkul & Boonma, 2020). Benson (1997, p.25) divides views of autonomy into three types:

1. the act of learning on one's own and the technical ability to do so;
2. the internal psychological capacity to self-direct one's own learning;
3. control over the content and processes of one's own learning.

The three levels that Bensen has spoken about are to be taken into consideration to promote learners autonomy.

Worthy to notice that the current study is, by no means, meant to give ready-made recipes to how teachers should foster learner autonomy. Rather, it aims at highlighting learner autonomy in the Moroccan university EFL context, reflecting on the traditional environments and on elements of responsibility-sharing that can secure the involvement of learners in the educational context. Undoubtedly, responsibility is to be shared and gradually transferred to give more space to learners to take charge of their own learning.

The necessity to shift to learner-centered approach in teaching and the necessity to promote learner autonomy are imperative needs if Moroccan higher education is to keep up with the changing world and the increasing challenges of the 21st century. A classroom should be a place where activities, practices and behaviors support academic objectives while developing learner autonomy. Nunan (2015, p.31) insists on the need to help learners take control of their own learning since ´some learners have clear ideas about what they want to learn and how they want to learn; however, many do not.

2. What is learner autonomy?

Learner autonomy was initially defined by Holec (1981, p. 3) as the "ability to take charge of one's own learning." Working on fostering this ability, the learner is faced with "a reality which he himself constructs and dominates" (Holec, 1981, p. 21). Throughout this process, learners "need help to develop their autonomy" (Yu, 2020, p. 1415); they will need support from their teachers, peers, classroom environment and even social environment. Likewise, learners need to accept this responsibility to exert some control over their learning. Practically, Cotterall defines autonomy as "the extent to which learners demonstrate the ability to use a set of tactics for taking control of their learning" (Cotterall ,1995, p. 195).

Following this line of thought, Littelwood (1996, p.427) states that autonomy is the "learners´ ability and willingness to make choices independently," joining both the capacity and the readiness to take charge of one's learning as prerequisites to develop the learner autonomy. It follows that the development of learner autonomy ought to be adopted as a goal by teachers as well. Teachers should be aware of what autonomy means and what implications it has on the students 1) to be motivated to deliberately work it into the curriculum; and 2) by the same token, Little (1991) has already advanced that the more autonomous learners are the most competent they become, hinting at the direct relationship between academic performance and autonomy development. For language learning specifically, Zarei and Gahremani (2010) have asserted that learners with a higher level of autonomy are more active and effective in language acquisition (cited in Ghasedi and Yazdani, 2021, p. 396).

It is worth mentioning that learner autonomy is a collective as well as an individual capacity, and its development is stimulated by the social-interactive processes on which effective cooperation between teachers and their learners depends´(Little, Dam and legenhausen, 2017, p. 15). Indeed,"When the educational environment provides optimal challenges, rich sources

of stimulation, and a context of autonomy, this motivational wellspring of learning is likely to flourish" (Deci and Ryan, 1985, p. 245).

 For the purposes of this study, autonomy will be approached taking into consideration the relationship between teacher and student with the aim of "transferring responsibilities for some aspects of the language learning process (such as setting goals, selecting learning strategies, and even evaluating progress) from the teacher to the learner" (yu, 2020, p. 1415). Both teachers and students are expected to work together to achieve their objectives in an autonomous-supportive environment.

The next section will deal with the roles of teachers in autonomous classes in more detail.

3. Revisiting teachers´roles

There has been a universal agreement in the field that the importance of the teachers' role in autonomous language learning cannot be ignored (Benson, 1997; Little, 1991). Nevertheless,so as to help learners move towards the goal of personal autonomy, reconsidering the traditional roles of teachers has become a must. Yet teachers, according to Punthumasen (2007), are reluctant to change their roles (In Reinders. et al 2020:, p.194). Yu (2020, p. 1415) clarifies that "the need for teachers will not decrease, but their roles, including the role of teaching process, will change.(----------) teachers should not be viewed as instructors anymore, but as facilitators, counselors, and learning resources."

Camilleri (1999, pp. 36-38) categorizes three roles that can be played by a teacher that can boost the autonomy of the learner; namely, (i) the teacher as a manager of the learning activities (ii) the teacher as a resource person who creates optimal learning conditions for the learners , and (iii) the teacher as a counselor who facilitates the learning process. Dam (2008) uses the same logic and states that the teacher's roles in an autonomous classroom are as "a consultant and a facilitator". We no longer speak about instructing and absorbing, but negotiating and cooperating. The learner is no longer a recipient but an active member of the process, at the center of all that is taking place in the classroom.

Teachers have to work now with a dual objective in mind: (i) academic achievement and (ii) learner autonomy development. The traditional role of teachers envisaged in the transmission of knowledge is wholly inaccurate; it goes much beyond that. The challenges of the 21st century have revealed that teaching learners how to learn in an appropriate learning environment will help them go beyond the classroom and apply what has been learnt to new situations. Fostering autonomous learning does not reduce the responsibilities of teachers in class; rather, it changes the approach to the learning experience; the teacher "gives them control of their learning but remains responsible for ensuring that learning takes place"(Little, Dam and legenhausen, 2017, p. 75). To this end, involving learners "fully in planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning" (Little, 2009a, p. 223) will encourage and inspire students to operate appropriately within such a new mode. The questions that crop up now are as follows:

To what extent teachers´ beliefs and practices support learner autonomy?

What can teachers do to help learners move towards the ultimate goal of personal autonomy?

In order for teachers to value the importance of learner autonomy, they should first focus on developing the "willingness and capacity for self-directed teaching and teacher learning" smith (2003, p. 6). Reinders and Balcikalini (2011) believe that teachers are not sufficiently trained to support autonomous learning (In Reinders et al., 2020, p. 194). The process should start somewhere and the first step could be what Sbaihi (2015) suggests, "training should start with developing positive attitudes towards autonomous learning by introducing this mode of

learning as a bridge to success at university and life in general." Teachers are "to stay positive and enthusiastic without having immediate access to the rewards of their efforts" (Mercer, S. et al 2015, p. 119), keeping in mind the ultimate goal which is to accompany students in their learning experience so as to achieve greater autonomy levels as they learn. The latter should be prepared through adapting various strategies that involve learners in "making decisions and choices about content and procedures" as has been clearly stated by (Nunan, 2015, p. 34). Further, Nunan goes on insinuating that teachers have to unveil and work on the "learner resistance" to foster autonomy from learners who see the teacher as the only one responsible for decision making in the classroom.

Littlewood (1996) summarizes the needs to develop learners autonomy into two components; namely, ability (i.e. Knowledge and skills for learning) and willingness (i.e., motivation and confidence). Teachers are expected to not only provide learners with strategies to learn the language and opportunities to put into practice what they have learned, but they are also required to motivate them to gain ownership of the whole process, getting them involved in each and every step of their journey towards their autonomy. This would not be possible if they, themselves, do not value the outcomes of such mode of learning. Indeed, "A society (a teacher) that values au- tonomy should therefore strive to facilitate the kinds of learning that lead to autonomy." Benson 2008 in (Lamb and Reinders, 2008, p. 19) He or she will adopt practices that support the process. Teachers would need training in the skills that facilitate the implementation of such new mode of teaching which gives utmost importance to the autonomous growth of learners.

Secondly, I believe that thinking in terms of a system should work i.e. a learning environment that provides autonomy-supportive activities that accompany academic achievement and empower students´autonomy simultaneously. Of course, learners ought to be willing to be part of these educationally appropriate learning opportunities and should be motivated to remain and cooperate with their teachers and peers to make the experience a fruitful one. Similarly, teachers should be trained to handle such a change from teacher-centered mode to a teacher independent one. To this end, as has been stated earlier, roles of teachers should be revisited and adjusted to achieve these objectives and to "guide learners to be accustomed to the shift from teacher-dependence to teacher-independence" (Yu, 2020, p. 1418).

On the background, two pedagogical principles accompany learners towards their autonomy: "learner involvement" and "learner reflection" (Little, Dam and legenhausen, 2017, p. 14). By "learner involvement" is meant that the learner is part of all the learning process from the goal setting to the evaluation of what has been learnt. Then "learner reflection"can lead to a greater level of learning and can as a result foster autonomy. Both principles are mutually dependent and one is likely to consolidate the outcomes of the other and support the implementation of autonomy in classes.

Practically, Zeng (2005) suggests that English teachers in an autonomous learning mode have these central roles to play. They include:

- developing learning motivation and interest of students,
- establishing pleasant learning environment,
- providing learning guide, teaching metacognitive and learning strategies for students' independent learning,
- organizing learning activities that promote learner autonomy,
- and encouraging students to use other resources.

    (Cited in Boonma & Swatevacharkul, 2020, p. 179)

One last thing to mention here is the fact that working on the students´ psychological side will boost the autonomy level of students. Wang and Wang (2016) find that the lack of students' motivation is a barrier to learner autonomy. Motivating students to operate in an autonomous atmosphere will push them to take charge of their learning, which has been confirmed by Ghasedi et al (2018), who note that autonomous learners are more willing to participate in classroom interactions and negotiations. This echoes Spratt et al. (2002) who have come to the conclusion that autonomous learners are essentially motivated learners, highlighting the relevance of motivating students and engaging them in the teaching practices to the success of the learning process since all types of learners, be they weak or strong, are possibly able to take responsibility of their own learning (Little ,1990).

More than this, "a teacher can also introduce certain classroom activities that could lessen the learners´anxiety and promote the confidence of the learners" (Maliki, Kousar and Rana, 2021: 3635-3636). Put at its simplest, "When learners´interest (or identity) is fully engaged, they find within themselves the motivational resources to maintain their commitment to learning whatever external setbacks they may encounter"(Little, Dam and legenhausen, 2017, p. 73); they will have the strength to go on and bring about the change removing all the barriers that limit their progress and limit the role of learner autonomy. This is to be founded on the belief that a "pedagogy of autonomy involves the creation of an atmosphere of freedom that allows learners and teachers to explore possibilities cooperatively, to find out what is relevant and meaningful for them" (Jimenez & Vieira, 2015, p. 37). Learners are supposed to negotiate meaning and reflect on the requirements and outcomes to work on and evaluate the pre-established learning objectives. Autonomy is "a pedagogical imperative" (Little, Dam and Legauhausen, 2017, p. 15).

All in all, teachers ought to know enough information about their students " to be able to tailor the methods, materials, and techniques they use in accordance with the specific needs of their learners" (Kalman, 2018). Teachers are to know the needs of their students as well as how the latter learn. They should not forget to reflect on their practices to embetter the performance of his/her students. Only when they better understand their interlocutors can they take appropriate actions to reach higher levels of competence and learning and can they equally engage students in sustained autonomy development.

4. Purpose and methodology of the study

This study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

- Do teachers value their learners´ autonomy ? To what extent do teachers feel their learners are autonomous?
- Are teachers ready to give control to their students in class ?
- To what extent do Moroccan university teachers engage in autonomy-supported teaching practices?
- What activities/ types of behavior do teachers have to foster their learners´autonomy?

This study has made use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches: in the first place, a questionnaire was administered to collect a wide range of information and gain insights on the teachers´beliefs and practices in the classroom (see appendix 1). The Participants are 74 English university teachers. They were informed that the data would be used for research purposes only. It consists of wh questions, open-ended questions and likert-type scales. The questionnaire has been meant to explore attitudes of teachers towards their learners´autonomy. It has also aimed at revealing the teachers´readiness to share responsibility. Activities and behaviours in class that are likely to foster autonomy have been equally scrutinized to help both teachers and students improve their performance.

The questionnaire was initially revised by two researchers Dr Amy minet and Dr gonzaöes Melanie at Salem state university to evaluate the clarity of the items. The questionnaire was tested before use and a question was deleted because it did not fall within the objectives of the questionnaire.

Later, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven university teachers with at least 10 years of experience to gain insightful information as to the attitudes towards the implementation of learner autonomy and in order to reveal reasons that either help or impede the promotion of learner autonomy. Accordingly, interview questions addressed to teachers typically revolve around the connection between the participants´beliefs and their teaching practices. They were asked to define learner autonomy and elaborate on multiple ways to promote it in terms of their practices in the classsroom. They were also required to reveal potential factors that can impede the promotion of learner autonomy. By the end of the interview, teachers were encouraged to elaborate on the ideal learning environment that fosters autonomy.

Data was processed using both narrative (percentages) and descriptive statistics (SPSS: Standard Deviation ´SD´ ; Mean ´M´ ; Mode´Mo´and Median ´Md´). Measures of central tendency were used to have more details about the results of the study.

5.   Findings and discussion

The focal interest of this study is to figure out the perceptions teachers of English within Moroccan universities have about their learners´autonomy with the aim of supporting teachers and students in their everyday learning/teaching experience. I start with the assumption that the willingness to take in charge the learners' progress stems from a collaboration between teachers and students so as to attain their aim since "learners need help to develop their autonomy learning skills" (Yu, 2020, p. 1415).

For analysis purposes, the attitudes and the practices of teachers towards their student´autonomy will be dealt with in terms of three dimensions. The first set of questions, will depict the teachers attitudes towards their learners´autonomy. The second set of questions will investigate the readiness of teachers to share responsibility with their students so as to create an autonomous-supportive environment while the third set will address the extent to which the behaviors adopted in class foster students´autonomy.

### 5.1.   Attitudes of teachers towards their learners´autonomy

As far as the attitudes teachers hold, Moroccan university teachers of English seem to recognize the power of students taking responsibility for their learning, which suggests a great potential for cultivating more autonomy in the Moroccan higher education context.

In answer to ´question 9´of the questionnaire, about whether or not teachers value their students´autonomous behaviour, approximately half of the teachers report that they do value their students´autonomous behaviour (M=4.30; Md= 5; Mo= 5; SD=845); there is a small variation which seems insignificant since nobody opted for ´Never´. In most cases, teachers are positive about their learners´autonomy, which has been already reinforced by Shahsavari (2014) who claims that "Learner autonomy can strongly influence the learners´ability to learn a language well".

Table 1.
Do you value your students´ autonomous behavior?

N	Valid	73
	Missing	1
Mean		4.30
Median		5.00
Mode		5
Std. Deviation		.845
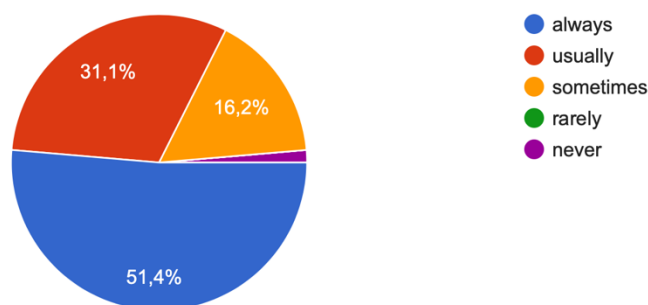
Figure1. Do you value your students´ autonomous behavior?

In fact, the majority of teachers hold the view that autonomy enhances learner development (98.6%) (See Figure 1). They have given multiple reasons most of which confirm the direct implications of autonomy on the learner and on his/her personal and professional growth. Answers to the reasons behind them considering autonomy relevant to learners´development look like the ones below:

- It enhances the learners'motivation, their responsibility, and their involvemen in the process of learning.
- Autonomy helps learners discover their strengths and weaknesses. It also help them learn how to learn.
- Students feel more motivated when they take control of their learning strategies especially in task based activities.
- It makes them think of goals and then work accordingly.
- The ultimate goal of all teaching is to help develop the sense of autonomy and initiative of the learner who will assume his or her future professional and civic responsibilities.
- It paves the way for students to engage in self-directed learning.

Equally, this awareness of the importance of learner autonomy to the learning process is reflected in the participants´responses to ´question 1 and 6´of the questionnaire. About 95% of teachers consider learner autonomy an educational goal that is to be taken into consideration in all steps of the learning process.

University teachers have further substantiated that they consider learner autonomy as a priority when deciding on their learning outcomes (See table M= 4.20 ; Md= 4 ; Mo=5 : SD= 786).

Table 2.
When deciding on your learning outcomes, do you consider learner autonomy as a priority?

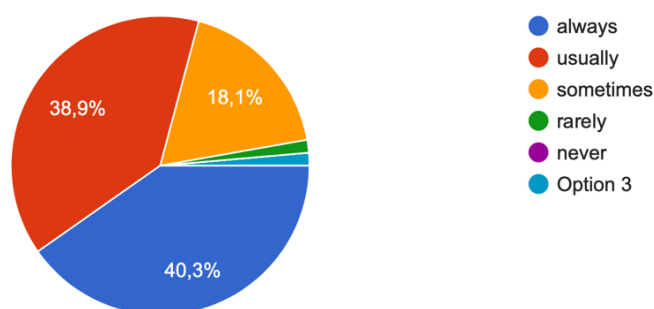| N	Valid	71
	Missing	3
Mean		4.20
Median		4.00
Mode		5
Std. Deviation		.786
Range		3
Minimum		2
Maximum		5

Figure 2. When deciding on your learning outcomes, do you consider learner autonomy as a priority?

This said, "learner autonomy" is viewed as an educational objective that is to accompany academic achievements. About 62% of teachers have grasped the importance of operating with dual objectives in mind (See Figure 2). The results suggest the strong association existing in the teachers´minds about the relationship between autonomy and academic success, as has been already proven by Shahsavari (2014), "learner autonomy can strongly influence the learners´ability to learn a language well."

5.2. Teachers´readiness to share responsibility with their students

Hedge (2000) characterizes autonomous learners as learners who know their needs and collaborate with the teachers to make them come true.The equal partnership between teachers and students is a prerequisite to develop learners' autonomy. Accordingly, the willingness to take in charge the learners' progress stems from not only believing in what they can do and in their capacity to step forward but equally from a collaboration between teachers and students so as to attain their aim. Said differently, it stems from a readiness of teachers to share responsibility with their students and a strong belief that they are able to assume and make the experience a success (See Figure 3 Table 1).
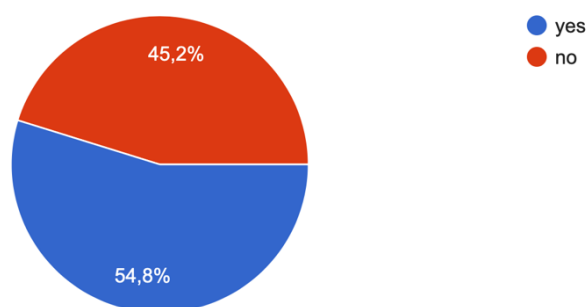

Figure 3. Do you think teachers are ready to share authority with their students in class?

Deciphering the readiness of teachers to share responsibility of the learning process with their students, many discrepancies crop up. While the above results indicate that more than half of teachers agree to share responsibility with their students (54.8%) since they support autonomous behaviours and create activities that stimulate motivation and interest (See Figure 5) and While 55.5 % of teachers express their willingness to work with their students on their learning outcomes (See Figure 4), giving reasons like:

> *the interactive nature of learning,*

> *or that teachers are no longer the only source of information*

> *or even that there is a need to hand over authority to students,*

Behaving autonomously can never take place if students themselves are not willing to get engaged in the process. Teachers believe their students can not always show autonomous behaviour (See Table 3; M03.11, Md=3: Mo= 3: SD=826) while it is a basic principle of the autonomy classroom that learners take responsibility for what they do (Little, Dam, and Legenhausen, 2017, p. 3). If the classroom environment does not favor the promotion of learner autonomy or if students do not feel prepared to be active members of the process, then the aim of prioritizing the learner involvement can never be achieved. Indeed, when the educational contexts support autonomous practices and provide different challenges, students become ready to get involved in challenges so that learning can take place as has been clearly stated by (Ushida, 2011, p. 224).
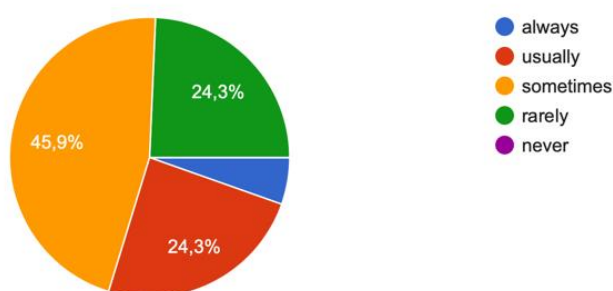

Figure 4. Do you think your students are prepared for autonomous learning?

Table 3.
Do you think your students are prepared for autonomous learning?

N	Valid	73
	Missing	1
Mean		3.11
Median		3.00
Mode		3
Std. Deviation		.826
Range		3
Minimum		2
Maximum		5

To justify this reluctance to share responsibility with the learners, teachers very often mentioned their fear to lose authority, the need of teacher training in such mode of teaching to be able to transfer its principles, and the lack of maturity of students to take control of the process. These are samples of their provided answers:

- Cannot go out of their comfort zone
- Most teachers are not confident in sharing authority with students since the the latter are not all high-achievers.
- Not all teachers are ready to share authority with their students. Some are afraid they may not be respected. in their mind, the teacher should be the center of learning.
- A lot of teachers are reluctant to give away their authority because they still believe that teaching and learning are teacher's responsibility.

Regardless of these discrepancies and this resistance from some teachers to collaborate with their students to achieve their agreed upon objectives, Moroccan higher education university teachers are convinced they are capable of working on their learners´autonomy and have positive feedback about that as illustrated in Figure 5.
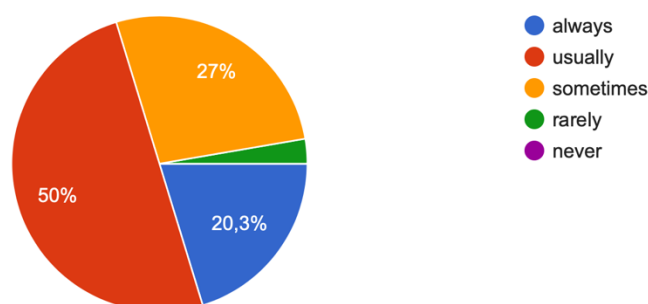

Figure 5. Does your desire to foster your students´ autonomy match your classroom practices?

97.2% of teachers are ready to foster their students' level of autonomy and do their best to orient their classroom practices to this end, which is evidence for a strong foundation of developing learner autonomy. This is further substantiated by the feedback to ´question 14 ´on the classroom practices that teachers use to foster their students´ autonomy in which the teachers confirm the match between the desire to promote learner autonomy and the activities they choose in class (M=3.89 ; Md= 4 ; Mo= 4 ; SD= 756) (See Figure 5 and Table 4 for more details).

Table 4.
Does your desire to foster your students´ autonomy match with your classroom practices?

N	Valid	73
	Missing	1
Mean		3.89
Median		4.00
Mode		4
Std. Deviation		.756
Range		3
Minimum		2
Maximum		5

Looking at Table 4, the mean score obtained already exerts 50.7 % of teachers are on ´usually´, they are able to foster their students´autonomy through appropriate activities chosen for class work. They plan their classes so as to drive their students to improve their autonomy level.

5.3. Activities and behaviors in class as a variable to foster autonomy

An autonomy classroom as has been repeatedly mentioned by little, Dam and lengenhausen (2017) does not renounce control in class but teachers approach class control differently. ´Dialogue´ is the foundation in all lessons´steps starting from the negotiation of the learning outcomes to the evaluation of the whole process. In between, teachers are to maintain a high degree of "participation through activities that engage their (students´) interests and identity and exploit their intrinsic motivation" (Little, Dam and Lengenhausen, p. 218). The environment/ the classroom is to encourage a sense of autonomy through involving students in the decision-making, pushing them to embrace the value of the autonomous setting. And profiting fully from the learning experience.

Overall, The Moroccan environment for higher education seems to raise learners´awareness and enhance students´ability to study independently. Many are the behaviors and the activities included in this context that do foster learners´autonomy. Results related to Questions 7, 8, 10, 15, and 17 of the questionnaire shed light on these aspects.

Firstly, there is a widespread acceptance that the learning and the teaching are rapidly evolving, requiring teachers to adjust their roles and giving students the right to make decisions about their learning, which seems to be the case in the Moroccan context (See Figure 6).
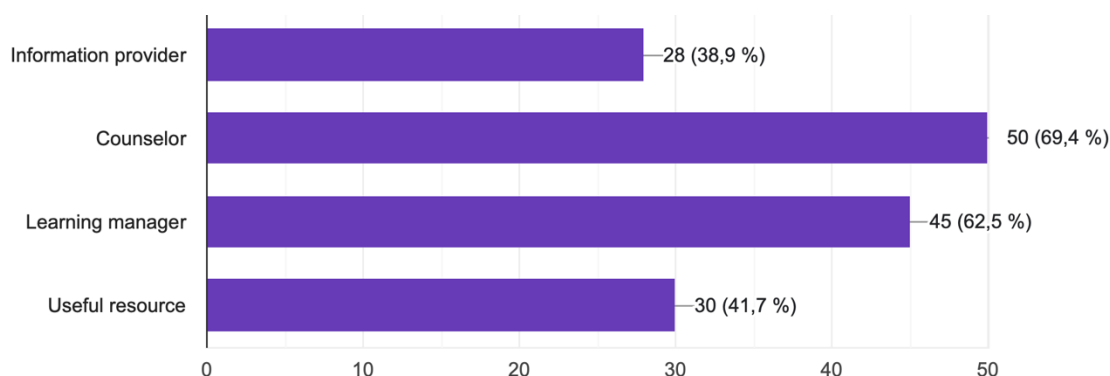

Figure 6. Teachers´ roles in classrooms

We can notice a shift in teachers´roles from the traditional ´information provider´ (38%) to ´counselors´ and to ´learning managers´.

As depicted in Figure 6, 69% describe themselves as counselors and 63.4% view themselves as learning managers, which implies that teachers are having autonomy in mind while they are working on other objectives in the classroom; they are giving more space to the learners´involvement to take their decisions and they do support them emotionally to realize their goals. They are, thus, changing their approach to classroom environment giving students more control over the different steps and activities of the process and through the psychological support (See Figure 7).
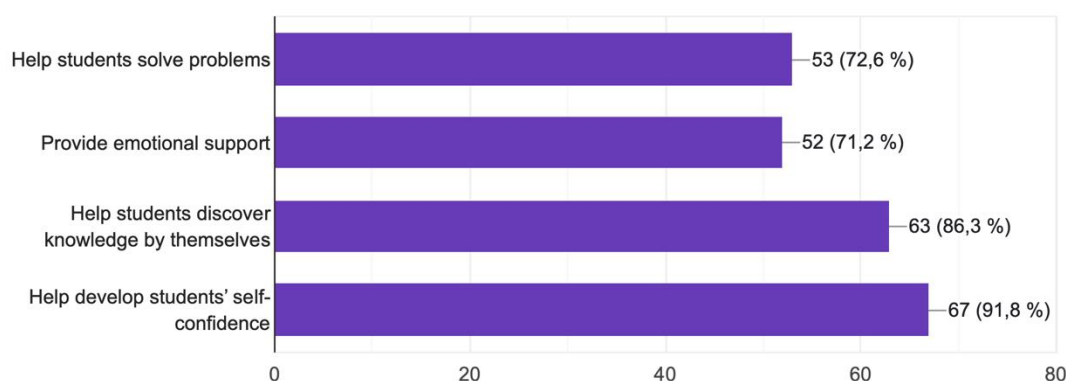
Figure 7. Teachers´ support to their students´ autonomy

87.5% of teachers help students discover knowledge by themselves, and 70,8% provide emotional support, which entails that teachers have been aware of the psychological dimension in supporting their learners´autonomy. In fact, From a teachers´ perspective, the activities provided in classrooms seem to accompany the learners in their journey towards their autonomy. Scrutinizing the activities worked on in the classroom reveal that teachers create various opportunities for students to learn how to learn. Most of the activities have received high scores. ´knowing students background´ and ´involving students in the evaluation process´ are to be focused on by teachers since they have both received low scores (See Figure 8).
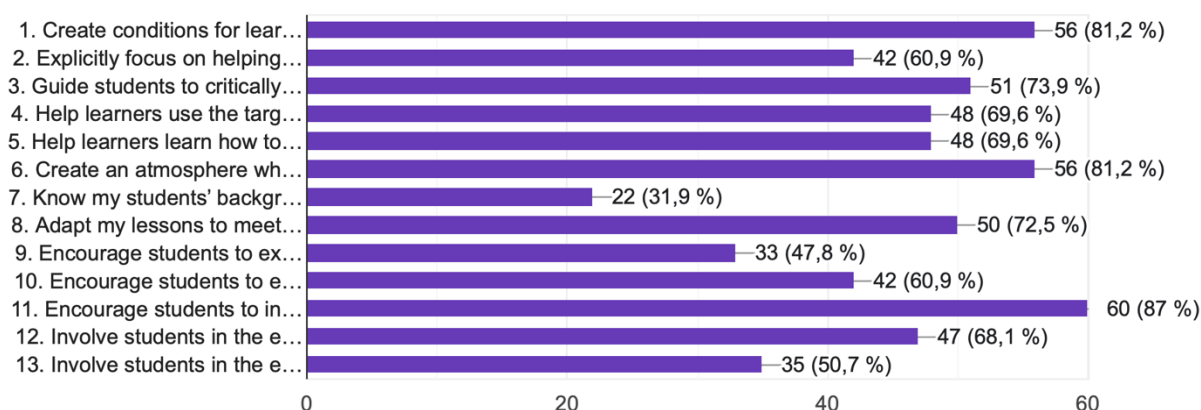

Figure 8. The activities meant to promote learner autonomy in classes

Highlighting the behaviours manifested in the classroom, a great effort is witnessed from the part of the teacher to help students gain sights in their learning strategies. Seemingly, teachers are giving much heed to help their students ´learn how to learn´ with a percentage of 69.6 %, an efficient way to push them to take charge of their learning. Karababa (2010) believes autonomous learners are conscious in their choice of strategies and they are able to transfer these strategies to other contexts . Figure 8 reveals other opportunities during which students take responsibility like working effectively in small groups (87%), which is fascinating. Moe (2006) has already set it up that in order to try to develop learner autonomy in the classroom, teachers should encourage students to be interdependent and work collectively. However, lower scores are received by the ability of students to learn without their teachers (43.8%) and the same percentage is recorded for the capacity of students to choose their own methods to complete tasks. This goes in line with Camilleri (1999) who came to the conclusion that the willingness of teachers to change and develop practice is a strong support in incorporating learner autonomy in different areas of teaching. More scrutiny is to be made on the ability of students to assess their own learning (30.1%), and the possibility of students to choose their

own assignment (39.7%). They have received lower percentages in comparison with other behaviors (See Figure 9) despite the fact that teachers confirmed earlier that they did their best to Involve students in the evaluation of the learning and the teaching (68.1 % and 50.7 %) experience (See Figure 8).
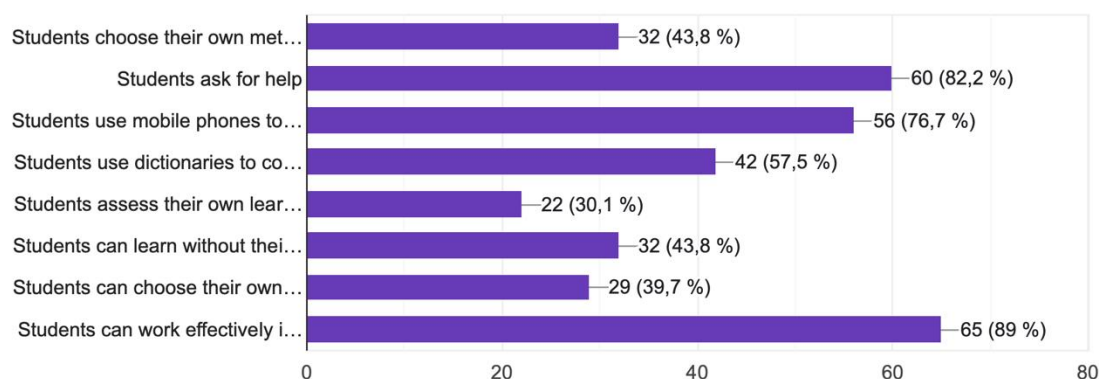

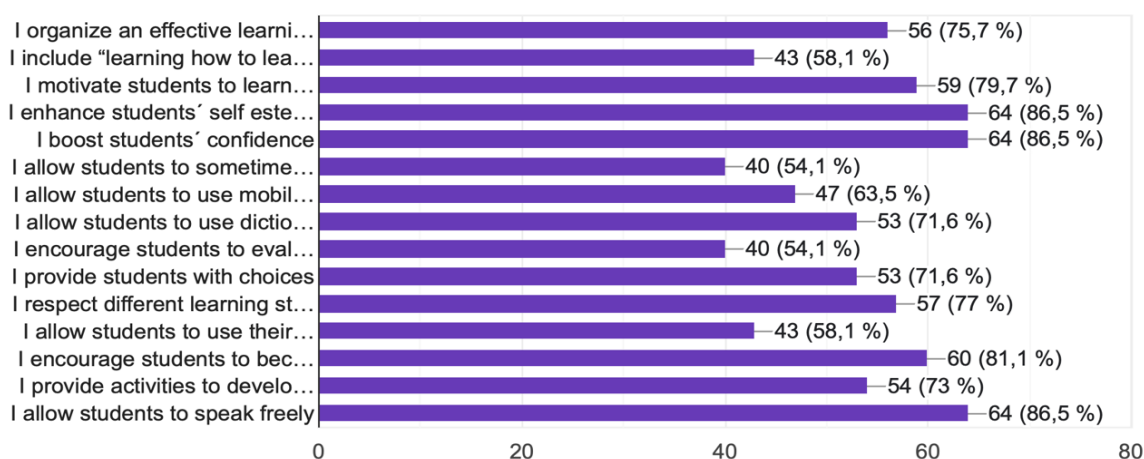*Figure 9.* Autonomous behaviors demonstrated by students in classes

Figure 10. Opportunities that demonstrate autonomous behavior in classes

Fortunately, Moroccan university teachers have realized and worked on the psychological dimension of the classroom environment. They are aware of the positive energy provided by enhancing the students ´self- esteem (86.5 %) and boost students´ confidence (86.5 %) as cases in point. Nonetheless, they are resistant to involve students in the evaluation of the learning process. They still think that the teacher is the only authority that can decide whether the teaching learning experience has been fruitful while *Cotterall (1995, p. 199)* believes learners should "be able to evaluate the quality of their learning. An appreciation of their abilities, the progress they are making and what they can do with the skills they have acquired is essential if learners are to learn efficiently". The fact of being resistant to support the involvement of learners in the evaluation process may limit the promotion of learner autonomy. In essence, evaluation is considered the teachers´responsibility while this is a basic principle in developing learner au*tonomy*. This also explains why students are somehow reluctant to take full responsibility to assess their own learning (30.1 %) (See Figure 9 above)

Indeed, while Little, Dam and Ligenhausen think that "evaluation and assessment are fully integrated with teaching and learning" (Little, Dam & Ligenhausen, p. 241), they have made it clear that in order to develop learners´evaluation skills, "an environment in which learners are used to thinking about what they are doing and comfortable sharing their views" (Little, Dam

& Ligenhausen, p. 102) is to be established "which entails a shift of focus from classroom procedures to self and from self to peers" (Little, Dam & Ligenhausen, p. 101).

Evaluation is part of exercising the responsibility students have already accepted in an autonomous class. Holec (1981) has already confirmed that learner autonomy requires taking responsibility for all aspects of learning, including the evaluation of what has been acquired.

In the light of the above discussion, it has been obvious the role of the teacher in fostering the learners´ autonomy. The universally agreement in the field that the importance of the teachers' role in autonomous language learning cannot be ignored (Benson, 1997; Little, 1991) has been approved for one more time .

Nevertheless, the role of the student is equally if not more essential to the success of the process. Hence, if teachers and students agree on the relevance of learners´ autonomy to their context, they will work together to create opportunities to develop such ability as has been found earlier with Hedge (2000) who characterizes autonomous learners as learners who know their needs and collaborate with the teachers to make them come true.

There is a need to highlight the value and the implications that learners has to be continuously interested in going further, and a reconsideration of some parts of the learning like evaluation is to be revisited to allow students to be part of it. Both teachers and students should be ready to play active roles in their classes.

5.4. Interview findings

Interview findings have further substantiated many of the results obtained earlier.

The first question concerns the definition of learner autonomy by teachers. The results show that learner autonomy strongly relates to the ability and the willingness to take in charge one's learning without the frequent need for directions from the teachers´side. The seven interviewed teachers implicitly admit that the role of the teacher is not denied, but simply less apparent. Answering other interview questions, all teachers agree that learner autonomy is important and relevant to the success of the learning/ teaching experience, but that fostering autonomy is not an agreed upon target among all of them. All the interviewed teachers are aware of the importance of learner autonomy. It is highly valued and they seem to be motivated to promote it since they hold positive attitudes towards the whole concept of empowerment of learner autonomy.

Teacher 1 reported that they fostered learner autonomy through being a facilitator of the learning process. Giving students the chance to negotiate meaning and understanding helps a lot in providing enough space to learn how to learn. Most importantly, one teacher said that the most important thing is to make students understand that no energy is to be spent from the teacher's side if responses from students´perspective are not sufficient. Using collaborative work, be it pair or group work, seems to be the recurrent strategy all teachers use to promote their learner autonomy. In addition to that, teachers 4 and teacher 5 motivate their students to do project work and assignments, which they believe are prerequisite to work on their autonomy while Teachers 6 and 7 allow students to choose what interest them having deciding on the learning outcomes to be achieved.

Teacher 1 goes further to claim that the best thing to be done with students is making them part of the evaluation process. By evaluation, he means being conscious of all the steps of the process from the identification of their learning plans to the description of the alternative strategies they could have used to achieve better results. This joins the claims of teachers 6 and 7 since the three participants try giving the foundation of independent learning then start

training students to take responsibility for their own learning. They believe and initiate activities to work on developing students' skills to take ownership of their learning.

Worthy to notice that all teachers agree that autonomy should start from home and from school (primary, secondary and high school). It would be somehow unfair to judge students' autonomy if they have not worked on it earlier. Later, "students' level of autonomy then depends on the control of power which teachers transfer to their students" (Reinders et al., 2020, p. 195). In our context, the degree of teacher control seems to vary from one teacher to another and this lack of consistency may hinder learner autonomy since no continuous work through other modules/no coordination is done under the heading of developing students´autonomy. The seven interviewed teachers confirm that autonomy is to be spoken about in a reasonably populated groups, with a motivated students to take challenges. They all consent that the learning environment is to be a relaxed one that favours initiative taking, which is not always the case because of either the size of the class, the many lessons to be covered or the lack of motivation from either the side of the teacher or that of the student to embark into an autonomy objective while they think they have other important academic targets to be measured.

Teacher 4 has tried to find a way out when he states that autonomy ought to be implemented gradually. She adds that autonomy will be promoted if objectives are negotiated with students and only if they align from the beginning to make it part of the learning outcomes.

One important thing mentioned by Teacher 5, which has been implied in the questionnaire findings as well, is that peer teaching gives good reward to students. When students learn from one another, they nourish their self esteem and learn how to collaborate in a mixed ability group. They take in charge their learning and discover appropriate strategies to learn and this may be a first step to motivate them to start enjoying the fact of being responsible for their own learning. Teacher 7 regularly uses peers to promote autonomous learning. He believes it to the best way to focus on the learners help them learn from each other rather than relying solely on the instructor.

Sinclair (1999: 103-4) proposes that teachers make use of questions like the ones below to accompany their students in their journey of awareness of the way they learn and as a result the way to embetter and extend their good strategies to other contexts:

- Why did you do this piece of work?
- Why did you do it in this way?
- What is your plan for next week? Why?
- What, if any, problems did you have?
- Why did you have them?
- What did you do about them?
- What else could you have done?

This is part of the evaluation of the learning process enabling students to be more mindful of what they are doing. In the classroom, students can be made aware of the strategies they have used and can dwell on the possibilities of using them in other situations. They can also be motivated to work and be tolerant with themselves even they mess up. Most importantly, students are to be aware of the evaluation criteria so that they can assess their performance and give better versions continuously.

6. Conclusion

This study has, by and large, given evidence that there is a good foundation upon which autonomous learning can be further fostered in the language classroom in the Moroccan higher education context since teachers value this type of learning and are engaged in the process .

The target is to create an autonomy-supportive environment where learners are to be active members of the whole process from planning to evaluation of this process. What needs to be worked on, taking into consideration the results of this study, is ´evaluation´; Moroccan higher education teachers seem to be somehow reluctant when it comes to making students part of the evaluation process.

In the light of the above discussion, it has been obvious the role of the teacher in fostering learners´ autonomy. However, the role of the student is equally if not more essential to the success of the process. Hence, if teachers and students agree on the relevance of learner autonomy to their context, they will work together to create opportunities to develop such ability as has been found earlier with Hedge (2000) who characterizes autonomous learners as learners who know their needs and collaborate with the teachers to make them come true. Practically, teachers should have "the competence to help diverse groups of learners to learn increasingly more and more complex material and to help them become lifelong learners." (Raya & Vieira, 2015, p. 45); they should be trained to support autonomous learning and will train and prepare their students for that.

In a nutshell, this article positions the development of a pedagogy of autonomy in universities as an urgent need, especially given the demands of the 21st century. This pedagogy aims to help learners grow personally and professionally to be able to "function effectively." Teaching 21st skills or "global skills," "the skills which people are acknowledged to need in order to flourish in their professional and personal lives,"--part of which are independent work and collaboration (Mercer et al., 2019, p. 10) is no longer an option. It is a must. This implies that learner autonomy has been established as an indicator of success of the whole learning process.

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