



College of Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

**An Investigation of English Majors Autonomous
Learning Strategies and Autonomous Learning Levels**

دراسة لمستويات التعلم الذاتي لدى طلبة اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية
واستراتيجيات التعلم التي يستخدمونها

By

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Supervisor

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Birzeit University

Palestine

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2017

Abstract

This study investigated autonomous learning strategies used by 4th year English majors at Birzeit University. Moreover, it intended to find out levels of autonomy among students and roles of university instructors in developing their autonomous learning levels. Social constructivism and its principles constitute the theoretical framework of the current study. A qualitative research paradigm was adopted for the purposes of the study. Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with 4th year students majoring in English language and literature at Birzeit University. All of the participants were females. The total number of the potential participants was about a hundred students. Interviews transcripts were organized and analyzed using the qualitative thematic analysis approach. Moreover, Autonomous Levels Rubric was designed to explore levels of autonomy among students (advanced, intermediate, beginning, and emerging). Results indicated language learning strategies (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social) used by students and other strategies that are neglected. It appears that use of language learning strategies affects language learners' ability to foster their level of autonomy. Most of the participants are at the advanced level of autonomy in self-motivation and choosing materials. Many of them enjoy an intermediate level pertaining to reflecting, cooperating, controlling feelings and self-evaluation. On the other hand, many of them are at the beginning or emerging level pertaining to designing, editing and completing tasks, and recognizing their needs and setting goals. It was concluded that university instructors need to take into consideration students' autonomous levels and design tasks that help students become more autonomous and self-dependent. As a result of the study some implications and recommendations were highlighted.

ملخص الدراسة

دراسة لمستويات التعلم الذاتي لدى طلبة اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية واستراتيجيات التعلم التي يستخدمونها

هدفت الدراسة الى معرفة استراتيجيات التعلم الذاتي التي يستخدمها طلبة السنة الرابعة من تخصص اللغة الانجليزية وآدابها في جامعة بيرزيت. كما هدفت إلى استكشاف مستويات التعلم الذاتي لدى هؤلاء الطلبة ودور الأساتذة الجامعيين في تطوير مستويات التعلم الذاتي لدى طلبتهم. شكلت نظرية "البنائية الاجتماعية" الإطار النظري لهذه الدراسة. وبنيت هذه الدراسة على التصميم الكيفي بحيث أجريت ثلاثين مقابلة شبه منظمة مع طلاب يدرسون اللغة الانجليزية وآدابها في جامعة بيرزيت وهم في سنتهم الرابعة وعلى وشك التخرج. كان العدد الإجمالي للمشاركين المحتملين حوالي مائة طالب وطالبة. تم تنظيم نصوص المقابلات وتحليلها باستخدام نهج التحليل الموضوعي. إضافة إلى ذلك، فقد تم تصميم جدول تقييمي لاستكشاف مستويات التعلم الذاتي لدى الطلبة (متقدم، متوسط، مبتدئ، ناشئ). بينت النتائج استراتيجيات التعلم المستخدمة من قبل الطلبة وتلك التي يميلون إلى اهمالها. واتضح أن استخدام استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة تؤثر على قدرة الطلبة على تطوير مستويات التعلم الذاتي لديهم. كما أظهرت النتائج أن غالبية المشاركات يتمتعن بمستوى متقدم في تحفيز الذات واختيار المواد والمصادر المناسبة لتعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ومن جانب آخر فإنهن يتمتعن بمستوى متوسط فيما يتعلق بالتأمل والتعاون والتحكم بالمشاعر والتقييم الذاتي. بالمقابل، فإن الكثير منهن يقعن في المستويين المبتدئ والناشئ في تصميم وتعديل وانجاز المهام، ومعرفة احتياجات التعلم لديهم وتحديد الأهداف. وخلصت الدراسة إلى ضرورة أن يحمل الأساتذة الجامعيين على عاتقهم مهمة مساندة الطلبة وتطوير مستويات التعلم الذاتي لديهم آخذين بعين الاعتبار مستويات الطلبة وتصميم مهام تجعلهم أكثر استقلالية واعتمادا على أنفسهم. وبناء على هذه الدراسة فقد تم اقتراح بعض التطبيقات العملية والتوصيات لدراسات مستقبلية.

**“Education is the most powerful weapon
which you can use to change the world.”**

Nelson Mandela

This work is dedicated to my children

Rayan & Alma

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Chapter One

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Background

Interest in language learning autonomy has increased noticeably since the 1970s. Since then a huge amount of literature focused on autonomous language learning documented in books, collections from conferences, collections of commissioned papers, articles and guides for both teachers and students (Benson, 2007). The reasons behind the huge interest in autonomous learning are due to the global expansion of learning a second language. The developments in the field of language teaching and learning resulted from

“a greater biographical diversity and diversity of purposes among teachers and learners; the growth of migration for purposes of language learning or teaching; learning diversity within classrooms; and growing diversity in the settings and modes of practice involved in language teaching and learning” (Benson, 2009, p.22).

The concept of autonomy has become part of the mainstream of practice and research in language education due to efforts of those who work hard to make autonomy the goal of education. Many researchers and educators believe that autonomy is a matter of degree (Benson, 2006). This notion motivated some of them to design a dynamic model which makes it possible to assess learners' autonomy taking into account that autonomy is not a steady state. Approaches in literature regarding the measurement, assessment and enhancement of learner autonomy vary according to the conceptualization of learner autonomy, the teaching and learning contexts, and the methods (qualitative, quantitative, combination of both) adopted to assess learner autonomy (Everhard and Murphy, 2015).

Assessing learners' autonomy is challenging. Such challenges include technical problems and conceptual problems. Technical problems are related to the complexity of the notion and the construct of autonomy which means that it should be possible to measure autonomy of learners when the notion of autonomy and its construct are operationalized and conceptualized. If it's possible to think of autonomy as a 'measurable' aspect then it's possible to treat it as a matter of degree (Murase, 2015).

In order to assist educators measuring learners' autonomy some researchers tried to develop a dynamic model for learner autonomy. For instance, Tassinari (2015) developed such a model taking into account a number of principles. These are: the inter-relationship between learning process dimensions, learning behaviors suitable for different contexts, the non-linear improvement of learner autonomy, the relationship between learner autonomy and performance in language, and the necessity of integrating learner autonomy assessment with suitable pedagogical practices. Tassinari's dynamic model consists of cognitive and metacognitive component (e.g. awareness, learners' beliefs), an affective and motivational component (e.g. learners' feelings and willingness), an action-oriented component (e.g. skills, behaviors), and a social component (e.g. learning and negotiating learning with others).

To enhance autonomy among language learners many strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social-interactive) could be used. Cognitive strategies are used for mental processing of the second language and creating cognitive frameworks (schema) such as synthesis and analysis. Metacognitive strategies are important for guiding the learning process (planning and evaluation). Affective strategies help learners develop positive motivation and deal with negative emotions. As for the social-interactive strategies they are used for aiding the learner within a particular socio-cultural setting such as elaboration and noticing socio-cultural factors (Oxford, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

Over the years, several theories of learning and epistemologies have been introduced to theorize and explain how learning occurs and knowledge constructed. One of those is constructivism. “Constructivism is an epistemology, a philosophical explanation about the nature of knowledge” (Airasian, 1997, p.444). It describes the way cognitive processes are attained, used and developed. Some educators such as Vygotsky and Piaget explain how knowledge construction and cognitive processes involved in constructivism. Since foreign language learning is a social and interactive process the researcher believes that constructionism as an epistemology is the most suitable to function as the theoretical framework of the current study.

Several educators such as Piaget and Vygotsky believe that students are the meaning makers and the main goal of learning is developing individuals’ personal knowledge. One of the theoretical perspectives introduced by Piaget is that cognitive conflict is formed by social interaction and it is considered the place where power driving intellectual development is created. This perspective emphasizes that discrepancy between existing knowledge and learners’ experiences cause lack of equilibrium or stability which motivate learners to question their beliefs and try different ideas (Palinscar, 1998): “Disequilibrium forces the subject to go beyond his current state and strike out in new directions” (Piaget, 1985, p.10). Piaget emphasized that social interactions between children lead to cognitive development more than interactions between children and adults. As for verbal interaction, it is the key to cognitive change and co-construction. Lack of sufficient verbal interaction cause insufficient cognitive conflict (Palinscar, 1998).

The second version of constructivism is social constructivism. This perspective rejects Piaget’s individualistic orientation and focuses on social construction of knowledge (Airasian, 1997). According to the social constructivist approach, knowledge is constructed by “an

individual's interaction with social milieu in which he or she is situated, resulting in a change in both the individual and the milieu" (EBID, 1997, p.445). Vygotsky's perspective implies that individual's mental functioning is not derived from social interaction. In fact, specific structures and processes individuals expose can be traced to their interactions with people around them. As students take part in an expansive scope of joint exercises and internalize the impacts of cooperating, they acquire new strategies and understanding of the world and culture (Palinscar 1998). This is reflected in Vygotsky's "genetic law of development".

"An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one. Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people..., and then inside the child. This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher [mental] functions originate as actual relations between human individuals" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.57).

In spite of the variations in constructivism, all of them have the same essential claim: knowledge is constructed by "bringing what we already know into interaction with the new information, ideas and experiences we encounter" (Little, 2007, p.18). Constructivists consider knowledge a set of 'working hypotheses' rather than a set of 'universal truths' and these hypotheses are subject to replacement, refinement, rejection and change (Airasian, 1997).

Some educators differentiate between 'school knowledge' and 'action knowledge'. School knowledge is the knowledge presented to us by someone else. We understand and grasp part of this knowledge to be able to answer teacher's questions, examinations' questions, and to do exercises. However, it remains someone else's knowledge. Never using this kind of knowledge again may result in forgetting it. In contrast, action knowledge is incorporated in our view of the world which helps us use part of it to cope with life's necessities and requirements. The distinction between school knowledge and action knowledge draws attention

to one of the problems of educational systems: learning is not connected (in isolation from) learners' lives (Barnes, 1976 as cited in Little, 2007).

Educational measures intended to counteract the cut off effect between learning and real life should engage students in interpretative and exploratory processes which help them bring their 'action knowledge' when 'school knowledge' is presented. Avoiding traditional educational methods and giving voice to learners and allowing them to take initiatives, ask exploratory questions, make suggestions, evaluate plans, challenge statements, and evaluate tasks and outcomes creates continuity between learning and real life. In Little's words:

... new forms of classroom discourse make it possible, at least in principle, to establish continuity between the roles that learners play inside and outside the classroom; for they seek to stimulate learners' 'active presence', harness their 'willful agency', accommodate their 'demands and protests', engage them in 'negotiation' and integrate their 'personal agendas' into the evolving learning agendas of the classroom (Little, 2007).

Knowledge will guide and control a young person if he fails to develop a sense of 'reflective intervention' (Bruner, 1986), which (Little, 2007) considers a characteristic of autonomous learners. In contrast, creating and developing 'reflective intervention' enable a young person to select knowledge and control it. Later, he becomes a member of the 'culture creating community'. When learners construct their knowledge unconsciously and involuntarily using participatory, exploratory and interpretative educational methods, they control their learning and become autonomous learners.

"knowledge is constructed through the learner's involvement in linguistically mediated interactions, encoded in language, and reproduced through one or another kind of communicative activity (speaking or writing)" (Little, 2007, P. 20-21).

Language is the tool with which knowledge is constructed and the tool used for metalinguistic and metacognitive processes of what Bruner calls 'reflective intervention'. In addition to Piaget and Bruner Vygotsky contributed tremendously to constructionism.

Vygotsky (1978) started his discussion about Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) emphasizing that children's learning process begins before they go to school. ZPD is defined as

“the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.83).

What they learn at school always has a previous history (e.g. dealing with operations of addition and division before studying arithmetic at school). Preschool learning happens when children ask questions and give answers. They acquire information, imitate adults and learn from instructions they receive about how to act. Vygotsky believes that learning should be matched and convenient with the developmental level of the child.

Little (2007) analyzes Vygotsky's definition of ZPD noting that it sheds light on autonomy. Independent problem solving is the major goal of learning. Every time a new goal is achieved, a new platform is provided to go for the next ZPD. Even though the definition targets the learning process in general, language still plays a vital role since it is the tool that shapes the learning process and mediates knowledge and skill. Language is central for spoken communication (analyzing and describing tasks, suggesting alternatives, describing characteristics of different approaches) and building internal representations of the task that could be used by learners to perform tasks independently.

Students make progress through the ZPD tasks when they are challenged under the supervision of the caregiver who provides a suitable environment that enables students to participate in the task at a challenging level (Rogoff, 1990). The learning process is negotiated by both teachers and students. The progress is achieved by construction of 'support structure' provided by the teacher while conducting the ZPD tasks which reflects a non-hierarchical relationship between teachers and students (Tort-Moloney, 1997). Teachers have to maintain

high expectations of their students when they provide 'effective' scaffolding to help them complete tasks elaborately (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

Another fundamental concept in social constructivism is 'scaffolding'. It is the support provided to learners (e.g. by parents, peers, teachers, reference resources) to enable them to perform well and reach ZPD. Teachers should design tasks to challenge students and motivate them to improve their current capacity (Yang & Wilson, 2006). Dam (1995) suggests that having a teacher/student-directed learning environment built on a 'scaffolding structure' requires turning focus into learning, changing teachers' and learners' roles, improving evaluation process, and creating a substantial learning environment. She emphasized the 'visibility' of the learning process. This means that decisions should be made jointly with teachers since learning autonomy is principle-driven rather than activity-driven. Meaningful tasks should be conducted to gradually enhance proficiency in L2. Classroom teaching implies overcoming difficulties and obstacles facing learners. Consequently, teacher autonomy is needed to liberate teachers from 'spontaneous' teaching practices which are considered inappropriate to 'artificial' classrooms (Tort-Moloney, 1997).

To make the scaffolding effective and to enable students to extend their existing knowledge, clear goals and well-organized learning tasks and activities are required. Goals of the tasks (micro level) need to be part of a learning plan (macro level) (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Teachers need to 'scaffold' students' performance by recruiting their interest in the task, simplifying the task, motivating students while keeping eyes on the goal, marking discrepancies between students' 'product' and the 'ideal solution', controlling frustration while solving problems and showing an idealized version of the goal to be fulfilled (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976, cited in Rogoff 1990, p.93f)

In communication, three kinds of speech were highlighted: social speech, egocentric speech and inner speech. Communicating with people (social speech) is internalized in egocentric speech and later in inner speech. Inner speech is supposed to be an integral part of proficiency of any foreign or second language. It is important for reading, listening, planning, apologizing, preparing for interviews, etc. Inner speech is developed when learners take initiatives in setting goals, choosing materials and tasks and, most importantly, using the target language for 'reflective intervention' so that they can enhance their proficiency which results from performing tasks successfully and improving autonomy (Little, 2007). This notion (inner speech) expresses the bridge between reflection and social interaction in learning and self-direction (Benson, 2001).

Significance of the Study

The current study investigates levels of autonomy among 4th year English majors at Birzeit University and autonomous learning strategies they use. In spite of the huge interest in the issue of language learning autonomy and autonomous learning strategies in the field of foreign language teaching and learning worldwide, very limited and insufficient studies were conducted in the Palestinian context. Very few studies (e.g. (Aziz, 2005) and (Shmais, 2003)) examined the use of language learning strategies among Palestinian EFL learners. No studies were found that examined autonomous language learning levels or strategies among Palestinian students. This reality motivated the researcher to investigate such issues in the Palestinian context.

The significance of the current study is two-fold. First, it provides curricula developers with the effective autonomous learning strategies, which could be impeded in the curriculum that learners use to improve their English. Second, English as a foreign language teachers become

aware of those autonomous learning strategies. They could use them during instruction and train their students how to use them.

Research Problem

English is one of the main foreign languages taught in Palestine. Students begin learning English at age six in grade one. They spend twelve years learning English at schools before they join university. Some of these students choose to major in English at the university level. In spite of this, Palestinian students still do not have a high level of English proficiency. Further, learning English should not stop after graduating from school or university. Students should strive to keep learning and improving their English proficiency. Thus, learner autonomy should be one of the main curriculum expectations. It is worth investigating the autonomous learning strategies that learners use, their level of autonomy after university graduation, the strategies that their English instructors use to instill in them autonomous learning and improving their level of autonomy.

Research Questions

This study seeks to investigate the levels of autonomy among 4th year university non-native English speakers specializing in English, the autonomous learning strategies they use and the role of university instructors in developing them. In particular, this study focuses on answering the following research questions:

- (1) What are the autonomous learning strategies that 4th year English major university students use?
- (2) What are the autonomous learning levels of 4th year English major university students?
- (3) What is the role of university instructors in developing their autonomy?

Limitations of the Study

The present study was conducted in Palestine. The Palestinian educational context is unique in terms of its policies and practices. The participants in the study are the graduating class (30 graduates) of the 2016 / 2017 academic year. The author cautions against generalizing the results of the study to other educational contexts especially those that have different policies and educational practices. Also, the small number of the participants might make it challenging to generalize the results of the study to all Palestinian English majors at all Palestinian post-secondary institutions. Moreover, it should be noted that the researcher and the supervisor are insiders themselves. The researcher was an English major at Birzeit University and she is aware of teaching strategies used and challenges facing students. The supervisor is also aware of policies and practices in the English department. Their position to the research, however, didn't affect data analysis or results. Data collected was analyzed with a high level of objectivity to achieve reliability and credibility. Finally, I have to mention that few participants refused to speak in English so their answers to the interview questions were translated without affecting the meaning.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was conducted during the 2016/2017 academic year. The participants were thirty Palestinian 4th year university non-native speakers specializing in English. The main purpose of the study is to investigate the Palestinian university students majoring in English autonomous learning strategies, their autonomous learning levels and their instructors' role in developing such levels in their final years at the university.

Definition of Terms

Assessment of autonomy: refers to “the process of collecting information about the students’ autonomy, either qualitatively or quantitatively, for the purpose of giving the students a grade or mark according to their level of autonomy” (Murase, 2010, p.71 as cited in Murace, 2015).

Measurement of autonomy: refers to “the process of quantifying the characteristics of learner autonomy on the basis of its conceptual and operational definition in the specific target context” (Murase, 2010, p.71 as cited in Murace, 2015).

Self-Assessment: is a precondition for learner autonomy that enables students to “appraise their performance accurately for themselves so that they understand what more they need to learn and don’t become dependent on their teachers” (Blanch and Marino, 1989, Dragemark Oscarson, 2009).

Motivation: is “a process whereby a certain amount of instigation force arises, initiates action, and persists as long as no other force comes into play to weaken it and thereby terminate action, or until the planned outcome has been reached” (Dörnyei, 1998).

Metacognition: “Enhancing (a) metacognitive awareness of what one believes and how one knows and (b) meta-strategic control in application of the strategies that process new information” (Kuhn, 2000, p. 178)

Tawjihi: The General Secondary Education Certificate Examination in Palestine

Abbreviations

ESL: English as a Second Language

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

SILL: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

FLA: Foreign Language Anxiety

FLCAS: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

LLS: Language Learning Strategies

BZU: Birzeit University

Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter presents and reviews relevant literature concerning language learning autonomy and language learning strategies. The third chapter discusses the methodology and procedures of the research (setting and participants, instrumentation, pilot study, procedure, data processing and analysis). The results of the study are presented in the fourth chapter. Finally, chapter five discusses results and concludes the research providing a summary of the major issues and questions involved and some recommendations for further study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

An enormous body of research on learning autonomy was conducted since the 1970s when a number of language educators discussed the idea of ‘autonomy’ at the University of Cambridge. This idea was really unheard of in language learning and teaching. Since then, and particularly at the beginning of the 21st century, interest in language teaching and learning autonomy has increased remarkably and many publications investigated the issue of autonomy. This ‘new’ idea have begun to appear in books and specific work relating to various topics such as vocabulary, speaking, motivation, distance learning, figurative thinking and young learners (Pemberton et al, 2009).

Phil Benson, a professor in applied linguistics, emphasizes the need for learning autonomy in such a world where educational systems significantly expanded and second language learning was institutionalized. He claims that “one consequence of this process is the expectation that ever-growing educational sectors will produce individuals who fit the ‘needs’ of the new global economy” (Benson, 2009, p 21). This idea encouraged linguists, educators and those who are interested in second language learning and teaching to study the issue of language learning autonomy and autonomous learning strategies.

This chapter offers a review of the literature concerning language learning autonomy and language learning strategies that help to promote autonomy among foreign language learners. Studies reviewed and referred to below are classified into two major topics: Autonomy in Language Learning and Language Learning Strategies.

Autonomy in Language Learning

Readiness for Autonomy

Some researchers find it useful to investigate the readiness of language learners for autonomous learning. Hozayen (2009) studied the readiness of freshmen students in the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport for language learning autonomy. A questionnaire was distributed to the participants to collect data about role of the teacher, role of the students and the importance of feedback. The researcher concluded that time and constraints which are resulted from the learners' tight timetables prevent them from practicing more of the language being learned in informal contexts. He recommended that teachers encourage learners to use autonomous learning strategies in order to become creative and autonomous learners.

Cotterall (1995) argues that it is necessary to measure learners' readiness for change in their beliefs and behaviors that are implied by autonomy. The researcher constructed a questionnaire that was administered to adult ESL learners taking into account a number of factors: role of the teachers, role of feedback, learner independence, learners' confidence in their study ability, experience of language learning and approach to study. The study concluded that beliefs language learners affect and may inhibit learners' acceptance and engagement in the language class activities. She also concluded that teachers and learners should be aware of the roles they play in the language learning process and that this awareness is the "pole" of autonomy.

Readiness and awareness are required when learners try to improve their ability to take responsibility of their learning process. In order to be able to go through the components of Tassinari's dynamic model, which is adopted in the current study, learners need to be aware of the way they would plan, cooperate, evaluate, monitor, structure knowledge, complete tasks, choose materials, deal with their feelings and motivate themselves. Some researchers believe that readiness

and awareness are somehow related to culture. Ho and Crookall (1995) shed light on the Chinese culture and its effects on learner autonomy in English language teaching. They suggest that learners need to redefine their attitudes and views about roles of teachers and learners in the learning process. They claim that teachers should help learners take responsibility of their own learning taking into account the culturally-constructed nature of the classroom setting. Learners participated in the 'stimulation' which aimed to provide them with an opportunity to take responsibility of their learning by: deciding to engage in the stimulation, taking responsibility of the stimulation tasks and taking responsibility of learning and use of skills necessary. The results show that the participants keenly dealt with people from different cultures, became critical thinkers and learned to argue and write effectively and rationally. Thus, they took greater responsibility for their own learning. So, is it really important to promote autonomy among learners?

Importance of Learning Autonomy

A two-phase study by Cooker (2012) addresses the debate on the importance of learner autonomy. In the first phase, the study explored the relationship between assessment and language learning autonomy. A survey was used to collect data from forty five participants in thirteen countries and showed that language learning autonomy is widely assessed by a variety of tools. In the second phase, thirty participants participated in Q-methodological study and interviews and expressed their perceptions on the non-linguistic outcomes of learning in an environment in which autonomy is supported. The findings showed that there are six modes of autonomy: A love of languages, oozing confidence, socially oriented and enthusiastic, love of language learning, teacher-focused and competitively driven.

Some other studies focus on the same issue discussing the reasons why it's important to enhance learning autonomy. Dam (2011) provided insights into secondary school learners' autonomy.

In his paper, he discusses reasons for improving autonomy among school-aged learners. He also outlined essential principles related to the implementation of autonomy in language teaching and learning. Moreover, he described how such principles can be practiced in an institutional context. After conducting the study, Dam listed a number of positive results for developing learner autonomy. These results include: developing enhanced self-esteem, preparing for life-long learning, learning how to be responsible for one's own learning. However, he mentioned some pitfalls that should be avoided in implementing autonomous learning. Such pitfalls include: lack of teachers' confidence in their students' ability to be responsible for their learning, forgetting about being authentic, teaching instead of supporting learning and finding excuses for not being able to enhance autonomy among language learners.

Teachers' Attitudes and Practices

Lack of teachers' confidence in their students' ability to be autonomous is also addressed by Aliponga et al (2002). They studied the students rating of a three-stage model of skill learning: verbalization (requires teachers to provide new materials or skills that can be easily understood by students), automatization (students are engaged in meaningful activities), and autonomy (students can improve on their own). The participants in this study were 107 university students and the instrument was a questionnaire. The researchers concluded that teachers should aim high when implementing the three-stage process and believe in its importance in enhancing autonomy which means that they should design classroom activities according to this process.

Another study by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) examines beliefs and practices of English language teachers regarding learner autonomy. Results of the study showed that teachers were disposed to the concept of autonomy, so their definitions of learner autonomy revealed support for concepts and notions such as choice, independence, control, freedom and responsibility. Most of them

see autonomy as a set of abilities. Findings also show that there is a gap between what teachers believe about learning autonomy and feasibility of letting students participate in making decisions related to their learning process. There was also a gap between teachers' beliefs regarding developing students' autonomous skills and feasibility of applying this on the ground. However, most of teachers claimed they enhance autonomy among learners.

A similar study by Dwee and Anthony (2017) examines English teachers' practices and perceptions in enhancing learning autonomy among university students in Malaysia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from participants who were five English language teachers. Findings show that there is a lack of focus on improving students' autonomy in English classrooms because of lack of teachers' readiness, passive attitude towards students, and timing and relevance of courses within the university curriculum.

The issue of teachers' readiness and awareness of enhancing autonomy among their students was studied thoroughly by a number of researchers. Griva and Chostelidou (2017) investigate the role of language awareness issues and teachers' beliefs and perspectives about language learning. Data was collected using questionnaires from 150 EFL teachers teaching at public schools in Greece. Results show that EFL teachers are, to a certain degree, conscious of the importance of raising awareness among EFL students and improving students' language learning strategies.

Students' Attitudes and Perspectives

Other researchers tended to shed light on students' attitudes, perspectives and understanding of autonomous learning practices. Bekleyen and Selimoğlu (2016) examine students' behaviors and perspectives about language learning autonomy at the university level in Turkey. It was conducted during the 2013-2014 academic year and the participants were 171 undergraduates. Findings showed that students believe teachers should be responsible for choosing materials and activities in English

classrooms and that course planning is a teacher responsibility. Students think they need their teachers' assistance and guidance in their learning process. Results also showed that students prefer some activities such as watching movies and TV programs and listening to English songs more than writing letters or diaries in English.

Different results were revealed by Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee (2017) which aimed to investigate beliefs of undergraduates about autonomous language learning. Results show that students had a high level of beliefs about language learning autonomy. However, outside the classrooms, language learning behaviors were at a moderate level. It was concluded that there is a relationship between beliefs about language learning autonomy and English proficiency, attitudes towards English learning, gender and students' language learning behaviors out of class. It was suggested, therefore, that responsibilities should be shared between teachers and students.

Levels of Autonomy

The significance of autonomy and the need to enhance it among learners motivated linguists and authors to operationalize that autonomy is "a matter of degree" (Benson, 2006). Macaro's three-stage model, for example, involves 'autonomy of language competence', 'autonomy of language learning competence', and 'autonomy of choice and action' (Benson, 2006). Benson attempted to model levels of learner autonomy. His model involves dimensions of control over the teaching-learning process grouped under three major headings: learning management, cognitive processing and the 'content of learning' (Benson, 2006). Although these models are widely adopted in the field of foreign language learning, they were criticized for not considering the relationship between language and autonomy development problematic. Kumaravadivelu states that "it would be a mistake to try to correlate the initial, intermediary, and advanced stages of autonomy with the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of language proficiency" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003 as cited in Benson, 2006).

For those who are interested in measuring autonomy and assessing learners' independence, the issue of 'assessment' is pivotal. Everhard (2015) conducted a study which examines assessment of oral skills as component of a research project "the Assessment for Autonomy Research Project (AARP)" which was conducted in Greece between 2005 and 2010. It investigates the way learners could assess themselves and their peers with objectivity and reliability using predetermined criteria. Moreover, it investigated the use of pre-determined assessment criteria checklist to practice judgment in a cooperative atmosphere. The results show that students who participated in the project went towards assuming responsibility for assessment and tried to practice objectivity as a pre-requisite for the development of autonomy. They tended to be honest in their grading and assessment.

Autonomy and Self-assessment

Some studies show that self-assessment, in particular, increases learners' motivation towards autonomy. Birjandi (2010) examined the role of self-assessment in promoting Iranian EFL learners' motivation. Participants in the research were sixty intermediate students divided into two groups (experimental and control groups). With the experimental group, the researcher used journal writing as a self-assessment technique. Results revealed that writing journals are effective in promoting motivation among language learners. Encouraging learners to make decisions about the focus of their learning based on their own reflections in order to enhance their learning helped participants promote communication with the tutors and improved learner autonomy (Murphy 2015).

A similar study by Lamb (2001) focused on learners' assessment of their peers and of themselves. Findings showed that students are able to overcome their attitudes and beliefs about the learning process and participate in reflections and critical thinking in the production and assessment of assignments. Most of the participants used peer-assessment to improve their ability in self-assessment, took more responsibility and experienced a higher level of autonomy.

Tassinari's Dynamic Model

Tassinari (2012) conducted a study aiming to answer questions on how can a balance be found between the focus on language learning and the focus on learning to learn and on approaches needed for languages. As a result of this research, a dynamic model for learner autonomy was designed. This model consists of cognitive, metacognitive, action-oriented and affective components of learner autonomy. Moreover, it provides descriptors for learners' behaviors, attitudes and competencies. The model has been validated in a number of workshops with experts in France and Germany. Most of the students who took part in the inquiry on the dynamic model confirmed that self-assessment encouraged them to become more reflective, helped them focus on learning goals, and raised their awareness of their learning. Some of them stressed that the model provided different strategies for language learning autonomy. Results of the study showed that the model is valid for evaluation, raising awareness, decision making and reflection.

Language Learning Strategies

Many strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social-interactive) could be used to enhance autonomy among language learners. Cognitive strategies are used for mental processing of the second language and creating cognitive frameworks (schema), such as synthesis and analysis. Metacognitive strategies, on the other hand, are important for guiding the learning process (planning and evaluation). Affective strategies help learners develop positive motivation and deal with negative emotions. As for the social-interactive strategies they are used for aiding the learner within a particular socio-cultural setting such as elaboration and noticing socio-cultural factors (Oxford, 2008) (See Table 2.1 below). It is worth mentioning, therefore, that learners should learn such strategies in order to be able promote their autonomy and improve their learning process.

**(Table 2.1) Strategies and Tactics that Help Improving Autonomy and Independent Learning
(Oxford, 2008)**

Learning Strategies	Strategy	Tactic
Metacognitive	Plan	I set realistic objectives for this week's two major writing tasks.
	Organize	I organize the computer files on my laptop before doing anything else.
	Monitor	During the reading task, I monitor my energy level and clarity of thought every 20 minutes or so.
	Evaluate	I compare my current listening performance a month ago to evaluate progress.
Affective	Build positive motivation	I search for something about the task that excites my interest.
	Maintain positive volition	I use positive self-talk to keep going.
	Deal with negative emotions	I lower any unhelpful anxiety by deep breathing, music, humor, relaxation, mediation, or a short break.
Cognitive	Combine	I combine this week's two phrases to write five sentences.
	Group	I group the new material I find about the topic and put it into various files so I can find it.
	Analyze	I break today's multisyllabic words into component parts so I can understand and remember them.
	Synthesize	I use topic sentences in paragraphs to help me write a summary of the essay I just read.
Socio-interactive	Ask questions	I ask the tutor the questions and listen well to the answers.
	Collaborate	I respond to other students' postings in the discussion forum.
	Notice socio-cultural factors	I ask myself the meaning of certain social behaviors and sayings that I encounter by video.

Use of Language Learning Strategies

Many educators suggest that language learners should be trained to use strategies in order to enhance their autonomy. Cohen believes that “language learning will be facilitated if students become more aware of the range of possible strategies that they can consciously select during language learning and language use (Cohen, 1998 as cited in Benson, 2001). In assisting learners becoming aware of such strategies and training them to use these strategies language teachers need to take into consideration five major components. These are discussing strategies learners already use, presenting new strategies, modeling strategies, explaining when and why strategies can be used as well as providing extensive practice using authentic opportunities for students to discuss applications and effectiveness of the strategies (Benson, 2001).

Hakan and others (2015) believe that language-learning strategies enable students to be responsible for their own learning. In their study, they investigated language learning strategies used by undergraduate students. The participants were 120 undergraduates. Data was collected using “Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)” and frequency standard deviation was used to analyze the data collected. The results show that learning strategies play a vital role in enhancing autonomy among second language learners.

In this regard, Ungureanu and Georgescu (2012) conducted a study that aimed at assessing foreign language learners’ favorite learning strategies. A questionnaire was used to collect data from fifty foreign language learners. Results show that students prefer using cognitive and metacognitive strategies more than socio-affective strategies. It seems that students are not used to cooperating and asking questions. The researchers concluded that teachers should be familiar with learning strategies and aware of the importance of using such strategies. Also

they recommended that language students need to be aware of the language learning strategies, practice using them and keep trying to speak naturally in order to enhance their autonomy.

Ali et al (2016) investigated the use of language learning strategies by M.A in English literature / linguistics students in Pakistan. Data was collected using SILL questionnaire. Results indicate that all the strategies (memory, cognitive, metacognitive, social, compensation, affective) were used at medium frequency. The participants who stated that the most important thing for them is organizing and managing English language learning used only metacognitive strategies in a high frequency.

Some researchers studied the same issue focusing on variables and factors affecting use of strategies. Kashefian-Naeeni and Maarof (2016) investigated use of language learning strategies by undergraduate English literature students at Shiraz University in Iran. Instruments used to collect data about the issue studied were structured interviews and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). Results showed that students' use of language learning strategies is affected by year of study (e.g. first year students use metacognitive strategies). Students' gender and educational level of their parents did not have much impact on use of strategies.

Strategies Used by Advanced Language Learners

Other researchers tended to shed light on learning strategies chosen and used by high achievers and advanced learners. Nazri et al (2016) investigate strategies used by good ESL learners in a private university in Malesia. Findings indicated that successful language learners use learning strategies frequently. Metacognitive strategies are the mostly used strategies followed by compensation, cognitive and social strategies. In contrast, memory and Affective strategies were less used among the participants.

Similarly, Lee and Heinz (2016) examined effective English language learning strategies employed by advanced language learners. Twenty student interpreters were the participants in the study. Data was collected using unstructured essay writing. Students were asked to freely write about methods and strategies that helped them improve their proficiency. Results showed that there is a number of effective strategies advanced students use: metacognitive strategies (e.g. monitoring progress) and cognitive strategies (e.g. text analysis). Some participants indicated that conscious attention to language input during activities is important in improving their language proficiency. Their determination to improve their language expresses their motivation to learn English autonomously. Other participants mentioned ‘exposure to English’ by utilizing a variety of written texts, reading, listening to the radio and watching American TV programs. Other strategies were discussed by other students include: listening to recordings and dialogues repeatedly until hearing each and every word, observing how native speakers pronounce words, mimicking speaking of favorite drama characters, practicing speaking out loud and creative writing. A number of strategies were evaluated as unhelpful or ineffective. These strategies are mere memorization of words, memorizing words without understanding meanings and emphasis on grammar.

Autonomy and Metacognitive Strategies

Yuan (2007) conducted an empirical study that investigated a number of metacognitive strategies for promoting learners’ autonomy in oral language learning. Findings indicated that autonomy and metacognitive strategies are closely linked in creating a successful teaching-learning environment. Thus, Yuan’s study emphasized the importance of metacognitive strategies in enhancing autonomy among language learners. Sadeghi and others (2013) conducted a study in which they examined the relationship between learners’ needs and the use of language learning strategies. The researchers used self-reported questionnaires to collect data

from the participants (150 students) who had studied English as a compulsory subject. Findings showed that students' needs are among the factors that influence the use of strategies.

Among the strategies that are commonly used to promote language-learning autonomy a strategy based on language learning contracts. Ismail and Md.Yusof (2012) investigated the use of language learning contracts as a strategy to enhance autonomy among ESL learners. Their study focused on students' experience in using such contracts and the extent to which contracts could promote autonomy among language learners. Participants in the study were university ESL students (freshmen). Questionnaires, contracts, conferences' transcripts and focus group interviews were used to collect data for the study. The findings show that contracts made learners more motivated to learn and helped them assess and measure their progress. Moreover, contracts made them feel successful while learning the second language.

Motivation, Learning Styles, and Achievement

Some other studies explored the connection between learning strategies and achievement, learning styles and motivation. A study by Uslu (2016) investigated the relationship between learning strategies and academic achievement. A correlation design was used to examine the relationship between variables. Participants were 733 students at a vocational college in Izmir were chosen randomly in the academic year 2014-2015. Language learning strategies scale (a five-point Likert type) was used to analyze data collected from the participants. Findings showed that there is a relationship between learning strategies and achievement and that learning strategies predict nearly 20% of achievement.

On the other hand, Balci (2017) investigated the relationship between learning styles of freshman students and language learning strategies they use. Participants were 328 freshman students in a Turkish university. Data was collected using the SILL in its Turkish version and analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient and descriptive statistics. Results showed that

there are significant relationships between language learning strategies and learning styles in an EFL context. Strategies students use are really affected by their learning style.

Vibulphol (2016) examined motivation of second language learners and teachers' motivational strategies. Questionnaires were distributed from both students and teachers in twelve classrooms in Thailand. Moreover, two observers observed lessons. Results indicated that most of students are highly motivated to learn English. Teachers use motivational strategies such as autonomy support strategies and controlling styles. However, autonomy support strategies were used only in high performing and highly motivated English classrooms.

Teachers' Role

Teachers' role is vital in training students to use language learning strategies and improve their autonomous learning skills. A study by Dahlberg (2016) investigated the best practices used by English language teachers regarding learning strategies for reading and listening (receptive skills). Data was collected by analyzing national syllabus and other policy documents in Sweden and interviewing four English language teachers. Results show that teachers believe in the importance of learning strategies and using them in their teaching process. The most occurring strategies were cognitive and metacognitive strategies. However, analysis indicated issues related to grading, assessment and testing strategies.

Effects of Economic, Technological and Cultural Changes

Economic, technological and cultural changes that the world experiences impose changes and new issues in the field of language learning. New strategies are currently used to learn English as a second language and to enhance autonomy among foreign language learners. Educators and researchers are now covering issues imposed by changes in the field. Zhao and Qin (2017) shed light on hypertext reading and the way it affects Chinese students' English reading and scores of reading comprehension. Participants were 100 freshman students divided

into two groups; experimental and control groups. Results show that hypertext reading is effective in improving students' learning, autonomy learning and achievement.

On the other hand, Brahmi (2016) investigated Tunisian students' perceptions on developing their writing skills and wikis. Results show that students have shown remarkable tendency towards collaboration in digital environments which aim to liberate students from repression in classrooms. Similarly, a project by Ohashi (2016) aimed at providing out-of-class opportunities for communicating in English and motivates students to study English. Data was collected from teachers and students' contributions on Facebook posts and comments, an online questionnaire, and two interviews with two students to shed light on students' attitudes. Results show that the private Facebook group which was created for the project provided participants with opportunities to practice English outside English classrooms. It also helped them become exposed to English learning resources and encouraged them to use and study English. Moreover, students played a central role in the group. It wasn't solely teacher-led.

Another study by Rezaei and Davoudi (2016) investigated the influence of electronic dictionaries (in comparison with paper dictionaries) on vocabulary learning and retention of Iranian EFL students. Participants were 75 university students. The study was conducted in reading comprehension lessons. Results show that vocabulary learning will improve significantly when learners are exposed to several presentation modes. It was concluded that benefits of using electronic dictionaries include: saving time, motivating students to learn new words and expressions.

In spite of the revolutionary changes in educational systems in some countries and the unlimited number of learning strategies, some difficulties and obstacles seem to affect learners' improvement. Lababidi (2016) examined experiences and perspectives of foreign language

anxiety (FLA) among EFL students in a higher education institution in the United Arab Emirates. In the first phase scores of anxiety were investigated using Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). In the second phase the same scale was used with the classes that showed the highest levels of anxiety and focus group interviews were conducted. It was concluded that stressful atmosphere made students feel highly anxious. Moreover, previous experiences, attitudes and perspectives about learning English affect and may cause anxiety. Most of the participants stated that the current learning atmosphere is relaxing and that instructors do their best to make them feel relaxed and welcomed.

Summary

In this chapter, varieties of studies were reviewed to explore the issue being investigated in the current research. It started with shedding light on readiness for autonomy, teachers' attitudes and practices and students' attitudes and perspective. Furthermore, it included evidences of the significance of autonomy and promoting autonomy. It also explored self-assessment and autonomy measuring (levels of autonomy). Moreover, different kinds of language learning strategies were clarified with emphasis on the connection between such strategies and autonomy. It provided studies conducted to investigate use of strategies, teachers' role in training students to use language learning effectively, and effects of economical, technological and cultural changes. Studies explored in this chapter have provided an overview of the issue of autonomy shedding light on pivotal aspects.

In spite of all the studies conducted in the field of language learning autonomy, the current study is authentic and needed in the Palestinian context. English is one of the main foreign languages taught in Palestine. Students begin learning English in grade one. They spend twelve years learning English at schools before they join university and some of them choose to

major in English at the university level. However, Palestinian students still do not have a high level of English proficiency. Therefore, it is worth investigating levels of autonomy among English majors and language learning strategies they use.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

This study investigated levels of autonomy among 4th year English majors at Birzeit University and the autonomous learning strategies they use. The current chapter provides an outline of research methods followed in the study. It describes the research design that was chosen to answer the research questions stated in the first chapter. Information was also provided on setting and participants and the way they were sampled. The instrument used to collect the data is discussed along with the data collection procedures and the pilot study. Moreover it discusses methods used to analyze the data collected. Following are description of research design, setting and participants, instruments and data collection, the pilot study, data analysis and a summary.

Research Design

The current research is exploratory and descriptive in nature as it explores levels of autonomy among English majors and their experiences in using autonomous learning strategies. Experiences, practices and perspectives of the participants created the core data of the study. Consequently, the researcher decided to use a method that allows her to deal with the issue being studied in an exploratory nature. To answer the research questions and for the purposes of the study, the research paradigm adopted is of qualitative nature, using semi-structured interviews. This approach was particularly chosen aiming to understand the context and the environment in which the study was conducted. In addition, such an approach allowed the researcher to explore experiences, practices and ideas of the participants and to understand feelings and values that

underlie and influence the participants' behaviors. It also allowed the researcher to observe immediate reactions and to identify the participants' levels of autonomy, language learning strategies they use and their needs.

Setting and Participants

This study aimed to investigate levels of autonomy among 4th year English majors at Birzeit University and autonomous learning strategies they use. Birzeit University is a Palestinian university located in Birzeit near Ramallah. Among Bachelor programs the university offers for undergraduates, it offers an English Language and Literature program which includes writing, literature (novel, fiction, mythology, drama, poetry, etc.) and linguistics (grammar, phonetics, syntax, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, etc.) courses. Before they graduate, English majors have to conduct in-depth studies of particular areas in literature or linguistics.

Participants of the current study were thirty 4th year English majors at Birzeit University. All of them were females and their age ranged from 20 – 23 years old. The total number of the potential participants (research population) was about a hundred students who were 4th year English majors and about to graduate. They were about to complete 45 credit hours of both core and elective courses in English language and literature. Maximal variation is the sampling procedure that was used to choose the participants.

Instruments and Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data about the issue being studied. The researcher followed the seven stages set by Kvale (1996): thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting. In the first stage “thematizing” reasons behind conducting the study and its theoretical background were clear. The researcher

decided on the kind of instrument needed to suit the research approach and to answer the research questions.

In the second stage “designing”, a number of variables were set as a start to design items and questions of the interview taking into account the purpose of the interview and the nature of the issue being studied. Both ‘Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and Tassinari’s Dynamic Autonomy Model were used to design interviews and write interview questions.

The interview questions were divided into three major sections: Language Learning Strategies, Language Learning Autonomy and Role of University Instructors. The first section consisted of nearly thirty eight questions about the autonomous memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies that fourth year English majors use to improve their English proficiency. In the first section participants were asked about making connections between previous and new knowledge, preparing for English classes in advance, reviewing after classes, speaking like native speakers, initiating conversations in English, reading for pleasure, making summaries, monitoring mistakes, planning, setting goals, dealing with feelings, interacting with native speakers and culture, and many other issues that were addressed to cover all language learning strategies.

The second section included questions about managing learning autonomously. Participants were asked about things that motivate them to learn English independently, strategies they use to deal with their emotions while learning English as a foreign language, planning their learning process, choosing materials and methods, and completing tasks. Moreover, they were asked to assess and evaluate their learning progress and materials, resources, methods and strategies they use to learn English. They discussed their strengths and weaknesses and explained the factors that prevent them from making progress in particular English language areas. In

addition, they answered questions about performing tasks in cooperation with others. These questions were written using ‘descriptors’ of the Dynamic Autonomy Model: motivating yourself, dealing with feelings, planning, choosing materials and methods, completing tasks, monitoring, evaluating and cooperating.

The last question in the interview was about the role of university instructors in assisting students in developing their autonomous learning levels to reach their highest desired level.

In the interviewing stage, participants were provided with an overview of the issue being studied and the purpose of the study. The participants have also signed a ‘Participant Consent Form’. They voluntarily agreed to participate in the study knowing that they can withdraw or discontinue their participation any time, they had the right to decline to answer questions and that an audio tape of the interview will be made. Moreover, they understood that the researcher will not notify them by name in any study reports. Thirty interviews were conducted with fourth year English majors at Birzeit University. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes.

The Voice Memo application on iPhone was used to record the interviews. In the fourth stage, transcribing, the researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim indicating both verbal and Non-verbal communication (e.g. pauses, laughs). The last three stages (analyzing, verifying and reporting) will be discussed later in this chapter.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with four fourth year English majors at Birzeit University to check the time needed to conduct interviews and the suitability and efficiency of interview questions. After the pilot experiment the researcher became able to decide on the time needed to conduct the interviews. Moreover, she made some changes to the initial interview questions. Unneeded and repeated questions were omitted and some other questions were added to

comprehensively cover the issue being studied. For instance, similar questions about students' use of strategies to improve their English proficiency were omitted and more specific questions were added.

Data analysis

The qualitative thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the data. Boyatzis (1998, p.4) defines thematic analysis as:

“ a process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an explicit “code”. This maybe a list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms”.

The researcher followed a six-phased outline for thematic analysis provided by Braun, and Clarke (2006). These phases are: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report.

The researcher collected the data herself. She interviewed the participants so she has a prior knowledge of the data collected. To familiarize herself more with the data, she has read it repeatedly looking for codes and themes. Transcription of the interviews also helped the researcher to immerse herself with the data collected.

During the first phase, some codes were generated (e.g. preparation, previous knowledge, speaking, and evaluation). In the second phase, a number of initial codes were produced. Actually, codes were generated manually around particular questions in mind. Later in the third phase, these codes were classified using mind maps and sorted into themes, initial ones.

While reviewing the themes during the fourth phase some potential themes were omitted or added to other themes (e.g. Language Learning Diary). Some other themes turned into more than one theme (e.g. Language Learning Strategies). It took so much time and effort to classify

and re-classify codes and themes to end up having a number of themes which help answer the research questions thoroughly.

In the fifth stage, theme maps were created. Themes were reviewed again and again in order to give them suitable names according to their specifications and characteristics. After naming themes and sub-themes it became possible to create good, clear theme maps which made it possible to look at the data critically and to start discussing the results.

The last stage “producing the report” appears clearly in the coming chapters. The researcher presented the results and explained them coherently to express validity and to answer the research questions effectively. Along with thematic analysis, Autonomous Levels rubric was designed to report how many participants are at each level (see table 3.1 below).

Summary

The chapter discussed methods used to conduct the research. It included a description of research design, setting and participants, instruments and data collection, pilot study and data analysis. A qualitative approach was adopted since the research is exploratory in nature. Participants were thirty 4th year English majors at Birzeit University. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. The researcher followed the seven stages set by Kvale (1996): thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting. The qualitative thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the data. Moreover, Autonomous Levels rubric was designed to report how many participants are at each level.

(Table 3.1) Autonomous Learners' Levels: A Rubric

Autonomous Activity	Advanced Level	Intermediate Level	Beginning Level	Emerging
Motivating Oneself	Learners always have the will to learn autonomously. They always motivate themselves.	Learners sometimes have the will to learn autonomously. They sometimes motivate themselves.	Learners rarely have the will to learn autonomously. They rarely motivate themselves.	Learners never have the will to learn autonomously. They never motivate themselves.
Controlling one's feelings	Learners always effectively control their feelings while learning	Learners sometimes effectively control their feelings while learning	Learners rarely effectively control their feelings while learning	Learners never effectively control their feelings while learning
Recognizing one's own needs and setting goals	Learner always recognizes one's own needs, formulate them into realistic learning objectives, and structure them into steps and create a learning plan	Learner sometimes recognizes one's own needs, formulate them into realistic learning objectives, and structure them into steps and create a learning plan	Learner rarely recognizes one's own needs, formulate them into realistic learning objectives, and structure them into steps and create a learning plan	Learner never recognizes one's own needs, formulate them into realistic learning objectives, and structure them into steps and create a learning plan
Choosing materials and methods	Learner always chooses and works with suitable learning materials, methods and strategies	Learner sometimes chooses and works with suitable learning materials, methods and strategies	Learner rarely chooses and works with suitable learning materials, methods and strategies	Learner never chooses and works with suitable learning materials, methods and strategies
Completing tasks	Learner always organizes time to learn and completes tasks.	Learner sometimes organizes time to learn and completes tasks.	Learner rarely organizes time to learn and completes tasks.	Learner never organizes time to learn and completes tasks.

Reflecting	Learner always reflects on topics, tasks, learning process, and thinks about oneself as a learner.	Learner sometimes reflects on topics, tasks, learning process, and thinks about oneself as a learner.	Learner rarely reflects on topics, tasks, learning process, and thinks about oneself as a learner.	Learner never reflects on topics, tasks, learning process, and thinks about oneself as a learner.
Self – evaluation	Learner always evaluates his / her competencies and progress.	Learner sometimes evaluates his / her competencies and progress.	Learner rarely evaluates his / her competencies and progress.	Learner never evaluates his / her competencies and progress.
Cooperating	Learner always learns with and from others.	Learner sometimes learns with and from others.	Learner rarely learns with and from others.	Learner never learns with and from others.
Managing one's own learning	Learner always connects all aspects of the learning process and summarizes important steps and phases of autonomous learning from other areas	Learner sometimes connects all aspects of the learning process and summarizes important steps and phases of autonomous learning from other areas	Learner rarely connects all aspects of the learning process and summarizes important steps and phases of autonomous learning from other areas	Learner never connects all aspects of the learning process and summarizes important steps and phases of autonomous learning from other areas
Structuring knowledge	Learner always structures all autonomous learning phases and activities.	Learner sometimes structures all autonomous learning phases and activities	Learner rarely structures all autonomous learning phases and activities	Learner never structures all autonomous learning phases and activities

Chapter Four

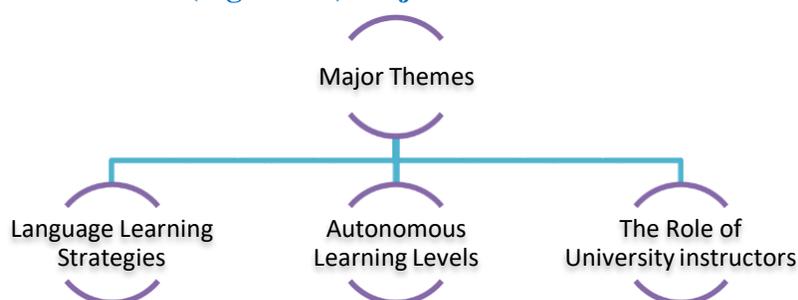
Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate levels of autonomy among 4th year English majors at Birzeit University and the autonomous learning strategies they use. The following research questions informed this study (1) What are the autonomous learning strategies that 4th year English major university students use? (2) What are the autonomous learning levels of 4th year English major university students? (3) What is the role of university instructors in developing their autonomy?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirty female fourth year English majors at Birzeit University. A six-phased outline for thematic analysis by (Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006)) was followed to analyze the data collected. After familiarizing herself with the data, the researcher started generating initial codes and searching for themes and sub-themes. A number of themes emerged from the data. These themes were named and defined and theme maps were created to look at the data and discuss it clearly and critically. The last stage “producing the report” appears in this chapter where findings are presented to answer the research questions and to express validity. The major themes emerged from the data are: Language Learning Strategies, Autonomous Learning Levels and The Role of University Instructors as illustrated in Figure 4.1 below.

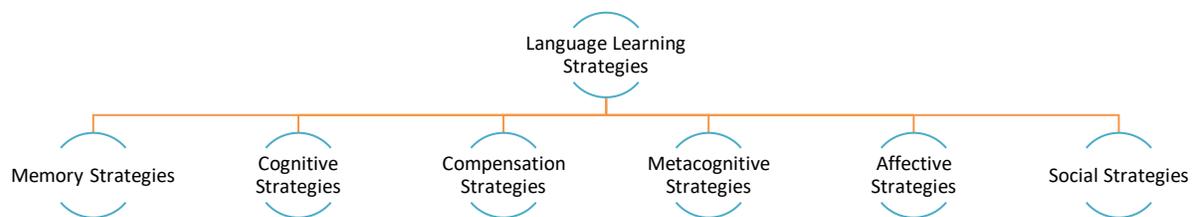
(Figure 4.1) Major Themes



Language Learning Strategies

The researcher asked the participants about language learning strategies they use to improve their English proficiency. The major theme emerged from their answers is “Language Learning Strategies”. This theme includes a number of sub themes that are described thoroughly in this section. (See Figure 4.2 and 4.3)

(Figure 4.2) Language Learning Strategies



Memory Strategies

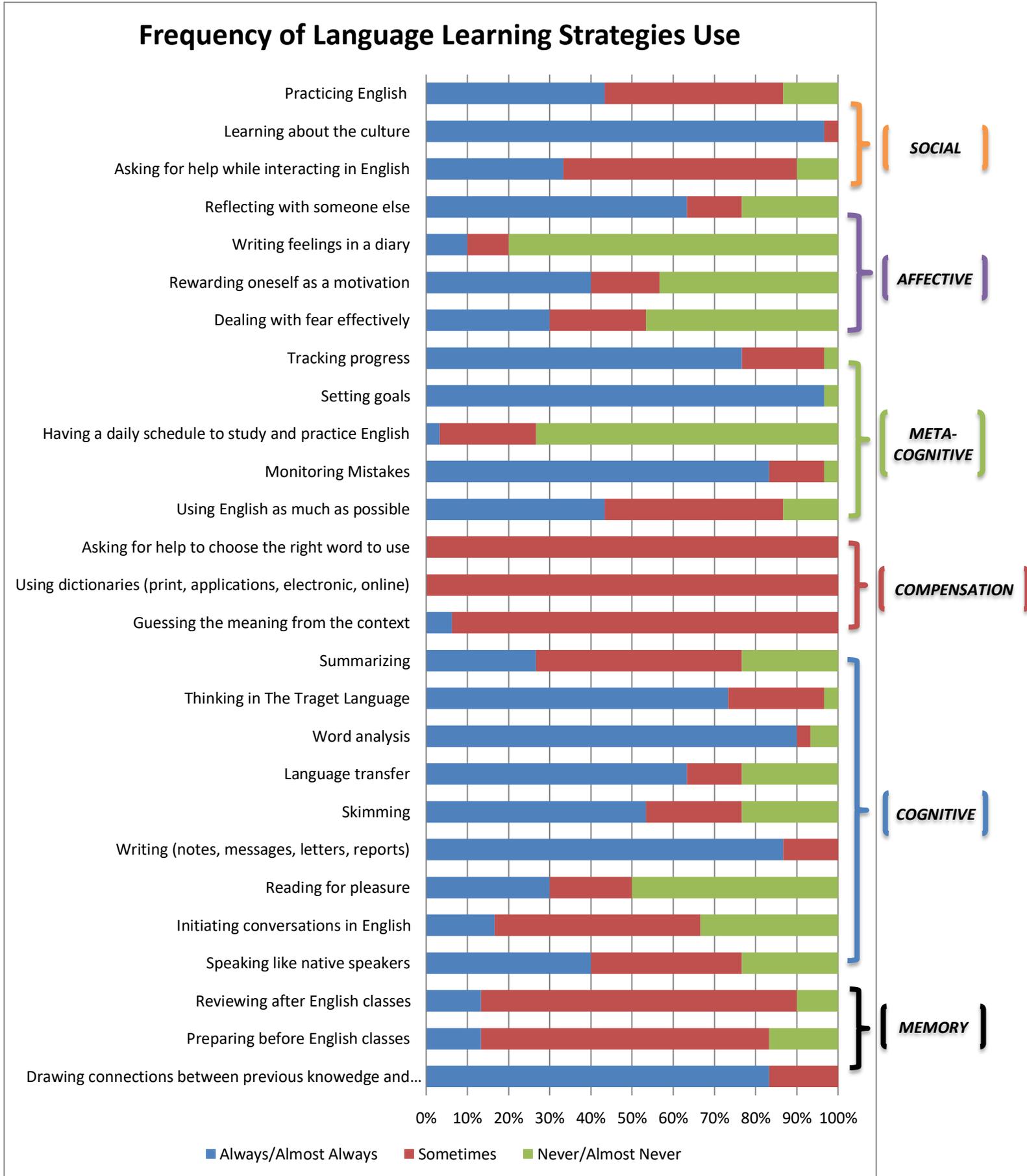
This section presents a number of subthemes under ‘Memory Strategies’: ‘Previous Knowledge’, ‘Preparing for Classes in Advance’ and ‘Reviewing after Classes’. It also emphasizes frequency of using memory strategies in learning English as a foreign language (See Figure 4.4 below).

Previous Knowledge

Most of the participants said they draw connections and make relationships between what they already know and the new things they learn in their English classes. In the words of one of the students:

I learned the alphabet ... they trained us to write sentences
 ...short ones ... and then longer ones ... I learned the connectors
 (the linkers) and I started connecting sentences. And now I can
 write good essays with an introduction, a thesis statement, a
 body where I present my ideas and my analysis, and a conclusion.
 Interesting!

Figure (4.3) Frequency of Language Learning Strategies Use



The new knowledge they learn is built on what they have learned in the past. They talked about the way they improved their language and the difference between learning English at school and at university. One of the participants said:

For example... At school they taught us that there are five components of a story... the characters, the plot, the setting and ... mmm... What else? The conflict and the ... resolution. But I never really understood what these elements mean until I came to university. Now I can analyze stories, plays, novels and even poems.

Some of them said they consider knowledge “cumulative” and an “information network”.

Others agreed it's impossible to learn without the previous knowledge.

It's impossible to learn without the previous knowledge ...it's like a building...each stone is built on the other. I do that ALWAYS! I do it automatically... I draw relationships between what I already know and the new things I learn. Writing is the best example. In 141 and 231 we learn how to paraphrase... summarize... write reports and short essays ... and now we write descriptive, narrative, persuasive and other kinds of essays. We need to first learn the basics ... and then build on them.

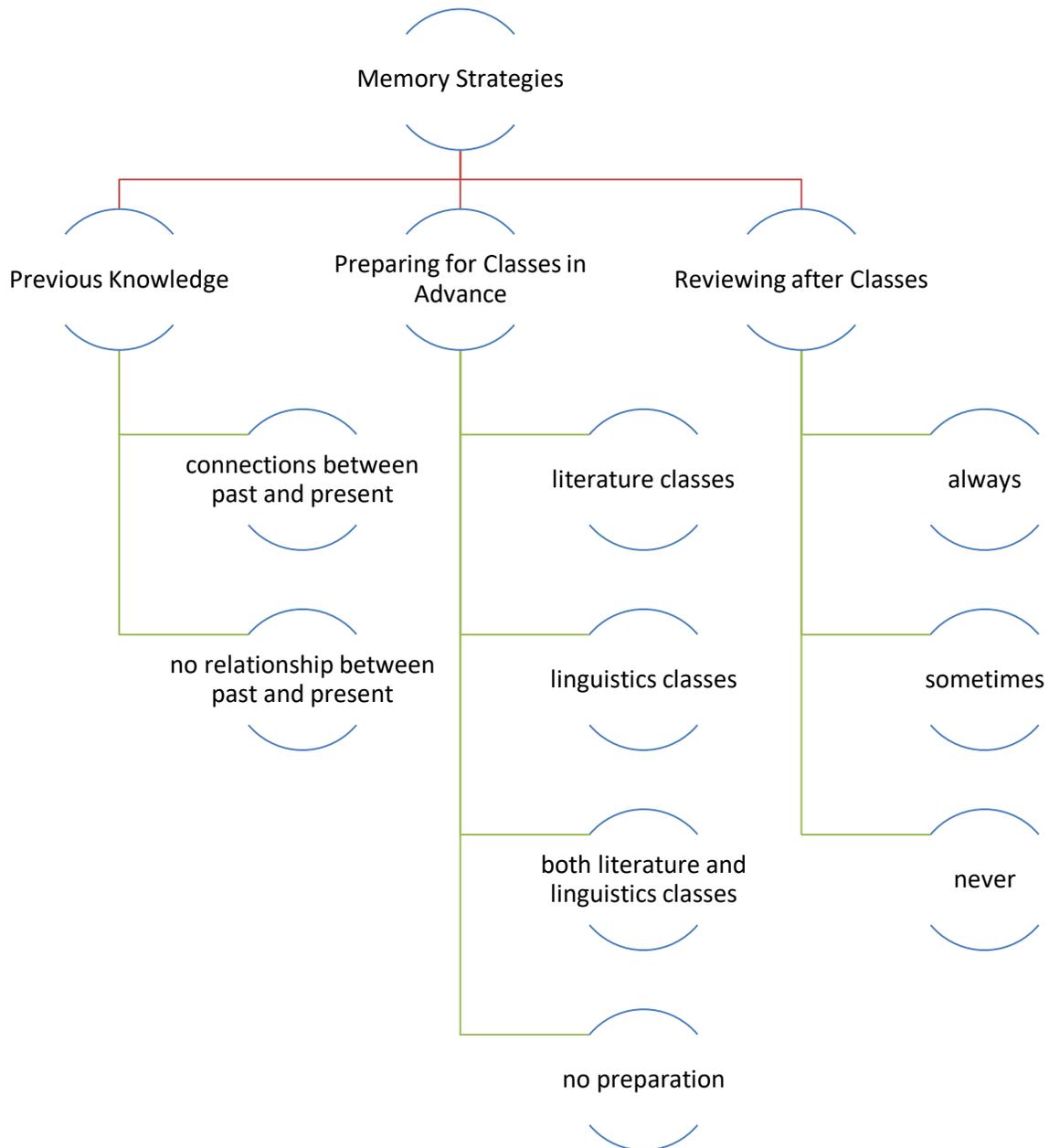
A few number of participants (about five) said there's no relationship between what they have learned in the past and what they are learning now. They believe that learning English at school is not satisfying and it is “nothing” in comparison with learning English at university. One of the students stated:

I don't think there is a relationship between what I have learned at school and what I'm learning now. The English we learn at school is really silly! We learn English for more than twelve years but we end up knowing nothing. I finished Tawjihi... I couldn't write a correct sentence! I learned the real English at university! I still need to improve my skills but I really made a big difference!

Some of them blame public schools for not teaching good English. In the words of one of the students:

There is no relationship between what I have learned at school and what I'm learning now! I studied at a public school... so ... what I'm learning now is so different ... so complicated and hard! It's more comprehensive!

(Figure 4.4) Memory Strategies: Themes and Sub-themes



Preparing for Classes in Advance

Some of the participants said they prepare for literature classes more than linguistics classes. Some of them affirmed that in linguistics classes, teachers keep lecturing and providing information all the time. They meant that there is no need to prepare for linguistics classes because they are very passive in such classes and that teachers do it all. One of the students stated:

I mostly prepare for drama classes. Actually I prepare for literature classes more than linguistics classes. In literature classes we analyze literary texts so we need to read the text and understand it in order to be able to participate and ready for questions." In linguistics classes we usually memorize information... teachers lecture all the time.

Other participants said that they prepare for literature classes because teachers ask them to prepare and give them quizzes. "*I prepare for literature classes because they ask us to prepare... and sometimes they give us quizzes*" in the words of one of the participants. Some of them keen to prepare before literature classes in order to be able to participate effectively.

Few participants said they prepare for linguistics classes more than literature classes. They prepare because they "love" linguistics or because they need to listen to the teacher and understand the subject being explained. One of those participants stated:

I prepare for linguistics classes... I love linguistics... in the department they suppose that good students go to literature seminars and weaker students go to linguistics seminars... I don't agree with them because I'm good in both literature and linguistics... but I prefer linguistics... and inshallah I will get a master's degree in linguistics.

Few participants said they prepare for both literature and linguistics classes. They believe preparing before classes help them participate effectively and answer teachers' questions. One of the participants said:

I prepare for both literature and linguistics classes. We all need to prepare before the classes in order to participate and be active and effective. For example, before literature classes I read the text, let's say a play, I try to analyze it... I read analysis on some websites... Sometimes I watch videos on YouTube. I do everything to understand the text and to be ready for any question from the teacher.

Some of the participants admitted they don't prepare before classes mostly because they don't have time to prepare. Some of them complained of the assignments that usually consume most of their time. *"I don't prepare... I don't have time to prepare... I spend time doing homework"* In the words of one of the interviews".

Reviewing after Classes

Few participants said they always review after their English classes. *"I always do that! When I go home I transcribe the notes I recorded during the lesson... so I review every day!"* one of the participants said.

Half of the participants said they only review before exams. *"I understand well and focus during the lessons... I only need to read and revise my notes before the exams"* in the words of one of the students. Others confirmed that they sometimes review after classes especially at the weekends and when there's something they didn't understand well. One of them stated:

I review after English classes when I feel I did not understand well...
I read my notes... I use the internet to understand... and sometimes
I ask the teacher to explain

Cognitive Strategies

This section presents subthemes under 'Cognitive Strategies': speaking like native speakers, reading for pleasure, writing, skimming, language transfer, word analysis, thinking in the target language and summarizing. Moreover it points out to frequency of using cognitive strategies in learning English as a foreign language (See Figure 4.5 below).

Speaking Like Native Speakers

Most of the participants affirmed they try to speak like native English speakers by imitating their accent and using idioms and everyday language they use. One of the participants stated:

Yes! I try to imitate the pronunciation... I like the American accent. When I watch movies I try to learn the way they pronounce certain words”.

Another student said,

I try to ‘swallow’ letters and merge words ‘you + have = you’ve’... I also try to use some expressions to be like native English speakers”.

Some of the participants explained that there is no need to speak like native English speakers.

“There is no need to speak like native English speaker... I want to learn the language...I’m here...

not to imitate those rude “natives”” in the words of one of the students. Other students argued that

there is no need to be like native speakers and the accent is not that important. One of them stated:

No! I need to learn the language... to understand it... not to imitate native speakers. It’s important to learn grammar and pronunciation... the accent is not that important .. it improves with practice”.

Initiating Conversations in English

Many participants admitted they don’t initiate conversations as much as they could for a number of reasons:

(a) Lack of opportunities to practice speaking English. *“The surrounding environment is not motivating at all... even the teachers speak in Arabic!”* as one of the students stated.

(b) Speaking English only in presentations.

(c) Friends don’t speak English.

(d) Fear of speaking English. *“We don’t practice speaking English here! I don’t have enough confidence to speak with native English speakers. We need to take speaking courses”*.

(e) One of the students emphasized.

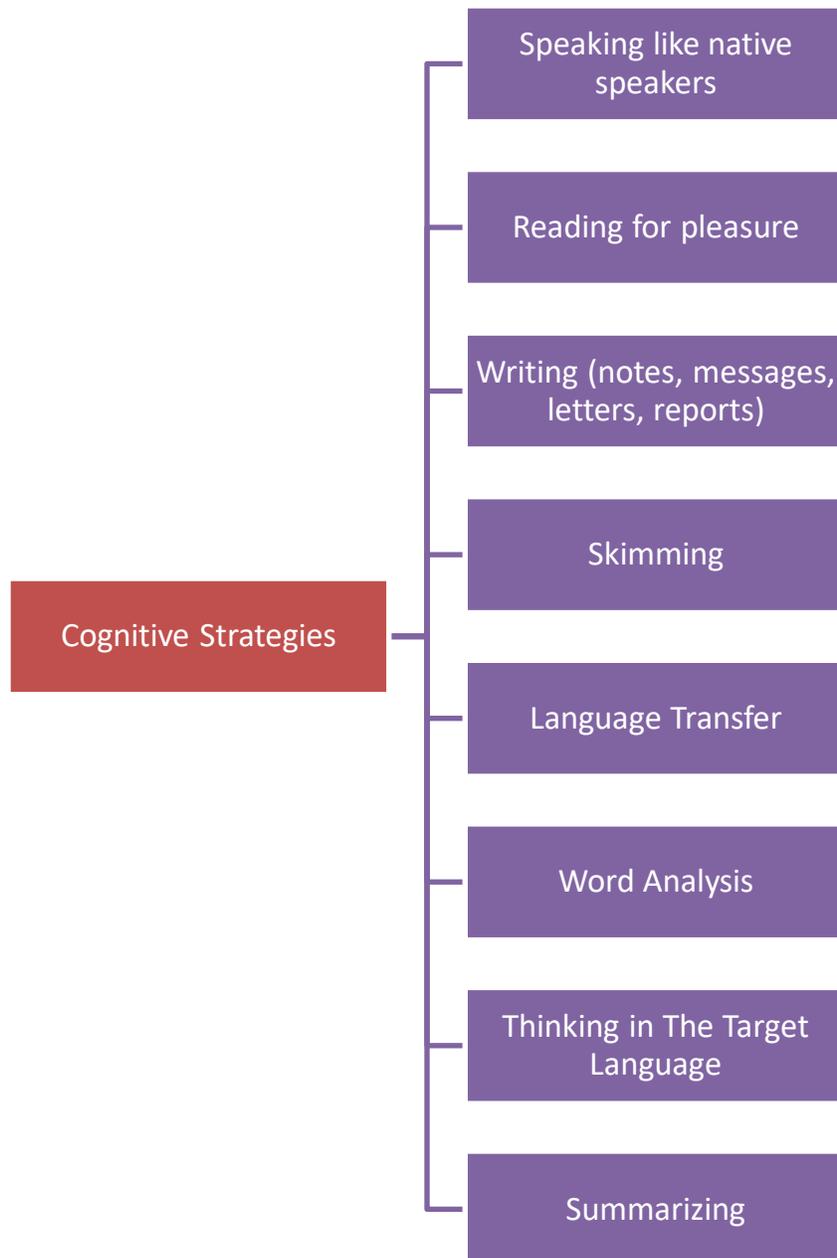
(f) People may think they are showing off.

(g) Native speakers make fun of them. One of the interviews said:

I try to speak and to initiate conversations but I hate it when some... I’m sorry to say it again... rude native speakers make fun of me...

they're really silly because they learned the language... no I mean they acquired it... we put effort to learn the language... they should understand this point and stop being that rude.

(Figure 4.5) Cognitive Strategies



Few of the participants reported they initiate conversations as much as they could. One of them said she speaks English when interacting with people on Facebook. Another confirmed she looks for people with whom she can speak English. *“YES! I look for people with whom I can speak English... I*

initiate conversations in English with my colleagues... my friends... my family... even when I talk to myself".

Reading for Pleasure

Some of the participants said they usually read for pleasure. They read novels, stories, online articles and historical books. One of them said she reads books and novels with simple language.

But the language of some books is very high... I feel depressed... I don't finish reading them! I read books and novels with simple language. I read reports about health and daily life

However, the majority admitted they don't read for pleasure for a number of reasons:

- (a) Lack of time
- (b) Getting bored fast
- (c) They don't like reading
- (d) They prefer reading summaries of novels and stories.
- (e) They prefer reading in Arabic.

One of the participants stated:

I try to read for pleasure... but sometimes I do not... especially when the book is boring! I prefer to read summaries... not full books! I read more in Arabic... I LOVE political books...I read about prisons and prisoners. I love politics more than literature... more than romantic and classical texts.

Writing (Notes, Messages, Letters, Reports)

Most of the participants reported they write notes, messages, letters and reports in English. They take notes during lessons, and mostly write essays and reports especially when teachers ask them to. One of the participants said: "*Yes, I do! I try to write in English as much as I could... because... when I write more I improve more and more*". Another student stated:

I chat with my colleagues in English... I also write notes in English. Teachers ask us to write reports and essays ... but there's no creativity... because they choose the subject and sometimes the resources we need to use.

Language Transfer

The majority of the participants said they look for words in Arabic that are similar to new words in English. One of them stated: *“Yes! This helps me memorize the new words”*. Some students reported they don't do so because Arabic and English are not similar languages. *“... But there is a huge difference between Arabic and English... they have different structures... Arabic and Hebrew... are Semitic languages ... they are so similar”* in the words of one of the students.

Word Analysis

Most of the participants confirmed that they find the meaning of English words by dividing them into prefixes, suffixes and stems that they understand. *“I omit the prefixes and the suffixes... I try to guess the meaning from the stem”* as one of the interviewees stated. Only two participants said they don't divide words into parts they understand.

Thinking in the Target Language

Many participants stated that they try to think in English. One of them stated:

I try to think in English... because when we think in Arabic and speak or write in English the speech or the text becomes weak... and when someone reads a text written by you... he or she can tell that you think in Arabic and translate... so I always try to avoid translation.

Another student said: *“Well... I try to think in English... It was hard for me to think in English... I practiced a lot... and now I can think in English... It takes more time when you think in English... but it's better”*.

Others admitted they sometimes translate word for word. *“Honestly, most of the time I translate word for word... the text is always ‘unsound’... maybe because I think in Arabic and write in English”* as one of them stated. Three students said they translate word for word when they translate Arabic texts into English. *“When I translate from Arabic into English .. I translate word for word”* in the words of one of them.

Summarizing

Summarizing is another strategy that students use during studying English. They reported that they make summaries before exams “*I summarize chapters included in the exam... I can’t memorize the whole book*” in the words of one of them. Others summarize after reading a novel. “*When I finish reading a novel I usually summarize it*” or when teachers asked them to do so.

Compensation Strategies

This section presents subthemes related to ‘Compensation Strategies’: ‘Guessing from the Context’, ‘Using dictionaries’, ‘Asking for Help’ and ‘Avoidance’. In addition, it sheds light on frequency of using compensation strategies in learning English as a foreign language (See Figure 4.6 below).

Guessing from the Context

The researcher asked the participants about what they might do if they do not understand the meaning of an English word. Most of them stated that they try to guess the meaning from the context as one of the participants stated: “*I try to guess the meaning form the context*”. They read a text or listen to a conversation and try to understand the meaning of certain words from the context.

Using Dictionaries

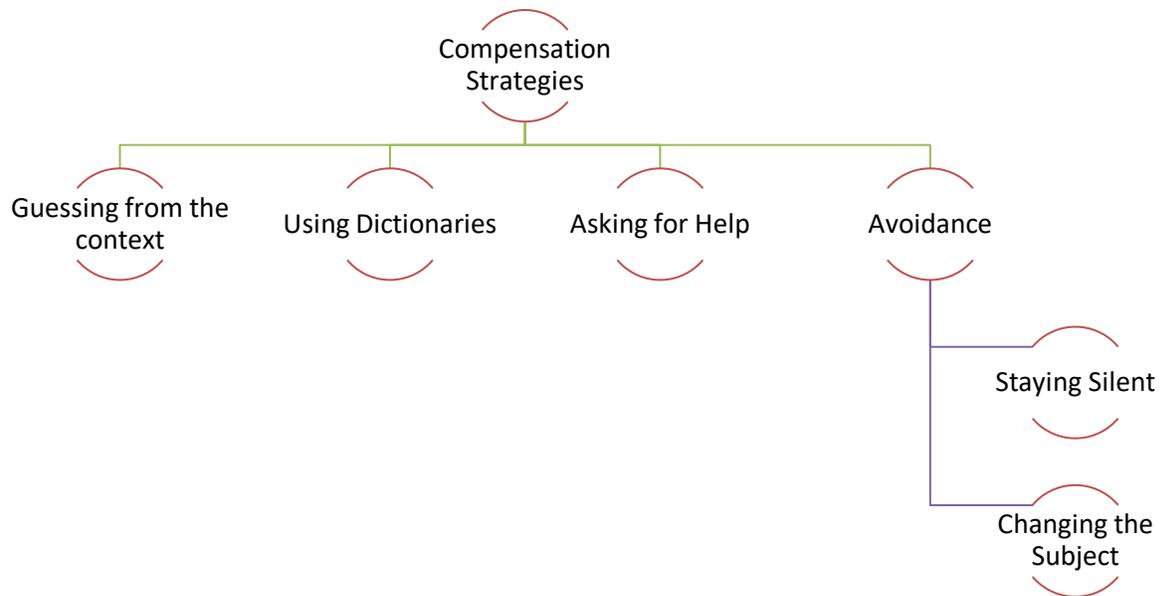
Other participants reported they use online and electronic dictionaries to look up words they did not understand. “*I use my electronic dictionary... I use it in translation classes.*” “*I use Google Translate*”.

Asking for Help

Some participants said that when they cannot think of a word during a conversation they usually ask for help. They seek assistance from instructors and colleagues who might help them use the right word or suggest another. “*I try to use a similar word... and... mmm... I sometimes ask for help... I ask the people I’m talking to suggest a good word*” in the words of one of the participants. Some of them do not directly

ask for help. Gestures and facial expressions express their need for urgent assistance. One of the participants said, “*I stammer until someone helps*”.

(Figure 4.6) Compensation Strategies



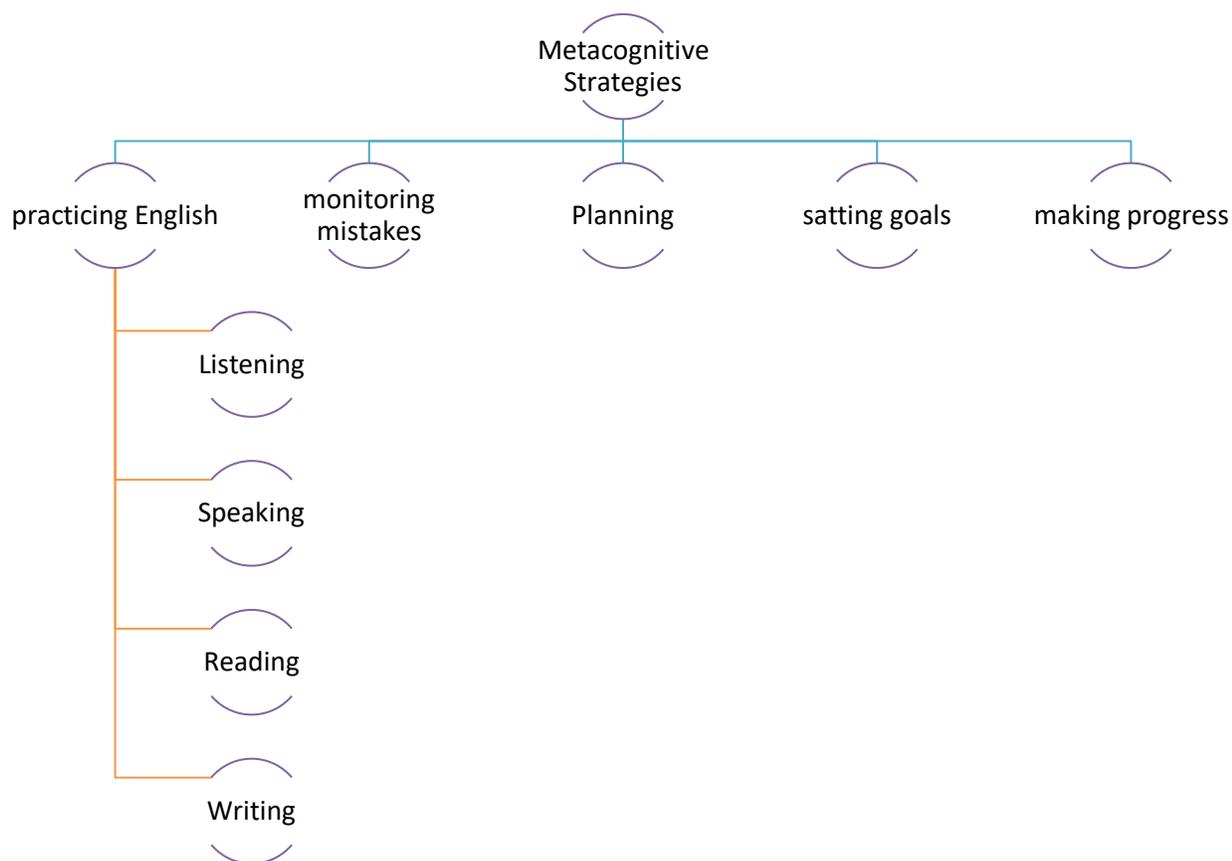
Avoidance

Some of the participants affirmed that when they cannot think of a word during a conversation and when they do not know the right word to use, they simply change the subject or stay silent as expressed by one of the participants: “*I stay silent*”. They do not have enough courage and confidence to use the language, so they tend to avoid speaking and interacting with others using English.

Metacognitive Strategies

Following is a representation of subthemes under ‘Metacognitive Strategies’ ‘Practicing English’, ‘Monitoring Learning’, ‘Planning’ and ‘Evaluating Improvement and Progress’, and an emphasis on frequency of using metacognitive strategies (See Figure 4.7).

(Figure 4.7) Metacognitive Strategies



Practicing English

Listening

In response to the question about how often they pay close attention when someone is speaking English, most of the participants stated that they usually pay attention. They watch movies and documentaries, listen to English conversations and listen to music because: (a) they enjoy listening to native speakers; (b) they learn new words and expressions; (c) they love the language, (d) people may ask them about what is being said, and (e) they need to assess their listening comprehension. One of the participants said “*ALWAYS! Not only because I’m an English major... I love the language... it attracts me*”; another interviewee stated:

I usually pay close attention even when people aren't talking to me... because someone may ask me to translate... especially my family. I have to listen to anybody speaks English... if I didn't translate to my family they will mock me... simply because I'm an ENGLISH MAJOR!"

Speaking

The majority of the participants said they don't practice speaking English because they feel afraid of speaking English and their family and friends don't speak English. "*I don't practice my English in my daily life... my friends and my family doesn't speak English*" one of the participants said. Only few of the interviews said they practice English with their friends or co-workers. "*I try to speak English with my co-workers*" as one of the participants stated. One of the participants said "*I make friendships with native speakers in order to benefit from them and to practice speaking English*".

Reading

Most of the participants reported they do not read in English. Those who read tend to read summaries and analysis of novels or poems, short stories and novels or historical books every day. "*Every day! I told you before... I prefer historical books... historical fiction*" in the words of one of the participants.

Writing

Some of the participants said they practice writing in English. They tend to write different kinds of essays and reports. They also write messages and posts on social media websites.

Monitoring Learning

Participants were asked about the way they monitor their English mistakes and use that information to help them do better. Most of them answered that they usually learn from their mistakes. One of them said "*I know that everyone makes mistakes but I really feel embarrassed*

when I make mistakes so I never make the same mistake. I learn from my mistakes”. Another one said:

I always do... I’m still learning... and everybody makes mistakes. I always learn from my mistakes... believe it or not... I love the mistakes... because they make me think of the language... they help me do better”.

Some of them think of the reasons behind making certain mistakes. “... I try to learn from my mistakes. If I make a mistake I try to know the reason why I made it. I write notes” as one of them put it. Other participants stated that exams results help them monitor their mistakes, writing help them edit and correct their mistakes. Some of them write down the mistakes they made so that they never forget them. One of the participants said:

I want to show you my notebook... look... I write my notes here... when I make mistakes I write them down here... look there's grammar mistakes, writing mistakes, spelling mistakes... etc. I write the mistake and correct it in this column... I always do that... this strategy helped me do less mistakes because I learn from the mistakes.

To correct their mistakes, some of them said they ask teachers to help them or use English learning websites.

Planning

In response to a question about the way they plan their daily schedule to allow them to study and practice English, most of the participants said they don’t have a learning plan. One of the participants said:

OMG! [Oh My God] I don’t want to remember! It’s a disaster! I don’t plan... and when I decide to plan... everything goes wrong. When I plan I literally do nothing! I only study before the exams...and sometimes... I surprisingly get good marks.

Even those who plan they have a hard time adhering to their plans. One of the students said:

I can't adhere to a plan... a daily schedule! Things happen automatically... I don't think of what I have to do... I know that I'm losing so many chances to improve my language... I'm depressed.

Even though the majority of the participants reported that they do not plan, most of them have certain goals to improve their English skills. These goals include learning new words and expressions, improving listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation skills. For learning new words one of the participants said: *"I think I need to learn new words... I want to open the dictionary and memorize one, two, three, four, five words. I need to add new words to "my dictionary" "*". Another participant who would like to improve her language skills said;

I know that if I go to the States I will speak English fluently... but... for sorry... my family will never ever allow me to go there... even if I get a scholarship they will not allow me to travel alone. So my major goals are to read more books, to write more advanced essays and to interact with native English speakers

Another goal the participants mentioned is improving self-confidence and getting rid of fear and anxiety. In the words of one of the participants *"I also need to feel more confident... to get rid of fear and anxiety"*. Other goals the participants reported is to continue learning English and improve their language skills even after graduation. *"After graduation I will take conversation courses in the AmidEast"* one of the participants stated. Travelling to English speaking countries to learn the language and the culture is another goal the participants talked about. One of them stated *"to speak the language fluently... to travel to the UK, Canada and the States to learn the language and... the culture... the ideas... the beliefs... lifestyle"*

Evaluating Improvement and Progress

Participants mentioned several ways that they use in order to gauge their progress in learning the language. Some of them said that they evaluate themselves. In the words of one of them:

I evaluate myself when I talk to others... especially native speakers. I evaluate my performance in presentations. I do not take into account the teachers' evaluation because they depend on particular assignments and exams... on marks

Others said they notice improvement in their language skills. One of the participants said:

When I talk to others, I feel that my speaking skills are better than before. When I read or watch movies... I feel that my listening and reading comprehension... significantly improved

Affective Strategies

This section presents 'Dealing with Negative Feelings', 'Staying Motivated' and 'Maintaining Positive Desire' as related to 'Affective Strategies' Pointing out to frequency of using affective strategies among the participants (See Figure 4.8)

(Figure 4.8) Affective Strategies



The researcher asked the participants several questions about the way they feel learning English and how they deal with both positive and negative feelings. Two themes emerged from the participants' responses: encouragement and avoidance.

Dealing with Negative Feelings

Some students said they can control negative feelings while learning English. They encourage themselves to speak in English when they are afraid of making a mistake or people make fun of them. Four participants stated they speak confidently and pretend they are ok. One of the participants said: *"People don't make fun of me because I'm not bad... I'm good... very*

good! but when I feel afraid I try to laugh and pretend that I'm ok". Others said that self-talk help them feel better. Moreover, self-confidence helps them get rid of fear and anxiety. *"I always feel afraid but this feeling never prevents me from speaking... I speak with native speakers... I participate in class... I give presentations"* as one of interviewees mentioned. Some of them reported they don't care if people make fun of them. One of them added that remembering her goals help her control negative feelings.

Keeping Motivated

To keep motivated participants reported that they do a variety of things. These include talking a day off and relaxing, going shopping, buying a new book or a gift to oneself, and talking to their parents about their achievement. In the words of one of the participants *"when I achieve something really special I take a day off... I study nothing... I just relax and enjoy life with my family"*. Another participant stated:

I talk to my parents about what I have done. It's the best reward for me! Yesterday we discussed a novel with Dr. Ahmad Harb and he admired one of my comments about the education in China during the cultural revolution .. I felt really happy .. and I wrote more about this issue

A number of participants added that feeling happy and satisfied is the best reward from their point of view. *"Happiness and satisfaction are the real rewards"* as one of them put it.

Maintaining Positive Desire:

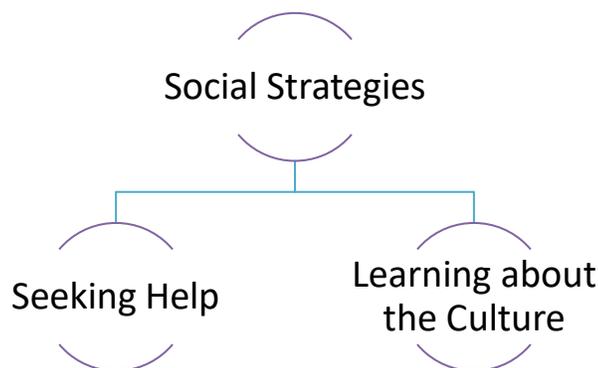
To maintain volition to keep learning some of the participants reported that they usually talk to their friends, instructors, or family members (e.g. parents, sisters, husbands). One of them said *"I usually talk to my family. It's like a reflection... a healthy outlet. Actually, studying English wasn't my choice... it was my parents' choice!"*.

Social Strategies

‘Seeking Help’ and ‘Learning about the Culture’ are subthemes presented in this section.

Frequency of using social strategies is also emphasized (See Figure 4.9)

(Figure 4.9) Social Strategies



While interviewing the participants they demonstrated use of some social strategies while learning the language and using it. Two main themes emerged from the participants’ responses: seeking help and learning about the culture.

Seeking Help

Many participants indicated they seek help from others when they don’t understand someone speaking to them in English. Most of them said they ask the speaker to slow down or say it again. “*I ask them to say it again... I ask them “what do you mean?”*” in the words of one of them. Moreover, some of them ask people to correct them when they make mistakes. “*When I make mistakes I ask the people I’m talking to ... to correct my mistakes*” a participant stated. Others try to use gestures, facial expressions and body language to show they didn’t understand.

Learning about the Culture

Participants stated they try to learn about the target culture by: (a) watching movies, documentaries, series and TV shows, (b) reading books and novels, (c) listening to songs, (d) using social media websites (e.g. Facebook), and (e) asking native speakers about the culture.

Some participants believe that in such an open world it is so easy to know more about different cultures and people. *“Watching movies ... listening to music! It’s so easy to learn about the culture in such a globalized world”*. *“Native speakers reflect the culture... in their behaviors!”* another student stated.

Autonomous Learning Levels

Motivating One’s Self

Most of the participants reported that they always motivate themselves to learn English independently. To motivate themselves they are engaged in a variety of practices. (See Figure 3.1) Such practices include using interesting materials (e.g. reading short stories and exciting online articles), listening to songs, watching movies, funny TV shows and series, learning with other students. *“I try to choose materials that interest me .. I also motivate myself by learning with other students”* in the words of one of the students. Listening to native speakers, attending workshops, writing about interesting issues are other practices used. One of the participants said *“I write about interesting issues .. I use interesting materials”*. Practicing grammar exercises online, using checklists and communicating with relatives who live in the US are some other practices.

Other activities that the participants mentioned to motivate themselves include imagining instructors that motivate them, loving the language. *“I don’t know... it’s an internal motivation... I love the language and I really want to improve myself”* one of the participants said. The desire to learn English because it is a prestigious and universal language. One of the participants said:

English is an international language! All people around the world understand this language .. learning this language can help me interact with people around the world .. China .. India .. Somalia! Everywhere.

The participants also motivated extrinsically. Most of them stated they want to learn English in order to be able to get a good job and communicate in English. *“I need to get a good job .. I want to be able to communicate with the whole world! English is dominating the world”*.

Another student stated:

My brother speaks English fluently and he keeps making fun of me ..of my speaking. I really want to be like him! I want to improve my writing .. and my speaking .. I want to be like native English speakers.

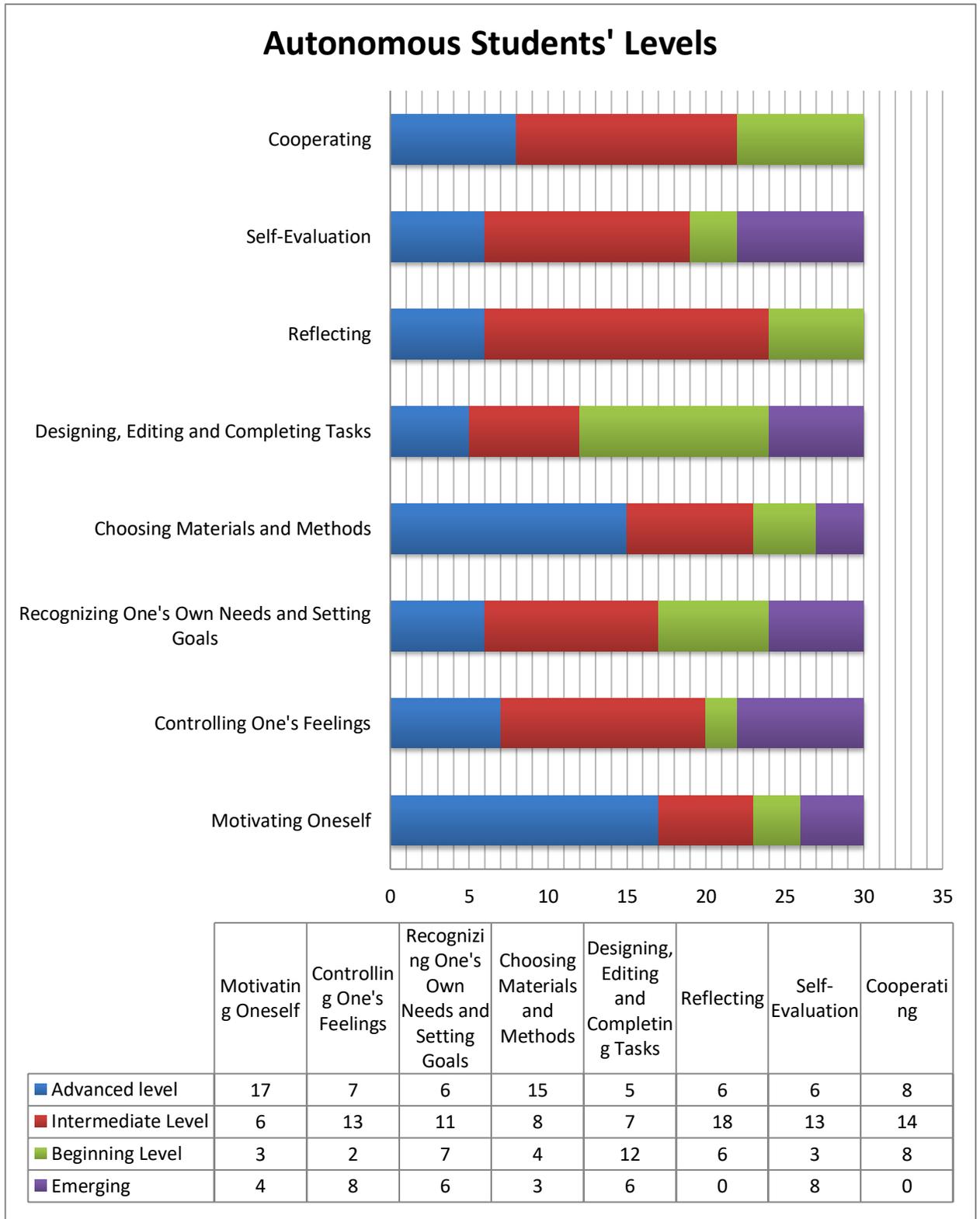
On the other hand, few of the participants stated that they are not motivated and cannot learn independently. They prefer to depend on their instructors. *“I can't learn English independently... teachers know what we need to learn... They are professional... They have a plan for us...”* in the words of one of the participants. One of the participants admitted she knows she can learn English independently but she is not motivated and putting enough effort to improve this ability. She stated:

I know I can learn English independently but I don't put effort to do so... I want to tell you something! My father forced me to study English he said: “English .. or .. nothing”.. that's why I'm not that motivated. I like the language but I hate the way they teach it .. so boring!

Controlling One's Feelings

Approximately half of the participants stated that they try to stay positive and try to get rid of negative feelings while learning English. They try to control negative feelings to prevent them from affecting their learning. One of the participants said *“I control myself... I don't let people notice when I have negative feelings... if I surrender to such feelings I'll end up doing nothing”*. *“I try to get rid of bad ideas... I told you that I practice so much before presentations.. I do so to minimize fear and to look confident and prepared”* another student stated.

(Figure 4.10) Students' Levels of Autonomy



Some of the strategies that they use to control negative feelings are talking to their parents or teachers about the way they feel learning English, about their achievement, and the challenges they face. One of the participants emphasized that feelings should be dealt with rationally. In her words

Aha!! Negative and positive feelings should be treated rationally...if you let positive feelings make you lazy and arrogant then you're a LOSER! And similarly if negative feelings make you feel useless or good-for-nothing then you're also a LOSER! I try to control my feelings both positive and negative to be successful.

The other half of the participants admitted they could not control their negative feelings that, in a way or another, affect their learning. “*Negative feelings such as hesitancy and fear are really affecting my learning*” one of the participants said. Another one stated:

I can't control negative feelings .. THEY CONTROL ME .. I feel sad and blame myself! But when I feel satisfied .. for example .. mm ..it's really good .. it's motivating!

Recognizing One's Own Needs and Setting Goals

The majority of the participants reported they tend to depend on teachers' evaluation and needs assessment. “*Teachers evaluate my skills and analyze my needs... they know more than me! I don't know how to evaluate myself... they have rubrics, checklists and the answers*” in the words of one of the participants. Some of the participants stated they are able to evaluate their language skills and analyze their needs. They use checklists and rubrics to assess their needs and improvement. One of them stated:

I use checklists... I love checklists because they help you know what you have learned... what you have achieved and what you need to learn and improve. Sometimes teachers give us checklists and rubrics to evaluate ourselves... they also use rubrics to evaluate our writings.

When setting learning goals, those handful of participants take into account: (a) their language skills and needs, (b) their learning competencies and preferences, (c) their learning

style, (d) materials they need to use, and (e) time and place. *“My learning preferences and my needs. I also take into account the time I need to achieve my goals”* in one of the students words.

Choosing Materials and Methods

A few of the participants only could be considered at an advanced level in choosing materials to help them learn and improve their English. This group of students uses various kinds of materials and resources such as websites, movies, novels, songs, YouTube videos, summaries, magazines, stories, essays, books, textbooks, dictionaries, communicating with native and fluent speakers, TV shows and CDs. When choosing materials they take into account their goals and needs, , learning style, skills, preferences, effectiveness of the materials and nature and goals of the assignment. The other participants (the majority) follow the outline and use materials suggested by their instructors. *“Teachers usually suggest materials and resources... according to the task.”* *“Teachers tell us which materials to use”* in the words of some of the participants.

Tasks Completion

Only a minority of the participants could be considered at the autonomous advanced level in this activity. They always organize their time to design and complete tasks. They design some tasks and complete them based on their needs and skills. One of them put it this way:

I design and edit some tasks... I don't depend on the English courses I'm taking at the university... I do other tasks to improve my language independently. Sometimes I perform tasks I find on English teaching websites.

Another few participants reported that they partially design learning tasks and activities. They modify instructors' designed tasks and complete them as part of the course requirements. *“Teachers design and edit tasks... but sometimes they allow us to make some changes”* one of the participants sated.

Most of the participants could be considered at the beginning level pertaining to this autonomous activity. They reported that they rarely design and complete tasks on their own. They follow instructors' instructions and perform what they ask them to do. "*We don't have the chance to design or edit tasks... teachers give us tasks they designed*" in the words of one of the participants. Another participant stated: "*I can't design or edit a task. We are not allowed to. We only complete previously designed tasks*".

Reflection

All participants reported that they always reflect on themselves as foreign language learners. In particular, they always reflect exclusively on their strengths and weakness. Some of the strengths that they mentioned include remembering new words, writing good essays and reports, skimming and scanning, observing language structures and patterns, analyzing literary texts, preparing presentations and explaining issues, using the internet professionally and speaking clearly and confidently. Some of them talked about strengths in their personality such as self-confidence and persistence, the ability to learn, ambitious and being self-motivated.

The vast majority reported that speaking is their major weakness. In the words of one of the participants:

Speaking! Mainly speaking! I don't have many opportunities to improve my language... I don't participate in the discussions... I'm always afraid because my colleagues may make fun of me when I make mistakes

Some of them added that they always reflect on ways to improve their pronunciation, listening comprehension, and writing. Few of them always reflect on how fear and lack of concentration are affecting their learning negatively.

Self –Evaluation

All participants reported that they always evaluate their competencies and progress in improving their English. They believe they are not making major progress in improving the language skills due to contextual and personal affective factors. Some of the contextual factors that are hindering their progress are the atmosphere at the university, need for more advanced courses, lack of daily exposure to English and lack of opportunities to practice English. In the word of one of the participants *“the not motivating environment here at the university. “They neglect low performing students”*. Fear of speaking and making mistakes, tension, low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, laziness, boredom, frustration and lack of motivation are some of the affective and personal factors that thwart participants from making progress. One of the participants stated:

Honestly? Not putting so much effort to improve my language... not being motivated... and maybe caring too much about what people may think... I mean... their criticism.

Cooperating

Two third of the participants reported that they always learn with and from others. They stated that that cooperation helps them improve their language. They cooperate with others when planning, making presentations, selecting materials and resources. In the words of one of the participants commenting on when she cooperates with others *“when selecting materials... it helps... more students... more ideas... variety in materials and resources”*. Other methods the participants reported that they cooperate with other learners are when they prepare for exams, doing a project or a task. On the other hand, the remaining ten participants prefer individual work. They prefer to do tasks by themselves.

The Role of University Instructors

Participants' responses reflect two points of view about teachers' role in assisting them in developing their autonomous learning levels to reach their highest desired level. Some of the participants stated that it is not teachers' responsibility to help them develop their autonomous learning levels. Some indicated that teachers do encourage them to improve their language and to become more creative. *"Most of them encourage us to be creative... they encourage us to learn individually... to choose different materials and resources"* in the words of one of the participants. The problem, according to a number of participants, is their intrinsic motivation. One of the interviewees stated *"they have to do nothing! If students don't have intrinsic motivation to learn the language independently NOTHING in the world can motivate them!"*. Although teachers do encourage students, they are not putting enough effort. One of the students emphasizing this point that students are not exerting the required effort stated:

We're not kids! We can guide ourselves we can motivate ourselves... we have the power and the ability... but we underestimate ourselves... we're lazy... it's easier to blame others... it's better to think rationally and to become active... active learners... not passive.

On the other hand, some participants claim that teachers keep lecturing and do not motivate them to learn independently. *"Most of the teachers keep lecturing... they keep talking! They don't motivate us to learn independently. We are passive most of the time"* as one of the students put it.

In order to assist them to become autonomous and active learners participants would their instructors to stop treating them as passive objects. One of the participants argued:

They [instructors] should stop treating us as passive objects! They want us to follow their directions and that's it... they don't want to get tired... it easier for them to treat us in the same way. That's why they don't allow us to participate in designing tasks and making evaluations.

They would like their instructors to let them participate in choosing the material, the resources required for some courses and participating in designing the learning tasks. From their perspective, this allows them to be active and improve their autonomous learning levels. In this regard, one of the students stated:

They should not force us to use particular materials and resources... especially the textbook! They should train us to look for information...to improve our skills and our knowledge individually. In literature classes they should allow us to analyze from our point of view not from THEIR point of view. I think when we reach to the point that we are able to explain what we have learned... then we are fully autonomous... we reach to the highest desired level”

Another student stated:

They could encourage us to learn individually... they should give us the chance to design tasks and choose the materials... and I think it's a matter of choice ... if you choose to learn you learn.

To help them, become autonomous learners some students would like their English instructors to let them work on projects rather than the mere provision of information. One student stated *“they should ask us to do projects not to memorize information and take exams”*. Differentiating the methods of instruction is also emphasized by other participants. *“They should use more interesting and modern instructional method... they need to stop lecturing and help us become active”* in the words of one of the participants. Another participant summarized this point succinctly:

Well... they should use various kinds of instructional methods to meet all students' preferences and learning styles. They should also encourage us to learn individually ... to depend on ourselves...they should help us feel free to use the materials and methods we choose... to think... they want us to believe in their ideas...their points of view ... their analysis... and that's really bad... and old-fashioned.

Further, the participants would like their instructors to stop spoon-feeding them. *“They have to assist us to be creative and responsible for our learning. They spoon-feed us! Even when we want to be creative and think out of the box...some of them don’t like it”* as one of the participants stated.

Summary

This chapter presented major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data collected. The first section that represents the first major themes “Language Learning Strategies” explained the way students deal with different kinds of strategies “memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social”. It focused on issues such as preparing for classes in advance, speaking like native speakers, practicing English, monitoring learning, dealing with feelings and learning about the culture. Students’ practices and preferences were explained in details.

The second section represented levels of autonomy among 4th year English major university students. Results revealed that the majority of the graduating English majors enjoy an advanced level of autonomy in self-motivation and choosing materials. In addition, many of the participants are at the intermediate level pertaining to reflecting, cooperating, controlling feelings and self-evaluation. On the other hand, many participants are at the beginning or emerging level pertaining to designing, editing and completing tasks, and recognizing their needs and setting goals.

The third section presented results regarding role of university English instructors in enhancing autonomy among English majors. Results revealed two different points of view. Few Participants pointed out that it is not the teachers’ responsibility to help them develop their autonomous learning levels and that their lack of motivation is the reason behind having a low level of autonomy while the other point of view blames university instructors for using traditional instructional methods and not enhancing autonomy among their students.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion

This study focused on finding out autonomous learning strategies used by a graduating class of non-native English speakers whose major is English language and literature. Moreover, it investigated levels of autonomy among students and roles of university instructors in developing their autonomous learning levels to reach their highest desired level. These students have been learning English for almost sixteen years. They learned English for twelve years at the schools before they joined university. At university they spent four years majoring in English. Results of the study show that the majority of these graduating English majors enjoy an advanced level of autonomy in particular autonomous activities such as self-motivation and choosing materials. In addition, many of the participants are at the intermediate level pertaining to reflecting (18 students), cooperating (14 students), controlling feelings (13 students) and self-evaluation (13 students). On the other hand, many participants are at the beginning or emerging level pertaining to designing, editing and completing tasks, and recognizing their needs and setting goals.

Many of the participants reported that it is their instructors' responsibility to improve and enhance their autonomous levels. They would like their instructors to engage them in the learning process and encourage them to design activities that promote autonomy such as working on projects individually and cooperatively instead of spoon-feeding them. In addition, they recommend that their instructors use motivating instructional methods to help them become autonomous learners.

Palestinian English language majors are in dire need of training and instruction that develops and improves their autonomy and assist them to become life-long learners. To achieve this, university English language instructors need first to be aware of their students' autonomous levels and design activities and tasks that enhance these levels. This is very vital particularly for English majors who need to continue learning and improving their command of English after graduation. It is essential to professionally and continuously develop pedagogy and content to improve learners' English proficiency especially since most of the graduates will become English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers.

The current study is very informative since it highlights vital issues that university English department professors and instructors need to be aware of. They are required to provide support and attention to students majoring in English after finishing high school. The nature of the major (English) and the type of students who choose to major in a language other than their mother tongue is challenging. Accordingly, university instructors should reflect on their instructional practices in light of the results of the present study. Such reflection will help them design classroom and outside classroom activities that assist students in becoming autonomous, life-long learners after they graduate. This is expected to positively influence foreign language learners' achievement that they teach when they become teachers.

Having autonomous life-long English language learners who became EFL teachers will assist enormously in creating school learners who have a high command in English. Some of these high school graduates will major in English language and literature. Having non-native English speakers who have already a high level in English is a great achievement. Students' level and proficiency in English could be continuously enhanced by university English instructors when they change their instructional methods to create autonomous language learners.

Autonomous Learning Strategies Used by 4th Year English Majors

The first research question that guided this study aimed to find out autonomous learning strategies that 4th year English major university students use. Participants highlighted a range of practices which reflect use of both direct and indirect strategies. Their responses indicated that many of them use language learning strategies unconsciously and without really knowing they are using strategies or what kind of strategies they are.

Participants are aware of the importance of activating the previous knowledge before dealing with the new knowledge. They use what they have learned in the past to target gaps in their knowledge in particular areas or subjects and to create a bridge and draw connections between previous knowledge and the new materials. This reminds us of the constructivist theory of learning which confirms that the new knowledge is constructed from the previous knowledge. Piaget focused on this issue and indicated that learners combine experience and prior knowledge.

Some of the participants pointed out that they can't build bridges between the previous and the new knowledge because there are differences between learning at school and at university. At university the English they learn is way more advanced from what they have learned at school. They study the language deeply, deal with different kinds of literary works and themes, and analyze aspects of English texts (linguistic, cultural, historical ...etc.). In addition, they learn how to criticize literary works in light of theories and approaches and discuss different interpretations of texts. Moreover, they write in different genres and study linguistics (phonetics, phonology and morphology, syntax) to develop their fluency and accuracy. In contrast, learning English at school is often ineffective. Although the Palestinian curriculum is 'supposed' to be developing higher order thinking skills among students and helping them communicate freely and effectively, most of the students end up 'knowing' very poor English. Many schools and

teachers don't deal with English as a priority and keep focusing on grammar and vocabulary rather than on listening and reading comprehension, practicing speaking and interacting with native English speakers. Moreover, many teachers are not qualified to teach English effectively. They lack knowledge, accuracy, fluency, instructional and assessment strategies. On the other hand, many students have negative attitude towards learning English and tend to depend on their teachers as the main source of information. It should be noted, however, that there is a number of elite private schools (e.g. Ramallah Friends Schools, American School of Palestine) serving Palestinian students and particularly those returning to the area from the States and graduating students with high English proficiency.

Participants discussed their practices before and after attending English classes. Some of them pointed out that they prepare for literature classes more than linguistics classes. They feel they have to prepare for literature classes to avoid criticism and embarrassment because teachers ask them to prepare and give them quizzes. Additionally, if they understand some basics in linguistics, they can build on this 'previous knowledge' and understand the new material even if they didn't prepare. On the contrary, if, for example, they didn't read a novel and they know nothing about it, they cannot answer any question related to it. Some of them prepare for literature classes simply because they love literature. Those who prefer literature tend to be good readers and have interest in culture, history ...etc.

Few participants said they prepare for linguistics classes more than literature classes because they "love" linguistics or because they need to listen to the teacher and understand the subject being explained. Those who prefer linguistics tend to prepare to be able to participate and answer questions. This leads us to think of the way learners' emotions and attitudes affect their learning preferences and levels.

Other participants stated they prepare for both linguistics and literature classes. They believe preparing before classes help them participate effectively and answer teachers' questions. Regardless of their preferences, they prepare for both because they refuse to be passive. They work hard to be active, effective and high achievers.

Many participants admitted they don't prepare before classes. Some of them argue they have no time to prepare. In fact, it seems that distraction and lack of motivation are the major reasons behind lack of preparation. Distraction is usually caused by chaos and interruption caused by smartphones' applications, social media websites, games and chatting with friends. Most importantly, absence of a learning plan and, consequently, lack of objectives and expected outcomes lead to demotivation and lack of preparation. Those who really don't have time to prepare have a heavy work schedule and can't handle stress caused by studying at university and working at the same time. They are unable to manage time and effort effectively.

Only two participants stated they review after English classes. It seems that they are aware of the fact that if they don't review, information will be lost gradually. In contrast, the vast majority of the participants said they only review before exams. They believe that preparing for exams is a strenuous mission so they keep avoiding it until the last minute when there is a threat of failing in the exam. Many students count on last night cramming and end-up sleep deprived the day before the exam. They might think that it is better for them to study at the last minute because if they study a long period before the exam they forget the material. This may lead us to also blame the system which is built on attending classes and taking exams during the semester and at the end of the semester. This system is also the reason why they keep postponing reviewing until the last minute.

Another issue that was discussed with the participants is speaking like native speakers. We cannot deny the fact that it is prestigious to speak English fluently. Students aim to look intellectual since English is the language of science and media industry. Moreover, speaking English fluently opens more opportunities for getting a good job. Some of them don't mind speaking English with the accent of their native language (Arabic) even if their strong accent affected comprehension of the people they are interacting with. They consider learning the accent a waste of time arguing that as long as the receiver understands what is being said, there is no need to learn the accent. Others may think they cannot get the accent since they are adults and 'unable' to acquire the language and speak it like kids. When an Arab kid, for example, moves to the states, he/she acquires the language and perfects the accent. In contrast, adults tend to have some strong accent when they learn the language in later stages.

Students don't have opportunities to practice speaking English. They need more inclusive, motivating and respectful environment. English classrooms are supposed to be more dynamic, effective and fun. Drama classes, for example, should train students to be more creative and imaginative and improve their speaking through initiating conversations and representing scenes. On the other hand, many students don't get enough support and encouragement at home because their family members don't speak English, don't appreciate speaking English, or make fun of them when they try to speak English. Moreover, students' personalities (introverts vs. extroverts) affect their tendency to practice speaking English and initiating conversations with others.

Some of the participants expressed avoidance when they cannot think of a word during a conversation and when they do not know the right word to use. They simply change the subject or stay silent. Reasons behind avoidance may include: fear of making mistakes, worrying about people's criticism (face saving), low self-esteem and frustration, comparing themselves with other students (fluent or native speakers) and lack of using English out of class (in their daily

life). They don't participate during lessons and stay anxious because teachers call on students to answer questions. They feel shy and afraid of asking or answering questions in class. Peer-pressure makes them feel afraid of negative evaluation especially if they have poor vocabulary, pronunciation or grammar. Other reasons include: being not sure of what to say or how to say it, thinking in Arabic and translating into English, having poor pronunciation and inability to express themselves using English. It is obvious; therefore, that psychological factors, negative feelings and linguistic barriers prevent students from practicing speaking and improving their language.

On the other hand, ability to control negative feelings while learning English, having the courage to speak in English when they are afraid of making a mistake or people make fun of them, self-empowerment with positive self-talk and positive coping statements, keeping eyes on learning goals, knowing priorities, and managing time and effort to enhance learning are reasons behind having some students who have the confidence and the courage to speak in English even if they are not fluent. They start thinking of mistakes as a motive for improvement. Making mistakes motivate them to improve their language so that they can avoid making the same mistakes again and again. This depends on students' personality and ability to control stress and negative feelings. Fear, lack of confidence and avoidance can prohibit learning.

Presentations are sometimes the only chance to speak in English. Even those who prefer to stay silent have no choice but to speak when they have presentations. Many students tend to memorize the content of the presentation hoping to avoid making mistakes. They speak better than in ordinary situations because when they have presentations they talk about something they prepared for previously.

Reading is the 'perfect' activity that improves verbal abilities and linguistic inventory and enhances imagination and creativity. Unfortunately, many participants are considered non-

readers. They lack skills and strategies used by ‘professional’ readers. Reasons behind not having reading as a habit may include considering it an ‘intimidating activity’. This stems from lacking effective reading strategies that help them read efficiently taking into consideration the nature of the text. In addition, having poor vocabulary, distraction, lack of motivation towards reading because they simply think there is no reason to read and having a heavy schedule are other reasons behind not considering reading a pleasant activity. It is possible that some of them lost the track and didn’t find the book that will awaken their passion for reading. On the other hand, those who read spend their time wisely, improve their speaking and writing skills, enhance their imagination, creativity and memory, and become more reflective and critical.

Writing is also a ‘great’ activity which helps language learners improve their language skills and organize their ideas and thoughts. One of the challenges facing foreign language learners is literal translation. Many participants confirmed they avoid literal translation (word-for-word translation). They possibly avoid it because literal translation may help understand the meaning of a text without showing its beauty and coherence, however. Literal translation of idioms, for example, may result in vague sentences or silly jokes.

Other participants admitted they sometimes translate word-for-word. They should interact with native speakers, read intensively and practice speaking and listening so that they can stop translating and start thinking in English. Thinking in Arabic and translating may result from using English – Arabic dictionaries rather than English-English dictionaries. Moreover, learning the language focusing on grammar and vocabulary memorization prevent students from ‘experiencing’ the language and speaking it fluently.

Translating Arabic texts into English may also be confusing or complicated for some participants. This refers to the fact that it is difficult to find a suitable equivalent and that they may end up writing run-on sentences or repeating expressions and synonyms to emphasize an

idea or a message. Students need to read different kinds of texts to learn the way English is written and expressions are used especially because English and Arabic have different writing systems.

Most of the participants studied at public schools. After twelve years of studying English at school they end up having low level of English proficiency. Therefore, when they start studying at university, and some of them choose to major in English, most of them are usually in elementary, pre-intermediate or low-intermediate levels. Writing is one of the skills that students find difficulties with. Many of them can't write short paragraphs or even sentences. When they study English at university they practice writing different kinds of essays, reports, CVs, etc. The more they write the more they improve their writing skills. Many of the participants claimed that they made a real progress in writing in comparison to their level in their 1st year at university. So, writing good essays is an indication to improvement they have made while studying English as a Foreign Language.

Other indicators to making progress (from students' point of view) include: improving their ability to analyze literary works, getting good marks and teachers' assessment and feedback. Students assess their current language level in comparison with their previous level and think of the practices that may help them continue improving their language. Some of them don't use checklists or rubrics; rather they 'observe' their performance in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Many people watch movies or read novels without thinking deeply of the symbols and hidden messages behind the text/scenes. English majors tend to be more critical when they read a literary text or watch a documentary or a movie. They practice analyzing and criticizing literary texts in literature classes so they use this knowledge in their daily life when they read or watch something. Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness', for example, is not simply a series of events

that readers follow to enjoy the story. It's full of themes (e.g. imperialism, evil), motifs and symbols (fog, river, whited sepulture). So those who are used to analyze literary texts enjoy the events and understand the issue that the novel sheds light on. Their ability to criticize literary texts reflects the progress they have made after four years of studying English at university.

Getting good marks in exams, essays or presentations may indicate that students are making progress and improving their language. They are intended to measure students' knowledge and language skills. But we should ask ourselves: Are exams and other assessment tools well prepared and designed so that they can assess students' performance in particular areas? What do teachers take into account when they write exams' questions? How do they decide on which answer is better? What makes an answer a typical answer? What does the exam evaluates (remembering, understanding, applying, memorization, analysis, synthesis)?

Some of the participants stated that teachers' assessment help them know the extent of progress they have made. Full dependence on teachers' feedback may reflect lack of confidence, lack of motivation and lack of awareness of their needs and areas that need improvement. It appears that they don't think deeply and critically of their learning process.

Some participants reported that they need to improve their listening comprehension. They live in an Arabic speaking community so most of them are not exposed to English and don't practice it that much. Many of them tend to listen to native speakers, watch movies and TV programs and listen to songs. However, some of them still need to improve their listening comprehension. Reasons behind students' poor listening comprehension include lack of vocabulary (they don't know the most important words in the text), trying to understand every single word, losing attention when they try to understand meanings of the words they don't know and feeling tired because they put so much effort to focus on what they are listening to. In

addition, distraction (noise and optical dispersants) around the listeners, inability to understand different accents and ‘pretending listening’ also justify students’ poor listening comprehension.

Most of the difficulties and challenges discussed by the participants stem from a number of factors which include: absence of a well-organized well-developed plan and inability to adhere to a plan, inability to deal with affective factors rationally and effectively, and not getting enough support and encouragement. Possible reasons for inability to follow a plan are: setting goals without having a real motivation to achieve them, setting big goals without thinking deeply and rationally on how to achieve them and what actions should be done (unrealistic), lack of management of time and efforts while learning and executing the plan and giving up!

Affective factors could be both positive and negative. Participants talked about negative affective factors (affective filters) that affect language learning. Anxiety and fear of tests, communication and negative evaluation affect students’ learning process negatively. Fear of communication prohibits students from practicing the language and improving their fluency. Moreover, when they feel afraid of speaking in front of others to avoid negative criticism, they lose many opportunities to practice the language and learn from their mistakes. This is reflected by the students’ performance in productive skills (speaking and writing). On the other hand, Lack of self-confidence and negative self-image prevent students from making the needed progress. Students with low self-esteem tend to be more introverts and don’t communicate in foreign language to avoid making mistakes or losing face. This might be attributed to various factors. These include learners lack of practice and training in emotional intelligence. The unique stressful context in which learners live might also contribute to the absence of the ability of learners to control their feeling during the learning process.

On the other hand, some of the participants have unsupportive friends and family. Others are more fortunate to have people that listen to them and support them. It was noted, however,

that some of them didn't choose to study English at university. It was their parents' decision! Parents' expectations for their children's education make some of them decide on behalf of their children. In our Palestinian society, we hear about parents who ignore their children's talents and skills because they think they know better and want to protect their children. In fact, they use their children to fulfill their own dreams or try to protect them from experiencing the same 'bad' experiences. Social status and prestige motivate them to choose particular specialty even though there is something that may suit their children better.

It is obvious that language learning strategies help language learners improve their level of autonomy. This finding confirms Hakan and others' (2015) argument that learning strategies play a vital role in enhancing autonomy among second language learners. Factors affecting use of language learning strategies may include students' motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic), language proficiency, learning environment (supportive, relaxing, stressful, uncomfortable), getting support and encouragement from others (family, friends, teachers), students' personalities (introverts vs. extroverts), preferences, needs and learning styles, their attitudes and beliefs about roles of students and roles of teachers in the learning process, and instructional methods used by university instructors.

Lababidi (2016) has also pointed out that stressful atmosphere made students feel highly anxious and that previous experiences, attitudes and perspectives about learning English affect and may cause anxiety. On the other hand, findings confirm Sadeghi and others' (2013) conclusion that students' needs are among factors that influence the use of strategies and Balci (2017) conclusion that there are significant relationships between language learning strategies and learning styles in an EFL context. Strategies students use are really affected by their learning style.

Students' Levels of Autonomy

The second question in the study investigated levels of autonomy among 4th year English major university students. Results show that the majority of the graduating English majors enjoy an advanced level of autonomy in self-motivation and choosing materials. In addition, many of the participants are at the intermediate level pertaining to reflecting, cooperating, controlling feelings and self-evaluation. Advanced and intermediate level of autonomy in the previously mentioned autonomous activities could be attributed to one main reason. University students who choose to major in English have an outstanding academic achievement. The requirements to major in English are very demanding. Each year the English department accepts a limited number of students. Their 'Tawjihi' average is at least approximately 90 out of 100.

On the other hand, many participants are at the beginning or emerging level pertaining to designing, editing and completing tasks, and recognizing their needs and setting goals. The reasons in the current study behind graduating English majors who have low autonomous learning levels in some of the aforementioned autonomous activities described in the rubric might be attributed to various factors. These include students' total reliance on their teachers at school and at the university in designing and editing tasks, planning (needs recognition and goals setting) and activities required for meeting students' needs. The spoon-feeding, teacher –centered teaching methods and control of instructors of the learning process might be the reason behind having a low autonomous level in task completion.

The finding that learners depend on their instructors pertaining to needs assessment, evaluation and instruction corresponds with Cotterall's (1995) conclusion that learners' beliefs affect and may inhibit their approval and commitment to leaning autonomously. Most of the Palestinian learners believe that it is their instructors' responsibility to design, manage and implement the learning process. Palestinian Non-native English majors are aware of their role

and their instructors' roles in the learning process. This emphasizes the traditional way of teaching in the Palestinian Education system where rote learning, memorization and total dependence on teachers are the main and acceptable practices. That's why many of the participants in the study are unable to assess their language needs and design a plan that helps them improve their English skills, and choose effective learning tasks and activities.

Following the traditional way of teaching (lecturing) and lack of motivating learners to be active and learn independently support Ho and Crookball (1995) argument that the learning context plays a major role in taking responsibility over one's own learning. Such lack of confidence in Palestinian English learners' ability to learn independently because they are used to the traditional way of teaching confirms Aliponga et al (2002) who found out such lack of confidence have a major impact on developing autonomous learners.

It might be that Palestinian instructor's lack of readiness and Palestinian students' passive attitude and role towards autonomous learning are the reasons behind such prevailing teaching and learning practices in Palestine. This confirms Dwee and Anthony (2017) conclusion that lack of training and awareness prohibits and delays acceptance of autonomous learning roles and practices. The Palestinian educational context in which autonomy is not encouraged and supported will continue to have learners who entirely depend on their instructors.

Role of University Instructors in Enhancing Autonomy among Language Learners

The third question focused on the role of university English instructors in enhancing autonomy among a graduating class of non-native English speakers whose major is English language and literature. Results revealed two different points of view regarding students' attitudes and beliefs about the role of university instructors in enhancing their learning autonomy

to reach their highest desired level. Few Participants pointed out that it is not the teachers' responsibility to help them develop their autonomous learning levels and that their lack of motivation is the reason behind having a low level of autonomy. This could be attributed to the fact that university students are adults and expected to be aware enough of their needs, learning preferences and styles. Moreover, teachers are no more the 'source of knowledge' in the era of 'information explosion'. Students are aware of various kinds of resources, materials, methods and strategies which may help them improve their learning and play an active role in their learning process. Endless resources and literature are available (online, libraries, bookshops) and students can easily choose according to their needs and preferences. In addition, they could find a suitable way to practice their English (e.g. with friends, attending workshops).

The other point of view blames university instructors for using traditional instructional methods and not fostering autonomy among students. It seems that many students are still attached to the idea that teachers should be responsible for planning, choosing materials and methods and assessing students' performance. This finding confirms Bekleyen and Selimoğlu (2016) conclusion that students believe teachers should be responsible for choosing materials and activities in English classrooms and that course planning is a teacher responsibility. They think they need their teachers' assistance and guidance in their learning process. Reasons behind differences in students' points of view include differences in motivation levels and willingness to learn, students' needs, beliefs and attitudes towards learning, personalities and social backgrounds. Autonomy is a skill that some people have 'by instinct' while others lack and need to improve by training and getting support. When parents raise an autonomous kid, his/her autonomous skills will appear in their learning process.

Those who lack the skill of ‘autonomy’ need training from their instructors. The problem is that many instructors are not autonomous themselves. They inherited traditional instructional methods from previous educational systems and teachers. Some of them use the same methods, the same course outlines, and the same resources for semesters, for years! It seems that they don’t enjoy an enough degree of political autonomy. I wonder if they are allowed to freely design courses and assessment tools and methods. I should note here that even instructors who use various assessment tools are obliged to give their students a final exam at the end of the semester even if they don’t want to. This has a double effect because many of the students will become EFL teachers and may inherit the same ideas and the same practices. This cycle will never end until ‘winds of change’ blow through our educational system.

Instructors are expected to play an active role in turning teaching into a student-centered process and to foster autonomy among learners. Findings confirm Hozayen’s (2009) suggestion that teachers are expected to encourage learners to use autonomous learning strategies to become creative and autonomous and Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee’s (2017) conclusion that responsibilities should be shared between teachers and their students.

Final Remarks

Finally, it is worth noting the following two points regarding this study:

- The focus of this study was on students rather than on teachers. Information about teachers’ practices and roles in enhancing students’ autonomy and use of strategies is limited to the data collected by interviewing students.
- Participants were all from Birzeit University. The study did not investigate levels of autonomy and use of LLS in other Palestinian universities.

Recommendations for Future Research

The three questions addressed in this study targeted three major issues related to language learning autonomy. However, there are a number of gaps in our knowledge regarding teachers' points of view, the Palestinian educational context as a whole, and the effects of technology on language learning. For future research:

- It might be also beneficial to shift the focus away from students onto teachers in order to find out strategies and instructional methods they use in EFL classrooms and the way these strategies influence students' achievement and autonomy.
- It is possible to find out with a larger sample differences in autonomous learning levels between students from different Palestinian universities (e.g. Bethlehem University, Al-Najah National University) and reasons behind such differences.
- Regarding the new technologies and openness to the world, it might be worth conducting a study to investigate the effects of 'the information revolution' on students' learning autonomy and the way they utilize technology to learn a foreign language independently.

Summary

The study is very informative since it investigated an issue that both students and university instructors of which should be aware. Results revealed students' use of particular language learning strategies and negligence of some others. It appears that use of language learning strategies affects language learners' ability to enhance their level of autonomy. Factors affecting use of strategies included: motivation, proficiency, personalities, learning preferences, needs, learning styles, attitudes and beliefs. Moreover, it appeared that environmental factors and support provided by surrounding people affect students' use of strategies and their level of autonomy.

Results showed that participants were aware of the importance of activating the previous knowledge before dealing with the new knowledge. They sometimes used other memory strategies such as preparing before English classes and reviewing. It seems that distraction prevent some of them from preparing for class and reviewing after class. They only review before exams when there is a threat of failing. Their responses indicated the effects of their emotions and attitudes on their levels and preferences.

Participants used some cognitive strategies such as trying to speak like native speakers to look intellectual and to be able to get a good job. However, they don't have opportunities to practice speaking English. They need more inclusive and motivating environments. Some of them expressed avoidance when they cannot think of a word during a conversation and when they do not know the right word to use. They feel afraid of making mistakes and try to avoid criticism or mockery. They feel frustrated because they are not used to use the language in their daily life. Psychological factors and linguistic barriers prevent students from practicing speaking and improving their language.

It was obvious that many participants are non-readers. The lack of effective reading strategies, having poor vocabulary, distraction and lack of motivation are reasons behind not having reading as a habit. Writing is also a 'great' skill which helps learners improve their language and organize their thoughts. The problem is that some of the participants think in Arabic and then translate into English. This may result from using English – Arabic dictionaries and focusing on grammar and vocabulary memorization. Listening comprehension is also an issue that was discussed with the participants. Some of them stated that they need to improve their listening comprehension. They live in an Arabic speaking community and most of them are not exposed to English.

Participants talked about indicators to making progress which include: improving their ability to analyze literary works, getting good marks and teachers' assessment and feedback. Full dependence on teachers' feedback may reflect lack of confidence, motivation and awareness. It seems that they don't think critically of their learning process. On the other hand, they discussed challenges and difficulties while learning English as a foreign language. These obstacles stem from absence of a learning plan, not getting enough support and inability to positively deal with feelings. Anxiety affects students' learning process negatively. Fear of communication prevents them from practicing the language and improving their fluency.

The majority of the participants enjoy an advanced level of autonomy in self-motivation and choosing materials. Many of them are at the intermediate level pertaining to reflecting, cooperating, controlling feelings and self-evaluation. On the other hand, many of them are at the beginning or emerging level pertaining to designing, editing and completing tasks, and recognizing their needs and setting goals.

Another fundamental issue highlighted in the present study is the role of university instructors in fostering autonomy among EFL students. It was concluded that they need first to

be aware of their students' autonomous levels and design activities and tasks that improve these levels. This is really substantial for students majoring in English since they need to continue learning and improving their language after graduation. Instructors are expected to design activities that assist students in becoming autonomous and life-long learners.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Invitation

Dear 4th year English majors,

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at Birzeit University under the supervision of College of Education. The study will investigate levels of autonomy among 4th year English majors at Birzeit University and autonomous learning strategies they use.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 30 minutes in length to take part in mutually agreed upon location. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide are completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from the study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used.

If you have any questions regarding the study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me by e-mail at ayat.f.tamimi@gmail.com.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in the study.

Sincerely,

Ayat Tamimi

Department of Curriculum & Instruction

College of Education

Appendix B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Ayat Tamimi from Birzeit University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about English majors autonomous learning strategies and autonomous learning levels. I will be one of approximately 30 people being interviewed for this research.

My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time.

I understand that most interviewees in will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made.

I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

My Signature

Date

Signature of the Investigator

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Study Research Questions:

What are the autonomous learning strategies that 4th year English major university students use?

What are the autonomous learning levels of 4th year English major university students?
What is the role of university instructors in developing their autonomy?

Interview Questions

Research Question #1: What are the autonomous learning strategies that 4th year English major university students use?

Language learning strategies

What are the autonomous memory strategies from the following that you use to improve your English proficiency?

Memory strategies

Thinking of the relationships among what I already know and the new things I learn in my English classes? How often do you do that? Please provide an example.

Preparing for my English classes in advance? Which classes, if you do, prepare for the most? Why?

Do you review your English classes after each class or some of your classes?

Cognitive strategies

I try to speak like native English speakers

I use the English words I know in different ways

I initiate conversations in English as much as I could.

I watch movies, TV shows and other programs in English

I read for pleasure in English? What kind of books you read?

I write notes, messages, letters or reports in English

I first skim-read an English passage (read over the passage quickly), then go back and read carefully

I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English

I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand

I avoid translating word for word

I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English

Compensation strategies

If you do not understand a meaning of an English word what do you do? For example guessing)

When you can't think of a word during a conversation in English what do you do (e.g. use gestures, use similar word or phrase...)

If you do not know the right word to use what do you do? (e.g. making up a new word)

When you are reading an English text do you look up every word? Yes, Why? No, Why not?

Metacognitive strategies

Do you try to find as many ways as you could to use your English? Please provide some examples.

Do you monitor your English mistakes and use that information to help you do better? Could you provide an example?

How often do you pay close attention when someone is speaking English?

What strategies, if any, did you find effective in helping you learn and improve your English?

In what ways you plan your daily schedule to allow you to study and practice English?

Do you always look for people with who you can talk to in English?

How often do you read in English? What type of books you read?

What are your goals that you set for yourself to improve your English?

How do you know that you are making progress in learning English?

Affective strategies

What do you do when you feel afraid of using English?

How do you encourage yourself to speak in English when you are afraid of making a mistake or people make fun of you?

How do you reward yourself as a motivation and an encouragement when you do well in improving your English?

How do you notice when you are tense and nervous when you are leaning English?

How often you write down your feelings in a language learning diary?

How often you talk to someone else (e.g. friend, teacher, etc.) about how you feel learning English?

Social strategies

What do you do when you do not understand someone speaking to you in English (e.g. slow down, say it again, ...)

How do you ask English speakers to assist you when you are talking to them (e.g. correcting you when you make a mistake).

How do you practice your English?

How do you learn about the culture of English native speakers?

Are there any other strategies that you would like to share with me? (please describe)

Open-ended Question about the effectiveness of the above strategies:

What are the most effective strategies you identified in the previous questions from your perspective? Why?

What are their Autonomous learning levels?

MOTIVATING YOURSELF

How do you motivate yourself to learn English independently (e.g. rewards, interesting materials and projects...)?

What other things motivate you to learn English?

DEALING WITH FEELINGS

How do you usually deal with your feelings and emotions (e.g. satisfaction, achievement, boredom, emotional blocks, fear of speaking or making mistakes ...) while learning English as a foreign language?

PLANNING

How do you evaluate your language skills and analyze your needs?

What do you take into account when putting your own goals in language learning? (e.g. needs, skills, given conditions ...)

What does your learning plan include? (e.g. goals, materials...)

CHOOSING MATERIALS AND METHODS

What materials and methods do you use to learn English as a foreign language? (e.g. authentic materials, native speakers, websites ...)

What do you take into account when choosing materials for learning English?

COMPLETING TASKS

How do you carry out your learning plan (possibly with appropriate modifications)? Please explain. For example by doing all or some of the following:

Designing, editing and completing tasks?
 Using materials and resources?
 Analyzing Language structures and patterns?
 Dealing with texts, conversations ...?
 How do you manage the given conditions (e.g. time, place...) when completing a particular task?

MONITORING

What are your strengths and weaknesses as a language learner?
 How do you observe your progress?
 What do you think prevents you from making progress in particular English language areas?

EVALUATING

How do you usually evaluate your learning progress and the materials, resources, methods and strategies you use to learn English? For example
 For progress: (goals achieved, goals match your language skills and needs, ...)
 Materials and resources (meet the objectives)
 Methods and strategies (tasks correspond learning style, make learning effective and efficient, ...)

COOPERATING

How do you learn with and from others (e.g. fellow learners, teachers, language learning consultants, native speakers, competent non-native speakers)
 When do you think it is more advantageous to perform a task in cooperation with others? (e.g. when planning, when selecting materials ...)

Research Question #4 (Open-ended Question):

How university instructors could assist you in developing your autonomous learning levels to reach your highest desired level?