

and since freshmen have had fewer chances to use the language, they are probably in earlier stages compared with students of higher years and educational levels who have had more experience of language learning at the university and who have been more engrossed in learning. This condition would probably precipitate more favorable attitudes towards language learning.



### Summary And Conclusion

The principal objectives of the present study were to compare different views about autonomy and to shed light on the various contingencies and thoughts which have given rise to this important pedagogical goal. As such, it aimed at examining the role of gender and year of study in students' predispositions towards autonomy. To this end, a questionnaire was prepared, and based on factor analysis of responses, five underlying factors were extracted. Those factors were learner independence, dependence on the teacher, learner confidence, attitudes towards language learning and self-assessment. Although index of autonomy was higher for females, the differences were not statistically significant. In other words, students' gender did not show any impact on their readiness for autonomy. MA students received higher scores in learner autonomy in comparison with students of other years; however, the differences in means were not statistically significant either. It can be concluded that level of study does not have impact on students' autonomous behavior. As achievement of a sense of autonomy would impel language learners to make the most of the available resources and would elevate students' self-concept so far so that they would try to increase their knowledge in spite of all drawbacks, attention to this goal can be of great significance.

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assigned to the response categories starting at the favorable end and for negatively stated items the values 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 were assigned. The minimum possible score for each item was 1 and the maximum possible was 5. Therefore, a student would at least obtain a score of 40 [(40) (1)] and at most 200 [(40) (5)] on the questionnaire.

## Results

In order to find out whether or not significant differences existed between the means, t-test for independent samples was run. The means of males and females were compared and it was found that females obtained slightly higher means regarding the factors of learner independence, dependence on teachers, learner confidence, and self-assessment and males received a higher mean with regard to attitudes towards language learning. However, the differences did not turn out to be statistically significant as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparison of Means of Males and Females Considering the 5 Factors

Factors	Means for Males	Means for Females	SD for Males	SD for Females	t-value	d.f.	2-Tail Sig
Learner Independence	40.81	41.46	8.81	8.19	.45	166	.651
Dependence On Teacher	25.68	26.41	2.87	3.45	1.45	166	.149
Learner Confidence	27	28.44	4.76	4.10	1.91	166	.060
Attitudes Towards Language Learning	14.72	14.25	2.87	3.21	.76	166	.448
Self-assessment	18.23	18.42	2.87	2.10	.43	166	.665

The total means for males and females as indexes of autonomy were also compared. Although females had a higher mean (128.99) as compared to males (126.43), the difference was not statistically significant.

The one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the means of students of different

years with regard to the five factors. The differences in means were not significant for the factors learner independence, dependence on the teacher, learner confidence and self-assessment. When the means of students of different years were compared considering attitudes towards language learning, it was found that the differences in means were significant at .0166 level.

Table 4: One-way ANOVA for Attitudes towards Language Learning by Year of Study

Source of Variance	d.F.	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	P
Between Group	4	135.39	33.84	3	.0166
Within Group	163	1828.89	11.22		
Total	167	1964.28			

The Scheffe test was used to determine the pairs which were different and it was found that the means of group 1 (freshmen) and group3 (juniors) were significantly different at .05 level.

Students' scores on learner autonomy for different years were also compared. Although MA students received the highest mean (133.11) and juniors, sophomores, and freshmen received the next highest means, the



differences were not statistically significant.

It can be argued that year of study affects students' attitudes towards language learning

The present study also intended to embark on the concept of learner autonomy as conceived by language learners in an Iranian context.

## Procedure

All male and female B.A. and M.A. students majoring in English Literature at the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics of Shiraz University were involved in the present study. Participants were from two levels of education referred to here as undergraduate (B.A. students) and graduate (M.A. students). 168 students (53 males and 115 females) participated in the study. They differed with regard to their gender and level of study. Table 1 indicates the composition of the participants.

**Table 1: Composition of Participants**

Year of Study	Number	Percent
Freshman	35	20.8
Sophomore	43	25.6
Junior	49	29.2
Senior	24	14.3
MA Student	17	10.1

The necessary data were collected through a questionnaire the items of which were taken from two other questionnaires by Cotterall (1995b) and Cotterall (1999) with some adaptations. The items of the questionnaire in this study were obtained from those of the previously mentioned questionnaires which showed students' beliefs regarding autonomous language learning.

Forty items were incorporated into a five-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from strong agreement to strong disagreement. In

order to establish the validity of the questionnaire, it was given to a number of professors and experts in the field and they were asked to mark inappropriate items. Appropriate items which provided indexes of students' predispositions towards autonomy were included in the final version.

Factor analysis showed the five clusters of items which formed different factors and these factors were learner independence, dependence on the teacher, learner confidence, attitudes towards language learning and self-assessment. For every factor, participants got numerical indexes together with a total score which showed students' predispositions towards autonomy.

The five factors together with their percents of variance, and cumulative percentages are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Percent of Variance and Cumulative Percentage of Factors**

Factor	Percent of Variance	Cumulative Percentage
Learner Independence	16.4	16.4
Dependence on the Teacher	10.8	27.2
Learner Confidence	5.7	32.8
Attitudes toward Language Learning	4.7	37.5
Self-assessment	4.0	41.5

The reliability of the questionnaire was established via Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha for the whole questionnaire was found to be .76. As Ary, Jacob and Razavieh (1996) maintained, coefficient alpha or Cronbach alpha is the best index of reliability for an attitude scale. It provides a measure of the extent to which all the items are positively intercorrelated and measure one characteristic.

For positively stated items the numerical values 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 were respectively

school and university population all paved the way for the idea of autonomy.

In her article, Cotterall (1995a) contended that autonomy was desirable for philosophical, pedagogical, and practical reasons.

Crabbe (1993) claimed that autonomous learning was justified by a combination of three arguments: the ideological, the psychological and the economic. The ideological argument stated that the individual had the right to be free to exercise his or her own choice in learning and in other areas. The psychological argument contended that we learned better when we were in charge of our learning and the economic argument was that society did not have the resources to provide the level of personal instruction needed by all its members in every area of learning.

### **Autonomy-Oriented Projects**

A project was carried out from January to May 1998 in which computer technologies, specifically the possibilities offered by MOOs (Object-Oriented Multiple User Domains), were used to train students to become independent active learners and to create enthusiasm for language learning by providing rich cultural contexts and access to native speakers as informants. In this project, the possibility and potential of teaching intermediate learners of a foreign language (in this case, English and German) via the internet was assessed.

Donaldson and Kötter (1999) argued that the project aimed at combining principles of autonomous language learning and tandem learning with the resources of the internet in order to provide a good learning environment for language learners with an intermediate ability level. Autonomous Language Learning aimed

at the development of language and language-learning awareness and the learners became much more aware of their needs and were both better motivated to learn and, in the long run, more competent in their use of foreign/Second Language (L2).

The ALMS of the Helsinki University Language Center underscores autonomous approaches to language learning. As Sirvio (1998) declared, the ALMS was based on a task-based learning model, where student-centered approach and concept of "learning to learn" are the key elements. The ALMS was first implemented in the learning of English as a second language at the university level. As Karlsson, Kjisik, & Norlund (1996) confirmed, in the Project students were perceived as thinking human beings with different needs, skills and motivations. Students were given more control over what, when, how and where they learned. The changes in attitude were in a positive direction. There was a general improvement in motivation and students discovered that learning could be fun and useful. They had a realization that they were empowered for life and that they themselves had control over what they learned. There was also a growth in awareness that affected other domains in life. The success or failure of an individual student or teacher working in an autonomous setting rested largely on their attitudes.

Park (2002) reported that studies of learner autonomy led to the development of the Learner Autonomy Profile by four researchers. Their instruments identified four factors of learner autonomy:

- (1) The desire to learn
- (2) Learner resourcefulness
- (3) Learner initiative
- (4) Learner persistence

active roles are allocated to language learners and they are deemed active participants in the process of language learning. The present study investigated those learners' beliefs which demonstrated their predispositions towards autonomy. All male and female BA and MA students majoring in English Literature at the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics of Shiraz University were involved. On the whole, 168 students participated in the study. They differed with regard to their gender and year of study. The necessary data were collected through a questionnaire the items of which were taken from two questionnaires by Cotterall (1995b) and Cotterall (1999) which were incorporated into a five-point Likert-type rating scale. Factor analysis of students' responses revealed the existence of five underlying factors for learner autonomy which included: learner independence, dependence on the teacher, learner confidence, attitudes towards language learning and self-assessment. Based on t-test for independent samples and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) it came to light that gender did not have much impact on students' readiness for autonomy, while year of study affected students' attitudes towards language learning and juniors showed the highest tendency towards language learning, which was one of the underlying factors of autonomy, compared to the freshmen who obtained the lowest index in this regard.

**Key Words:** learner autonomy, learner independence, dependence on the teacher, learner confidence, attitudes toward language learning, self-assessment

## Introduction

The swing of the pendulum has recently shifted towards empowering students. Language learners are no longer regarded as passive recipients of instruction, rather they are deemed active participants in the process of language learning.

The demands of the changing world impose on learners the need to take increasing responsibility for their learning and to exercise more control. By the same token, Warschauer, Turbee and Roberts (1996) argue that a main goal of modern approaches to language teaching is to enhance student autonomy and control over the language learning process.

This study aimed at comparing students' views on autonomy and to shed light on the various contingencies and thoughts which have given rise to this important pedagogical goal.

In particular, the study intended to find answers to the following questions:

1. Are male and female students different in their readiness for autonomy?
2. Are male and female students different with regard to the underlying factors of autonomy?
3. Does year of study affect students' predispositions towards autonomy?
4. Are the underlying factors of autonomy different for students of different years?

## Background to the Study

Various social contingencies and currents of thoughts paved the way for the emergence of the idea of autonomy. Gremmo and Riley (1995) stated that reaction against behaviorism, the wave of minority rights movement, adult education in Europe, developments in technology, the increasing demand for foreign language, the commercialization of much language provision, and the vast increase in



# THE ROLE OF GENDER AND YEAR OF STUDY IN STUDENTS' PREDISPOSITIONS TOWARDS LEARNER AUTONOMY

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## چکیده

افکار عمومی در آموزش و یادگیری، اخیراً به سمت مختار کردن شاگردان معطوف شده است. در حال حاضر، زبان آموزان نقش های فعال تری را ایفا می کنند و در جریان یادگیری، عناصری فعال به شمار می آیند. پژوهش جاری، با هدف بررسی باورهای دانشجویان در مورد میزان تمایل آن ها به استقلال در یادگیری، انجام گرفته است. همه دانشجویان پسر و دختر رشته زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی دانشگاه شیراز که در مقاطع کارشناسی و کارشناسی ارشد به تحصیل اشتغال داشتند و از نظر جنسیت و سال تحصیلی با هم تفاوت داشتند، در این پژوهش شرکت کردند. اطلاعات مورد نیاز به کمک یک پرسشنامه جمع آوری شد که مواد آن از پرسشنامه های کاترال ۱۹۹۵ و ۱۹۹۹ اقتباس شد و تنظیم آن بر اساس مقیاس پنجگانه لیکرت صورت گرفت. تحلیل عوامل، وجود پنج عامل زیربنایی را آشکار کرد که این عوامل به ترتیب عبارتند از: استقلال یادگیرنده، وابستگی به معلم، اعتماد به نفس، نگرش نسبت به فراگیری زبان و خودارزیابی. نتایج به دست آمده از این پژوهش می تواند در بهبود امر آموزش و یادگیری به طور عام و در آموزش زبان دوم به طور خاص در مراکز آموزشی مورد استفاده قرار گیرد. کلیدواژه ها: استقلال در یادگیری، استقلال یادگیرنده، وابستگی به معلم، اعتماد به نفس، نگرش نسبت به فراگیری زبان، خودارزیابی.

## Abstract

The swing of the pendulum has recently been towards empowering students. Today, more