

Research Article

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Teachers Iranian EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Learner Autonomy and their Beliefs about the Role of Textbooks in Fostering it: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of learner autonomy; however, the roles of teachers and language materials in fostering it have not received due attention. This mixed methods study investigated the association between what Iranian teachers perceived of LA and what they thought about the role of textbooks in fostering EFL learners' LA, and to what extent they believed the principles of LA in their classrooms. The participating teachers were 200 male and female teachers that taught Iranian tenth-grade EFL textbook in senior high schools of Qom, Arak, and Karaj. The first instrument was a questionnaire developed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), which primarily focused on the teachers' perspectives and opinions about LA. The second questionnaire was used to investigate how Iranian EFL teachers think the EFL textbook Vision 1 helps foster LA. The questionnaire was developed based on the LA principles (Fenner & Newby, 2000). The last instrument was an interview protocol that was developed by the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' promoting LA in their teaching. The interview protocol also was based on Fenner and Newby's (2000) principles. For this study, the questionnaire data were collected through two questionnaires. Moreover, an interview protocol was used to gather qualitative data from 12 teachers, who participated in the interviews (i.e., 2 face-to-face and 10 online interviews). The result of the bivariate correlation test showed that there was a significant relationship between teachers' perception of learner autonomy and their opinions about the LA-fostering role of the Iranian 10th-grade EFL textbook. The results of the interview analysis showed that the principles of learner autonomy were largely approved of by the interviewees. The study has some implications for textbook developers, teachers trainers, and teachers.

Keywords: EFL, Iranian EFL textbooks, learner autonomy, teacher's perceptions

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1. Introduction

Learner autonomy (LA) has been a major area of interest in foreign language (FL) teaching for some 30 years (Little, 2022). LA is based on the idea that if students are involved in decision-making about processes regarding their language competence, “they are likely to be more enthusiastic about learning” (Littlejohn, 1985, p. 258), and learning can be more focused and purposeful for them (Chan, 2001; 2003). Additionally, the fact that “learners have the power and right to learn for themselves” (Smith, 2008, p. 2) is seen as an essential aspect of LA.

There is evidence in studies to support the claim that “increasing the level of learner control will increase the level of self-determination, thereby increasing overall motivation in the development of learner autonomy” (Chan, 2001, p. 506). Thus, students must be involved in their learning to contribute to the development of LA in language classrooms. Through this process, the autonomous learner establishes “a personal agenda for learning” (Chan, 2003) by setting up directions in the planning, pacing, and evaluating learning process.

To achieve this goal, well-designed textbooks can be a useful tool in fostering LA (Fenner & Newby, 2000) because they serve as the basis for much of the language practice that occurs in the classroom (Richards, 2001), help students to achieve learning targets and objectives, consolidate what they have learned, extend their personal knowledge, include inexplicit focus on learning strategies, and encourage students to reflect on their progress (Reinders & Balcikanli, 2011). In this way, textbooks do play an important potential role in the development of LA.

Moreover, teachers' role in promoting LA is essential, as teachers need to carefully plan their lessons to provide learners with opportunities to develop and exercise their autonomy (Benson, 2001). Not only should teachers have this awareness that they should promote LA, but also they should be bold enough to put a variety of teaching techniques into practice to foster students' autonomy in their daily teaching (Little, 2022). Nevertheless, only limited space in the literature has been awarded to the study of what LA means to teachers. Additionally, teacher's voices and the role of language materials in fostering LA have been largely absent, and little is known about what LA means to language teachers and what tasks and activities the textbook should have to promote LA.

Given the gap in the literature, there is a need to develop an understanding of the association between teachers' perceptions and opinions

about LA and their LA-fostering practices, and what factors the textbook should have to foster LA. To discover and understand teachers' beliefs about LA, there is a requirement to examine what teachers say, intend, and do about facilitating LA. Therefore, given the preceding background, this study aimed to explore Iranian EFL teacher's perceptions about LA and their beliefs about the role of textbooks in fostering LA through the newly developed Iranian EFL textbook (i.e., Vision 1) in fostering LA, besides investigating the alignment of their agreements with LA principles.

2. Literature Review

2.1. An Overview of Learner Autonomy

The origin of the research on autonomy in language teaching and learning dates back to the early 1980s (Holec, 1981). Nowadays, there are many definitions of autonomy, which consider teaching/learning contexts. The most known definition used in the literature is that LA means the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec, 1981). Later, Little (1991) described autonomy as “a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning, a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action” (p.2), Dickinson (1987) outlined autonomy as “a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his [or her] learning and the implementation of those decisions” (p.81). Although Holec's (1981) definition covers all the areas that involve the transfer of control over learning from the teacher to the learner, other researchers do not agree with him and maintain that Holec's account of LA does not take into consideration “the nature of the cognitive capabilities underlying effective self-management of” (Benson, 2001, p.49).

According to Benson (2005), LA has the following three important characteristics. Firstly, LA refers to the language learner's attitude. Language learners are willing to take an active attitude toward their language study and take the initiative to be responsible for the study. Secondly, LA is viewed as a capacity. Through learner training and teacher support, language learners can develop the capacity to learn independently. Finally, the development of LA cannot be accomplished without a supportive environment or context. Here environment includes the teacher's guidance, teaching and learning facilities, and learning materials. Based on the above discussion a language teacher largely plays a crucial role in classroom teaching in fostering LA.

2.2. Teachers' Roles in Fostering LA

Although developing autonomy is a phenomenon within learners, teachers can help learners achieve this goal by fostering LA (Benson, 2001). The traditional view is that teachers should be in control of the classroom and

direct learning. To some, LA may sound more like bringing chaos into the classroom. Nevertheless, teachers can successfully choose between relinquishing control and sharing it with the learners (Lacey, 2007). Fostering autonomy in the classroom is done by providing learners with “opportunities to make significant choices and decisions about their learning” in an informed way (Nunan, 2003, p. 290). That means the learners have a say in what and how they learn, and the teacher encourages this by giving the learners opportunities and tools to make informed decisions regarding their learning. This applies both to choosing appropriate material and learning strategies.

There are various ways of describing teacher’s roles and the principles for fostering LA. However, they all have the commonalities as follows. First, the nature of autonomy decides that the classroom should be learner-centered and context-based (e.g., Cotterall, 2000). Second, teachers need to raise learners’ metacognitive awareness of the learning process (Cotterall, 2000; Sinclair, 2000). Third, teachers need to give opportunities to help learners exercise their autonomy in their learning—from setting goals, and choosing relevant materials, to the use of strategies and evaluation (Martinez, 2008; Nunan, 1997; Sinclair, 2000). Fourth, teachers should constantly equip learners with various learning strategies and skills to effectively take control of their learning (e.g., Sinclair, 2000).

In the aspect of how teachers should promote LA in practice, however, there is “little empirical evidence available for the effectiveness of any particular approach” (Benson, 2001, p. 110), which makes the beliefs of the teachers important in fostering LA. It is clear, therefore, from the above illustration that the teacher’s role in fostering LA should be well-considered (Little, 2022).

2.3. The LA-Fostering role of Language Materials

A textbook has long been considered the most preferred instructional material in ELT. They are best seen as a resource in achieving aims and objectives that have already been set concerning learner needs (Cunningsworth, 1995). Fenner and Newby (2000) demonstrated that textbooks can help promote self-directed learning. Nunan (1997) illustrated how the principles of LA can be incorporated into learning materials. He has given examples of ways to modify materials in terms of experiential content and learning procedures so that they can assist in the development of LA. Textbooks can include tasks focusing on the learning process and encourage learners to reflect on their learning progress (Reinders & Balcikanli, 2011). Inclusion of such tasks in language textbooks make learners less dependent on the teacher and gradually helps them develop as independent learners. It can

be said that the concept of developing autonomy and the use of textbooks are not mutually incompatible. Therefore, textbooks do have a potential value in the development of LA.

All the same, Green (2000) criticized that textbooks are potential obstacles to the development of LA. It seems that the whole concept of developing LA may coincide with the use of language textbooks because most textbooks determine the learning progression; therefore, they may not fulfill the individual needs of all learners. All in all, although LA has caught the attention of many scholars and researchers in the past few decades, surprisingly the degree of LA-fostering role of language textbooks has not been studied enough. It may probably be due to the controversy over the role and use of language textbooks in fostering LA.

2.4. Related Research

In the past decades, several studies have investigated LA and language teacher beliefs regarding LA. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) shed light on teachers' positive theoretical dispositions of LA and their views about the feasibility of promoting it in practice. They also explored teachers' views on the factors that hinder the development of LA. The most salient finding of their study was that learners lacked motivation with limited experience of independent learning. They also found that institutional factors (e.g., fixed curricula) were barriers to LA fostering.

Al-Asmari (2013) found that both male and female teachers agreed with the involvement of students in making decisions about their language learning. Findings also showed that there was a great tendency for autonomous learning among teachers, and they believed that the autonomous learner should have an active positive role in the learning process and make use of learning opportunities.

Daflizar and Kamil (2022) found that the EFL university students felt good about their capacity for independent learning and participated in several independent activities within and outside of the classroom. The participants' usage of language learning strategies and their opinions of their skills, as well as the practices of independent English language learning outside of the classroom, were found to be significantly correlated.

Singh Negi and Laudari (2022) used a mixed-method research design to examine students' engagement in autonomous learning and discussed the difficulties and strategies of learner autonomy in an EFL context. They gathered from students ($n = 84$) and teachers ($n = 20$) from various colleges (n

= 15) located in Far Western Nepal. According to this research, students relied too much on their teachers, and teachers often acted as though they were spoon-feeding their students throughout class.

Almusharraf and Martínez Agudo (2023) did a qualitative case study that involved instructors as participants over an extended length of time to investigate their methods and their agentive roles on the language development of female students as an agentive self within the sociocultural environment of language acquisition. The data were gathered through audio recordings of instructional practices, in-person semi-structured interviews with six teachers from two distinct classrooms, and observations of two of the six teachers in the classroom. The results show that students' intrinsic motivation to learn new words and their level of intrinsic engagement are significantly influenced using autonomous learning.

There is a growing body of research studies on autonomous language learning in Iran. Zohrabi (2011) used a reciprocal approach to enhance language learning autonomy among 63 students in an English for general purposes (EGP) course. The researcher used different instruments to collect data (i.e., informal needs analysis, informal discussions with students, field notes, continuous observation of students, journals, and diaries) to give freedom and autonomy to the students to learn English based on their needs and aims. Results showed that the students in an autonomous classroom setting can learn the language based on their needs and aims. Most recently, Ahmadi and Izadpanah (2019) sought to study whether learner autonomy and thinking style were related. They found that there was a correlation between linguistic anxiety and thinking style.

Given the previous literature review, some of the previous studies that addressed LA were generally based on the learner's perception of LA (e.g., Alibakhshi, 2015; Almusharraf & Martínez Agudo, 2023; Singh Negi & Laudari, 2022) and mostly done in universities, while the beliefs of teachers about the role of textbooks have never been addressed. Therefore, the following research questions were put forward:

RQ1: Is there any statistically significant relationship between teachers' perception of LA and their opinions about the LA-fostering role of the Iranian 10th-grade EFL textbook (i.e., Vision 1)?

RQ2: How is LA fostered by Iranian EFL teachers?

3.Method

3.1. Design

A mixed-method research design was selected to answer the research questions of this study. This research approach is used when this integration provides a better understanding of the research problem than either of each alone (Johnson et al., 2007). Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires. Qualitative data consisted verbal and textual data that the researcher gathered through interviews. The data collection was based on sequential explanatory design, in which the collection and analysis of quantitative data was followed by the collection and analysis of the qualitative data (Hashemi & Babaei, 2013). Priority was given to the quantitative data, and the findings were integrated during the interpretation phase of the study.

3.1.Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 200 male (40%) and female (60%) Iranian teachers, who were teaching the newly developed the EFL textbook Vision 1 in senior high schools of Qom, Arak, and Karaj. Forty-four percent of the participating teachers had 15 to 19 years of teaching experience, 41 percent had experience in teaching EFL from 20 to 24 years, and the remaining 13 percent had more than 25 years of EFL teaching experience. The 56.9 percent of the participants were BA holders, 42.5 were MA graduates, and the remaining 1.5 percent did not mention their last qualification. From among the participants, twelve teachers voluntarily participated in the face-to-face (n=2) and online (n=10) interviews conducted by the researcher.

3.2. Materials and Instruments

3.2.1. Materials

The material of this study was the Iranian senior high school EFL textbook Vision 1 (Alavi Moghaddam et al., 2016). This book consists of two volumes: a student book and a workbook. The student book includes 4 lessons; each lesson consists of different parts (i.e., get ready, conversation, new words and expressions, reading, grammar, listening and speaking, pronunciation, writing, what you learned). Compared with the previous high school books which were based on traditional approaches in language teaching and learning and taught for 25 years without any change in Iran, the new textbook values speaking, listening, and writing, which was really absent in the previous Iranian EFL textbooks and there is special attention on pre-teaching and post teaching activities. The cultural values of Iran are also considered in different parts of lessons. The workbook has different kinds of activities (i.e., identifying, selecting, matching, ranking, sorting and sequencing, producing, guided practice, controlled practice, and opinion gap activities).

3.2.2. Instruments

This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods of research to examine teacher's perceptions of LA and whether local authors have integrated principles of LA into newly developed senior ELT textbooks in Iran. To answer the four research questions of this study, data were collected from three instruments.

The questionnaire developed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) based on Borg (2012), was used to explore the teachers' perceptions of LA. The questionnaire included 37 items based on the ten-point Likert scale. The questionnaire included no right or wrong answers, and it primarily focused on the teachers' perspectives and opinions about LA. It enjoyed established reliability and validity for measuring teachers' beliefs about LA (Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$). This instrument has proved to be highly influential in the consideration of present research methods, given the considerable work they carried out drafting, reviewing, redrafting and piloting, before finalizing their questionnaire (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012).

Another questionnaire was used to investigate how Iranian EFL teachers think the Iranian EFL textbook Vision 1 (Alavi Moghaddam, 2016) helps foster LA. The questionnaire was developed based on the list of LA principles drawn by Fenner and Newby (2000). This includes principles of LA which were considered by 50 textbook authors and publishers before they published textbooks. This list of principles of LA was adapted and used in this questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 21 items. The reliability of the questionnaire was computed, and it resulted in a good level of reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$).

The other instrument was an interview protocol that was developed by the researcher to gain a more in-depth understanding of teachers' evaluation and practice of promoting LA in their teaching. The interview protocol also was based on Fenner and Newby's (2000) principles. The purpose of the interviews was to identify the underlying practical issues from the teachers' point of view that led to their assessment prospect of LA in high school education in Iran. The interview protocol was arranged according to Dörnyei's (2007) guidelines.

3.3. Procedure

In adapting Borg's questionnaire these changes were made. Section 1, which comprised 37 items, and Section 3 were used with some minor changes in their wordings. For example, questions concerning the specific institution on which Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) based their study were changed. Section 2, which investigated desirability and feasibility of LA and section 5 were eliminated.

The other questionnaire, which investigated how Iranian EFL teachers think the EFL textbook Vision 1 helps foster LA, was administered to participants. An online instrument was selected given the speed with which it can be administered without geographical constraints (an unrestricted compass), and its low cost to administrate the questionnaires to a broader geographical region.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face and online. Two face-to-face semi-structured interviews were administered, with interviewees' responses to the questionnaire serving as the basis for question direction and discussions. They lasted approximately 15-20 minutes; the interviews were conducted in a neutral, non-academic environment convenient to the interviewees in English, and were digitally recorded. The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

The quantitative data, collected through two questionnaires, were subjected to descriptive statistics to answer the first two research questions. Pearson correlation was used to probe any significant relationship between total autonomy and belief to probe the third research question. Cronbach's alpha reliability indices were also computed for the questionnaires.

The interview data were transcribed and analyzed through a process of qualitative thematic analysis (Newby, 2010). This process involves reading the data carefully, identifying key issues in them, and then organizing these issues into a set of broader categories. The questions in the questionnaire and the interview schedule provided an initial structure within which specific answers could then be further categorized. Given the mixed methods nature of this study, data analysis also involved a comparison of the questionnaire and interview data. This allowed the researcher to corroborate particular conclusions from two perspectives and to obtain a more meaningful understanding of why teachers answered particular questionnaire items in the ways they did.

4. Results

4.1. Results for the First Research Question

In the first phase of the study the participants completed the teachers' perception of LA questionnaire. The results of descriptive statistics for the data collected through the Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) questionnaire are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Autonomy Questionnaire and its Components

	Min	Max	M	SD
Age and Learning Autonomy	0	5	2.59	.99
Teacher Role	1	5	2.58	.94
Technical Perspective	0	5	2.57	.98
Proficiency & Learning Autonomy	1	5	2.56	1.01
Psychological Perspective	1	5	2.55	1.03
Benefits of Learning Autonomy	1	4	2.55	.94
Political Perspective	1	4	2.52	.92
Cultural Universal	0	5	2.52	1.11
Learner Centeredness	0	4	2.50	1.03
Social Perspective	0	5	2.50	.96

Table 1 shows that the mean scores ranged from 2.59 for age and learning autonomy to a low of 2.50 for social perspective and learner-centeredness. According to the results, the second most attractive component was the teachers' role with a mean score of 2.58.

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics for the six components of the researcher-made questionnaire on teachers' beliefs about LA in textbooks, based on Fenner and Newbys' (2000) list.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Beliefs

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
External resources	200	1	5	3.45	.958
Selecting materials	200	2	5	3.29	.678
Self-reflection	200	1	4	3.24	.772
Setting goal	200	2	4	3.15	.666
Self-assessment	200	1	4	2.94	.748
Selecting learning strategy	200	2	5	2.94	.705

As shown in Table 2, the mean scores ranged from 3.45 for external resources to a low of 2.94 for self-assessment and selecting a learning strategy. The second most supported orientations are selecting materials and self-reflection with a mean score of 3.29 and 3.24, respectively. The second least supported component is setting goals with a mean score of 3.15. To answer the question of whether there was any statistically significant relationship between teachers' perception of LA and their opinions about LA fostered by *Vision 1*, Pearson correlation was conducted. The normality of questionnaire data was checked using skewness and kurtosis in Table 3.

Table 3*Descriptive Statistics; Testing Normality Assumption*

	N	Skewness			Kurtosis		
		Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
Autonomy	200	-.044	.172	-.255	.349	.342	-1.02
Belief	200	-.020	.172	-.116	-.006	.342	-.017

As shown in Table 3, the assumption of normality was met because the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors were lower than +/- 1.96.

Table 4*Pearson Correlation between Belief and Autonomy*

		Autonomy
	Pearson Correlation	.87**
Belief	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	200

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

As depicted in Table 4, a Pearson correlation was run to probe any significant relationship between belief and autonomy. Based on the results, the null hypothesis (i.e., there is no statistically significant relationship between teachers' perception of autonomy and their belief.) was rejected, $r(198) = .879$, $p = .000$. It can be concluded that there was a significant relationship between the two variables.

4.2. Results for the Second Research Question

To answer the second research question, ten interviews were conducted face-to-face, and two interviews were run online. The questions of the interview were developed based on the principles of LA by Fenner and Newby (2000). In what follows, the prominent findings from the interviewees' responses to the questions are presented.

4.2.1. Do your students have any power to set or modify the goals and objectives of the tasks?

This question aimed to evaluate principle 1/A. Eight teachers believed that they had to cover the syllabus because the textbook was published by the Ministry of Education.

Excerpt 1: The principle of allowing learners to be aware of their objectives is a fundamental factor in boosting the learners' autonomy.

Excerpt 2: Opportunities for learners to determine their level are not provided at all educational levels investigated.

4.2.2. Do you give your students the opportunities to choose content of learning based on their interests and needs?

The second question in the interview was based on principle 3/A. Eight cases supported this principle while the rest of them disagreed with it due to the lack of time. Based on the answers given, teachers asserted that it is important for the teachers to implement the opportunity for their learners to choose the content of learning and to express their feelings towards the class material.

Excerpt 1: “The students are told to do the task they are assigned, but they are sometimes permitted to add one or two items to the exercise existing in the course book.”

Excerpt 2: “Lack of time and a tight syllabus were another problem pointed out by the teachers.”

4.2.3. Do your students have any power to choose their activity types?

The third question aimed to explore principle 2/A. Seven teachers disagreed with the theme of the question.

Excerpt 1: “The type of activity that is completed by the learners can play an important role in fostering autonomy in learners.”

Excerpt 2: “The learners did not have any power to choose their activities.”

4.2.4. Do your students have any chances to make decisions on the execution aspects of the tasks such as brainstorming ideas, planning working steps, and collection of information?

The fourth question, which was supposed to cover the principles 3/B, 3/E, and 3/D. Nine teachers approved of the idea. For them, brainstorming and collecting information can contribute to a better learning opportunity since the learners have the chance to collect and possibly exchange ideas.

Excerpt 1: “For making a poster in the class, the students should be allowed to create their ideas and talk about the topics. Alternatively, the students were asked to talk about and choose a topic. They were then put in groups to collect information in order to discuss the case.”

Excerpt 2: “The tasks and brainstorming ideas should be planned by teachers.”

4.2.5. Do you encourage your students to bring their own materials into class?

This question, which aimed to check principles 3/B and 3/D, received different answers from the teachers. Ten of the interviewees approved of the idea whereas only two interviewees answered negatively.

Excerpt 1: “It would be so helpful to get help from students in collecting extra materials.”

Excerpt 2: “The materials should also be developed by authorities.”

4.2.6. Do you allow your students to choose and monitor their own learning strategies?

Question six was based on principles 2/B and 3/E, which say that learning strategy involves two factors, being aware of the strategies and being able to choose the most suited strategies. Only one interviewee disagreed with the sixth question since they believed that it would be impossible in high school classes and maybe it could be done in private institutes, while the other 11 teachers approved of the idea.

Excerpt 1: “The students are sometimes allowed to utilize different ways to present their ideas. For example, in discussion tasks, they need to choose a topic first, and then they work in groups in class. One group can go to the computer to surf the net to find some information. Another group can talk with others to brainstorm. Some of them may bring photos to share in class with others.”

Excerpt 2: “They are able to choose their strategies to learn and they can choose to work in groups or independently. They work in the same group all the time but they share ideas or they can get some ideas from others.”

4.2.7. Do you allow your students to monitor and assess their own learning progress?

The seventh question was developed to check principle 4. Nine interviewees approved of the idea, stating that they let their students check their exercises and correct their mistakes. The remaining three interviewees were negative.

Excerpt 1: “Yes. For example, before handing in their writing task, they may be given a checklist to see whether they have used the correct tenses and stuff like that.”

Excerpt 2: “I don't pay much attention to their learning progress; I just do my task I mean I just teach and I never have time to pay attention to them one by one because the classes are very crowded.”

4.2.8. Do you ask your students to correct their own errors?

In addition to the previous question, question 8 is connected to a self-assessment factor (i.e., principle 4). Surprisingly, all interviewees agreed with the idea.

Excerpt 1: “I ask students to check their responses.”

Excerpt 2: “My students are allowed to discuss their answers in groups.”

4.2.9. Do you encourage learners to reflect on their choices of the tasks?

The ninth question, which is based on Principle 5, has two sections: learners' reflection on their choice and their learning. Seven teachers were positive while the remaining five were negative.

Excerpt 1: "I always invite my students to share what they liked and disliked."

Excerpt 2: "I ask them what they learned, and how they felt about the tasks."

4.2.10. Do you think the tasks in the textbooks can help to promote LA? How effective do you think they are?

Question 10 is to discover the relevance of principle 3/D to using additional resources in the class to help the learners complete their learning process. Eight teachers believed that the textbooks were not enough to promote LA. The four remaining teachers thought that the tasks in the textbook allowed students to look for information and knowledge and develop their creativity.

Excerpt 1: "The textbooks just provide some basic information and do not encourage students to find additional resources to foster LA."

Excerpt 2: "The textbooks help them develop their creativity although the design of the tasks is quite controlled."

4.2.11. Which level of students would you like to allow to take more responsibility? Why?

As to the 11th question, which aimed to check principle 5, two teachers stated that they gave responsibility to intermediate and higher-level students, another two teachers agreed that all levels can take responsibility for their learning, and two other interviewees preferred their lower-level students to take responsibility. The rest of the interviewees were against the theme of this question.

Excerpt 1: "My average intermediate learners are allowed to take responsibility."

Excerpt 2: "The students at higher proficiency levels can make better choices."

4.2.12. What do you think is the best way to encourage students to learn English independently?

One dimension of learning independently is the ability to choose learning materials or to produce learning content (Fenner & Newby, 2000). All interviewees confirmed that motivation is the most important factor and stated if they get motivated to learn, they will make use of every opportunity to learn by themselves. Only one was negative as to the theme of this question.

Excerpt 1: “If the students get interested in learning, they will learn better. But it is not easy to find something that all students like.”

Excerpt 2: “Due to time limitations, it would be impossible to take any action in encouraging them.”

Overall, what emerges here is a picture of a group of teachers who are, in theory, positively disposed towards LA and familiar with key concepts commonly used in defining and promoting it. As to the working context, though, these teachers are much less positive about the extent to which autonomy can be productively fostered in their learners. Opportunities for learners to exercise their autonomy do exist both within and outside the education system; however, there was a general sense that the learners lacked the capacity and willingness to take advantage of these opportunities. Teachers also felt hindered by a top-down curriculum in which content and assessment were defined top-down. Nonetheless, most of the teachers felt that they did, to some extent, foster LA in their practices. All the same, the practices they adopted in doing so varied significantly as did their judgments about what constituted LA among their students.

5. Discussion

The first purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between teachers' perception of autonomy and their LA beliefs. Based on the results, there was a significant positive relationship between the two variables. All in all, it was found that the learners' age and the teacher's role had the most important place in teachers' perception of LA. The social perspective and the learners' centeredness were not supported much by the respondents. This result can be due to the teachers' tendency to work alone and not being part of a team. Technical perspective and proficiency level occupied the second and third places, respectively, while the psychological issues were in the middle in terms of importance.

The findings of the second questionnaire revealed that teachers mostly supported the external resources and selecting materials items in connection with their beliefs about the textbook Vision 1. However, learning strategies and self-assessment, which were supported by most teachers in the interviews, did not receive much attention from the questionnaire respondents. It suggests that the results of the questionnaire data and interviews did not match to some extent. This is against Cotteral (2000), who opined that learning how to learn is a procedure that helps learners become aware of the learning process, and learning strategies help them to develop positive attitudes toward language and language learning. Based on the results from the interviews, the setting goals component was not favored by most interviewees. According to them, they had

to cover the syllabus so that there remained no place for their students to build the goals of the task. Self-assessment did not have a good place in the questionnaire results. However, it was confirmed by the majority of the teachers in the interviews as an LA principle.

Lack of attention to the social dimension by the respondents can represent the fact that teachers are not certain that cooperation and social interaction (as opposed to individual work) play in fostering LA. The present result contradicts Dam et al.'s (1990) view that LA is an independent and cooperative capacity in a learner as a social being. It was also found that the Ministry of Education and policymakers are the main challenges for teachers to help learners become autonomous. The educational system does not involve teachers and learners in selecting materials, objectives of the curriculum, teaching styles, and assessment methods.

Due to the policy of the Ministry of Education, the participants of the present study felt that they were not able to promote LA because of the centrality of the objectives, types of materials, and ways of evaluation. This finding is in line with Benson (2011), Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), and Alibakhshi and Rezaei (2013) who found that there are some constraining factors involved in the formal learning environment that may be viewed as hindrances to the development of LA. The results are also in line with Reinders and Lazaro (2011), who argued that teachers believed that learners did not understand the importance of developing autonomy, lacked the skills to learn independently, and were not accustomed to being asked to take responsibility for their learning.

6. Conclusions and Implications

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that most Iranian EFL teachers are somehow aware of LA principles, and their beliefs about LA mostly correspond with their opinions about the LA-fostering role of the particular textbook they used in a classroom although there are some praxis gaps between their beliefs and practices. Therefore, this implies that materials developers should draw their attention to the incorporation of LA elements into the EFL textbooks. Moreover, publishers should follow the LA principles when releasing textbooks. Hence, in light of the findings, there is still a place for fostering LA in the textbooks, which could help the learners stay less dependent. Therefore, there is a need for authors and publishers to reflect on and modify the design of the textbooks so that they can foster the development of LA. It is crucial that EFL textbooks contain activities that lead learners to set their goals, monitor their learning progress, and reflect on what and how they have learned.

Managers and administrators should empower EFL teachers and increase their awareness about their role in fostering LA in learners as a major goal in language learning. Another implication of the findings is that they should raise the awareness of the teachers and even the students as to the development of LA through training elements or courses that would aim to provide them with the strategies to take responsibility for their learning. The result of this study can be illuminating for EFL teacher trainers since they should promote LA in their workshops. This study also highlights the importance of boosting the teachers' perception of their students' autonomy. In fact, the teachers should follow the LA guidelines as a reference when choosing or suggesting textbooks.

All in All, the result of this study cannot be generalized to all EFL learning contexts because of some complications and limitations. First, this study was limited in terms of the number of participants. Therefore, the sample might not be representative of the population of EFL teachers. Moreover, since the researcher could employ other qualitative data collection instruments (e.g., diaries, observations, focus group interviews), the result of the current study may not be dependable enough.

Therefore, it would be beneficial to replicate this research project with a larger sample of EFL and ESL teachers and instructors. Moreover, replication of this study with male and female teachers in other contexts is necessary to understand how well the findings can be generalized to other contexts. Furthermore, future studies can be conducted with the samples of language learners to as they are the parties involved in using the textbooks. Future investigation can also examine the differences and similarities between teachers' and students' perceptions of LA factors to see if a match or mismatch between teachers' and learners' perceptions of and beliefs about LA factors may influence the learners' performance.

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