

University of Reading

Institute of Education



**Autonomous Learning in Saudi Writing Classroom: Teachers' and  
Students' Beliefs, Attitudes, and Practices**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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## Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and that the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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## Abstract

The development of learner autonomy (LA) is an important factor in learning to write in a foreign language. In Saudi Arabia, however, English as a foreign language (EFL) writing instruction is still traditional and largely teacher-centred, even at the university level. As a result, such autonomy is difficult to achieve in EFL writing, a skill in which Saudi students receive few practice opportunities. The reasons for this are under-explored but are likely related to the beliefs of teachers and students themselves.

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' and students' beliefs, attitudes, and practices of autonomous learning in a Saudi university preparatory year level (foundation year). The study also explores the barriers and supporting factors around promoting learner autonomy in EFL writing classrooms. In addition, by comparing classrooms where teachers employ more or fewer autonomous practices, the study explores the development of students' writing with and without an autonomous learning class environment. Finally, the study explores the autonomous approach students develop while studying in both classroom groups.

This exploratory study uses a mixed method research design. Quantitative data were gathered through surveys from 16 female EFL teachers in the preparatory year, and from a survey at the start and end of the year among 91 students within four classes. Based on teacher responses to the questionnaire, four teachers and their writing classes were classified as *autonomous* (Group A, two teachers) or *non-autonomous* (Group B, two teachers). Further qualitative data regarding teachers' and students' beliefs, practices, and writing development were collected through interviews, classroom observation, and writing samples.

The findings revealed that teachers appeared to believe in the importance of LA in learning EFL writing, but did not always translate these beliefs into practice due to fixed teaching/learning restrictions outlined by the university. It was also found that time and group type significantly affect students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs. Moreover, students'

writing accuracy was improved in the autonomous group more than in the non-autonomous group. Lastly, some of the autonomous writing strategies were totally missing in EFL writing classes. These findings suggest a need for the modification of EFL writing curricula so that they relate more to students' cultural backgrounds and real-life experiences as this would promote autonomy through increased interest. Furthermore, less central university control regarding the fixed examination system and more attention to students' learning needs and proficiency levels would help promote LA in writing classes.

This study ultimately showed that EFL students have the ability and willingness to learn to write independently. The autonomous approach to learning also helped students improve their writing. However, the lack of resources, the deanery's regulations, and discouragement and guidance from teachers prevent EFL students from the effective implementation of LA in EFL writing classes.

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## **List of Acronyms**

LA	Learner autonomy
EFL	English as foreign language
TEFL	Teaching English as a foreign language
L1	First language or native tongue
L2	Second language
CFA	Confirmatory factor analysis
A1	First autonomous class
A2	Second autonomous class
NA1	First non-autonomous class
NA2	Second non-autonomous class
ZPD	Zone of proximal development
MOE	Ministry of Education

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Introduction**

This section first presents the background and issues addressed by this study. It also outlines the significance, aims, and purpose of the study. Finally, the structure of the thesis is presented.

### **1.2. Background of the Study**

**1.2.1. Saudi EFL educational reform.** In Saudi Arabia, much attention has been given to the process of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) since this subject area was first introduced in 1924. As an international language, English is a significant aspect of the Saudi Arabia's development. Therefore, the Saudi Ministry of Education (MOE) has made huge efforts to promote English as a foreign language (EFL) learning at different educational levels. Students have typically been introduced to English in intermediate school at the ages of 12–15 and have always found learning English difficult (Al-Seghayer, 2014). The MOE sought to overcome this issue by making TEFL a compulsory subject starting in the fourth year of primary school. However, despite that change, students rely solely on their teachers' instruction for the acquisition of English, and students' EFL levels remain unsatisfactory (Al-Hazmi & Scholfield, 2007). Students also have low motivation levels and high dependence on teachers (Albeshir, 2012). Moreover, based on assessment outcomes of the Saudi educational system, decision-makers in the MOE have become aware that the lack of learner autonomy (LA) is a serious problem that potentially harms student outcomes. As a result, the Saudi MOE modified the EFL curricula, and one modification is to include independent learning as a learning strategy.

Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013) noted that the Saudi MOE is aiming to include autonomous strategies, such as group working and collaborative working, in TEFL. According to Al-Zubeiry (2012), autonomous learning is considered a relatively new concept

in Saudi as it was first encouraged in 2011 EFL curricula by incorporating cooperative and group working, critical thinking, and planning techniques. He discussed the new Saudi MOE project called 'Tatweer', which falls under The King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Public Education Development Project. Tatweer received large amounts of funding just to further develop TEFL instruction strategies and curricula. Al-Zubeiry added that the project and research on it have resulted in Saudi educators noticing that TEFL faces many problems, one of which is the traditional methods of instruction, such as teacher-centred teaching which deals with students as passive learners. In line with the changes recommended via the project, textbooks have been modified to include more new instructional strategies and approaches in TEFL, such as autonomous learning and student-centred classes. However, according to Albedaiwi (2014), even with these strategies in place, students often do not know how to promote their own independent learning. LA is also considered a new concept for Saudi teachers and students which potentially challenges their traditional perceptions of learning, in which the teacher is viewed as the transmitter of knowledge. Furthermore, the Saudi culture is highly resistant to change as it tends to be extremely conservative and religious (Al-Saraj, 2014), and the attitudes of students and teachers towards a newer, less traditional approach to education could present barriers to the implementation of strategies such as LA. In addition, there is a lack of research about the implementation of autonomous learning in Saudi EFL writing classes. Therefore, there is a gap which needs to be filled by a study exploring teachers' cognition and students' perceptions of LA, in order to better understand issues surrounding its implementation.

Saudi students have long been taught using the traditional methods of TEFL, such as teachers lecturing students and treating them as passive learners without paying attention to their needs, interests, and proficiency levels (Alonazi, 2017), with a heavy focus on grammar-

translation and less emphasis on communication, especially in high school. After high school, students enrol in the preparatory (foundation) year of university.

The construct of LA in the Saudi context is approached differently by students and the MOE. For example, the MOE believes that engaging students in active learning through autonomous strategies could help students become autonomous (Aldera, 2017). The MOE has tried to incorporate autonomous strategies into activities and exercises in EFL textbooks as a step towards making students foster LA. The MOE, however, has a different perspective on LA than students. Saudi students were not always taught and exposed to these autonomous strategies in their textbooks (Alhinty, 2016). Moreover, students' traditional beliefs about the role of teachers as the only information source has been a major obstacle preventing the MOE from achieving the goal of making students foster LA. The literature shows that Saudi students believe they are not able to take control of their learning; thus, they are unready to foster LA (Alhareth & Dighrir, 2014). This discrepancy between Saudi students and the MOE concerning the nature of LA indicates that there is a need to explore students' beliefs, attitudes and practices regarding LA.

The preparatory year, like a regular academic year, includes two semesters but provides only intensive EFL and computer courses. After passing the courses in the preparatory year, students are able to progress onto their Bachelor of Arts (BA) major. Since the teacher-centred approach is predominant at school levels, university students struggle when they are first introduced to autonomous learning at university, where they need to take greater responsibility for their own learning. According to a study conducted by Al-Roomy (2015), when students enter university and become responsible for their own learning and achievement, they feel lost. These findings arose from his administration of the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory questionnaire with 151 male college students. The study also showed that those students struggle when they can no longer rely on the traditional

methods of teaching, such as rote memorisation and so-called *spoon-feeding*, where learners passively expect the teacher to tell them exactly what to do and what to learn.

**1.2.2. Saudi EFL students' writing.** Many undergraduate Saudi EFL students have such poor writing skills that they cannot compose basic paragraphs (Al-Khairi, 2013). Based on Al-Khairi's (2013) study which investigated undergraduate students' writing, students were found to have very weak writing levels, to only engage in a paragraph-level academic writing, and to not consider it important to improve their writing. The study results also suggest that inappropriate teaching methods such as teacher-centred teaching, neglect of students' interests, and a lack of motivation have led students to lose interest in improving their writing skills. Moreover, LA in Saudi classrooms is not associated with learning EFL. According to Alrabai (2016, 2018) and Al-Seghayer (2014), the Saudi educational system is resistant to new concepts and methods in teaching EFL, such as LA, self-directed learning, and the development of metacognitive strategies. They mentioned that there are many reasons that LA is not implemented in Saudi EFL classrooms. One reason is the teacher-centred approach and the spoon-feeding method of teaching. Another reason is that decision-makers in Saudi Arabia have not paid attention to incorporating LA into the educational curricula. In addition, Saudi EFL teachers have very little information about the instructional strategies of LA implementation and therefore do not typically give students the opportunity to become independent learners.

**1.2.3. LA and EFL writing.** What distinguishes LA as an educational aspect is that it is a learner-based concept rather than teacher-based. Student-centred learning is a central strategy within LA. Accordingly, the main theoretical framework adopted for this study is constructivism as it supports learner-centred methods of teaching. This theory also holds that knowledge is an active social construction and not an independent objective. Zhuang (2010) also clarified that autonomous learning decreases teachers' control over the educational

process. In autonomous learning, teachers are not the main source of information but have a supervisory role in the learning process. According to Zhuang's (2010) theoretical study to analyse the concept of autonomy, previous techniques in learning have depended on the teacher, while autonomous learning is more student centred. Learners become responsible for and can control their own learning (Dickinson, 1987; Tran & Duong, 2018; Zhuang, 2010). Engaging students in the learning process encourages them to plan, control, and assess the learning process—that is, use metacognitive strategies associated with improved learning outcomes (Macaro, 2006).

Developing English writing skills is a struggle for Saudi students at the college level, who rarely achieved high levels of improvements (Albeshir, 2012). Moreover, Albeshir (2012) pointed out that the traditional teacher-centred writing classrooms in Saudi Arabia are not effective in teaching writing. New techniques and strategies for teaching writing, such as group work and collaborative work, however, have been shown to improve students' writing (Elbow, 1975; Graham, 2006; Turan, 2016; Williams, 2003; Yasmin & Naseem, 2019).

### **1.3. Problem of the Study**

A review of the literature shows that many researchers agree on the importance of LA for effective independent learning (Ikonen, 2013; Kohonen, 1992; Pennycook, 1997).

Researchers have also emphasised the need to conduct additional studies in order to gain a clearer understanding of LA practices and implementation. LA helps students improve their skills as they learn to independently construct knowledge. However, in Saudi learning contexts, EFL students are typically over-reliant on teachers. EFL teachers, on the other hand, feel overwhelmed when they devote themselves to teaching as was found in a questionnaire-based study by Alrabai (2017). In his mixed method research findings, the teachers' perspective also identified LA as a solution to be implemented for better EFL

teaching and learning. Hence, promoting LA is potentially an effective solution for both teachers and students to maximise the outcomes from the learning process.

In Saudi Arabia, learning EFL has become a priority to enable communication with the outside world due to globalisation and the rapid lifestyle transition. The Saudi MOE has therefore taken important steps to enhance and promote the teaching of EFL. However, to date, research in this field is limited, and many variables have not been explored. Especially in writing skills, the achievement levels of Saudi students have remained unsatisfactory in college (Alkubaidi, 2014), and the majority are unable to achieve the satisfactory level of EFL writing that enables them to communicate well and clearly. Students practise their speaking, listening, and reading skills more often than writing, and with limited writing practice, it is difficult for them to improve their writing skills. Consequently, Saudi educational systems are increasingly focused on writing as an important skill for EFL students to learn in their acquisition of English as a whole.

In the past few years, the Saudi MOE has struggled with the design of new curricula for teaching EFL. As part of designing the new curricula, textbooks have been modified and entirely changed several times (Al-Zubeiry, 2012). As new trends, concepts, and strategies in education emerge, the MOE has attempted to implement these within the new EFL curricula without conducting studies to measure their effectiveness. For instance, no studies have examined the factors that support and prevent the promotion of LA in Saudi EFL classes. This study addresses this gap in the research by exploring what aids and interferes with adopting autonomous leaning practices in the Saudi educational system. Both EFL teachers and students significantly affect the learning process and LA implementation. Given that, understanding EFL teachers' cognition—such as their thoughts, knowledge, and beliefs—is necessary in the field of EFL LA (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) stated that, even though there were many studies exploring LA, there is still a need to explore

teachers' cognition of LA as it directly affects the teaching/learning process. Moreover, few studies have explored students' perceptions of LA in high schools and university, or compared the differences. It would be helpful to examine these areas, for several reasons. First, findings on the differences between high school and university students' autonomous learning experience could shed light on the limitations of EFL textbooks, teaching methods, and the learning environment of Saudi students. Such research could help policymakers in future EFL educational and curricula reforms. Second, it could help reinforce some of the teaching guidelines the MOE gives to EFL teachers for different learning stages. In other words, investigating students' exposure to LA between high school and university will offer insight about the types of changes in their perceptions and practices of learning independently. This study will therefore explore teachers' and students' beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding LA in order to gain a better understanding of the best ways to implement autonomous learning.

In particular, there is a clear gap in the literature related to promoting LA in Saudi EFL writing classrooms. Saudi EFL students struggle when they write in English. Their writing practice is restricted to their writing classes, and they have little opportunity to improve their writing skills (Shukri, 2014). Importantly, they do not take charge of their learning to write but strictly follow their teachers' instructions in writing assignments in order to produce pieces of writing that guarantee passing the course (Shukri, 2014). With limited studies addressing such issues, a study is needed to explore teachers' practices in EFL writing classrooms in order to gain a better view of how Saudi EFL teaching is delivered following the significant changes the MOE implemented to enhance TEFL. It has been argued that EFL teachers' and students' beliefs and attitudes might not be reflected in their practices; however, the reasons behind this argument remain unclear (Kynigos & Argyris, 2004). Many studies pertaining to EFL writing skills have investigated the traditional strategies for teaching

writing, such as lecturing students and teacher-centred approaches, but researchers have not investigated how students can take control of their own writing development through autonomous learning. Research has also not explored the change in teachers' and students' views and practices after modifying the new EFL curricula which encouraged the autonomous learning approach. To address these shortfalls, this study will explore how students develop their writing skills with and without LA.

#### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

The following factors must be considered when assessing the significance of this study:

- 1) Although many studies have explored LA with regards to EFL students' and teachers' perceptions, few studies conducted in recent years have explored the factors that support and impede the promotion of LA in EFL writing classes. This study will highlight what helps and hinders the implementation of LA in Saudi classrooms. The findings will help establish a base for incorporating LA in the learning curricula and provide decision-makers and curriculum designers with new insights and perspectives on the potential value of LA to enhance learning.
- 2) It is important to fill the gap in the literature due to the lack of research in the area of LA in Saudi TEFL writing classrooms. The findings of this study will help TEFL writing teachers change their traditional methods of teaching and implement autonomous learning in order to enhance both the teaching and learning of EFL writing.
- 3) As LA is a relatively new trend in and a new aim of the Saudi educational system, this study is timely in exploring practices, beliefs, and attitudes about LA on the part of both teachers and students. The results will provide new awareness and insight around the potential use of LA in Saudi EFL writing classrooms, which

can help encourage both EFL teachers and students to embrace LA in order to maximise the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process.

- 4) The Saudi MOE has modified the EFL curricula many times by incorporating new learning and teaching strategies. No study has investigated how implementing these new strategies has impacted student achievement, especially in EFL writing classes.
- 5) This study will provide evidence about whether it is useful to implement LA in writing classrooms, by exploring the ways in which LA might affect writing development. Findings will raise teachers' awareness about promoting LA in their classrooms and provide a profound look at incorporating methods to teach EFL writing in an autonomous learning atmosphere.

### **1.5. Purpose of the Study**

This study will attempt to achieve the following:

- 1) Explore teachers' and students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs towards LA.
- 2) Compare students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs towards LA at the start of their first university year (i.e., the preparatory year) with their practices, attitudes, and beliefs at the end of their preparatory year.
- 3) Explore the perceived barriers and supporting factors around promoting LA in EFL writing classrooms.
- 4) Explore EFL teachers' promotion and implementation of LA in their writing classes.
- 5) Explore the development of students' writing with and without autonomous learning.

### **1.6. Reflections on Researcher Background**

One of the main reasons for my interest in this area of research is that I, myself, have been an autonomous learner since my earliest stages of education. I noticed that I achieved higher scores in English compared to my colleagues, who were intimidated by learning this new language when we were first introduced to it in intermediate school. As I was autonomous, English was my favourite subject among all subjects during my whole educational life, and I took control of learning it by myself. I eventually ended up choosing English as my BA major in university. One of the inspirations behind becoming an autonomous English learner was my father, who took the teacher's role and motivated me from the beginning to learn this language. He used to teach me EFL using topics from my real-life experiences. He raised interesting topics when teaching me and motivated me by letting me control my own language education, set my learning goals, identify my weaknesses and strengths and evaluate my progress. Although I had good teachers in the course of my education, I was usually taught the language by traditional methods of teaching, such as lecturing.

During my nine-year personal experience of working as an EFL lecturer in a university, I noticed that most of my students did not perform well in EFL, especially in writing. I also noticed that some of them hated learning about writing for unknown reasons. These reasons led me to read more about autonomous learning during my MA and PhD studies. My belief was that LA is important in learning a language. Studies have supported this belief, as will be discussed later in the literature review. However, there were not sufficient data about autonomy among my Saudi students in university. When I was reading about LA in the Saudi EFL educational field, I was not able to fully identify solutions to this problem. There were not enough studies about writing autonomy specific to Saudi educational contexts. This lack of research made me want to explore this area and find clear answers about the

importance of autonomy in learning English. I eventually ended up choosing this as the topic of my research.

### **1.7.Thesis Structure**

The structure of the thesis will be in the following order:

- 1) Chapter 1: Introduction highlights the background of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, purposes and aims of the study, research questions, and theoretical framework.
- 2) Chapter 2: Literature Review outlines in greater detail the theoretical basis of LA and how it relates to models of second language writing, and examines the empirical research exploring teachers' and students' beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding LA, as well as the factors that influence them.
- 3) Chapter 3: Research Methodology addresses the methods employed in the study, justifications for using the mixed methods research design, paradigm of the study, and descriptions of the instruments, data collection, and data analysis methods. In addition, the pilot study, reliability, validity, and ethical issues are discussed.
- 4) Chapter 4: Findings (Qualitative and Quantitative) explains the analysis and presents the results of the analysis.
- 5) Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings interprets the results of the study in relation to the research questions. It offers in-depth discussion of the findings in light of teachers' and students' autonomous learning implementations in EFL writing classes and related theoretical and empirical studies.
- 6) Chapter 6: Conclusion presents the key findings for each research question. It then discusses the implications and recommendations for implementing autonomous learning in Saudi EFL classes.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Learner Autonomy (LA)

**2.1.1. The concept of LA.** The concept of LA first appeared in the 1950s. Since then, various studies have been conducted on autonomous learning and its influence on the learning process (Zhuang, 2010). LA has been and remains a much-debated topic in the TEFL field. However, according to Sella (2014), no exclusive definition of LA exists. Even though Holec's (1981) description is widely agreed upon by researchers as it is one of the first definitions added to the literature, there is still no universal meaning of LA. Holec (1981) defined LA as '...the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (p. 3). Benson (2007) and Ikonen (2013) agreed with Holec's definition and stated that it is one of the most frequently used definitions by researchers. They clarified that LA, according to Holec's explanation, is a learner's active engagement in the learning process, the responsibility to make decisions, and the act of controlling and assessing the outcomes of the learning process. Other researchers, such as Little (1991) and Sella (2014), have used the same definition as Holec but evolved the meaning to include thinking critically and making conscious decisions about the learning process.

In order to think critically and make such decisions, according to Harwood's (2010) empirical study into how LA might be promoted through using blogs, learners must have self-regulation, motivation, and personal accountability. Self-regulation comes when learners monitor their mental learning process by choosing, controlling, and assessing their own learning. Motivation modifies learners' interests, desires, and goals by boosting their autonomy. Finally, personal accountability occurs when the students detach themselves from the control of the teacher and deeply analyse their own learning progress.

A review of the literature indicates that there has been a lot of discussion about autonomous learning levels, which is also called the *theory of stages*. Some researchers have

considered LA as a matter of degree and a never-ending progression. For instance, Leach (2012) and Nunan (1996) suggested awareness, interacting, identifying, and linking as phases of an autonomy model. Littlewood (1996), however, stated that autonomous learning consists of three stages: level of communication, level of learning, and the personal level. Firstly, the level of communication involves the learners' ability to communicate and operate independently in real-life situations. Secondly, the level of learning involves the learners' ability to learn actively by themselves. Lastly, the personal level involves learners' ability to take responsibility for their own personal learning and to apply personal strategies within their learning.

Macaro (2005) presents a three-level model of LA that includes the autonomy of language competence, learning competence, and awareness of autonomy. Firstly, autonomy of language competence is the improvement of communication skills. Secondly, learners reach the learning competence level when they can transfer the needed or required skills and strategies to new learning contexts. Finally, awareness of autonomy is when the learner activates metacognitive strategies. Similarly, Scharle and Szabo (2000) indicated a three-stage model that includes increasing awareness by experiencing new activities to bring the learners' inner awareness of themselves and to think consciously; modifying attitudes, which is a slow process when aiming to break old, entrenched attitudes to facilitate new understanding; and controlling learning.

The process of learning is highly affected by a person's subjective experience (Gremmo & Riley, 1995). Gremmo and Riley (1995) indicated that both humanistic psychology and cognitive psychology consider the process of learning to include a range of concepts related to learner capabilities. Indeed, many concepts related to LA—such as self-regulation, metacognition, and motivation—are all part of the psychological field (Vancouver, 2005). Self-regulation involves control over one's learning; hence, Vancouver

(2005) considered autonomous learning as part of the self-regulation process. Moreover, Vancouver suggested that metacognition and LA are almost the same in terms of the conceptual nature, the psychological background, and the way learners process their learning experiences.

With the growing interest in autonomous learning, researchers have specified the characteristics of language LA (Breen & Mann, 1997; Little, 1991; Sella, 2014; Ushioda, 1996; Wenden, 1998). Firstly, higher levels of autonomous learning leads students to be more confident and to exercise better self-perception (Lamb, 2001). Secondly, based on Breen and Mann's (1997) findings, autonomous learners have an interest in learning, self-sense, metacognitive ability, control over their personal learning processes, independence, and the ability to engage with other sectors in the learning environment. According to Wenden (1998), autonomous learners are insightful, learn actively, improve their learning experiences, think metacognitively, and control their learning. Meanwhile, Little (1991), Sella (2014), and Ushioda (1996) agreed that autonomous language learners are those who take control over their learning, judge and criticise as part of being aware, and make decisions according to their learning outcomes.

Autonomous learning significantly impacts both learners and teachers. Ikonen (2013) and Kohonen (1992) showed evidence from their studies that LA improves learning. Moreover, Pennycook (1997) believed that autonomous learning is empowering as it helps learners control the learning process. According to Little (2003), Dwee and Anthony (2017), and Thawabieh (2017), active participation in learning would lead a person to effective learning and increased awareness of the learning process. However, there are some critical factors that affect the application of the autonomous learning since some learners lack the ability to foster LA due to the sociocultural context.

**2.1.2. Theoretical framework.** The main theoretical framework adopted for this study is constructivism. Constructivism is not a new concept; while it is philosophy-based but has roots in education, psychology, and sociology, it has been a common theory in the academic field (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Little, 1994; Nunan, 1996). According to Little (1994), constructivism has received much attention from researchers and scholars as it provides a theory that supports educational research and methods of teaching. Constructivism mainly focuses on the cognitive role of learners during learning (Wang, 2015) and is a process where people construct knowledge while being connected to the outer world. In other words, constructivism means learning is a social experience that includes language and interacting and collaborating in real-life situations (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Little, 1994; Nunan, 1996). According to this theory, learning is a conscious social interaction; it happens when people interact with each other in a specific environment (Ozer, 2004). This theory is unique because it has tried to change understanding about knowledge by indicating that knowledge is a conscious construct of the learning process; learning is not a passive process (Dickinson & Wenden, 1995). According to Kafai and Resnik (1993) and Little (1991), the reason for teaching is learning. Furthermore, constructivism holds that learners could learn better by understanding the information they have constructed by themselves, meaning that teachers' role is not one of information givers but information mentors. Learning is aided if teachers support learners in becoming responsible and constructing an effective learning environment (Dickinson & Wenden, 1995; Kafai & Resnik, 1993; Little, 1991; Ozer, 2004; Wang, 2015).

Constructivism has important implications for foreign and second language learning. For instance, learning a language requires interactive communication and involves socio-cultural, educational, and psychological components. When learning a language, learners

construct a reality that involves a culture in learning that language (Dickinson & Wenden, 1995; Little, 1991).

Vygotsky is a scholar who is an important figure in the development of constructivism theory. According to researchers (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Nunan, 1996; Oxford, 1990; Ozer, 2004; Thanasoulas, 2000), Vygotsky believed that learning in classrooms must be based on a constructivist environment. Vygotsky (1896–1934) is known for his theory of constructivism (Barnes, 1976; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Little, 1994; Oxford, 1990; Thanasoulas, 2000). He believed that collaboration and collaborative activities are the base of learning. He also added that children’s contact with the environment is the first way they construct new ideas through cognitive development. According to him, children develop cognitive tools based on culture—such as religion, traditions, and language—that eventually form their attention, perception, and memory capacity.

Vygotsky believes in the importance and impact of the social and cultural means on learning; this is why his version of constructivism is known as social constructivism theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Oxford, 1990; Thanasoulas, 2000). He indicates that children’s cognitive ability is low when they are young. However, social context, culture and mentors’ supervision help increase this cognitive ability through time as they get older.

Vygotsky (1978) presented a new concept that deals with independent learning (Mariani, 1997; Reinders, 2010). This concept is known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). 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. 86). It means the opportunity adults give to children to develop children’s higher thinking. It is the area where a mentor gives children an instruction allowing them to use it in their own way when they need to.

To conclude, Vygotsky believed in learning through a meaningful and real environment (Dickinson & Wenden, 1995; Kafai & Resnik, 1993; Little, 1991; Ozer, 2004; Wang, 2015). He also believed in the significance of collaborative activities during the learning process. This learning theory emphasises the importance of constructing knowledge through a variety of methods such as collaboration and engaging in real environmental activities in learning. It modifies the role of teachers as information givers. This helps learners gather, analyse and evaluate their learning rather than memorising new given information as in rote-learning.

According to the theory of constructivism, learners are constructors of knowledge and learning. Moreover, it emphasises the role of learners in constructing their knowledge by themselves. Holec (1981, p.3) defined learner autonomy as ‘...the ability to take charge of one’s own learning.’ Benson (2007) and Ikonen (2013) clarify that learner autonomy, according to Holec’s definition (1981), is a learner’s active engagement in the learning process, responsibility to take decisions, controlling and assessing the outcomes of the learning process. Moreover, other researchers, such as Little (1991) and Sella (2014) evolved Holec’s definition to be thinking critically and making conscious decisions about the learning process.

Learner autonomy is linked to constructivism for many reasons (Benson, 2000; Benson, 2001; Benson & Voller 1997; Cotterall & Crabbe 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2006, Omaggio, 1986; Oxford, 1990; Palfreyman & Smiths, 2003; Thanasoulas, 2000; Wenden, 1987; Wenden, 1991). Firstly, LA has been known for giving learners the chance to construct their own knowledge. Secondly, LA is known for being the opposite of a teacher-centred teaching method. Thirdly, according to Mariani (1997) and Reinders (2010), Vygotsky’s theory explains the relationship between LA and ZPD. They stated that the concept of ZPD identified LA as the goal of learning. Also, according to ZPD, LA is a base

for learners to move from one level to another. While Vygotsky's theory pays attention to learning development, LA is confirmed to be the centre of developing learning. Moreover, LA gives learners the chance to control their learning by analysing information, organising and evaluating their learning process. Lastly, LA allows learners to construct their knowledge based on their social experience to form a meaningful learning process. Benson (2000) and Kumaravadivelu (2006) indicated that LA is taking control of one's learning; this could be considered as the base of the theory of constructivism.

As constructivism theory is about constructing a meaningful learning experience, LA promotes learning by making it personal so that it becomes meaningful. Autonomous learning has a significant impact on both learners and teachers. Moreover, Pennycook (1997) believes that autonomous learning is empowering as it helps learners become the controller of their learning process. According to Little (2003), active participating in one's learning leads to effective learning and increased awareness of the learning process.

Although constructivism is mainly about the learner, it has a significant relationship with teachers. In constructivism, the learner is the core element of the learning process. LA also treats learners as the core elements of learning. However, to make learners learn autonomously in educational environments, students need to be correctly and effectively guided and assessed by their teachers. Therefore, teachers play a significant role in enhancing students' autonomy. Teachers help students become autonomous learners by implementing autonomous strategies in their classes, such as motivation, student participation in decision-making and self-assessment. When conducted by teachers, such strategies make the learning process meaningful to students, enabling those students to construct knowledge independently. Students could become autonomous if their teachers gave them chances to direct their own learning instead of acting as the only sources of information. For constructivism, the relationship between teachers and students is about establishing a

meaningful learning context. This meaningful learning context is formed when students are allowed by their teachers to be actively engaged with their own learning process. Teachers can encourage this by applying autonomous strategies rather than traditional ways of teaching. Consequently, teachers play a significant role in developing students' autonomous learning.

**2.1.3. Factors that promote LA in classrooms.** Some studies have discussed the role of EFL teachers in promoting LA in classrooms. For instance, Little (1994), Alonazi (2017), and Scharle and Szabo (2000) stated it is not the teacher's role to plan, monitor, and evaluate the learning process. Autonomous learning requires students to take responsibility for their learning by setting their own goals and monitoring and evaluating their own progress. Promoting autonomous learning also requires the movement away from teacher-centred classrooms towards student-centred ones (Kassem, 2018). Hence, providing the environment that promotes a learner-based classroom is considered the teacher's role in developing LA. In an article, Chan (2000) reported some ways she promoted LA in her classroom, which included short talks, seminar discussions, group presentations, and debates. These methods were based on collaborative group work. Turloiu and Stefánsdóttir (2011) and Misir, Koban, and Koc (2018) agreed with Chan that engaging students in group work potentially leads to LA.

Another theory was proposed by Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, and Turner (2004) about supporting LA in the classroom. Offering propositions based on a literature review and their own observations, they suggested that support for LA in classrooms could manifest in three different ways. First, *organisational autonomy* support allows students to participate in making decisions around issues such as implementing classroom rules and choosing group members, evaluation procedures, and seating arrangements. Second, *procedural autonomy* support offers choices to students in how they present their ideas in learning. This aspect

gives students opportunities to choose class projects, display their work, and demonstrate their competence. Third, *cognitive autonomy* support provides students with the chance to evaluate their work, allowing them to discuss approaches and strategies, solve problems, re-evaluate errors, set learning goals, freely debate ideas, and be independent problem-solvers. The researchers concluded that these three aspects together support the promotion of LA in the classroom, and if one aspect is missing, the process cannot be properly facilitated. They emphasised the importance of cognitively engaging students in the learning process.

Reeve (2005) also indicated that LA could be supported in classrooms by engaging students more in the learning process. This active involvement is considered an investment by students in their own learning. He mentioned four types of student engagement in learning activities. The first type is *behavioural engagement*, which includes students' attention to and concentration on the task and their persistence in learning through difficulties. The second type is *emotional behaviour*, which includes their interest in learning and their enjoyment and enthusiasm in the learning process. The third type is *cognitive engagement*, which includes planning, monitoring, and evaluating their work and using sophisticated learning strategies, such as elaborating and summarising. The fourth type of engagement is allowing the *voice of students* in expressing preferences, offering suggestions, recommending activities, and participating in class discussions. Reeve also stated that allowing students to engage in the learning process makes learning possible as it is impossible to learn without attention, effort, and positive emotion. Moreover, engagement leads students to higher autonomous learning.

Additional factors that promote LA in classrooms were discussed in the literature. For example, Kelly (2014) conducted a quasi-experimental study and concluded that motivation and encouragement are important factors when fostering autonomous learning. According to Condrat (2014); Shadish, Cook, and Campbell, (2002); Hazaea and Alzubi (2018);

Schumacher and Ifenthaler (2018); Macaro (1997); and Almusharraf (2018), besides motivation, technology is also useful in promoting LA. For example, they mentioned that students could learn individually based on their need and level through computers and online resources. They also stated that using technology could help students feel responsibility towards their learning and towards making their own decisions in the learning process.

**2.1.4. Challenges of implementing LA.** The construction of autonomous learning is a difficult task for many reasons (Lamb, 2017). According to Lamb (2017), LA is tangled with ideological, social, and pedagogical constructs such as beliefs, motivation, and knowledge. Benson (2000) mentioned that there are four types of constraints for implementing LA: (a) policy constraints, such as the broad policies around language learning; (b) institutional constraints, such as rules, regulations, and curriculum; (c) language conceptions, such as the dominant perception of the target language; and (d) methodologies of language teaching. According to Little (2009), however, there are only three major constraints in implementing LA: (a) the lack of teachers' experience, (b) teachers' doubt about the usefulness of implementing autonomous learning, and (c) curriculum and textbook constraints. By contrast, a study by Borg (2011) identified additional factors which could impede the implementation of LA: (a) teachers' low expectations for student achievement and a lack of teacher autonomy, (b) lack of students' motivation and skills in independent learning, and (c) institutional factors such as the lack of learning resources and an overloaded curriculum.

In addition, Nunan (1996) indicated that the teacher-centred classroom is one of the big challenges that face students for promoting autonomous learning. He added that decision-making is a key factor in promoting LA, and in teacher-centred classes, students lose the option of choosing their preferred way of learning. Moreover, a lack of activities during learning could cause students' lack of interest in learning (Nunan, 1996; Szöcs, 2017).

Another challenge added by Salim and Yusuf is that absence of teachers' cooperation and encouragement would hinder promoting students' autonomous learning.

Moreover, Little (2016) wrote an article about the challenges of promoting learners' autonomous learning. He classified those challenges into four main factors: the teacher, the learner, the process of learning, and the learner training. He posited that teachers should allow students to take control over their learning. A teacher could, for instance, negotiate with students about their preferred ways of learning. Some teachers are unwilling to promote LA in their classes because they lack the proper awareness of its significance. Secondly, learners could prevent themselves from fostering autonomous learning as a result of a lack of interest and motivation. As for the process of learning, Little stated that any classroom and learning context require specific conditions in order to enable students to promote their LA. He argued that the absence of learning resources, such as computers and dictionaries in the case of EFL learning, could hinder promoting LA. Finally, he argued that learners might not be fully aware of their autonomy. A lack of awareness of LA would hinder its promotion

A review of the literature also highlighted the frequent mention of educational constraints as barriers that hinder the promotion of LA in EFL classes. For instance, a study by Halabi (2018) employed mixed methods to investigate factors that hinder the promotion of LA. Educational constraints such as a fixed examination system and curricula that do not pay attention to students' learning needs, interests, and proficiency levels were main issues noted by participants. Alrabai (2017) and Alhareth and Dighrir (2014) claimed that these were serious issues for Saudi EFL curricula as they do not promote critical thinking and instead promote rote memorising.

**2.1.5. Teachers' and students' beliefs about LA.** Beliefs play an important role in all areas of life as they help people make sense of the world and affect the way new information is internalised (Borg, 2003). A belief is comprehensively defined by Borg

(2001) as ‘a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in the sense that it is accepted as true by individuals, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour’ (p. 186). Some researchers mentioned that beliefs cannot be observed in a direct way but must be inferred (Borg, 2006; Bullock, 2010). Moreover, beliefs are difficult to investigate as individuals are usually reluctant to unveil their beliefs (Williams & Burden, 1997). Beliefs can also be considered contradictory as they often change over time due to life experience, contextual factors, and situational constraints (Borg, 2006).

Researchers have identified some factors that impact teachers’ beliefs even though no evidence shows how these beliefs change. For instance, Bandura (1986) suggested that the surrounding environment influences teachers’ beliefs and vice versa. Furthermore, Borg (2006) mentioned that teachers’ cognition is affected by external factors, such as contextual factors.

Horwitz (1985), Rieger (2009), and Althaqafi (2017) indicated that beliefs around language learning significantly impact student achievement as such beliefs affect students’ learning efficacy. Hence, it is vital to identify learners’ beliefs as doing so can help teachers understand the factors that influence students’ progress in language learning (Horwitz, 1985). According to Riley (2009), unsubstantiated beliefs can cause anxiety in language learning. He also added that beliefs can positively impact this learning if they coincide with the expected good practice of language learning; otherwise, beliefs would negatively affect language learning. Even though students’ beliefs towards LA have not been widely explored, Chang (2007) and Édes (2008) agreed that students’ beliefs about LA do not necessarily lead to autonomous learning behaviours.

While beliefs play an important role in directing learning, they do not always coincide with actual practices. According to Kaymakamoğlu (2018) and Aguirre and Speer (2000),

beliefs are not always shown in practices. Teachers could believe in the significance of a specific strategy but do not necessarily practise it. This reality is why it is important to investigate teachers' beliefs and practices in the Saudi educational context. Exploring their beliefs and actual practices could help curricula developers adjust new curricula based on updated findings.

A review of the literature revealed that many studies have focused on LA as a concept in the EFL field (Aljasir, 2009; Alrabai, 2016, 2017; Althaqafi, 2017; Lazăr, 2013; Merç, 2018; Stasiakiewicz, 2014; Sullivan & Lindgren, 2002). For instance, Alrabai (2016) conducted a study on Saudi EFL students to measure through their beliefs how ready they were to be autonomous learners. The study included participants from a wide range of educational levels from both sexes (male and female). Two tools were used for collecting data, a questionnaire to gather the quantitative data and a semi-structured interview for the qualitative data. The results showed that Saudi EFL students are not ready to be autonomous learners as they depend strongly on the teacher for learning new information. They view teachers as the sole providers of knowledge and are used to teachers having strict control over the learning process in teacher-centred classrooms. The researcher suggested that teachers should promote students' awareness by exploring their perceptions towards LA and recommended that further studies should focus on exploring methods to promote students' autonomy in the learning process.

To gain a better understanding of how Saudi students viewed LA, Al-Roomy (2015) explored the beliefs of 151 male students in their preparatory year for admission to medical school. He used a questionnaire developed by Horwitz (1985) called the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory. The results mainly showed that the students held both positive and negative beliefs towards learning EFL. Based on the questionnaire, students had positive thoughts and held positive beliefs about the importance of motivational strategies and

negative beliefs about communication strategies in the process of learning EFL. The study emphasised the importance of teachers being aware of students' beliefs and perceptions about EFL in order to guide them to a better learning experience. A final recommendation was that further qualitative research about students' beliefs over a long period of time should be conducted.

In addition, a number of studies have discussed teachers' beliefs towards LA in the EFL context. For example, Yunus and Arshad (2015) explored teachers' perceptions of their role in LA as it is vital for promoting autonomy in their students. The researchers delivered the questionnaire to 35 Malaysian secondary school teachers. The questionnaire explored teachers' perceptions towards LA and the practices they used to promote it in their classrooms. The results showed that teachers were ready to let students take control of their learning by sharing the authority in the learning process. Nevertheless, students in multicultural classrooms especially were not fully ready to take responsibility for their learning in researchers' opinion. Yunus and Arshad recommended further research to explore students' different backgrounds and different perceptions towards LA. They argued that, although teachers and curricula are the main aspects in developing LA, the students' conditioned dependency on teachers does not encourage it. Thus, more research on students' beliefs and perceptions is needed to be able to develop the process of both EFL teaching and learning.

According to Al-Asmari (2013), Saudi EFL students' independence and active learning are missing in traditional classroom settings. Teachers therefore need to enhance students' learning experience by encouraging them to become autonomous learners. Al-Asmari explored teachers' opinions and perceptions towards LA in their classrooms via a study sample consisting of 60 male and female teachers who taught college students. He designed a questionnaire with three sections to collect the data. The first section explored students' LA practices; the second section explored teachers' LA practices in their classroom;

and the third section explored teachers' perceptions regarding how LA should be promoted. The results showed a general agreement on the significance of involving students in active learning. Moreover, the findings showed that teachers expected their students to take control over the learning process. However, this study did not focus on any particular method or strategy during teaching, but rather explored LA in general without specifying which strategies teachers used to promote student autonomy. For instance, LA is not simply about placing the responsibility for learning on the students' shoulders without guiding or motivating them through the use of learning strategies designed for the task at hand. As an example, the strategies used in a reading lesson would differ from those used in a writing or listening class. Some of the categories Al-Asmari used in the questionnaire were communicative skills, group discussion, and home-based tasks. These categories were not precise enough, however, to judge how LA was promoted in a specific EFL class, such as reading or writing, in which the main objective of the lesson would lead to different strategies for promoting LA.

Teachers also believed that motivational strategies have an impact on LA in their classrooms. For instance, the results of Liu's (2015) study showed that LA can be promoted through motivation and that a strong and positive relationship exists between motivational strategies and LA. Alshehri's (2012) research was conducted on both Saudi EFL teachers and students. The study aimed to examine the possible mismatch of teachers' and students' beliefs towards motivational strategies that teachers used in the classroom. The study sample included 11 female participants: six EFL teachers and five EFL students. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather qualitative data. Even though the results showed that teachers and students agree on the significance of motivation in the educational setting, the teachers' beliefs opposed the students' beliefs in terms of motivational strategies. Teachers agreed on the importance of motivational strategies that help their students achieve better academic

outcomes, but students wanted more motivational strategies related to social factors, such as classroom participation and student interactions. Moreover, the students' and teachers' perceptions towards group work were different in that teachers had positive perceptions towards group work while students did not. The results also showed the passive role that students assumed in the classroom since teachers tended to plan for the whole lesson without the students' participation. Even when teachers planned motivational activities, the students' roles were almost passive. Based on these results, Alshehri recommended further research be conducted on other motivational practices in classrooms, such as giving rewards for tasks completed through written feedback. Therefore, a specific study exploring students' and teachers' perceptions towards written feedback as an autonomous strategy could add to the literature as it is a part of giving tasks and has not yet been explored.

Another study by Borg and Alshumaimeri (2017) explored teachers' beliefs around LA and their constraints in promoting it. The study included 359 teachers at a Saudi university and employed a modified questionnaire from a previous study (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012) to gather quantitative data. The findings showed that participants believed it was important to promote autonomous learning in their classes. However, they also believed that promoting LA was difficult due to educational restraints and learners' lack of motivation and independence. The researchers mentioned that interviews and observations could also be used to further explore the same questions as that study. Moreover, they suggested an exploratory study of teachers' beliefs towards LA within sociocultural, professional, and institutional contexts. Alonazi (2017) also focused on the use of LA among Saudi EFL secondary school teachers. Using a questionnaire to collect data from 60 EFL female teachers, he investigated the roles of teachers as facilitators, counsellors, resources, and managers in promoting students' LA. He found that teachers faced difficulties in implementing LA in their classrooms, such as the students' dependence on teachers.

Notably, though, the study revealed that teachers do try to implement strategies to promote autonomous learning with students, which indicates a promising future for LA in Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, a study by Alhaysony (2016) explored the perceptions of LA among 77 Saudi EFL teachers. He used a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. The study revealed that most of the EFL teachers were aware of the significance of LA in learning EFL. However, they believed that students lacked the responsibility to take control over their learning. He suggested further studies be conducted to explore students' preferred practices in classrooms and how such practices might be different from their teachers' preferences. Following this recommendation, a study on both EFL teachers' and students' beliefs towards LA in writing classes could fill the literature gap.

**2.1.6. Teachers' and students' attitudes towards LA.** The concept of attitude has historically been studied within the context of social sciences, and various definitions exist for the concept. For example, according to Eagly and Chaiken, an attitude is 'a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor' (1993, p. 1). Other researchers have agreed to include evaluation when defining attitudes (Prislin & Crano, 2008; Farahi, 2015; Khalil & Ali, 2018; Petty, Wegener, & Fabrigar, 1997).

According to Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), even though LA has been studied for 30 years, studies on teachers' views remain limited. Yet understanding teachers' views is essential when aiming to promote LA in EFL classes. In a study by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), the findings shed light on the significance of identifying teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards LA. The study included a questionnaire and interviews administered to 61 EFL teachers in Oman. They found that teachers had positive attitudes towards LA. Another

study conducted to identify teachers' attitudes towards LA was done by Balçıkanlı (2010). He conducted a study on 112 teachers in a Turkish university by administering a questionnaire and conducting interviews. He found that teachers held positive attitudes towards implementing LA in their classes. However, the teachers also believed that students should take responsibility for their own learning. Lastly, Nakata (2011) conducted a study in a Japanese high school to explore 80 teachers' readiness for promoting autonomous learning. His findings revealed that EFL teachers, even those who were familiar with the concept, were not all fully ready to promote autonomous learning in their classes.

There have been many studies conducted to explore students' attitudes towards LA. Some studies found that students felt good about relying on their teachers in which students were less positive toward LA. For instance, Chan (2001) conducted a study in a university in Hong Kong on 20 EFL students. She used questionnaires and interviews to investigate students' attitudes towards LA. The findings revealed that, even though students showed a capacity to be autonomous, they expressed negative attitudes towards independence from teachers. Moreover, Koçak (2003) administered a questionnaire to 186 preparatory year students at a Turkish university. His study was about exploring students' attitudes towards role of teacher in learning process He found that students had positive attitudes towards relying on their teachers. Seeking to explore the difference between the attitudes of successful and less-successful learners, Mineishi (2010) studied 219 EFL students in a Japanese university. His findings showed that successful learners had positive attitudes towards LA. The underlying reason for that attitude appeared to be that students held more positive attitudes towards active learning than towards passive learning.

**2.1.7. Students' writing and cognition.** Writing as a skill is considered a complex process. In order to write, students must have the necessary knowledge to generate ideas to express emotions and thoughts (Hayes & Flower, 1980). According to Güneş (2007), when

students write, they incorporate cognitive and metacognitive strategies into the process or writing. Although students' cognition entails their understanding of concepts and the ability to think and reason, students' metacognition is a process that guides how cognition should be controlled and monitored. It is also the process that students use to plan, monitor, and assess their understanding and performance. These metacognitive processes are considered the essence of LA (Pintrich, 1999). Öz and Çelik (2007) indicated that writing includes cognitive strategies when students incorporate their emotions and thoughts when structuring information into a text. At the same time, students use metacognitive strategies when they incorporate drafting, evaluating, planning, and monitoring (Flower & Hayes, 1984; Graham & Perin, 2007; Kellogg, 2008; Schraw, 1998; Todd, 2002; Williams, 2003; Zimmerman, 1995). Some scholars (Kellogg, 2008; Schraw, 1998; Todd, 2002; Williams, 2003; Zimmerman, 1995) indicated that, when using metacognitive strategies, students develop writing ability because they incorporate planning, drafting, monitoring, and evaluating processes into pre-, during-, and post-writing. According to Magogwe (2013) and Mekala, Shabitha, and Ponmani (2016), students who employ metacognitive strategies tend to emphasise linguistic structure, content, knowledge of the task requirements, and accuracy, and they control how they learn writing skills. Hayes and Flower (1980) added that students need to select, organise, and evaluate their work in order to improve their writing. Such findings suggest that high-proficiency-level students use metacognitive strategies when they write.

According to the above-mentioned models of writing (Hayes & Flower, 1980; Williams, 2003), content knowledge and discourse knowledge are both recognised as prior requirements for writing. Writers need to have both cognitive strategies and knowledge in order to write, and writers' knowledge of the topic increases cognitive efforts and influences the writing process (Olive, 2004; Olive & Kellogg, 2002). However, McCutchen (2000)

argued that knowledge is not enough when students are learning to write; in order to learn independently, students need to apply some metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating. In addition to that, McLeod (1987) stated that cognitive and metacognitive processes are combined in the writing of self-directed learners.

According to Harris, Santangelo, and Graham (2010), metacognitive strategies, such as self-assessment and evaluation, may help students become better writers. The researchers claimed that such autonomous strategies help students develop awareness of the linguistic and cognitive levels of writing. However, it was claimed that low-proficiency students tend to focus on cognitive strategies—such as clarification, self-questioning, and defining terms—when they write, while high-proficiency students become concerned with the metacognitive strategies of writing (Cindy, Monroe, & Troia, 2007; De Gloppe & Schoonen, 1996; Stasiakiewicz, 2014). According to Flavell (2004), employing metacognitive strategies, such as motivational autonomous strategies, while writing makes students more aware of learning and thinking. When students use metacognitive strategies, they tend to more autonomously develop their writing skills.

Some studies have been conducted on students' proficiency levels and LA. For instance, some scholars (Aliyu, Fung, Abdullah, & Hoon, 2016; Ezzi, 2018; Karahroudi & Reddy, 2014; Kim, 2016; Mekala et al., 2016; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994) claimed that autonomous writing strategies have an important impact on developing writing skills. A study conducted by Casanave (1995) emphasised the benefit of using journal writing activities in EFL college-level classes. She found that students who used journals as an autonomous writing strategy to help monitor and control their progress did better than students who did not. Other studies by Akmilia, Purnawarman, and Rodliyah (2017), Fulwiler (1987), Sharma et al. (2016), and Vanett and Jurich (1990) also reported similar findings related to students employing autonomous strategies, such as self-assessment,

writing journals, and evaluation. Moreover, writing freely rather than following a teacher's model leads students to write better. For instance, a study conducted by Hyland (1998) showed that students who had the chance to write freely produced better writing than students who did not. He also found that praise and encouragement from teachers led to enthusiasm among students, thus developing their learning.

Another qualitative study was conducted by Victori (1999) to explore the metacognitive knowledge that affects students' writing approaches. Two high-proficiency students and two low-proficiency students were required to verbalise the writing process while writing an argumentative essay. Results showed that there was a difference between high-proficiency students and low-proficiency students in the employment of metacognitive knowledge and cognitive strategies. This finding could suggest that the poor writing performance of low-proficiency students is attributed to their employment of metacognitive knowledge and cognitive strategies (Dafei, 2007; Dickinson & Wenden, 1995).

**2.1.8. LA and metacognition.** The concepts of autonomous learning and metacognition are sometimes misunderstood in the field of education. LA is about being an active and independent learner, by monitoring one's learning methods and evaluating one's progress (Littlewood, 1996; Zimmerman, 1986). By contrast, metacognition is about learners' knowledge and awareness of their own cognitive skills. Metacognitive strategies include planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning (Flavell, 1976; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1998). According to Wenden (1998), metacognition as a concept is knowledge about learning, while LA as a concept is responsibility for one's own learning. However, the characteristics of metacognition and LA do overlap.

A review of the literature suggests that many studies have been conducted separately on fostering LA and facilitating learning using metacognition and metacognitive strategies (Baker & Brown, 1984; Carrell, 1989; Cheng & Zheng, 2004; Guo & Yan, 2007; Ji, 2002;

Nunan, 1997; Qian, 2005; Wenden, 1998). Research by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Ji (2002) showed that using metacognitive strategies in learning improved learners' ability to plan, control, evaluate, and even promote their LA. Holec (1981) argued that a correlation exists between metacognitive strategies and LA. According to him, metacognition can also be defined as when autonomous learners control their learning, set learning methods, and evaluate achieved goals. Similarly, Wenden (1987) claimed that LA has many aspects and that metacognition is considered one of them. The literature showed not only that learners could foster autonomy only by becoming responsible for their learning but also that metacognitive awareness is a key factor in fostering LA (Baker & Brown, 1984; Carrell, 1989; Cheng & Zheng, 2004; Guo & Yan, 2007; Ji, 2002; Nunan, 1997; Qian, 2005; Wenden, 1998).

According to some researchers (Baker & Brown, 1984; Carrell, 1989; Cheng & Zheng, 2004; Guo & Yan, 2007; Ji, 2002; Nunan, 1997; Qian, 2005; Wenden, 1998), what LA and metacognition have in common is the thinking process. Learners' awareness of their learning (thinking) is metacognition, and having this skill enables them to become autonomous learners. A study by Hassan helped underscore this point by highlighting how the lack of metacognition can impact LA (as cited in Machaal, 2015). He found that Saudi students became disoriented on enrolling in colleges as they were not used to the new autonomous learning atmosphere when they were younger, when their teachers were the only sources of information and totally controlled the learning process (as cited in Machaal, 2015). A large body of literature argued that metacognitive learning strategies play a significant role in fostering autonomous learning and increasing learners' motivation and responsibility towards their learning (Alsahli, 2019; Cross & Paris, 1988; Eisenberg, 2010; Martinez, 2006; Paris & Winograd, 1990; Ray & Smith, 2010; Schraw, Crippen, & Hartley, 2006; Whitebread et al., 2009).

**2.1.9. How to measure LA.** Based on the literature, researchers clearly agreed that there is not a universal LA measurement scale (Murase, 2015; Mynard, 2006). However, many researchers have devised methods to measure and test the level of LA.

One of the approaches to measure LA is the interpretative approach, which involves some techniques that help researchers gain a better understanding and develop a deep description of LA. This approach is considered effective as it can measure learners' perceptions of the learning process (Ernest, 1994). There are many ways to measure autonomy using the interpretive approach. Firstly, self-reports where students keep a record of their stream of consciousness are one way (Wenden, 1998). Diaries, journals, and evaluation sheets are similar to self-reports in terms of their goal, which is to collect information and make students aware of the learning process by planning, controlling, and evaluating it. Secondly, interviews are considered an important tool to gather information and details about students' learning experience as they give in-depth explanation (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Thirdly, first-person narrative has become a common and main source of collecting information from learners (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Fourthly, questionnaires are considered one of the most common techniques used among researchers to measure LA (Murase, 2015). Finally, the researcher's observation is a naturalistic tool for gathering information (Mynard 2006).

Another approach of measuring autonomous learning is a focus on strategy use. For instance, Simmons (1996) found that learners who apply a strategy in their learning, repeat it, and apply new strategies they discovered during learning ultimately improved their learning because applying these strategies increased their awareness of their preferences, beliefs, and abilities, which then led to autonomous learning. Moreover, applying new strategies in learning as some traditional strategies in learning could hinder the possibility of measuring it.

Simmons (1996) could mean that, if the learner was autonomous enough, it would create an opportunity for autonomous learning to be clearly measured.

The literature showed that there have been some common scales to measure LA, such as Guglielmino's (1977) Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale. There is also the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale for Nursing (Fisher, King, & Tague, 2001). According to Kline (2000) and Fisher et al. (2001), this scale is beneficial for measuring LA as they conducted a study to measure and confirm the scale validity. In order to measure LA using a quantitative instrument, Dixon (2011) developed and examined an instrument in his study as well. He sought to determine whether a close-ended questionnaire was practical and viable for measuring LA, and the construction of the questionnaire was based on the literature. In total, 256 items were included in the questionnaire about specific strategies used to lead to autonomous learning. These strategies were classified into metacognitive awareness, responsibility, social interaction, self-assessment and evaluation, motivation, and attitudes towards learning. Factor analysis was used to group items into factors. Dixon then developed a critical reflexive approach in order to theoretically and practically examine the questionnaire. After analysing the results of the questionnaire and comparing them with teachers' views and literature, he concluded that LA can be assisted by his quantitatively developed instrument. However, he also stated that there could not be a universal technique to measure LA.

## **2.2. EFL writing and LA**

**2.2.1. Models of writing.** Key principles of LA include learners' ability to direct their own learning by employing metacognitive strategies, such as planning, revising, monitoring, evaluating, and collaborating. These metacognitive processes are also at the heart of a number of key models of second language (L2) writing. Students implement autonomous strategies by employing metacognitive processes that make them take control of

their learning and become independent. Based on the literature, a relationship exists between employing metacognitive strategies and students' writing autonomy (Flavell, 1976; Jouhari, 1996; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1998). It has also been suggested that, when students implement autonomous strategies, they tend to be better writers (Jouhari, 1996).

*Writing* is defined as exploring and developing a thought or idea to be expressed in a text in an appropriate way (Flower & Hayes, 1980). Another definition by Dyson and Freedman (2003) mentioned that '... writing is a developmental process' (p. 967), which means writing is a learning process which includes many stages students must work through in order to develop their writing skill and be able to write. Such stages start from an early age when children start to draw random marks and eventually develop the skill to start writing letters. In addition to these and other definitions, many theories have been proposed to explain the process of writing (Emig, 1967, 1971; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes & Flower, 1980, 1986; Rohman & Wlecke, 1964; Zoellner, 1969). One of these is the stage-model theory by Murray (1968), which positions the writing process as a series of distinct and sequential stages. Murray did not see writing processes as recursive or circular in the way that other theories do, but viewed them instead as sequential. Another theory is the recursive-cognitive process theory by Hayes and Flower (1980). This theory considers writing processes to be cyclical steps that can be revisited over and over during writing, such as steps of editing, rereading, revising, and adding. The third proposed theory is the conversation or social constructionist model by Graves (1983). This theory focuses mainly on the social context of the writer. It proposes that the piece of writing is constructed socially and that, when writers write, they respond to a multitude of voices and other texts.

These general writing theories were the basis for the most significant writing models in the literature. One of the most recognised models based on the recursive-cognitive process theory is the cognitive process model of writing, which was proposed by Flower and Hayes

(1980). This model sees the writing process as one of problem-solving. It also involves many developmental levels that are not linear but rather recursive and cyclical. This structure means that, in order to write, writers go back and forth to add, rearrange, edit, and modify their ideas. What differs in Flower and Hayes's (1980) model is that it downplays writing as a social activity. This model has been considered one of the most significant models in first language (L1) writing. It involves three stages: planning, translating, and reviewing. In the planning stage, information and ideas are retrieved from the long-term memory. Then, these ideas and information, which have been evaluated and structured, are transcribed into a text during the translation stage. Lastly, the process of rereading, editing, and modifying text elements is considered the review stage (Figure 2.1).

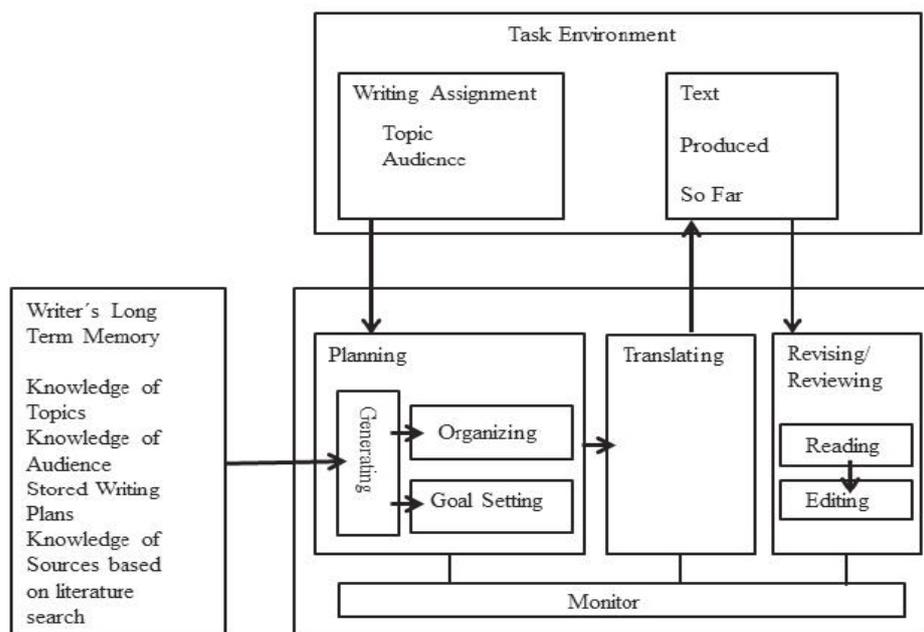


Figure 2.1. Hayes and Flower's (1980) model of writing process.

A later model by Williams (2003), called the phase model, was based on Flower and Hayes's (1980) model and was adapted in the present study. The rationale behind choosing this model is that it is more appropriate for L2 classroom learning, whereas Flower and Hayes's model recognises writers as solitary individuals involved in the struggle to explore

and communicate their personal meaning, which is less the case in L2 classroom-based learning. Secondly, Williams’s model emphasises metacognitive writing processes, which aligns well with a focus on LA. One reason that Williams (2003) emphasises metacognition is that writing is ‘the result of the complex interaction of activities that include several stages of development’ (p. 106). This means that writing is about producing a text with the involvement and development of different metacognitive processes (Figure 2.2). In addition, the process of writing—which includes the stages of planning, drafting, and revising—occurs continually. In autonomous learning, the continual development of learning is required. Thirdly, the writing process has certain influential phases, such as planning, editing, and modifying. These reasons are mainly related to the metacognitive processes upon which writing autonomy is based. Williams’s model contains eight writing processes: prewriting, planning, drafting, pausing, reading, revising, editing, and publishing. Each one of the metacognitive processes involves many activities that are linked to the nature of autonomous writing (Figure 2.2).

Process	Definition	Description
Prewriting	Generating ideas, strategies, and information for a given writing task.	Prewriting activities take place before starting on the first draft of a paper. They include discussion, outlining, free writing, journaling, talk-writing, and metaphor building.
Planning	Reflecting on the material produced during prewriting to develop a plan to achieve the aim of the paper.	Planning involves considering the writer’s rhetorical stance, rhetorical purpose, the principal aim of the text, how these factors are interrelated, and how they are connected to the information generated during prewriting. Planning also involves selecting support for the writer’s claim and blocking out at least a rough organisational structure.
Drafting	Producing words on a computer or on paper that	Drafting occurs over time. Successful writers seldom try to produce an entire text in one sitting or even in one day.

	match (more or less) the initial plan for the work.	
Pausing	Moments when the students are not writing but instead are reflecting on what they have produced and how well it matches their plan; this usually includes reading.	Pausing occurs among successful and unsuccessful writers, but they use it in different ways. Successful writers consider how well the text matches the plan, how well it is meeting audience needs and overall organisation.
Reading	Pausing occurs among successful and unsuccessful writers, but they use it in different ways. Successful writers consider how well the text matches the plan, how well it is meeting audience needs and overall organisation.	Reading and writing are interrelated activities. Good readers are good writers, and vice versa. The reading that takes place during writing is crucial to the reflection process during pausing.
Revising	Literally ‘re-seeing’ the text with the goal of making large-scale changes so that text and plan match.	Revising occurs after the students have finished their first draft. It involves making changes that enhance the match between plan and text. Factors to be considered during planning include rhetorical stance and rhetorical purpose, among others. Revising almost always includes getting suggestions from friends or colleagues on how to improve the writing.
Editing	Focussing on sentence-level concerns, such as punctuation, sentence length, spelling, agreement between subjects and predicates, and style.	Editing occurs after revision of the work. The goal is to give the paper a professional appearance.
Publishing	Sharing the finished text with the intended audience.	Publishing is not limited to getting a text printed in a journal. It includes turning a paper into a teacher, a boss or an agency.

Figure 2.2. Williams’s (2003, pp. 106–107) model of the writing process.

**2.2.2. LA in EFL writing classes.** A few studies have explored LA in writing classes. For example, a study by Yeung (2016) used a quantitative method to explore the construct of LA in EFL writing. She collected data from 70 students in three Hong Kong

secondary schools within a naturalistic setting of learning. She used a questionnaire to measure changes in learners' attitudes according to an adopted writing program. Three aspects were explored in the questionnaire: (a) autonomous attitudes which included motivation, self-direction, and teacher-centeredness, (b) general autonomous writing practices such as planning and using peer feedback, and (c) learning strategies employed to improve writing, including metacognitive and social strategies. She used a pre- and post-test to measure students' writing achievement, and the results showed that learners' independence from their teachers was a factor for improving writing skills. The more independent students were, the more they improved.

Bagheri and Aeen (2011) examined the effect of practising LA on writing proficiency. Their sample included 60 intermediate Iranian EFL students. Pre- and post-tests, a questionnaire, and writing tasks were employed to gather quantitative data, and the researchers used some social activities and exercises completed collaboratively with the students to promote LA. For example, the activities of summarising a book, describing a view, and engaging in picture story writing were used cooperatively to engage the students in untraditional writing tasks. The researchers found that the experimental group, the 'autonomous group', achieved better proficiency in writing. By contrast, the control group, which followed the traditional approach of writing which was teacher-centred class, had no obvious improvement.

A study by Wachob (2006) also indicated that motivation and LA play important roles in leading students to improve their writing and speaking skills. He exchanged traditional methods such as teacher-centred class for teaching EFL writing and speaking for those designed to promote more autonomous and cooperative learning, giving learners choices, active classrooms, and cooperative activities in his teaching as four groups. According to a questionnaire, all four groups showed improved self-confidence, and they had positive

attitudes towards taking control of their learning. As a limitation, however, this study lacked a comparison group.

Several studies with male and female students in Saudi Arabia suggest that in spite of curricular changes, learners are still exposed to traditional methods of teaching and lack the awareness of LA (Alrabai, 2016; Al-Saadi, 2011; Tamer, 2013). According to the results from Alrabai's (2016) study with 437 Saudi EFL male students in high school and a university, learners lack motivation, they are not considered autonomous learners, and they still depend on the teacher to learn English. He suggested further research be conducted on female Saudi EFL students. Tamer (2013) also found that Saudi EFL students are still learning through the traditional learning techniques, such as a teacher-controlled classroom. Al-Saadi (2011) and Tamer believed that the educational system in Saudi EFL classrooms was still traditional and following the teacher as the dominant provider of knowledge, an approach that does not help students become autonomous learners. Thus, students lack the opportunity to have a long-term, effective, and efficient learning experience.

**2.2.3. Teachers' and students' attitudes towards fostering LA through written feedback.** After a comprehensive literature review, it has been found that almost no studies dealt with EFL teachers' and students' attitudes regarding fostering LA in writing classrooms through written feedback. Those that do mostly focused on one or two aspects of feedback.

There are some studies that could be used to establish a base for the methodology of future research in this area. For instance, a previous study by Dowden, Pittaway, Yost, and McCarthy (2013) explored students' emotional perceptions while receiving written feedback from their teachers. The researchers adapted the qualitative method by using an online qualitative questionnaire and found that students' attitudes towards written feedback are affected by their emotions, which are impacted by their teachers' support and students' learning experience. Another study by Vasu, Ling, and Nimehchisalem (2016) investigated

how teacher feedback, peer-assessment, and self-assessment impacted students' dependency. An adapted questionnaire from a previous study was used in this quantitative study. The results showed a slight difference among students' preferences for feedback with a slight favour for teacher feedback and self-assessment over peer-assessment. These studies are helpful in providing information about the data they collected and the tools they adopted. However, each study focused on a specific factor or type in the process of providing feedback with nothing related to students' and teachers' attitudes about fostering LA through these factors.

While some studies about written feedback and LA appeared separately in the literature, there has been a lack of studies exploring the relationship between the two areas. A study by Farahani (2014) identified a gap between learners' actual practices and their preferred practices for learning EFL, such as peer feedback and self-assessment. Future research should therefore focus on autonomous learning while examining learners' written mistakes. Moreover, a study by Muchlis (2015) showed that students benefited from receiving a specific type of written feedback on their work, starting with the teacher guiding them and then followed by students working independently to correct the errors by themselves. Thus, a new investigation of the relationship between written feedback and autonomous learning under the Saudi sociocultural context is needed fill the gap in the literature.

Lastly, a study by Kuswandono (2005) explored fostering LA in writing classes through peer feedback. He used a writing activity with two checklists to be completed by the student and then a peer after writing a composition. He found that peer correction is cooperative and could enhance students' LA. Another similar study by Sultana (2009) revealed almost the same results regarding students' opinions about peer feedback and whether their perceptions affected their learning experiences. However, these studies mainly

focused on the effectiveness of peer feedback and lacked other types of written feedback, such as coded and un-coded feedback from teachers. They also missed the factor of exploring LA in depth with relation to different types of written feedback. Thus, there is clearly a huge gap in exploring LA concerning students' and teachers' attitudes about feedback in writing classes.

**2.2.4. Saudi students' difficulties in EFL writing.** Regarding the area of EFL teaching and learning in the Saudi educational system, numerous studies discussed the difficulties Saudi students encounter in EFL writing and the reasons for the difficulties (Albeshar, 2012; Alhaysony, 2008; Aljamhoor, 1996; Alnofal, 2003; El-Araby, 1983; Khafaji, 2004; Musa, 2010; Shah, Hussain, & Nasseef, 2013; Shehatah, 1998; Shukri, 2014). For instance, Musa (2010) considered EFL writing a difficult skill to teach and learn. One reason is that writing includes multiple components—such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation—that need to be considered when producing a piece of written work. Several researchers (Alhaysony, 2008; Aljamhoor, 1996; Alnofal, 2003) indicated that, in Saudi classrooms, teaching EFL writing is not emphasised as much as the other three skills of English—listening, speaking, and reading. Saudi teachers generally believe that the more vocabulary students memorise, the better writers they will become (Aljamhoor, 1996). As a result of this restricted focus, students fail to learn important writing techniques, such as pre-writing, planning, and revising. Moreover, when students mainly focus on the surface aspects of writing—such as vocabulary, grammatical rules, and spelling—they do not learn the deeper skills of planning, organising, and evaluating their written work (Alhaysony, 2008; Alnofal, 2003).

Another difficulty is noted by Smith (2001). He mentioned that LA is a difficult concept to implement in the Saudi educational system for three main reasons: (a) curricula are government prescribed and regulated, (b) intensive Saudi religious study is based on the

students receiving specific information from their teachers rather than searching for it themselves, and (c) rote learning, which is based on memorisation. Additional studies highlighted other reasons for the struggles and difficulties Saudi students face in learning EFL. For example, Shukri (2014) mentioned that English writing instruction in Saudi Arabia focuses on textbooks and information provided by teachers. Insufficient attention has been given to students devising their own ideas, such as engaging in critical thinking and creative writing activities. Shukri noted that the main reason behind Saudi students' struggle to think critically is their culture. They are raised in an atmosphere that restricts alternative perspectives and are not encouraged to think beyond their cultural norms. Moreover, Khafaji (2004) indicated that Saudi students' struggles in EFL writing stems from their lack of exposure to learning resources, such as books and computers, which limits their expression of ideas and thoughts. Shukri also indicated that Saudi students are weak in EFL writing because of the restrictive structure and format they have been trained to follow in writing. She added that providing students with instruction to make them aware of these limitations would allow them to better tackle difficulties in EFL writing.

Other studies were conducted at different schools and academic levels in relation to Saudi students' writing classes. For instance, Al-Khairy (2013) investigated the issues that college-level Saudi students face in EFL writing classes and the reasons for these issues. According to the questionnaire administered to the teachers, results showed that Saudi students have poor skills in academic writing. Nevertheless, these results were based on teachers' opinions and not supported with other evidence such as interviewing students. Regarding students, he discovered they did not consider writing skills to be important for academic writing. One reason is that they did not have a strong foundation in EFL writing from which to understand the relevance of these skills. The study also indicated that traditional methods of teaching did not help students improve their ability to write. Al-

Khairy ultimately recommended that students and teachers should be motivated to communicate in English with each other and that new, modern techniques, such as peer correction and group work, should be implemented in writing classes.

**2.2.5. Traditional Saudi EFL writing classes.** Many articles have discussed the EFL writing environment in the Saudi classroom. For example, according to Smith (2001) and Yasmin and Sohail (2017), Saudi classrooms are often teacher-centred, and the learning environment is highly controlled. Saudi students depend on rote learning, which inhibits their creative expression in writing. The roots of rote learning date back to Saudi traditional schools, or *Kuttab*, which literally means ‘writers’, where the teacher gave students religious texts to be memorised. To this day, rote learning as a traditional teaching technique is practised in the Saudi educational system (Paudel, 2019; Rugh, 2002). Another problem noticed by Hussein and Mohammad (2012) is that students tend to translate words literally from their mother tongue into their EFL writing. Meanwhile, Elkhafaifi (2005) suggested that anxiety is a key factor in EFL learning, and this could be reduced if teachers encouraged students to have confidence in their writing ability and development. In a study conducted by Saba (2013) in Saudi EFL writing classrooms, many issues were also highlighted about the difficulties that students encounter when writing in English. She noted that the teacher-centred approach and lack of technology use were the main issues affecting students’ EFL writing. However, the difficulty of EFL writing itself is not the only problem that appeared in the literature.

Researchers have also discussed some cultural issues regarding EFL writing in Saudi Arabia. According to El-Araby (1983), Saudi Arabia imposes cultural prohibitions on expression that affect EFL writing. For example, religion and family are cautiously discussed in the culture. Shehatah (1998) pointed out that teachers in Saudi Arabia are culturally restricted from promoting morals that contradict their religious beliefs. Shukri (2014) added

that it is difficult for Saudi students to accept a new culture without questioning it based on their beliefs and values. Moreover, Ozog (1989) argued that Muslim students perceive English as the language of a Western lifestyle that contradicts the rules and regulations of Islam, creating a resistance or barrier to their learning. This perception and attitude limit the topics available for students to write about. Conversely, Clarke and Otaky (2006) opposed these points of view and claimed that the values of Islam do not prevent the translation of Western educational and cultural concepts into EFL writing. All of these opposing opinions, however, are not supported by evidence.

In terms of traditional teaching styles, the grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods are the most used styles of teaching EFL writing in Saudi classrooms (Ahmad, 2014; Alrabai, 2016; Al-Seghayer 2014; Elyas & Picard, 2010). The grammar-translation method is based on the learning of grammatical rules, which are then used to translate from the mother tongue into the L2 and vice versa. According to some researchers (Ahmad, 2014; Alrabai, 2016), this method does not help students become independent learners. They instead rely on rote learning, where EFL teachers go through textbooks page by page and students memorise everything to repeat in their exams.

Some studies (Al-Harbi, 2014; Alrabai, 2016; Bahanshal, 2013; Syed, 2003) identified other problems in traditional Saudi classrooms. First, there are a large number of students typically in a classroom. According to Bahanshal (2013), classes in Saudi schools vary in size but are usually between 35 and 50 students. At the college level, classrooms can have up to 85 students. A second problem is that the Saudi educational system has many untrained teachers (Al-Harbi, 2014). Third, there is a lack of learning resources, such as language labs, technology, and books. Alharbi (2017) indicated that technology in Saudi schools has been underused and that computers, projectors, and recorders are not common in teaching English. Finally, Syed (2003) mentioned that Saudi students are not examined

based on their competence but rather on their ability to memorise. This approach lowers students' performance and prevents their creative exploration and expression.

**2.2.6. Less traditional Saudi EFL writing classes.** Many studies explored the application of new trends in teaching EFL writing at different levels in Saudi classrooms. For instance, a study by Alnufaie and Grenfell (2012) explored two approaches, product writing and process writing, with 121 Saudi EFL college-level students to gain insight on self-accessed language learning. The product writing approach treats writing as a straightforward action in which students learn the structure of sentences and clauses and then follow that structure. The approach involves imitating the writing models provided by the teacher (Hyland, 2003) and emphasises internal mental processes rather than external behaviours in writing, where students have the chance to control, express, and reformulate their ideas (Zamel, 1983). Alnufaie and Grenfell assumed that students used the product approach in writing. However, according to the questionnaire used to gather qualitative data, the researchers found that most students use mixed-method approaches in writing.

Some researchers investigated the impact of new strategies to develop EFL writing skill among Saudi students based on autonomous learning strategies. For example, according to Al-Ahmad (2003), new strategies in teaching EFL writing might raise students' levels of motivation and achievement and encourage them to be independent learners. Al-Ahmad (2003) also studied the impact of collaborative learning on EFL students' apprehension and attitudes towards writing and claimed that this strategy has more advantages than traditional instruction techniques. He found that students in traditional writing classrooms communicate solely with their teachers around their writing and that individual and competitive learning are the main focus in this approach which neglects the active learning approach among students. Also, a study by Alrabai (2014) also used a questionnaire to explore the motivational practices of Saudi EFL teachers and their students' perceptions of these

practices as autonomous strategies. The results showed that the techniques teachers used matched their students' preferences. However, the results also showed that using motivational strategies in EFL classrooms was not frequent.

Moreover, Alhosani (2008) examined the role EFL teachers play in improving the writing ability of fifth grade Saudi students. According to students' writing samples, results showed that EFL teachers played a significant role in teaching writing by providing effective autonomous writing techniques to their students. These techniques were incorporating group work and collaborative activities while giving them writing tasks. These activities led students to improve their writing and their attitudes towards the writing process. She revealed that the cooperative learning technique, which includes group work and collaborative activities, was the most frequently used by EFL writing teachers.

Another study by Morris (2011) explored the incorporation of technology such as laptops and cellular phones in Saudi EFL writing classes. It showed that technology is not widely used in writing classes. The study suggested that a greater use of technology could be a new trend in teaching writing in Saudi EFL classrooms, away from the traditional teacher-centred classroom. Moreover, Alghamdi (2016) conducted an interesting study in the field of self-directed learning, where students take over their learning by setting goals and controlling their development. Through a questionnaire and an aptitude test, the study examined the effectiveness of self-directed learning with 37 Saudi EFL college level students. Two groups of students were compared. According to the General Aptitude Test results that he used to measure students' levels of writing, the control group had poor levels of writing and the experimental group had good levels of writing. Also, a questionnaire showed that students in the experimental group with the good level of writing had much higher levels of self-directed learning.

Alshumaimeri and Bamanger (2013) investigated the impact of using WebQuest writing instruction in Saudi EFL writing classes. This type of writing instruction involves students following certain instructions when they write, such as paying attention to the introduction, task, process, evaluation and conclusion (Dodge, 1997 as mentioned in Alshumaimeri & Bamanger, 2013). The study was conducted with 14 students and used pre- and post-tests to analyse the data from both an experimental group assigned to the WebQuest instruction method and a control group assigned to the traditional method of teaching. The study demonstrated that using the new technique of WebQuest resulted in better overall writing performance in the experimental group. Also, a study by Okasha and Hamdi (2014) investigated the impact of strategic writing techniques on promoting Saudi EFL writing skills. Strategic writing techniques guide a student's writing process towards a well-organised composition. These include cognitive and metacognitive strategies for raising students' awareness and metacognition in writing. Another study by Bukhari (2016) used a new trend in teaching called the mind mapping technique, in which both traditional and innovative techniques in teaching EFL writing to Saudi students were explored. A survey, along with pre- and post-tests, were used to collect the data. The results showed that mind mapping improved the writing cohesion and coherence of 40 intermediate level students. In addition, Albeshar (2012) investigated the impact of collaborative learning in developing the EFL writing skills of 48 Saudi EFL students at the college level. The study used pre- and post-tests, interviews and questionnaires to collect quantitative data in two groups. The study demonstrated that writing skills of students in the experimental group improved after collaborative learning. Moreover, their attitudes towards writing in English were more positive.

Finally, a study by Jouhari (1996) explored the effect of writing techniques such as peer feedback and revision on writing development. The study found that, as a result of these

techniques, students became more proficient in expressing their ideas, planning, drafting and processing feedback.

These strategies which have been implemented in previous studies were all focusing on enhancing the teaching and learning process. Even though LA is a wide concept and includes many of these strategies, there has been a lack of research regarding implementing in LA in writing classes. Moreover, there was an obvious shortage of studies about the nature of LA in EFL writing classes. As new trends in teaching encourage implementing new techniques in teaching, research about barriers that prevent implementing LA in EFL writing classes is needed to overcome those barriers. Also, gaining a view of supporting factors which help promoting LA is required in order to strengthen decision makers to create clear guidance for teaching writing using new concepts.

**2.2.7. Influences on teachers' practices.** There has been a great deal of research investigating the relationship between teachers' beliefs and actual practices (Calderhead, 1996; Flores et al., 2000; Knight & Trowler, 2000). Even though many studies mentioned and examined the effect of specific factors on practising actual beliefs, there is little consistency in their results. For instance, studies conducted by Aguirre and Speer (2000) and Standen (2002) showed an agreement between teachers' beliefs and practices, whereas Kynigos and Argyris (2004) argued that there was a high degree of inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and practices. However, most of these studies revealed factors that could greatly impact teachers' beliefs and, hence, their actions. For instance, Pajares (1992) mentioned that teachers' knowledge has a significant impact on shaping their beliefs and practices. According to Schoenfeld (2000) and Shulman (1987), knowledge is shaped by the teachers' pedagogical knowledge and beliefs. Ball (1996) and Andrews (2003) noted that this knowledge is shaped before they become teachers. In fact, teachers' beliefs start to develop during their time as students while observing their own teachers (Lortie, 1975).

When students then become teachers, they rely on recalling their teachers' behaviours and practices (Schoenfeld, 2000).

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) proposed the theory of reasoned action, which explicitly focuses on behaviours and the impact of beliefs and attitudes on behaviours. This theory predicts actions based on attitudes and beliefs. Secondly, goals were also mentioned as greatly impacting teachers' practices and influencing their actions and activities in classrooms. Standen (2002) stated that teachers' practices depend on their goals and whether these goals are personal or pedagogical. For instance, teachers who only care about lecturing students without paying attention to their needs and levels choose teaching practices that suit this goal, whereas teachers who set the goal of making their students independent learners try to implement different techniques to achieve that goal. In addition, feelings have been identified as a factor influencing teachers' decision-making (Kynigos & Argyris, 2004; Liljedahl, 2008). According to a study conducted by Chen (2018), results from 1,830 teachers showed that emotions are a key factor affecting teachers' classroom practices. By using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, Chen added that the positive emotions of teachers, such as joy and love, lead to student-centred teaching approaches, whereas a teacher-centred approach is a result of teachers' negative emotions. Thirdly, contextual factors—such as curriculum types, the length and type of teachers' personal development, teachers' levels of satisfaction, and the educational environment—were identified as factors affecting teachers' practices (Borg, 2003; Duarte, 1998; Flores, López, Gallegos, & Barojas, 2000; Karaagac & Threlfall, 2004).

### **2.3. LA in the Saudi EFL Context**

**2.3.1. LA in the Saudi EFL context.** Even though some of the study context information was mentioned in the introduction chapter, there are still other significant details to be mentioned in this section in order to gain a deep insight about the study background.

Focusing on students' creativity and independence by making them autonomous learners is considered an important factor in the educational process in the 21st century (Coffman & Klinger, 2007). As Moores-Abdool, Yahya, and Unzueta (2009) demonstrated through their empirical research, most educational establishments in the Saudi educational context follow the teacher-centred approach. The Saudi EFL teaching and learning context has also always been teacher-centred (Al-Harbi, 2014). Ever since the English language was first introduced as a subject in the Saudi educational system in 1927, students have followed the traditional way of learning English, which is through a style characterised as lecturing students and treating them as passive learners.

In recent years, however, the Saudi MOE has sought to improve EFL learning in Saudi schools and universities. One tendency the ministry has tried to modify is students' heavy reliance on teachers in learning English in EFL classrooms (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). Within this tendency, the teacher is seen as the controller and contributor of knowledge, and students are the silent followers who never have the right to express their opinions, preferences, and different abilities in the learning process. With globalisation and the huge change between the past and present, the Saudi MOE has also tried to prevent students' over-reliance on teachers and to implement different teaching procedures and methods in order to improve student outcomes and enhance students' experiences in learning EFL. As a result, a huge educational movement towards a more learner-centred approach through autonomous learning strategies was adapted in the Saudi EFL educational context in 2011. Including autonomous strategies in Saudi EFL curricula was done through adding textbook exercises that require autonomous strategies to be implemented by students while working on the exercises.

Accordingly, the Saudi MOE (2011) identified several aims for the EFL curricula. One of the aims was making students aware of the significance of EFL learning and changing

their attitudes to be more positive than in the past. The second aim was to help students be more competent to make them grow personally and professionally. The third aim was to enlighten students about the economic, cultural, religious, and social issues of their society and share them in finding suitable solutions for these issues. The fourth aim was to connect students with English as a tool for them to gain a better understanding of cultural respect between different nations. However, even though those aims were promising, it did not go the way the ministry wanted. The main issue of the old effect of the Saudi traditional teaching method remained (Alhinty, 2016). Moreover, even though the textbooks included cooperative exercises as a strategy to promote LA among Saudi students, curricula neglected students' needs, such as the disconnect between the textbook topics and students' reality (Assalahi, 2013). In addition to these issues, teachers' lack of training on the implementation of LA has caused them to continue using non-autonomous teaching methods (Alharbi, 2015; Alhinty, 2006).

**2.3.2. Historical overview of EFL in Saudi Arabia.** The first time the English language entered Saudi Arabia was when pilgrims came to the Hejaz area to visit Mecca (Aldera, 2017). To communicate with the pilgrims, the Saudi people started to learn English (Crystal, 2003). Later, when valuable oil resources were discovered in the country, English began to spread widely. However, at that time, the use of English was mostly limited to translation and interpretation for business purposes (Alam, 1986). As the economy expanded, in order to fill the need for qualified workers in different industries, the government of Saudi Arabia employed a large number of people from different countries, such as India, in which English was their second language (Al-Haq & Smadi, 1996; Kachru, 1992). Gradually, English became the spoken language in hospitals, banks, and companies. Today, English is the main language used in employee training in big Saudi companies, such as Saudi Airlines, Saudi Aramco, and Saudi Telecommunication Company. Mahboob and

Elyas (2014) indicated that, with the worldwide demand for Saudi oil and the dealings with American companies, learning English has become an essential part of doing business.

In fact, after the oil boost in the country, the Saudi government passed legislation to teach English in schools. At that time, the main objective of teaching English was to produce students who could communicate in English to fill the demand in the oil industry (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). However, since English was first introduced in secondary public schools in 1924 (Al-Abdulkader, 1978; Al-Seghyer, 2014), learning English has held a high status and has now become a core subject in Saudi schools. Furthermore, learning English has become important since the requirement to speak the language is part of the qualifications for most jobs (Crystal, 2003; Prokop, 2003). Other authors have claimed that English was first introduced in Saudi Arabia in the late 1930s after the discovery of oil (Al-Ghamdi & Al-Saadat, 2002; Al-Johani, 2009). According to Faruk (2013), when Saudi Arabia was a young and poor country, the spread of EFL teaching in the country was very slow. He stated that teaching EFL in Saudi Arabia was based on two English-speaking world hegemonies, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

**2.3.3. Early EFL context in Saudi Arabia.** When English was first introduced as a school subject in Saudi Arabia, there was no specific objective of teaching EFL. However, in 1959, some instructional objectives and syllabi were established, and in the 1990s, the Saudi MOE re-assessed the usefulness of the English curricula. As a result, new EFL curricula and textbooks were introduced in 1995 (Almusharraf, 2019; Al-Seghyer, 2014).

According to Szyliowicz (1973), English was being taught only at the high school level and for only few hours a week. At the university level, an English department was first established at King Saud University in 1957 (Al-Abed Al-Haq & Smadi, 1996). In 1972, the first English department for female students was established at the female College of

Education in Mecca. After that, Saudi universities had English departments, called language centres and translation institutes, in every university.

Saudi society has gone through enormous changes since the discovery of oil and with the impact of globalisation and modernisation. These changes have greatly increased the use of English in the country (Looney, 2004). According to Elyas (2008), a shift has taken place in EFL teaching and learning since 2000. This shift included the introduction of English in all primary schools in 2003. Faruk (2013) added that, since 2005, a change has occurred in the Saudi outlook through a recognition of the need to reduce the country's dependence on the oil industry. This growing diversification of the economy has led to an educational revolution, with the number of universities increasing from eight in 2001 to 28 in 2015. This expansion of educational institutions has significantly impacted the teaching of EFL.

**2.3.4. Sociocultural factors in Saudi EFL context.** There has been much debate and conflict around EFL education in Saudi Arabia. The disagreements have typically been associated with religious, cultural, and social concerns. Nevertheless, the resistance to EFL learning within this conservative society has significantly declined. One reason for this increasing openness is the awareness by the Saudi government and its people of an urgent need to modernise and keep up with the advanced societies in the developed world (Alrabai, 2016)

According to Alrabai (2016), there are some major factors that have affected EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. Sociocultural factors, including the importance of the mother tongue and religion, were behind the country's early resistance to the introduction of EFL teaching and learning. Sociocultural factors are defined as large-scale forces within cultures and societies that have a profound impact on the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals (Alrabai, 2016; Vahidnia & Fatemi, 2015).

One of the concerns that affected EFL teaching and learning relates to the use of the Arabic mother tongue (L1; Shaikh, 1993). Because of the heavy reliance on Arabic even in EFL classrooms, introducing EFL as a compulsory subject in schools has been difficult to implement. A study conducted by Alshammari (2011) revealed that 61% of students and 69% of teachers believed that Arabic should be used in the EFL classroom. The participants' view was that the use of the Arabic language in EFL classrooms reduces time and effort in explanations. On the other hand, Alhawsawi (2013) and Rabab'ah (2005) claimed that the use of Arabic in EFL classrooms reflects the teachers' lack of competence and confidence. Another study by Al-Abdan (1993) showed that 75% of teachers used Arabic in EFL classrooms. The researcher concluded that using Arabic to teach EFL minimised students' exposure to and practice of English. Furthermore, Zaid (1993) noted that there was a misconception about the importance of learning EFL among some Saudi students who viewed learning English as not important and who only wanted to pass the course and not retake it.

Sociocultural issues ultimately have a great impact on EFL teaching and learning. According to Alhawsawi (2013), the majority of Saudi citizens are Arabs, with a very small minority of Asian and African origin. Alrahaili (2013) explained that the Saudi society is a collective tribal society with a conservative tradition that emphasises the alliance to one's tribe and family, as well as to the Islamic identity. There is a concern that, if young students are taught EFL, it could weaken their use of the Arabic language. This fear has prevented the teaching of EFL in early elementary school. However, EFL is now being taught from the fourth grade in elementary schools (Elyas, 2008).

Islam is the official religion in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi citizens are predominantly Muslims. Because Saudi Arabia was the birthplace of Islam, this religion dominates Saudi beliefs, cultures, customs, rules, and government policies. The educational system is also

structured and regulated according to the Islamic religion. For example, male and female students attend separate schools, and this gender segregation has been attributed to Islamic beliefs (Wiseman, 2010). Wiseman (2010) added that almost all cultural, social, and traditional values are based on Islam. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that single-sex schooling has a negative impact on EFL learning. Al-Johani (2009) noted that, even though there is a separation between male and female students in schools, both groups of students have the same quality of education and the same facilities. Alrashidi and Phan (2015) added that the stages of schooling, from primary school to the college level, and the curricula are the same for both groups as well.

**2.3.5. Societal factors supporting EFL in Saudi Arabia.** Recently, EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia has become important for many reasons. For instance, Faruk (2013) mentioned that learning English has become a tool for the Saudi people to advance their careers, build their nation, and expand their religion. He also indicated that EFL learning in the country is not limited to its linguistic usefulness, but also affects the society, politics, economy, and religion at both the national and international levels.

According to Mahboob and Elyas (2014), EFL has become important in the Saudi educational system as it is the language used in the oil business and thus has economic value. Many government-owned agencies in Saudi Arabia, such as Saudi Aramco and Saudi Airlines, use English to communicate, and these powerful government agencies force the Saudi people to learn English. In turn, learning English has helped the Saudi people communicate with the world and has become a key to enhancing foreign investment in the country (Cordesman, 2003). Cordesman (2003) also mentioned that relationships with other countries and the exchange of goods are based on English. Learning English has helped spread the use of technology in Saudi Arabia as well and has increased the country's participation in globalisation (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015).

**2.3.6. Instructional factors in the Saudi EFL educational system.** The educational system in Saudi Arabia consists of (a) kindergarten for children under the age of 6; (b) 6 years of primary school; (c) 3 years of intermediate school; (d) 3 years of high school; and (e) higher education at colleges and universities.

There are four main components of EFL instruction in the Saudi educational system: teachers, curriculum, teaching methods, and students. Each component is described below:

- The role of teachers in EFL learning is significant. However, in Saudi Arabia, EFL teachers are considered to be knowledge providers who dominate the learning process rather than facilitate it (Alrabai, 2014; Ganza, 2008; Harlen, 2004). As a result, students become passive rather than active learners as they depend on their teachers as the main source of knowledge. According to Fareh (2010), the Saudi EFL teacher's style is to explain the lesson without allowing the students to ask questions or giving them a chance to speak. Alharbi (2017) agreed that Saudi Arabia EFL teachers are the information controllers in the classroom, while students are the listeners and receivers of knowledge. This teacher-centred learning approach prevents students from developing their skills and improving their language competence (Ahmad, 2014; Alkubaidi, 2014; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). According to Alkubaidi (2014), EFL teaching in Saudi classrooms often follows the traditional methods, such as lecturing where teachers are the only knowledge providers, which typically results in students being unaware of their role in learning English and eventually leads to them losing interest.
- The Saudi MOE is responsible for developing the English curriculum for all educational stages. The curriculum is based on the beliefs, customs, values, and social traditions of Saudi Arabia. According to Al-Otaibi (2004), the curriculum package includes the student textbook, student workbook, and teacher's manual.

All four English skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) are integrated in the curriculum. However, students' goals, desires, and needs are not usually considered (Al-Subahi, 1991), and students are generally required to strictly follow the prescribed curriculum. Al-Subahi (1991) stated that developing Saudi curricula is often based on the perceptions of the EFL curriculum designers and are formulated without investigating the students' needs, requirements, and goals. According to Dörnyei (2001), students must learn content they can connect with and that is relevant to their lives. A comprehensive analysis was presented by Zaid (1993) about the inappropriate design of Saudi EFL curricula and the extent to which it is responsible for students' weakness in EFL. He concluded that the main problem is that the curriculum focuses on the content of the language and not the use of language as a communication vehicle. The need to design new EFL curricula has considered in recent years, and a new series of objectives has been added to improve the curricula. According to Al-Saadat and Al-Braik (2004), the new goals include emphasising intellectual and critical thinking skills and fostering learner-centred approaches. However, the curricula still suffer from the same weaknesses as before despite the huge efforts to improve them (Al-Saadat & Al-Braik, 2004).

- There have been many studies around EFL teaching methods in the literature. A review showed that the grammar-translation method is the most common teaching method in the Saudi EFL context (Ahmad, 2014; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Elyas & Picard, 2010). This method is based on learning grammatical rules and implementing them by translating sentences from Arabic to English and vice versa. Some researchers explored the use of traditional techniques and strategies in teaching EFL as a barrier to improving EFL skills (Ahmad, 2014; Al-Seghayer,

2014; Elyas & Picard, 2010), finding that teacher-centred approaches and the lack of student participation in decision-making caused students to be passive learners. Rote memorisation is another conventional teaching approach which has students memorise the information in the textbook without encouraging them to think deeply and critically about it (Alkubaidi, 2014; Almutairi, 2008; Alrabai, 2014). Such researchers (Alkubaidi, 2014; Almutairi, 2008; Alrabai, 2014) also mentioned that making students rely on memorisation is an ineffective teaching strategy which prevents them from becoming independent and autonomous learners.

- Students are the most important factor in the EFL teaching and learning process. Syed (2003) suggested that students in Saudi EFL classes do not use their creativity and imagination while learning. He also claimed that Saudi students are not motivated to take control of the learning process and become autonomous learners. This lack of motivation, according to Syed, could be a result of the traditional teaching methods and the lack of training for teachers. Al-Saraj (2014) also mentioned that Saudi EFL students are not engaged in the learning process. He emphasised that the students lack the opportunity to ask questions, and since they are viewed solely as passive learners, they are not urged to discover or improve their skills.

#### **2.4. Research questions**

- 1) What are Saudi EFL teachers' and students' practices, beliefs, and attitudes towards LA?
- 2) Are there any changes in students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding LA over the course of the preparatory year?

- 3) How do Saudi EFL teachers perceive the barriers and supporting factors of promoting autonomous learning in writing classes?
- 4) To what extent do Saudi EFL teachers promote students' LA in their writing classes?
- 5) To what extent do learners develop an autonomous approach to writing within the two types of classrooms studied?
- 6) In what ways does learner writing develop in autonomous and non-autonomous classes?

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodological details of the study and is structured as follows. First, it describes the paradigm and overall research design. Second, it addresses the context of the study and the selection of participants. Third, it explains the instruments, procedures, and data analysis methods that were used. Next, it discusses the study's ethical considerations, validity, reliability, and limitations. The chapter then concludes with a description of the pilot study.

#### **3.2. Paradigm**

There has been much debate among researchers about the nature of knowledge. Some of this difference of opinion is based on the researchers' epistemological and ontological positions regarding knowledge. Some researchers (Cronjé, 2006; Jonassen, 1999; Renkl, 2008) have rejected the dichotomy of these philosophical traditions into positions. Others, such as Carswell (2001) and Vrasidas (2000), conceptualised these philosophies as learning paradigms.

Paradigms and research traditions have always been based on beliefs about the nature of knowledge and reality (Reese, 1980). According to Patton's definition (as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 15), a paradigm is one way to explain in detail the complexity of the real world and is considered a general perspective. As a set of beliefs that directs action, a paradigm has three aspects (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): ontological, epistemological, and methodological aspects.

The constructivist paradigm is used in this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), this paradigm considers multiple realities as relativist ontology, learner understanding as subjectivist epistemology, and observation in a natural setting as the methodology.

Constructivism is best suited to research LA in EFL classrooms for two reasons. First, this paradigm allows for the exploration of teachers' and students' attitudes, beliefs, and learning perceptions from a psychological and social perspective. Second, it allows the researcher to observe the interactions among students and teachers in their classrooms. Moreover, according to Moallem (2001), constructivism is based on the idea that knowledge does not exist independently but is constructed by the students, which is the exact basis of LA.

Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, and Haag (1995) indicated that constructivism involves learners' perspectives on knowledge acquisition and their active engagement in the learning process. Thus, the constructivist paradigm is used in this study to explore teachers' and learners' beliefs and attitudes regarding LA, the factors that support and prevent the promotion of LA in writing classes, and teachers' practices in terms of LA in classrooms.

### **3.3. Research Design**

According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), when deciding on the methodological approach for a study, the notion of 'fit for purpose' must be considered. This notion simply means that researchers must match the purpose of their study with the selected research methodology.

The current study has two defining aspects: (a) Various instruments are used to collect as much qualitative and quantitative data as possible to allow for better interpretation and exploration, hence providing realistic solutions, and (b) it aims to discover and interpret a variety of factors regarding LA in EFL classes, such as teachers' practices in terms of LA, teachers' and students' beliefs and attitudes relating to LA, and the support for and barriers to promoting LA.

As the study aimed to explore the practices, attitudes, and beliefs of both teachers and students regarding LA, an exploratory and descriptive approach was applied that utilises case

study mixed-methods research, which helped to discover and interpret the data in the wider context. The mixed-methods research allowed the researcher to obtain a breadth of information using quantitative tools. Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to explore research queries in depth using qualitative data. Regarding promoting LA in EFL classrooms, both the social construction of the classroom's dynamic and the effects from outside the classroom can be considered using both qualitative and quantitative methods (Williams & Burden, 1997). The complex nature of beliefs and attitudes, which is influenced by many aspects, was the rationale for choosing mixed methods for collecting data (Barcelos, 2003; Borg, 2006; Dörnyei, 2005; Kern, 1995).

This research also adopted a case study approach for two main reasons: (a) It provides depth and enriches the research, and (b) it fits well with the perspectives of constructivist theory (Creswell, 2003; Dörnyei, 2007; Mackey & Gass, 2005). There are some advantages and limitations of case studies (Yin, 2003). One of the most noticeable benefits is that case studies allow for a more in-depth understanding of the cases. Despite this benefit, case studies are considered time-consuming, and the data gained from them might be difficult to organise (Yin, 2003).

The literature has a large amount of debate whether to consider a certain study a mixed-method study or case study. Some scholars mentioned that case studies and mixed methods are not contradictory designs (Creswell, 2005; Johnson & Turner, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Those designs can be considered together, and the research could ultimately have a case study mixed-method design as case studies can be based on qualitative or quantitative methods, or mixed methods. One of the small differences between both designs is that mixed-methods studies are more often used when continuity—that is, a continuous process—is needed in either quantitative or qualitative research (Creswell, 2005). This process was present in the current study, in which teacher questionnaires were

distributed first, and then, based on their responses, classes and students were chosen. Case studies could also be used as a tool in a mixed-method study to describe a single situation in a single place within a single group, which was also the case in this study (Johnson & Turner, 2003). Therefore, the case study approach was adopted in a mixed-method research design.

The literature has debated extensively on which of the two main methods of research, qualitative or quantitative, is preferable (Dörnyei, 2007; Mackey & Gass, 2005; Riazi & Candlin, 2014). However, mixed methods of research can effectively combine these two methods, and currently, it is considered to be a third approach in research methodology. The qualitative approach is associated with induction and exploration for interpretation. In addition, the approach deals with non-statistical and naturalistic data in sociocultural contexts (Creswell, 2003; Dörnyei, 2007; Griffee, 2012; Mackey & Gass, 2005). On the other hand, the quantitative approach is used for collecting data through objective measurements and uses statistical analysis and standardised data collection (Creswell, 2003; Dörnyei, 2007; Griffee, 2012; Mackey & Gass, 2005). According to Dörnyei (2007), combining quantitative and qualitative methods has been shown to increase the validity, reliability, and credibility of findings. He also suggested that the mixed-methods approach helps balance the weaknesses of one method with the strengths of the other method. For these reasons, a mixed-methods design was applied in this study.

In addition, data triangulation was used in this study to gain more insight into the findings. The triangulation of data provided the verification and validity of the data, and the attainment of more comprehensive data. *Triangulation* is defined as the usage of different sets of data, different sets of tools, and different types of analysis in order to study one particular phenomenon (Denzin, 1978). According to Xu (2009), triangulation is used not only as a tactic at the end but also as a beneficial strategy for building a chain of evidence. In this study, data on implementing autonomous learning by EFL teachers were collected by

different tools, such as interviews, observations, and questionnaires. Then, each data set from all of these sources was analysed. As a result of the data triangulation, the findings were explored comprehensively and in depth.

Table 3.1 illustrates the procedures of the study and the chronology of data collection.

**Table 3.1**

*The Chronology of Data Collection*

Time	Tool	Procedure
October 2018	Teacher Questionnaire	Distributed to 16 teachers at start of year. Based on Part 2 responses (LA practices), four teachers were selected: two teachers with highest mean scores were considered as having autonomy-promoting classes (named A1 and A2), and two teachers with the lowest mean scores were considered as being non-autonomous (named NA1 and NA2).
October 2018	Student Initial Questionnaire (Time 1)	Administered at start of semester to students in selected classes to gain information about students' practices, beliefs, and attitudes regarding LA and to explore their previous exposure to LA.
December 2018	Student Current Questionnaire (Time 2)	Administered near end of semester to same students to track changes in their practices, beliefs, and attitudes relating to LA and to gain an idea of their current exposure to LA.
December 2018	Teacher Interviews	All four selected teachers were interviewed.
November and December 2018	Student Interviews	Interviews were conducted with eight students from the four previously selected classes. One high- and one low-proficiency student were chosen from each class.
November and December 2018	Classroom Observation	Two observations of each of the four teachers previously selected to the two autonomous and two non-autonomous classes were conducted.
October, November, and December 2018	Student Writing Samples	Three writing samples were collected from the same eight interviewed students.

**3.4. Study Context**

There are more than 50 universities and colleges in Saudi Arabia. Most of them require students to complete a preparatory year, the *foundation year*. The preparatory year, like a regular academic year, includes two semesters but provides only intensive EFL and computer courses. After passing the courses in the preparatory year, students enrol in their previously assigned Bachelor of Arts (BA) majors. The students are mostly aged 19–20 and have recently graduated from high school. EFL writing textbooks are assigned by the deanery. Assessment criteria are also usually assigned by the deanery. EFL writing classes typically last for two hours twice a week. The instructors for the preparatory year in this Saudi university in the female section are all Saudi. They mostly hold a Master of Arts (MA) or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in English, with varying years of experience. Some EFL instructors are teaching assistants with a BA in English; however, those who teach preparatory-year students are usually MA qualified.

### **3.5. Participants**

This study included the following participants:

- 1) Sixteen Saudi EFL female teachers in the preparatory-year centre at a Saudi University completed a questionnaire, and four teachers were interviewed.
- 2) Four writing classes, including two classes that promote LA (A1 and A2) and two classes that do not promote LA (NA1 and NA2), were selected (see section 3.7.).
- 3) Ninety-one Saudi EFL female students from the four selected classes comprised the final sample. These students were studying in the preparatory-year centre at the Saudi university. The questionnaires were distributed by the researcher to 103 students within the four previously selected classes. However, only 93 students responded; additionally, two questionnaires were discarded due to incomplete data. Therefore, the following 91 questionnaire responses were included: 24

students in class A1, 23 students in class A2, 23 students in class NA1, and 21 students in class NA2.

### 3.6. Instruments

This study adopted a mixed-methods design. Moreover, different types of data were used for triangulation. To gain a wider view from the research, this study used a variety of instruments to collect qualitative and quantitative data (Figure 3.1). Qualitative data were gathered from teacher and student interviews, students' writing samples, and classroom observation; quantitative data were gathered using teacher and student questionnaires and students' writing samples. As a starting point, a four-section teacher questionnaire was administered at the start of the academic year to 19 EFL teachers in order to select four classes to observe based on the results. As mentioned previously, only 16 teachers responded. The second section was about teachers' practices regarding autonomous strategies deployed in their EFL writing classes. Based on teachers' responses, four EFL writing classes were chosen. The means of the teachers' responses were calculated. The two teachers with the highest means were identified as having autonomous classes. The two teachers with the lowest means were identified as having non-autonomous classes.

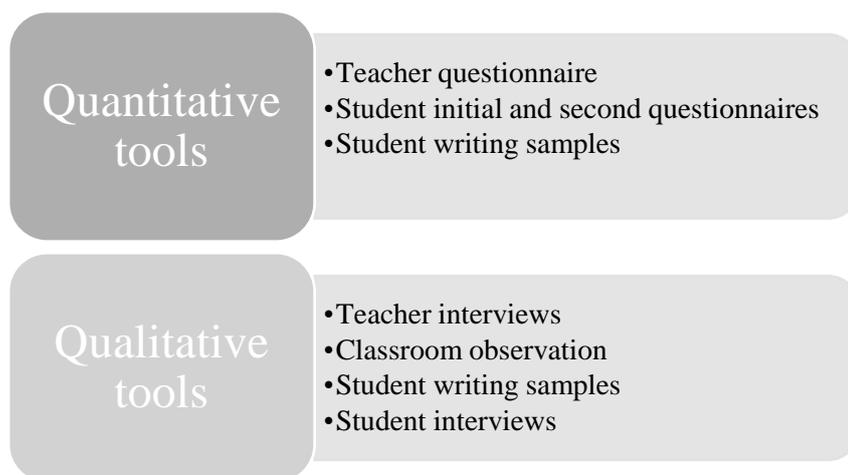


Figure 3.1. Qualitative and quantitative tools.

**3.6.1. Teacher questionnaire.** Even though the questionnaire as an instrument is not sufficient to generalise findings, it factually helps collect data (Punch, 2005). There are two main reasons for using a questionnaire to explore EFL writing teachers' and students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding LA. First, according to Dörnyei (2009), a questionnaire is considered the best tool for collecting a large amount of information. Second, while interviews provide in-depth insights into a specific issue, a questionnaire allows for gathering a large amount of data, which leads to more generalisable results (Dörnyei, 2009).

A closed-ended questionnaire developed by the researcher was used in this study (Appendix A, page 332). The development of the questionnaire was based on studies by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) and Yunus and Arshad (2015). Items about autonomous learning in EFL writing classes were added to achieve the aims of this study. The first part of the questionnaire focused on teachers' demographic information, such as their qualification levels and years of experience. The second part was based on a 5-point scale: *never* = 1, *rarely* = 2, *sometimes* = 3, *often* = 4, and *always* = 5. The third and fourth parts of the questionnaire used a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6). The four parts of the teacher questionnaire were presented as follows:

- 1) The first part asked for teachers' demographic information.
- 2) The second part (14 items) included items about teachers' practices in terms of implementing LA in their classes.
- 3) The third part (10 items) dealt with teachers' attitudes towards LA.
- 4) The fourth part (13 items) explored EFL teachers' beliefs about LA.

**3.6.2. Student questionnaires.** A closed-ended questionnaire was administered twice to the students in the four EFL writing classes: two classrooms in which LA was implemented and two classrooms in which LA was not implemented (Appendices B and C,

pages 335, 338). The questionnaire was translated into Arabic. The first questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the semester to gain information about students' practices, beliefs, and attitudes regarding LA and to explore their previous exposure to LA.

The second questionnaire was administered near the end of the semester in order to track any changes in students' practices, beliefs, and attitudes relating to LA and to gain an idea of their current exposure to LA. Both questionnaires consisted mainly of common items but also included a small number of different items to capture information regarding the students' autonomous learning experience before the preparatory year and during the preparatory year.

The questionnaire was developed based on the research by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) and Yunus and Arshad (2015). Some items about autonomous learning in EFL writing classes were added to suit the purpose of this study. The questionnaire included three parts. The first part (nine items) used a 5-point scale: *never* = 1, *rarely* = 2, *sometimes* = 3, *often* = 4, and *always* = 5. The first part was intended to explore students' practices in terms of LA. The second part of the questionnaire (eight items) was intended to explore students' attitudes towards LA in EFL writing classes and used a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree*, which was given 1 point, to *strongly agree*, which was given 6 points. The third part (eight items) was intended to explore students' beliefs about LA and used a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree*, which was given 1 point, to *strongly agree*, which was given 6 points. In the first questionnaire, students' initial practices, attitudes, and beliefs were explored. In the second questionnaire, all the parts from the first questionnaire were retained with minor modifications to reflect that students' practices in the second questionnaire referred to the preparatory year rather than high school. The second questionnaire was administered at the end of the semester to explore students' current practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding LA. In sum, the first questionnaire was about

students' initial exposure to LA in high schools, whereas the second questionnaire was about students' current exposure to LA during their preparatory year at university.

**3.6.3. Teacher interviews.** Interviewing is one of the most popular tools used in conducting research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Oppenheim, 1992; Seidman, 2006; Tierney & Dilley, 2001). According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), *interviewing* is defined as an interchange of views between the interviewer and interviewee. There are many advantages to interviewing. One is that interviewing offers an in-depth and contextual understanding of people's experiences (Seidman, 2006). This advantage makes interviews an extremely significant method of collecting data for gaining an understanding of people's beliefs and perceptions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Oppenheim, 1992). Yin (2012) also indicated that, since case studies concern human affairs, interviews are an effective source for gathering information in these types of studies. According to Bryman (2012), semi-structured interviews are more flexible than structured interviews that only use yes/no answers. Semi-structured interviews give both the interviewer and the interviewee the freedom to choose the direction of the exchange. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study as they would give the necessary focus and depth to the research questions (Appendix I, page 352). Conducting semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to ask participants for clarifications of any points that were ambiguous or that had been misunderstood. Moreover, the interviews helped the researcher gather a large body of information in a flexible way.

However, even though semi-structured interviews are flexible in terms of directing the discussion topic, they have some limitations. One is that analysing interviews consumes time, especially with a large sample (Bryman, 2012). Semi-structured interviews are also difficult to analyse, and comparing the answers of participants can be challenging and complex (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Lastly, the researcher cannot guarantee the honesty of participants in answering the questions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010).

To encourage participants in the current study to communicate and share their experiences regarding what is helpful and unhelpful in promoting LA, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews allowed teachers to give detailed explanations of the relevant factors from a deeper and wider perspective than could be gained from observation, which usually only occurs for a short period of time. Interviewing was used in this research to gain a view of the barriers to and support for promoting LA from the teachers' point of view. One-to-one interviews were undertaken to gain a detailed exploration of the ideas and concepts associated with promoting LA in writing classes.

The four teachers, whose classrooms were also observed, were interviewed at the end of the semester. Interviews were conducted after observing the classes. The reason behind this is that the researcher did not want the interviews questions to affect teachers' teaching. The autonomy-promoting teachers were labelled as A1 and A2, and the non-autonomy-promoting teachers were labelled NA1 and NA2. The interviews addressed promoting autonomous learning in general. Then, some themes with regard to promoting LA were addressed in order to gain in-depth information about teachers' practices and beliefs, as well as factors that, in their view, support and hinder the promotion of LA. The following themes were addressed to learn more about the factors that influence the promotion of LA:

- 1) Perceptions of LA and its definition and implementation
- 2) Feedback (self-assessment, peer feedback, teachers' feedback)
- 3) Collaborative learning
- 4) Methods of teaching (teacher-centred, student-centred)
- 5) Role of teacher and role of students
- 6) Classroom atmosphere (classroom size, number of students, availability of learning resources such as a library and technology)
- 7) Evaluation and assessment

- 8) Motivation and encouragement
- 9) Students' proficiency, learning preferences, and responsibilities
- 10) Dean authority, constraints of educational policy
- 11) Factors supporting the promotion of LA

**3.6.4. Student interviews.** One-to-one interviews were conducted with eight students from the four previously selected classes. Two students from each class (autonomous and non-autonomous) were chosen based on their writing proficiency levels, one with a high and one with a low level. This selection resulted in eight total students from the four classes. The reason for choosing students' assignments as a criterion for conducting interviews was that the writing samples from the same students were also collected by the researcher for later qualitative analysis.

For the previously mentioned reasons (see section 3.6.3.), semi-structured interviews were conducted, which allowed students to give detailed explanations of the relevant factors from a deeper and wider perspective (Appendix G, 355). The interview questions were mainly about students' writing processes in the two types of classes. Planning, setting goals, freedom of writing, assessment, feedback types, and evaluation were addressed. The first autonomous class was labelled A1, the second autonomous class A2, the first non-autonomous class NA1, and the second non-autonomous class NA2. To keep their names anonymous, students were named after their group, class, and proficiency level. High-proficiency students were titled Student H, and low-proficiency students were titled Student L. Thus, 'A1 Student H' referred to the high-proficiency student in the first autonomous class, while 'NA2 Student L' referred to the low-proficiency student in the second non-autonomous class. All interviews were conducted in Arabic as students wanted to be able to elaborate more and were then translated into English.

**3.6.5. Classroom observation.** Observation is a common tool used in case studies (Yin, 2012). According to Creswell (2005), recording data during observation is a valuable way to gather factual information. However, many issues have been addressed through the literature on classroom observation. For instance, Appel (2007) mentioned that the presence of the observer may cause some teachers to act in a more student-centred way than normal. In addition, Good and Brophy (2003) mentioned that observations could have problems with personal biases. They added that the observer must write down the event when it happens without analysing it. Contrarily, Pennington (1983) mentioned that observation checklists can be exhausting and imprecise. To overcome this issue, Eken (2001) stated that the observers must be clear about what they want to observe and organise their time based on that. According to Myers (2003), observation is considered the most common tool used while conducting a case study as such studies require a wide range of data to explore a phenomenon. Data gained from observations are also usually detailed and rich. There are two common types of observation. First, structured observation occurs when the observer only notes specific events or behaviours when they happen. The other type is the unstructured observation in which the observer notes down anything that happens. These types can be somewhat similar. A simple difference, however, is that structured observation is based on quantitative data, rather than the qualitative data used in the naturalistic observation (Myers, 2003).

In this study, as the researcher wanted to look for specific autonomy-promoting strategies, and in order to explore the nature of LA in Saudi EFL writing classes, classroom structured observation took place two times during the first semester in the four chosen writing classes (Appendix F, page 347). Two observations of each of the four teachers previously selected to the two autonomous and two non-autonomous class categories were conducted. As discussed earlier, the four teachers' classes were selected based on the

teachers' responses to the practices section of the teacher questionnaire. The choice of autonomous and non-autonomous classes is outlined below (see section 3.7.).

The semester was three months long, including the examination periods, and all classes were observed twice: once in the middle of the semester and again at the end. On the day of the observations, the researcher entered the classroom with the teacher and sat at the back of the classroom throughout the lesson. All classes lasted 2 hours. The researcher took written notes during the lessons to complete each item in the observation schedule (Appendix F, page 347). The completion of the items in the observation schedule was carried out during the lessons and at the time of noting the action. Some items in the schedule were not observed in certain classes and, hence, were not marked on the schedule. Any incident that happened but was not mentioned in the observation schedule was written individually on another piece of paper in case the researcher subsequently needed the information for analysis.

The observation schedule was developed by the researcher based on the research of Al-Busaidi (2012) and Yunus and Arshad (2015). The intent was to gather data on the following from both teachers and students:

- 1) Encouragement and motivation
- 2) Content and presentation
- 3) Methods of teaching
- 4) Collaborative working
- 5) Feedback
- 6) Freedom of writing
- 7) Learning resources
- 8) Assessment

**3.6.6. Writing samples.** Three writing samples from eight students from the four previously selected classes were collected. Two students were chosen from each class (autonomous and non-autonomous), giving a total of eight students, based on their writing proficiency levels; in each case, one showed a high level of proficiency, while the other showed a low level. Proficiency levels were determined based on students' scores on the first draft of their first writing assignment, as marked by their teachers. The researcher then checked the scores to ensure consistency in the marking process by following the same marking criteria given by the deanery to the teachers. The researcher collected the 10 highest marks and 10 lowest marks from each class, listed all the marks in order, and then picked one student from the very top and one from the very bottom to represent high and low proficiency levels, respectively. The researcher collected writing samples from the chosen students three times during the semester—at the beginning (October 2018), in the middle (November 2018), and at the end (December 2018)—with a different topic addressed at each time point. The first topic was *favourite sport*, the second was *I need a vacation*, and lastly, *laughter*. In order to have a wider view of the development of students' writing over time in both groups, data from student writing samples were analysed qualitatively at first by coding the samples to see if they included certain types of pre-determined mistakes. Secondly, the number of instances were counted. Thus, a qualitative analysis was carried out, and then those qualitative data were quantified. Based on the literature and previous knowledge, the researcher had predetermined categories for the analysis process of written mistakes.

### **3.7. Procedures**

First, the teacher questionnaire was administered to all Saudi EFL female teachers of the preparatory year at the Saudi University at the beginning of the academic year. The usual number of Saudi female EFL teachers in the preparatory year was 19 teachers. Only 16 teachers responded to the questionnaire. As a result, 16 questionnaire responses were

considered in this study. The questionnaire was first used in order to discover which EFL teachers implemented LA in their classes. It was also helpful for exploring their attitudes, beliefs, and practices regarding autonomous learning in their EFL teaching. The results of the questionnaire indicated which teachers most promoted LA in their classes and which teachers did it least. It was important to administer the questionnaire to as many EFL teachers as possible at the beginning of the academic year in order to know which classes to select for further observation. Based on the second part of the questionnaire, which dealt with teachers' LA practices, four EFL classes in the preparatory year at the Saudi University were selected as follows:

- Two classes in which the teachers most implemented autonomous learning.
- Two classes in which the teachers least implemented autonomous learning.

The calculation of teachers' results was done by working out the overall mean score for teachers' practices in terms of LA. Afterwards, one-to-one interviews were conducted with the four EFL teachers from the selected classes at the end of the semester. Classroom observations of 2-hour EFL writing classes took place twice for each class during the semester in order to explore teachers' practices in terms of LA in the classroom and to gain a further view of the factors that support or prevent the promotion of LA.

Writing samples were collected three times from eight students from the selected classes. The researcher considered students' level of writing proficiency before selecting certain students from whom to collect writing samples. One student who showed a high level of proficiency and another who showed a low level were chosen from each class.

The student questionnaire was distributed twice to all the students in the four EFL writing classes. The first questionnaire was distributed at the beginning of the semester to explore students' practices, beliefs, and attitudes regarding LA. The purpose of distributing the questionnaire at the beginning of the academic year was to explore students' previous

experiences and exposure to autonomous learning. The learners had recently graduated from high schools where the EFL teaching and learning process was different from the university teaching and learning experience. At the end of the semester, the same questionnaire was distributed again to the same students. The reason for this was to compare students' initial and current changes in their practices, attitudes, and beliefs after being exposed to a new educational system at university. This second questionnaire had some modified items to capture students' current experiences as university students.

### **3.8. Pilot Study**

According to Dillman (2000), it is helpful to judge the strengths and weaknesses of a research instrument before conducting a study. The main purpose of the pilot study in the current research was to assess the reliability, validity, and practicability of the questionnaires, interviews, observations form, and writing assessment criteria before fully administering them. Using a pilot study helps the researcher to test the research tools by ensuring that questions and items are clear and obvious and can be understood by participants. It also enables the researcher to change and modify difficult questions that might challenge the participants. Like the main study, the pilot study for the current research aimed to gather data about teachers' and students' practices, beliefs, and attitudes regarding LA and to gain a wider view of the practices, support, and barriers related to promoting LA in writing classes.

Questionnaires were administered to both Saudi EFL students and teachers at the Saudi University. Twenty students and five teachers participated in the pilot study. In addition, interviews were conducted with three Saudi EFL teachers. Teachers and students who were part of the pilot study did not participate in the main study. They were all asked to complete the questionnaires and give feedback on them in terms of structure, clarity, sentence order, and any other comments. The semi-structured interview content went through a revision process to hone its aptness. Teachers were asked to give their comments and

feedback on the interview questions. Modifications to the interview and questionnaire items were made accordingly. In addition, EFL classroom observations took place twice with two EFL teachers in order to enhance the observational process by adding significant items or removing unrelated items from the observation form. Lastly, writing samples could not be collected from students because the pilot study took place near the end of the semester, and students' writing samples had already been corrected and sent back to the supervision centre for further checks on the marking. Thus, the researcher had no access to such writing samples.

### **3.9. Validity**

In order to investigate the validity of the tools, the two questionnaires (one for students and one for teachers) and the researcher's observation form were given to two TEFL professors from a Saudi University. They were asked to review, edit, and give feedback on each item of the two questionnaires and the observation form, based on two main criteria: (a) clarity of the items' meanings and (b) appropriateness of the items in representing the topic. Items were modified according to the professors' comments. They confirmed that the questionnaire items had face validity before the researcher administered the questionnaires to participants. The professors also stated that the observation form was sufficient for exploring what the researcher intended to investigate. After amending items according to their comments and suggestions, the questionnaires and observation form were reviewed by two holders of PhDs in EFL. They were asked to read the questionnaire items and give comments on the wording, specificity, fairness, and appropriateness, as well as on the visual appeal, the quality of the instructions for the respondents, the scoring format, the page layout, the number of sections, and the number of items. They were also asked to give feedback on the content of the observations based on the observation form.

All the comments received from the TEFL professors and PhD holders were taken into consideration. The comments and feedback focused on item order, the length of items, and grammatical and wording mistakes. These steps of validating the tools were made before administering them to participants in order to maximise the efficiency of the tools for exploring autonomous learning in an EFL context.

### **3.10. Reliability**

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), a reliable questionnaire is one which gives the same results when reapplied. To measure the reliability level of the questionnaire items for this research, a pilot study was conducted. Twenty EFL students in their preparatory year were randomly selected. They were asked to give their suggestions and feedback on the questionnaire items. In addition, five female EFL teachers were asked to read and comment on the teacher questionnaire. Interviews were carried out with three EFL teachers to ensure that the questions were clear and in the ideal order.

The participants in the pilot study were not a part of the main study. Necessary revisions were made after carrying out the pilot test, such as those relating to the clarity of certain words and the length of some items. Students' Arabic and English interview transcriptions were sent to a lecturer in the TEFL department at a Saudi University to check their reliability. To estimate the reliability of the questionnaires in terms of internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was calculated after obtaining data from the pilot study, with the following results.

**3.10.1. Internal consistency for teacher questionnaire (pilot study).** Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. According to Lavrakas (2008), 7 is a minimum acceptable level for internal consistency. Table 3.2 shows that internal consistency level for the teacher questionnaire as a whole and for each section of it were acceptable.

**Table 3.2***Internal Consistency for Teacher Questionnaire (Pilot Study)*

Section	Internal consistency
Practices	.722
Attitudes	.759
Beliefs	.801
<b>Total</b>	<b>.865</b>

**3.10.2. Internal consistency for student questionnaires (pilot study).** Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine the reliability of the questionnaires. The internal consistency for each section of the student questionnaires is shown in Table 3.3. Notably, the alpha level for the beliefs section was slightly low. Thus, two items that seemed to be unrelated to students' beliefs were removed from the questionnaire. However, the alpha levels for the main study were all acceptable (see section 4.2.1.3.). The rest of the alpha levels in the students' pilot study were also considered to be acceptable as they were above .70 (Lavrakas, 2008).

**Table 3.3***Internal Consistency of Student Questionnaire (Pilot Study)*

Student questionnaire	Internal consistency
Current Practices	.711
Current Attitudes	.783
Current Beliefs	.602
<b>Total</b>	<b>.721</b>

**3.11. Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations refer to the measures that the researcher applies in order to prevent harm to others and to carry out a good and fair study (Sieber, 1993). When researchers deal with people, they have a responsibility to protect the rights of the participants (Yin, 2014). In this study, many ethical considerations were considered and applied throughout the research process. This study also obtained the ethical approval of the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Education at Reading University to conduct the study (Appendix P, page 365). The British Education Research Association (2011) guidelines were also followed carefully.

According to Opie (2004), researchers are privileged when they gain personal information about people's lives and take up their time. For this and many other reasons, the researcher in this study took care while dealing with the teachers and students in order to prevent any harm or distress. To avoid participants feeling that their abilities were being judged, the researcher explicitly stated that the objective of the study was not to evaluate their abilities before, during, or after data collection. This approach was also taken to ensure that participants engaged in normal practices and to avoid inauthentic or uncomfortable practices in the classroom. The researcher obtained informed consent from the deanery (Appendix O, page 364), teachers (Appendix N, page 361), and students (Appendix L, page 357) before conducting the study.

This study followed the principles of many researchers' suggestions regarding research ethics, such as those of Dörnyei (2007) and Mackey and Gass (2005). These principles are based on ethical considerations when collecting qualitative and quantitative data: voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and congeniality. In this research, teachers and students were voluntarily recruited after the approval of the head of the preparatory-year centre. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. As for the informed consent form, it was attached to the questionnaire and explained the

purpose of the study. The name of the university was kept anonymous and referred to as simply a Saudi university instead. The researcher assured participants that their identities would be kept anonymous and that their participation would be confidential. The privacy and confidentiality of all participants were guaranteed by hiding their identities. For example, in the research report, participants were referred to by numbers or pseudonyms. Participants were not asked to give their real names, and all personal data were stored securely.

### **3.12. Data Analysis**

**3.12.1. Qualitative data analysis.** Data obtained from teacher and student interviews, observation forms, and student writing samples were interpreted through a descriptive/interpretive lens. Alternative explanations were also considered. Emerging themes were linked to larger theoretical and practical issues.

**3.12.1.1. Teacher interviews.** The interviews were audio-recorded after gaining participants' approval. By taking this approach, the researcher could listen to the recordings many times for better analysis and interpretation. The second step was transcribing these interviews and translating them into English.

The analysis of the interviews was performed based on thematic analysis. Transcriptions were coded. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), coding can create units of analysis. To code the interviews, a word or abbreviation that describes something with a similar meaning was used. For example, the code 'independence' could refer to 'autonomy'. To be faithful to the data, the codes were derived from the interviews and were not created prior to collecting the data. In coding the data, frequencies and patterns were detected. After generating codes, data were classified and combined into relevant themes (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In addition, to assist in analysing these qualitative data, NVivo software was used. Finally, to maximise the trustworthiness of the findings, two experts in TEFL reread the data and rated samples of the data.

All interviews were conducted in Arabic (Appendix J, page 353), as teachers preferred to be able to elaborate more, and then were translated into English. The decision was made in this study to analyse the qualitative data using NVivo 11 software to enable the researcher to keep all the data together and conduct a more organised and systematic form of data analysis. A thematic analysis was conducted by creating initial codes, and then themes arose based on these codes. There are six practical steps to follow before, during, and after thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006): (a) become familiar with the data, (b) generate initial codes, (c) look for themes, (d) review the themes, (e) define the themes, and (f) extract a report based on the first five steps. Each of these steps is elaborated upon below.

First, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed into Arabic, and then translated into English by the researcher. Second, the Arabic and English transcriptions were sent to a lecturer in the TEFL department at a Saudi University to check the reliability of the translations. As there were only four teachers, it was decided to send all the interviews to be checked. There were a few areas of difference between the researcher's and lecturer's translations. One of these areas was word choice. For example, the lecturer used the words *implementation* and *criteria* instead of the words used by the researcher, *application* and *standard*, respectively. Another difference between the translations regarded verb tenses. Some sentence structures were also changed by the lecturer to ensure the intended meanings of the teachers were conveyed as accurately as possible. These differences were taken into consideration, and the appropriate changes were made accordingly.

*3.12.1.1.1. First-round coding: An initial codebook.* One transcript was coded to produce an initial codebook for the interview data. Each sentence/paragraph was carefully read by the researcher and defined by giving it a code. For example, 'They would never have new information that requires students' critical thinking', a line from one of the transcripts, was defined and coded as 'curriculum issues'. That is, this interviewee was blaming

curricula for not encouraging students' critical thinking as a constraint that hinders the promotion of LA. Many units from this and other transcripts were also coded as curriculum issues. A similar process was followed in producing the remaining codes, such as 'students' perception of teachers' role' and 'awareness and enlightenment'. One transcript was selected randomly to be coded and to construct the initial codebook. The initial codebook included every different code, its definition, and an example. There were four reasons behind creating an initial codebook. First, it was a guide and standard for the researcher to use in coding the rest of the transcriptions. Second, it helped by being a database for reviewing the coding procedure at any later research stage. Third, it was used by other coders in the later coding and checking stage. Fourth, it helped develop the final codebook, which helped with analysing data and reporting and discussing findings.

*3.12.1.1.2. Second-round coding: Revising the codebook.* The aim of the second-round coding was to revise the initial codebook and review the coding procedure. In this round, a second coder, who was a peer researcher from the same research discipline, reviewed the initial codebook and the transcript that was initially coded in the first round. After reviewing the codes of the second coder, the coder and the researcher discussed and revised the differences. Then, the initial codebook was revised and updated by reaching agreement. Some changes, such as to code titles, were made. Once the new version of the codebook and coding method had been finalised, the three remaining interviews were coded with the same coding approach.

*3.12.1.1.3. Third-round coding: Inter-coder reliability.* In order to double-check the reliability of the interview coding, all four interview transcriptions and the revised codebook were sent to a third coder. The third coder was an experienced researcher in qualitative analysis at the University of Reading. To examine the inter-coder reliability, the third coder was asked to code the four transcripts and review the codebook and coded transcript.

Afterwards, an inter-coder reliability analysis was conducted. According to Mouter and Noordegraaf (2012), inter-coder reliability ‘consists of coding and comparing the findings of the coders’ (p. 2). In order to check the reliability of the codes applied to the coded data, the researcher calculated the reliability coefficient by comparing the researcher’s coding version with that of the third coder. The inter-coder reliability was 81.36%, which indicates a moderate agreement level (Lavrakas, 2008). The researcher and the third coder discussed the disagreement and clarified coding issues to reach full agreement. A few changes were made based on that agreement, such as changing some code titles. After the third round, the final version of the codebook was considered complete.

**3.12.1.2. Student interviews.** The student interviews were conducted with eight students from the four previously selected classes. Two students from each class (autonomous and non-autonomous) were chosen based on their writing proficiency level, one with a high and one with a low level. Interviews were conducted with the chosen students at the end of the semester. They were mainly asked about their writing processes in the two types of classes.

All interviews were conducted in Arabic, as students wanted to be able to elaborate more, and were then translated into English (Appendix H, page 351). Qualitative data were analysed using NVivo 11 software to enable the researcher to keep all the data together and conduct a more organised, systematic, and visual form of data analysis. The thematic analysis process followed for the teacher interviews was followed for the student interviews. Moreover, in order to check the reliability of the translations, Arabic and English transcriptions were sent to the same lecturer who worked on the teacher interviews. The peer translator worked in the TEFL department at a Saudi University. As the student interviews were short, it was decided to send all these interviews to be checked. There were very few differences between the researcher’s and lecturer’s translations, and the differences that did

exist were mainly in verb tenses and sentence structures. These differences were taken into consideration and changed based on the lecturer's corrections.

The validity and reliability of the analysis of the student interviews were checked by following the same procedures as those used for the teacher interviews. A codebook was created and went through three rounds of testing. The inter-coder reliability in the third round was 79.14%, which was a little below the acceptable agreement level (Lavrakas, 2008). The researcher and the third coder discussed the disagreements and clarified the coding issues to reach full agreement. Changes, such as deciding which codes to choose, were made based on the agreement between the researcher and the third coder. After the third round, the final version of the codebook was considered complete. After the reliability and validity of these codes were checked, three main themes emerged, as will be discussed in the findings chapter.

**3.12.1.3. Observation forms.** Handwritten notes were taken during the observations. All notes were typed into Word and then imported into NVivo. The researcher used NVivo 11 software to qualitatively analyse the observational data. All observation schedule data were entered into NVivo as plain text, and codes were generated from the text. The researcher conducted a thematic analysis by creating initial codes and then identifying themes that arose based on the codes. The initial codes used to categorise the raw data were derived from the researcher's prior experience and understanding of the topic, the research questions, and the review of the existing literature. Thus, the researcher engaged in conceptual coding—namely, coding based on the researcher's experience and the wider literature on the topic (Gibbs, 2007).

**3.12.1.3.1. First-round coding: An initial codebook.** A similar process to that of coding the interviews was followed in producing codes for the observational data. As with the interviews, notes were coded to produce an initial codebook of the observational data.

Each note was carefully read by the researcher and defined with a code. As there were few observational notes, all notes were coded and used to construct the initial codebook.

*3.12.1.3.2. Second-round coding: Revising the codebook.* To check the reliability of the coding, a second-round coding for revising the initial codebook and reviewing the coding procedure was carried out by a second coder. A peer researcher from the same research discipline reviewed the initial codebook and notes, which had been coded in the first round. After the review of the codes by the second coder, the coder and the researcher discussed and revised the differences. Then, the initial codebook was revised and updated based on agreements reached between the coder and researcher. Finally, once the new version of the codebook was finalised, three main themes and their sub-themes arose from the codes: autonomy-promoting strategies, cognitive techniques, and feedback (see section 4.5.). These themes included both the presence and the absence of the area of interest.

*3.12.1.4. Writing samples.* In order to obtain a wider view of the development of students' writing over time in both groups, data from students' writing samples were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. A qualitative approach was first applied to the data, followed by the application of a quantitative approach. Based on the literature and previous knowledge, the researcher had predetermined categories for the analysis process of written mistakes.

Student writing samples were analysed qualitatively by discussing the types of feedback teachers provided to their students and the nature of students' mistakes. A deductive approach was followed when qualitatively analysing writing samples. As mentioned earlier, the researcher had predetermined categories for the analysis process of written mistakes. Therefore, a deductive analysis, during which the researcher looked for specific categories in the collected data, was conducted. As the writing samples were already in a written and textual form, the researcher initiated the analysis by first getting familiar with

the data. This phase included highlighting, labelling, and making marginal notes on the writing samples. The researcher then manually categorised all writing samples in the same way through coding. All the categories were used to create codes with definitions. In order to check the validity of the categories, categories with samples were sent to a peer reviewer, an EFL lecturer at another Saudi University. The researcher and the peer reviewer checked the overlaps in the categories and texts and made changes based on their discussion. Once the validity had been checked, two main categories emerged from the samples: types of teachers' responses to students' writing and types of students' written mistakes (see section 4.7.1.). The quantitative analysis of writing samples is detailed below (see section 3.12.2.2.).

**3.12.2. Quantitative data analysis.** The quantitative data were obtained from the teacher and student questionnaires and student writing samples.

**3.12.2.1. Questionnaires.** Questionnaires were allocated an ID number for anonymity purposes. The quantitative data from the teacher questionnaire underwent the following analyses:

- Cronbach's alpha to determine the reliability of the questionnaire.
- Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) for each item of the questionnaire to explore the teachers' background information, practices, beliefs, and attitudes regarding LA in EFL writing classes.
- A total mean score for the second section of the questionnaire (teachers' practices in terms of LA), which was calculated for each teacher to assign the highest two autonomous and two non-autonomous classes.

The quantitative data from student initial (Time 1) and current (Time 2) questionnaires underwent the following analyses:

- Cronbach's alpha to determine the reliability of both questionnaires.

- Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to check the fit of the assigned model to the data.
- Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations of each questionnaire item to explore students' practices, beliefs, and attitudes regarding LA.
- Parametric tests that were chosen after first checking that the required assumptions were met. The normality of data, equality of error variances, sphericity, and the equality of covariance matrices were all checked and met in this study.
- A mixed, two-way ANOVA to examine whether there was a change from Time 1 (initial) to Time 2 (current), and whether this varied according to Group 1 (autonomous) and Group 2 (non-autonomous).
- Paired samples t-tests (simple effect tests) to explore the interaction between the times and groups.
- Pearson correlation to explore the relationship between teachers' and students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs in the post-test questionnaire.

CFA data were entered and analysed using the Amos 25 program in order to verify the underlying structure of the student questionnaire sections, whereas the SPSS 20 program was used for the descriptive statistics; the mixed, two-way ANOVA; the paired sample t-tests; and the Pearson correlation. In order to examine the effect of time (Time 1 = initial, Time 2 = current) and group (Group1 = autonomous, Group 2 = non-autonomous), and to explore the interaction between time and group, a mixed, two-way ANOVA was conducted. This test was selected because this study had both within- (time) and between-participant (group) variables. In addition, including both group and time factors in the same omnibus analysis reduces the chance of making type 1 errors. The assumptions of the ANOVA were

checked and were all met. These assumptions are discussed in the findings chapter (see section 4.3.1.):

- A one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to explore the normality of the data in the first and second student questionnaire.
- Box's test was conducted to check the equality of the variance-covariance matrices.
- In order to check the equality of error variance, Levene's test was performed.
- To ensure that the relationship between the different pairs of conditions was similar, Mauchly's test of sphericity was conducted.

**3.12.2.2. Writing samples.** A quantitative approach was adapted in order to gain an overview of the development and changes in students' written mistakes over time across the autonomous and non-autonomous groups. The means and standard deviations of each mistake type were produced. The descriptive analysis tracked changes in students' writing development, and four main categories of written mistakes were included in the analysis: grammar, spelling, capitalisation, and punctuation. Descriptive statistics for all types of mistakes within the two groups were calculated.

Moreover, a qualitative approach was conducted on the same data. As the researcher had predetermined categories for the analysis process of written mistakes, a deductive analysis was followed, during which the researcher looked for specific categories as they were found in the collected data. Data were coded, and the data reliability was checked in the same way it was assessed for the observation data. Afterwards, two main categories emerged from the samples and were analysed.

### **3.13. Limitations**

This study was limited to EFL teachers and students, specifically Saudi female teachers and students in their preparatory year at a Saudi university. Despite this limitation,

according to the Saudi MOE's website, all English language centres for preparatory years in Saudi universities teach the same curricula and follow the Saudi MOE's regulations regarding teaching preparatory-year students. Another limitation could be the small number of participants. Even though the study sample is small, the qualitative data used in this research will still help gain a more rounded picture for promoting LA in Saudi universities.

Moreover, this study only explored the attitudes and beliefs regarding LA held by EFL teachers and students, and the support for and barriers to promoting LA and teachers' practices in writing classes. Hence, its relevance in terms of other LA areas is limited. Little (1990) stated that LA is difficult to achieve and measure as a concept because it can manifest in many different ways. Finally, the areas explored in this study might have some limitations regarding various learning contexts. Accordingly, these limitations need to be considered before developing LA programmes.

Finally, researcher positionality may have had an impact on data collection and data analysis. The researcher's previous thoughts and beliefs on the study were about the significance of LA and the role of teachers and students in fostering autonomous learning through an effective application of autonomous strategies in classes. Those reflections may have led the researcher to choose certain methods of data collection and analysis. However, the researcher tried to minimise the impact of positionality and subjectivity by choosing different instruments to collect data. Moreover, a mixed method design was chosen to analyse data obtained from participants, and data triangulation was implemented.

### **3.14. Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the research methodology that was used to achieve the study objectives. The study was a case study, descriptive, mixed-methods research design and utilised both quantitative and qualitative research to gather data. Within a constructivism

paradigm, the instruments used were classroom observation, interviews with teachers and students, students' writing samples, and questionnaires for both teachers and students.

## 4. Findings (Qualitative and Quantitative)

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents findings from both qualitative and quantitative instruments used in the study. The quantitative data were gathered through questionnaires, one for teachers and two for students. Students' first (pre-test) questionnaire was distributed at the beginning of the semester, and the second (post-test) was distributed at the end of the semester. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS. Qualitative data were collected using interviews, class observations, and student writing samples. The first section of the chapter presents the quantitative results for both teacher and student questionnaires. The second section presents qualitative results for teacher and student interviews, and classroom observation. The last section presents quantitative and qualitative results obtained from student writing samples.

### 4.2. Research Question 1

*Research Question 1: What are Saudi EFL teachers' and students' practices, beliefs, and attitudes towards LA?*

This section presents quantitative results for all sections of the questionnaire, which includes teachers' practices, attitudes, and beliefs towards LA, and students' initial and current practices, attitudes, and beliefs towards LA. The teacher questionnaire and student pre- and post-test questionnaires were used to answer this question.

The teacher questionnaire included four sections (Appendix A, page 332). The first part asked for demographic information regarding teachers' highest qualification and years of experience. The second section dealt with the exploration of teachers' practices of LA in EFL writing classes. This section included 10 items and used a 5-point scale: *never* = 1, *rarely* = 2, *sometimes* = 3, *often* = 4, and *always* = 5. The third section was about teachers'

attitudes towards LA. Lastly, the fourth section presented teachers' beliefs towards LA. The third and fourth sections used a 6-point Likert scale, from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies (F), percentages, measures of central tendency, and standard deviation (SD) were calculated for each section of the questionnaire to explore teachers' thoughts about LA.

The two student questionnaires included three sections (Appendices B and C, pages 335, 338). The first section in the first questionnaire explored students' initial LA practices during high school. In the second questionnaire, the first section explored students' current LA practices in the preparatory year. This first section included 10 items and used a 5-point scale: *never* = 1, *rarely* = 2, *sometimes* = 3, *often* = 4, and *always* = 5. The second and the third section were kept the same for both questionnaires. The second section was intended to explore students' attitudes towards LA in EFL writing classes. It included 12 items and used a 6-point Likert scale, from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6). The third section was intended to explore students' beliefs about LA, consisted of 12 items, and used the same 6-point Likert scale as the second section.

Some items in the teacher and students' questionnaires needed to be reverse coded. As a result, the researcher reversed those codes while putting data into SPSS. Those items are marked with an asterisk in each table reporting the results from the questionnaires.

**4.2.1. Confirmatory factor analysis.** The literature revealed a few differences between exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and CFA. EFA is a reduction technique that simplifies the data set (Child, 1990). Through applying EFA, the underlying factor structure is identified. On the other hand, CFA is a statistical technique used to confirm that certain structures of data are correct. CFA helps with confirming that a certain relationship exists between observed variables and their underlying latent factors, which makes it easier to

compare a number of factors and helps with exploring item loadings on factors and with excluding items that do not belong to a certain factor.

The literature review suggested a theoretical model of LA composed of practices, attitudes, and beliefs as separable constructs (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012; Lamb & Reinders, 2008; Maliqi, 2016; Zhang & Li, 2004). CFA was therefore conducted to check that such a model was a good fit for the data in this study. The assumptions for CFA include normality and a sufficient sample size (Byrne, 1994; Hassan, 2016). EFA was also considered, but the data did not meet the assumptions of a minimum value of .6 for the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test.

**4.2.1.1. Factor validity for the first student questionnaire.** CFA was conducted in SPSS Amos 25 to verify the validity of the underlying construct of the questionnaire sections: initial practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding LA. The three latent factors were examined among the research sample (91 students).

After modelling the three latent factors for analysis, it was concluded that the three sections of the questionnaire were well-matched with acceptable values for the goodness of fit test (Table 4.1). The ideal range given below for the various fit indices was drawn from Hassan (2016), Hooper et al. (2008), Kline (2005), and Ropovik (2015). Since the chi-square value was statistically insignificant and the values of the other indices occurred in the ideal range for each index, it can be concluded that the model has an appropriate goodness of fit for the tested data.

**Table 4.1**

*Goodness of Fit Test for the Three Latent Factors of the First Questionnaire*

No.	Index	Value of index	The ideal range of the index
1.	Chi-square $X^2$ df	554.32 504	$X^2$ value is not statistically significant

	<i>P</i> value	0.06	
2.	Root mean square residual (RMR)	0.10	(0) to (0.1)
2.	Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.03	(0) to (0.1)
4.	Normed fit index (NFI)	0.63	(0) to (1)
5.	Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.88	(0) to (1)

Furthermore, most loadings and validity coefficients were statistically significant at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  (Table 4.2); thus, the theoretical model which included most items of the first student questionnaire was valid.

**Table 4.2**

*Loadings of the First-Questionnaire Items*

Latent factor	Item no.	Loading	Standard error of estimate	T-values	Sig.
(A) Initial practices	a1	0.19	0.12	1.60	Non sig.
	a2	0.42	0.12	3.36	< 0.01
	a3	0.48	0.09	5.17	< 0.01
	a4	0.64	0.11	5.76	< 0.01
	a5	0.60	0.11	5.43	< 0.01
	a6	0.26	0.12	2.26	< 0.05
	a7	0.65	0.11	5.92	< 0.01
	a8	0.36	0.12	3.08	< 0.01
	a9	0.24	0.12	2.05	< 0.05
	a10	0.51	0.12	4.35	< 0.01
(B) Initial attitudes	b1	0.21	0.10	2.20	< 0.05
	b2	0.20	0.11	1.88	Non sig.
	b3	0.44	0.11	4.05	< 0.01
	b4	0.76	0.10	7.71	< 0.01
	b5	0.45	0.11	4.12	< 0.01
	b6	0.34	0.11	3.02	< 0.01
	b7	0.86	0.09	9.37	< 0.01
	b8	0.44	0.11	4.05	< 0.01
	b9	0.62	0.10	6.11	< 0.01
	b10	0.74	0.10	7.61	< 0.01
	b11	0.13	0.11	1.12	Non sig.
	b12	0.29	0.08	3.68	< 0.01
(C) Initial beliefs	c1	0.44	0.12	3.84	< 0.01

c2	0.68	0.11	6.18	< 0.01
c3	0.36	0.12	3.08	< 0.01
c4	0.46	0.12	3.99	< 0.01
c5	0.49	0.12	4.12	< 0.01
c6	0.55	0.12	4.73	< 0.01
c7	0.41	0.10	4.12	< 0.01
c8	0.41	0.11	4.12	< 0.01
c9	0.49	0.12	4.27	< 0.01
c10	0.53	0.11	4.74	< 0.01
c11	0.37	0.11	3.23	< 0.01
c12	0.30	0.11	2.70	< 0.01

There were only three invalid items: item (a1) from the first latent factor (i.e., initial practices), and items (b2) and (b11) from the second latent factor (i.e., initial attitudes towards LA). Their coefficients were statistically insignificant. Hence, those items were deleted from the questionnaire, reducing the number of items from 34 to 31. Therefore, the CFA provided strong evidence for the validity of the underlying constructs of the first student questionnaire. Figure 4.1, generated in SPSS AMOS 25, illustrates the three latent factors of the students' first questionnaire.

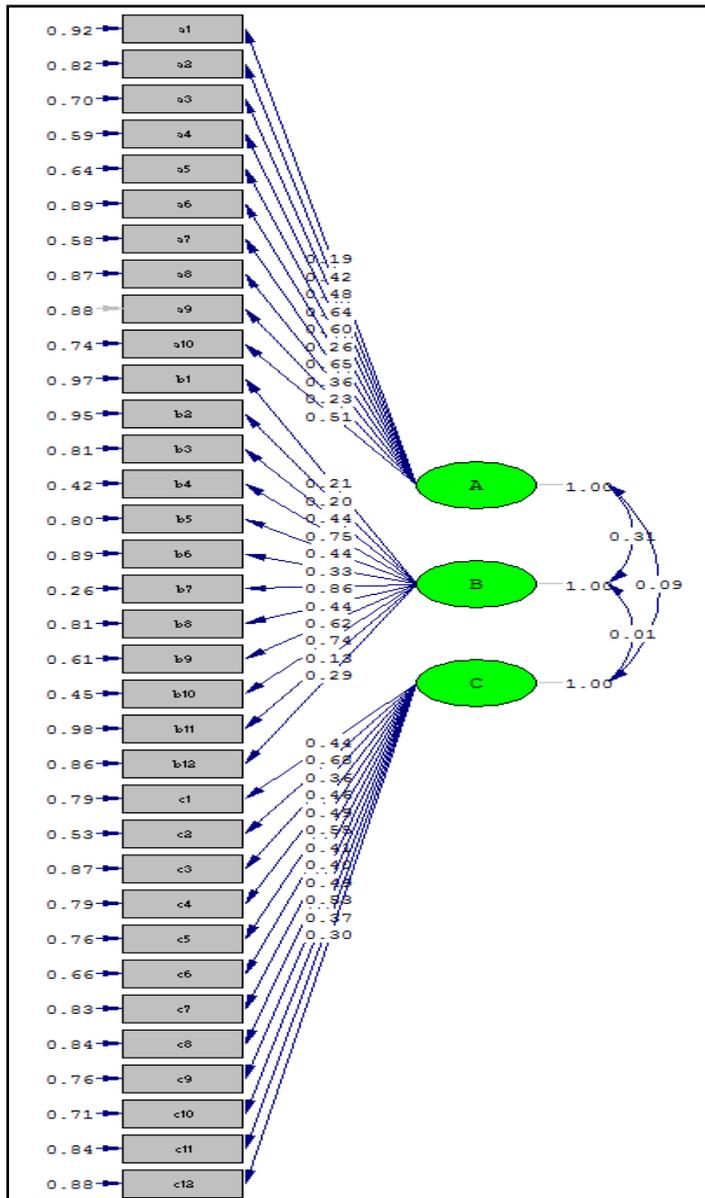


Figure 4.1. A model of the three latent factors for the students' first questionnaire. A = initial practices. B = initial attitudes. C = initial beliefs.

**4.2.1.2. Factor validity for the second student questionnaire.** The same analysis was conducted for the second questionnaire, examining the three assumed latent factors of current practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding autonomous learning. After modelling the three latent factors for analysis, it was concluded that the three sections of the questionnaire were well-matched with appropriate goodness of fit statistics, as shown in Table 4.3. The table shows that the chi-square value was statistically insignificant, and the values of the

other indices occurred in the ideal range for each index. Therefore, it can be concluded that the model has appropriate goodness of fit statistics for the tested data.

Most loadings and validity coefficients were statistically significant at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ), so the theoretical model which included most second-questionnaire items was valid (Table 4.4). However, the second questionnaire had eight invalid items: b2, b7, b9, and b11 from the second latent factor (i.e., current attitudes), and c2, c6, c7, and c10 from the third latent factor (i.e., current beliefs about LA). Their coefficients were not statistically significant. Hence, those items were deleted, reducing the number of items from 34 to 26. These findings also confirmed the three sections (current practices, attitudes, and beliefs) as latent factors.

**Table 4.3**

*Goodness of Fit Test for the Three Latent Factors of the Second Questionnaire*

No.	Index	Value of index	The ideal range of the index
1.	Chi-square $X^2$ df P Value	546.97 504 0.09	$X^2$ value is not statistically significant
2.	Root mean square residual (RMR)	0.10	(0) to (0.1)
3.	Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.03	(0) to (0.1)
4.	Normed fit index (NFI)	0.61	(0) to (1)
5.	Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.88	(0) to (1)

**Table 4.4**

*Loadings of the Second-Questionnaire Items*

Latent factor	Item no.	Loading	Stand. error of estimate	T-values	Sig.
(AA) Current practices	aa1	0.61	0.12	4.99	< 0.01
	aa2	0.40	0.11	3.65	< 0.01
	aa3	0.47	0.11	3.65	< 0.01

	aa4	0.45	0.11	4.01	< 0.01
	aa5	0.54	0.11	4.63	< 0.01
	aa6	0.45	0.11	4.08	< 0.01
	aa7	0.34	0.11	3.07	< 0.01
	aa8	0.78	0.10	7.52	< 0.01
	aa9	0.30	0.12	2.57	< 0.05
	aa10	0.28	0.12	2.40	< 0.05
(BB) Current attitudes	bb1	0.83	0.09	9.51	< 0.01
	bb2	0.15	0.11	1.38	Non sig.
	bb3	0.28	0.11	2.64	< 0.01
	bb4	0.26	0.11	2.39	< 0.05
	bb5	0.88	0.08	10.55	< 0.01
	bb6	0.89	0.08	10.94	< 0.01
	bb7	0.13	0.11	1.21	Non sig.
	bb8	0.32	0.09	3.35	< 0.01
	bb9	0.20	0.11	1.85	Non sig.
	bb10	0.89	0.08	10.64	< 0.01
	bb11	-0.14	0.11	1.35	Non sig.
	bb12	0.08	0.11	0.77	< 0.01
(CC) Current beliefs	cc1	0.70	0.12	6.02	< 0.01
	cc2	0.18	0.12	1.49	Non sig.
	cc3	0.60	0.11	5.35	< 0.01
	cc4	0.24	0.12	2.10	< 0.05
	cc5	0.21	0.11	1.98	< 0.05
	cc6	0.08	0.13	0.62	Non sig.
	cc7	0.19	0.12	1.57	Non sig.
	cc8	0.65	0.11	5.70	< 0.01
	cc9	0.32	0.12	2.71	< 0.01
	cc10	0.01	0.12	0.08	Non sig.
	cc11	0.52	0.11	4.54	< 0.01
	cc12	0.43	0.11	3.80	< 0.01

Figure 4.2, generated in SPSS AMOS 25, illustrates the three latent factors of the students' second questionnaire.

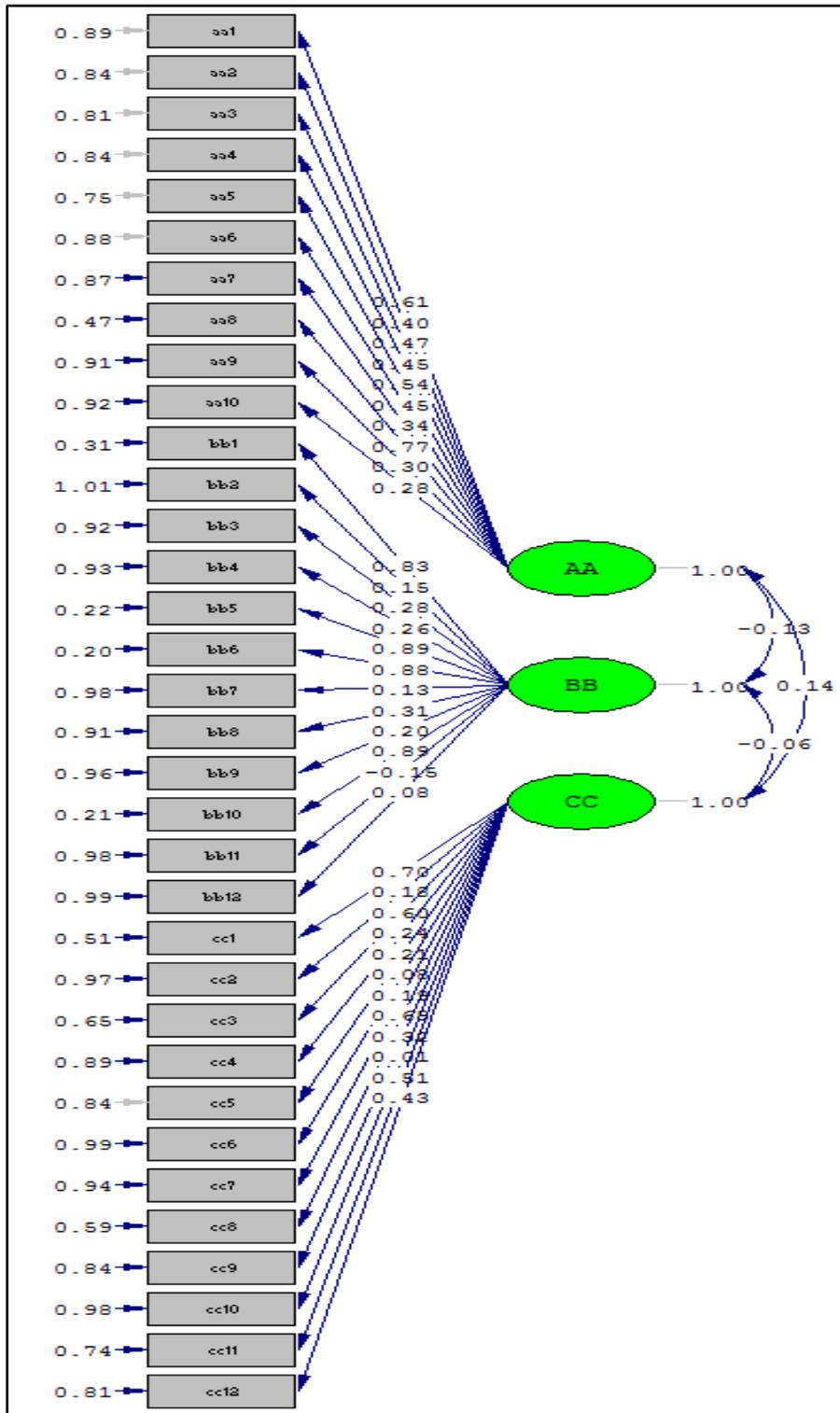


Figure 4.2. A model of the three latent factors for the students' second questionnaire. AA = current practices. BB = current attitudes. CC = current beliefs.

Meanwhile, Table 4.5 shows items that had statistically significant loadings with the three latent factors in both questionnaires, after the deletion of the invalid items.

**Table 4.5***Loadings from Both Questionnaires*

Latent factor	First questionnaire	Second questionnaire
Practices of LA	a2	aa2
	a3	aa3
	a4	aa4
	a5	aa5
	a6	aa6
	a7	aa7
	a8	aa8
	a9	aa9
	a10	aa10
	Attitudes towards LA	b1
b3		bb3
b4		bb4
b5		bb5
b6		bb6
b8		bb8
b10		bb10
Beliefs about LA	c1	cc1
	c3	cc3
	c4	cc4
	c5	cc5
	c8	cc8
	c9	cc9
	c11	cc11
c12	cc12	

According to Table 4.5, 25 items had statistically significant loadings within the three latent factors in both questionnaires. These items were kept in both questionnaires for subsequent analysis, which means these 25 items were the only ones analysed for this study.

**4.2.1.3. Internal consistency for teacher questionnaire.** Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. The internal consistency levels for the teacher questionnaire as a whole and for each section are shown in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6***Internal Consistency of Teacher Questionnaire*

Section	Internal consistency
Practices	.760
Attitudes	.614
Beliefs	.729
<b>Total</b>	<b>.817</b>

**4.2.1.4. Internal consistency for the student initial and current questionnaires.**

Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. The internal consistency levels for each section of the student questionnaires are shown in Table 4.7.

**4.2.2. Teachers' practices, beliefs, and attitudes towards LA.**

**4.2.2.1. Demographic information.** The first part of the teacher questionnaire asked teachers about their qualification and years of experience. The majority of teachers had an MA and over five years of experience. A summary of the frequencies and percentages of this demographic information is found in Tables 4.8 and 4.9.

**Table 4.7***Internal Consistency of Students' Pre- and Post-Test Questionnaires*

Student 1 <sup>st</sup> questionnaire	Internal consistency	Student 2 <sup>nd</sup> questionnaire	Internal consistency
Initial practices	.752	Current practices	.753
Initial attitudes	.762	Current attitudes	.746
Initial beliefs	.775	Current beliefs	.710
<b>Total</b>	<b>.786</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>.754</b>

**Table 4.8***Teachers' Qualification*

Teachers' qualification	N	%
BA	7	43.8
MA	9	56.3
<b>Total</b>	16	100.0

**Table 4.9***Teachers' Years of Experience*

Years of experience	N	%
1–4	3	18.8
5–9	7	43.8
10–14	4	25.0
15–19	2	12.5
<b>Total</b>	16	100.0

**4.2.2.2. Teachers' LA practices.** This second section of the teacher questionnaire contained 14 statements that examined teachers' LA practices in writing classes. As previously stated, this part of the questionnaire used a 5-point scale: *never* = 1, *rarely* = 2, *sometimes* = 3, *often* = 4, and *always* = 5. Those statements were about teachers' practical strategies employed within writing classes to implement LA.

As shown in Table 4.10, the highest mean was 3.94 for the second statement (*I allow students to take control over their writing development*), followed by the mean of 3.69 for the 12th statement (*I help students discover ways to improve their EFL writing*). This finding suggested that teachers claimed they helped their students become autonomous learners and

acted as learning facilitators. The lowest mean of 2.65 was for the fifth statement (*In the beginning of the academic session, I help students identify their own strengths and weaknesses in their writing*). This discrepancy between the highest and lowest mean suggested a contradiction between teachers' practices. On one hand, it showed that teachers supported students to find ways to improve writing. On the other hand, teachers did not make self-evaluation part of that process.

Six statements had a mean of below 3, indicating that teachers reported a low use of nearly half the practices, including those related to self- and peer assessments. The seventh item in Table 4.10 was a code-reversed item, and for clarity, the wording of the item has been changed to reflect this.

**Table 4.10***Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and Standard Deviations for Teachers' LA Practices*

Item	Mean	SD	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always	
			1		2		3		4		5	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. I ask students to set their own learning goals.	3.31	1.58	2	12.5	5	31.3	1	6.3	2	12.5	6	37.5
2. I allow students to take control over their writing development.	3.94	1.34	2	12.5	0	0	2	12.5	5	31.3	7	43.8
3. I ask my students to give peer feedback.	3.56	1.09	0	0	3	18.8	5	31.3	4	25.0	4	25.0
4. I ask for students' views on the study materials we use.	3.50	1.36	1	6.3	3	18.8	5	31.3	1	6.3	6	37.5
5. In the beginning of the academic session, I help students identify their own strengths and weaknesses in their writing.	2.65	1.50	5	31.3	4	25.0	3	18.8	1	6.3	3	18.8
6. I ask students to evaluate their progress in learning EFL writing during the session.	2.75	1.18	2	12.5	6	37.5	3	18.8	4	25.0	1	6.3
7. My EFL writing classroom is largely student-centred*.	2.75	1.39	3	18.8	5	31.3	4	25.0	1	6.3	3	18.8
8. When a student has a difficulty in writing, I suggest she seeks help from her peers.	2.69	1.49	4	25.0	5	31.3	2	12.5	2	12.5	3	18.8
9. I ask students to make a plan before they write.	3.13	1.36	2	12.5	4	25.0	3	18.8	4	25.0	3	18.8
10. When students write in English, I encourage them to practise new writing techniques.	2.88	1.58	5	31.3	1	6.3	5	31.3	1	6.3	4	25.5
11. I ask my students to self-assess their written tasks.	2.75	1.65	5	31.3	4	25.0	1	6.3	2	12.5	4	25.0
12. I help students discover ways to improve their EFL writing.	3.69	1.35	2	12.5	1	6.3	2	12.5	4	37.5	5	31.3
13. I give students the freedom to choose their preferred way of writing.	3.50	1.46	1	6.3	5	31.3	1	6.3	3	18.8	6	37.5
14. Using mobile dictionaries is allowed in my classroom.	3.31	1.40	1	6.3	5	31.3	3	18.8	2	12.5	5	31.3

\* = code-reversed item; for clarity, the wording of the item has been changed to reflect the intended meaning.

SD = standard deviation

F = number of teachers

% = percentage of teachers

**4.2.2.3. Teachers' attitudes towards LA.** The third section of the teachers' questionnaire focused on attitudes towards autonomous learning in EFL writing classes. Table 4.11 shows that the highest mean was 4.31 for the fifth statement (*I prefer to let students seek out information by themselves*), followed by means of 3.94 for the eighth statement (*I prefer to teach students EFL writing through collaborative working*). This finding suggested that teachers claimed to give students freedom to work independently and collaboratively. In contrast, the lowest means were 3 for the first statement (*How well students develop in EFL writing is not solely my responsibility*). Even though this first sentence has the lowest mean, it had a mean of above 3, which is considered positive. Thus, teachers' claim of handing over some responsibility for learning to learners was supported.

Even though teachers reported lower use of nearly half the practices in the above section, they held more positive attitudes towards LA as all 10 statements about their attitudes had a mean above 3. This finding contrasted with the results for practices.

**Table 4.11***Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and Standard Deviations for Teachers Attitudes Towards LA*

Item	Mean	SD	Strongly disagree		2		3		4		5		Strongly agree	
			1		2		3		4		5		6	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. How well students develop in EFL writing is not solely my responsibility*.	3.00	1.67	4	25.0	2	12.5	5	31.3	2	12.5	1	6.3	2	12.5
2. I prefer to follow new trends in teaching EFL writing*.	3.44	1.41	1	6.3	4	25.0	3	18.8	4	25.0	3	18.8	1	6.3
3. I prefer my EFL classes to be learner-centred.	3.69	1.88	3	18.8	2	12.5	2	12.5	3	18.8	2	12.5	4	25.0
4. I prefer to act as a facilitator in my EFL writing classes rather than a giver of information.	3.88	1.54	1	6.3	2	12.5	4	25.0	3	18.8	3	18.8	3	18.8
5. I prefer to let students seek out information by themselves.	4.31	1.44	0	0	2	12.5	3	18.8	4	25.5	2	12.5	5	31.3
6. I prefer to let students decide what they should do by themselves.	3.88	1.89	2	12.5	3	18.8	2	12.5	2	12.5	2	12.5	5	31.3
7. In my EFL writing classrooms, I prefer to take decisions on the basis of negotiation and agreement with learners,	3.69	1.70	2	21.5	3	18.8	2	12.5	2	12.5	5	31.3	2	12.5
8. I prefer to teach students EFL writing through collaborative working.	3.94	1.48	0	0	4	25.0	2	12.5	4	25.0	3	18.8	3	18.8
9. I believe it is important for learners rather than the teacher to correct written work*.	3.38	1.62	3	18.8	2	12.5	3	18.8	3	18.8	4	25.0	1	6.3
10. When learners make mistakes in their writing, I prefer to make them look for the correct version by themselves*.	3.69	1.85	2	12.5	3	18.8	4	25.0	0	0	3	18.8	4	25.0

\* = code-reversed item; for clarity, the wording of the item has been changed to reflect the intended meaning.

SD = standard deviation

F = number of teachers

% = percentage of teachers

**4.2.2.4. Teachers' beliefs towards LA.** The fourth part of the teachers' questionnaire investigated their beliefs about autonomous learning in writing classes. According to Table 4.12, the highest mean was 4.44 for the seventh statement (*The teacher has an important role to play in supporting students' independent learning*). This finding showed that teachers were aware of their role in promoting students' autonomy. The lowest mean was 3.19 for item 13 (*I believe self-assessment helps students become autonomous learners*). Therefore, this result indicated that teachers did not believe self-assessment was an important technique in promoting their students' autonomy as much as they believed in their role in supporting LA.

Nine of 16 teachers (56.3%) agreed that the teacher can play a significant role to support LA and that LA means taking responsibility for one's learning. The first and fifth items about the difficulty of implementing LA in writing classes and among Saudi learners both had a mean of above 3. This mean indicated that teachers believed Saudi learners could adapt with new learning concepts and were ready to take responsibility to learn independently. Again, the fact that none of the items had a mean below 3 suggested that teachers were aware of both the concept of autonomous learning and a teacher's role in supporting it.

**Table 4.12***Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and Standard Deviations for Teachers' Beliefs Towards LA*

Item	Mean	SD	Strongly disagree												Strongly agree	
			1		2		3		4		5		6			
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1. Making students' responsible for their learning is not difficult to do in EFL writing classes*.	3.88	1.36	1	6.3	2	12.5	2	12.5	5	31.3	5	31.3	1	6.3		
2. Individuals who lack responsibility for controlling their learning are not likely to be effective language learners.	3.31	2.05	5	31.3	2	12.5	2	12.5	0	0	4	25.0	3	18.8		
3. Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.	3.50	1.59	1	6.3	4	25.0	4	25.0	3	18.8	1	6.3	3	18.8		
4. Autonomous learning cannot be promoted in teacher-centred classrooms.	3.81	1.68	2	12.5	2	12.5	2	12.5	4	25.0	3	18.8	3	18.8		
5. Learner autonomy is not a difficult concept to implement among Saudi learners*.	3.25	1.69	3	18.8	4	25.0	1	6.3	3	18.8	4	25.0	1	6.3		
6. Motivated language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than learners who are not motivated.	3.50	1.82	2	12.5	5	31.3	1	6.3	2	12.5	3	18.8	3	18.8		
7. The teacher has an important role to play in supporting students' independent learning.	4.44	1.45	0	0	2	12.5	3	18.8	2	12.5	4	25.0	5	31.3		
8. To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	4.19	1.55	1	6.3	2	12.5	2	12.5	2	12.5	6	37.5	3	18.8		
9. Learner autonomy means that learners are responsible for their learning.	4.25	1.18	0	0	2	12.5	1	6.3	6	37.5	5	31.3	2	12.5		
10. Learner autonomy can be promoted in EFL writing classes by implementing a few strategies.	3.75	1.91	2	12.5	4	25.0	2	12.5	0	0	4	25.0	4	25.0		
11. I believe that students' reliance on teachers is the main problem for students' EFL writing.	3.94	1.56	1	6.3	3	18.8	2	12.5	2	12.5	6	37.5	2	12.5		
12. I believe that asking learners to collaborate with each other leads them to become responsible for their own learning.	3.31	1.40	1	6.3	4	25.0	5	31.3	2	12.5	3	18.8	1	6.3		
13. I believe self-assessment helps students become autonomous learners.	3.19	1.27	0	0	6	37.5	5	31.3	2	12.5	2	12.5	1	6.3		

\* = code-reversed item; for clarity, the wording of the item has been changed to reflect the intended meaning.

SD = standard deviation

F = number of teachers

% = percentage of teachers

**4.2.2.5. Most and least autonomous classrooms.** One objective of using the questionnaire was to categorise classes as more or less autonomous in order to compare students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs in both types of classes. A total mean score for the second section of the questionnaire (teachers' LA practices) was calculated for each teacher (Table 4.13). The two classes whose teachers had the highest means were taken as the autonomous classes (Group A), and the two classes whose teachers had the lowest means were taken as the non-autonomous classes (Group B).

**Table 4.13**

*Allocation of Four Classes: Two Autonomous Classes and Two Non-Autonomous Classes*

Teacher	Mean	Allocation
T1	4.50	Group A: First autonomous class (1A)
T2	3.64	
T3	3.21	
T4	2.29	Group B: Second non-autonomous class (2B)
T5	3.36	
T6	3.14	
T7	2.86	
T8	2.50	
T9	1.71	Group B: First non-autonomous class (1B)
T10	3.57	
T11	3.07	
T12	3.07	
T13	4.29	Group A: Second autonomous class (2A)
T14	3.64	
T15	2.71	
T16	3.07	

**4.2.2.6. Means for each section of teacher questionnaire.** The highest mean within the teacher questionnaire was for the beliefs section, and the lowest was for the practices section, suggesting that teachers were more favourably disposed towards the idea of LA than they were towards actually implementing it in practice.

**Table 4.14**

*Means for Each Section of Teacher Questionnaire*

Section	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Practices	16	2.79	1.71	4.50	3.1652	0.69972
Attitudes	16	1.50	2.90	4.40	3.6875	0.46458
Beliefs	16	2.08	3.08	5.15	3.7163	0.66926

**4.2.3. Students’ practices, beliefs, and attitudes towards LA.** The student questionnaire was distributed twice, once at the beginning of the semester (pre-test questionnaire) to probe students’ previous experiences with LA, and the second (post-test questionnaire), which dealt with students’ current experience with LA and was distributed at the end of the semester. Both questionnaires included three sections that dealt with autonomous learning in writing classes. Items in section two (students’ attitudes towards LA) and section three (students’ beliefs about LA) were the same in both the first and second questionnaires. However, the first section (LA practices) differed between the two questionnaires. In the first questionnaire, that section explored students’ initial practice (in high school) of LA (Appendix B, page 335), but in the second questionnaire, the section explored students’ current practice (during the preparatory year) of LA (Appendix C, page 338).

Descriptive statistics were calculated for students' responses in the first and second questionnaires, for each section. Items with an asterisk indicate code-reversed items, and for clarity, the wording of the items has been changed to reflect the intended meaning.

**4.2.3.1. Students' initial LA practices (first questionnaire).** The first section of the first and second student questionnaire included 10 items that dealt with students' previous experience of LA practice during high school. It used a 5-point scale: *never* = 1, *rarely* = 2, *sometimes* = 3, *often* = 4, and *always* = 5.

Table 4.15 shows the frequencies (F), percentages, and standard deviations (SD) for each statement in this part of the questionnaire. The highest mean, at 3.38, was for the third item (*In high school, I was taught using activities such as group working, collaborative working, ... etc.*). The lowest mean was 2.75, for the eighth item (*In high school, the teacher was not the only source of writing feedback*). This finding suggested that students were exposed to some autonomous learning strategies during high school, such as collaborative working. However, it also suggested that they were not exposed to other types of providing feedback except from their teachers. Seven of nine items had a mean over 3, which indicated that students experienced a fair amount of autonomous learning in high school.

**Table 4.15***Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and Standard Deviations for Students' Initial LA Practice*

Item	Mean	SD	Never 1		Rarely 2		Sometimes 3		Often 4		Always 5	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. In high school, I used to learn English language from different resources and not only through the teacher*.	3.04	1.20	11	12.1	20	22.0	24	26.4	26	28.6	10	11.0
2. In high school, I used to develop my EFL writing skills by myself.	3.15	1.18	15	16.5	7	7.7	23	25.4	20	22.0	26	28.6
3. In high school, I was taught using activities such as group working, collaborative working, ... etc.	3.38	1.40	15	16.5	7	7.7	23	25.3	20	22.0	26	28.6
4. In high school, I was allowed to make decisions about my EFL learning with the teacher.	3.35	1.27	9	9.9	15	16.5	23	25.3	23	25.3	21	23.1
5. In high school, if I did not understand something, I tended to look for information by myself rather than ask my teachers*.	3.13	1.43	16	17.6	19	20.9	14	15.4	21	23.1	21	23.1
6. In high school, I used to evaluate how well I had done in EFL writing.	3.10	1.27	10	11.0	24	26.4	19	20.9	23	25.3	15	16.5
7. In high school, I was allowed to use technology when I wanted to look for a new information*.	2.99	1.37	19	20.9	16	17.6	16	17.6	27	29.7	13	14.3
8. In high school, the teacher was not the only source of writing feedback*.	2.75	1.27	19	20.9	21	23.1	24	26.4	18	19.8	9	9.9
9. In high school, my EFL teacher encouraged me to look for new information by myself.	3.03	1.42	17	18.7	20	22.0	16	17.6	19	20.9	19	20.9

\* = code-reversed item; for clarity, the wording of the item has been changed to reflect the intended meaning.

SD = standard deviation

F = number of teachers

% = percentage of teacher

**4.2.3.2. Students' initial attitudes towards LA (first questionnaire).** The second part of the questionnaire was intended to explore students' initial attitudes towards LA in EFL writing classes. It included 12 items and used a 6-point Likert scale: starting from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*.

As shown in Table 4.16, the highest mean 3.44 was for the sixth item (*When I write in English, I like experimenting with new ideas or writing techniques*). On the other hand, the lowest mean was 2.82 for the fifth item (*I prefer to use reference tools like dictionaries and grammar books when I write*). This finding suggested that students were willing to develop their writing using new writing techniques. However, the lowest mean also indicated that students were less excited about using books as learning references when writing. Thus, the contradictory finding suggested that students preferred to write freely without being restricted to using reference books.

**Table 4.16***Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and Standard Deviations for Students' Initial Attitudes Towards LA*

Item	Mean	SD	Strongly disagree		2		3		4		5		Strongly agree	
			1		2		3		4		5		6	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. I prefer to look for information from different sources rather than from my teacher only.	3.25	1.45	12	13.2	16	17.6	27	29.7	16	17.6	13	14.3	7	7.7
2. I seek feedback from my classmates if I have a difficulty in writing.	3.05	1.44	18	19.8	17	18.7	18	19.8	19	20.9	18	19.8	1	1.1
3. I prefer participating in collaborative working.	3.40	1.42	12	13.2	14	15.4	19	20.9	21	23.1	22	24.2	3	3.3
4. Even if the teacher does not ask me to, I like to revise my own writing to make sure my writing is good.	3.01	1.46	18	19.8	22	24.2	11	12.1	22	24.2	17	18.7	1	1.1
5. I prefer to use reference tools like dictionaries and grammar books when I write.	2.82	1.45	18	19.8	28	30.8	16	17.6	14	15.4	11	12.1	4	4.4
6. When I write in English, I like experimenting with new ideas or writing techniques.	3.44	1.66	14	15.4	17	18.7	16	17.6	17	18.7	13	14.3	14	15.4
7. I prefer to assess my writing tasks by myself after submitting them to the teacher.	3.30	1.44	13	14.3	16	17.6	19	20.9	21	23.1	18	19.8	4	4.4
8. I am good at writing in English.	2.95	1.79	24	26.4	25	27.5	11	12.1	8	8.8	9	9.9	14	15.4

SD = standard deviation

F = number of teachers

% = percentage of teacher

**4.2.3.3. Students' initial beliefs towards LA (first questionnaire).** The third part was intended to explore students' initial beliefs about LA as they entered the preparatory year. The highest mean was 3.76 for the fifth item after reverse coding (*I believe that teachers should not make all decisions about students' learning*). This finding indicated that students were aware of the significance of participation in their learning decisions. Even though the lowest mean was 3.27 for students believing in the importance of self-evaluation, the mean was considered positive as it was above 3. The overall mean was above 3 for all statements, which indicated that students had a positive belief about autonomous learning during high school. Table 4.17 shows the findings related to students' initial beliefs about LA.

**Table 4.17**

Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and Standard Deviations for Students' Initial Beliefs Towards LA

Item	Mean	SD	Strongly disagree		2		3		4		5		Strongly agree	
			1		2		3		4		5		6	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. I believe that the teacher is not the only provider of knowledge*.	3.74	1.46	8	8.8	13	14.3	16	27.6	21	23.1	24	26.4	9	9.9
2. Learner autonomy is not a difficult concept to implement among Saudi learners*.	3.38	1.53	7	7.7	27	29.7	15	16.5	21	23.1	8	8.8	13	14.3
3. Learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy.	3.44	1.60	14	15.4	17	18.7	14	15.4	14	15.4	25	27.5	7	7.7
4. To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	3.27	1.54	15	16.5	21	23.1	7	7.7	24	26.4	20	22.0	4	4.4
5. I believe that teachers should not make all decisions about students' learning*.	3.76	1.87	17	18.7	14	15.4	6	6.6	13	14.3	19	20.9	22	24.2
6. Motivated language learners are more likely to practise learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.	3.71	1.39	6	6.6	16	17.6	12	13.2	29	31.9	20	22.0	8	8.8
7. The best way to receive feedback on my writing is not only from the teacher*.	3.42	1.62	12	13.2	21	23.1	15	16.5	13	14.3	20	22.0	10	11.0
8. I believe it is not difficult to learn EFL writing without a teacher*.	3.70	1.60	8	8.8	20	22.0	12	13.2	15	16.5	23	25.3	13	14.3

\* = code-reversed item; for clarity, the wording of the item has been changed to reflect the intended meaning.

SD = standard deviation

F = number of teachers

% = percentage of teacher

**4.2.3.4. Students' current LA practices (second questionnaire).** The first section in the second questionnaire explored students' current LA practices (during the preparatory year; Table 4.18). The highest mean, at 3.59, was for the eighth item about receiving feedback from different resources rather than the teacher only, compared to 3.38 for the third item in the pre-test questionnaire about learning via collaborative working. Even though the change was small, it still suggested that the preparatory year teachers paid more attention to encouraging their students to direct their own learning by themselves rather than only using autonomous strategies to teach them.

What also stood out was that students receiving feedback from different resources rather than teachers only had the lowest mean of 2.75 in the pre-test questionnaire; it had a high mean, 3.59, in the post-test questionnaire. This shift suggested that providing feedback was implemented more efficiently during the preparatory year. Moreover, the shift indicated that students were exposed to other types of feedback rather than their teachers' feedback only in the preparatory year, compared to high school. These higher means in this section suggested that, in general, students were more exposed to the experience of autonomous learning during the preparatory year than during high school.

**Table 4.18**

Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and Standard Deviations for Students' Current LA Practice

Item	Mean	SD	Never 1		Rarely 2		Sometimes 3		Often 4		Always 5	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. In the preparatory year, I used to learn English language from different resources and not only through the teacher*.	3.15	1.48	13	14.3	28	30.8	8	8.8	16	17.6	26	28.6
2. In the preparatory year, I used to develop my EFL writing skills by myself.	3.13	1.30	9	9.9	22	24.2	30	33.0	8	8.8	22	24.2
3. In the preparatory year, I was taught using activities such as group working, collaborative working, ... etc.	3.18	1.39	17	18.7	14	15.4	12	13.2	32	35.2	16	17.6
4. In the preparatory year, I was allowed to make decisions about my EFL learning with the teacher.	3.00	1.33	12	13.2	26	28.6	21	23.1	14	15.4	18	19.8
5. In the preparatory year, if I did not understand something, I tended to look for information by myself rather than ask my teachers*.	2.85	1.50	22	24.2	24	26.4	11	12.1	14	15.4	20	22.0
6. In the preparatory year, I used to evaluate how well I had done in EFL writing.	3.20	1.41	13	14.3	22	24.2	12	13.2	22	24.2	22	24.2
7. In the preparatory year, I was allowed to use technology when I wanted to look for a new information*.	3.27	1.32	9	9.9	19	20.9	25	27.5	14	15.4	24	26.4
8. In the preparatory year, the teacher was not the only source of writing feedback*.	3.59	1.16	4	4.4	13	14.3	24	26.4	25	27.5	25	27.5
9. In the preparatory year, my EFL teacher encouraged me to look for new information by myself.	3.25	1.32	8	8.8	23	25.3	21	23.1	16	17.6	23	25.3

\* = code-reversed item; for clarity, the wording of the item has been changed to reflect the intended meaning.

SD = standard deviation

F = number of teachers

% = percentage of teacher

**4.2.3.5. Students' current attitudes towards LA (second questionnaire).** The second section of the questionnaire dealt with students' attitudes towards LA during the preparatory year. As shown in Table 4.19, the highest mean (3.85) occurred with both the third and eighth items. The eighth item (*I am good at writing in English*), had a mean of 2.95 in the pre-test questionnaire and increased to 3.85 in the post-test questionnaire, indicating that students tended to be more positive about how good they were at writing in the preparatory year compared to high school. Moreover, students' preferences for using reference tools had a large increase from 2.82 in the pre-test questionnaire to 3.84 in the post-test questionnaire. This shift suggested that students tended to be more positive about using other resources rather than teachers to independent look for information. All of the eight items in this section reported a mean over 3.50, compared to six items which reported a mean around 3 in the pre-test questionnaire. Thus, the difference suggested that students' attitudes were more positive in the preparatory year than in high school.

**Table 4.19***Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and Standard Deviations for Students' Current Attitudes Towards LA*

Item	Mean	SD	Strongly disagree												Strongly agree	
			1		2		3		4		5		6			
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1. I prefer to look for information from different sources rather than from my teacher only.	3.62	1.73	14	15.4	17	18.7	10	11.0	13	14.3	23	25.3	14	15.4		
2. I seek feedback from my classmates if I have a difficulty in writing.	3.57	1.57	8	8.8	20	22.0	19	20.9	13	14.3	18	19.8	13	14.3		
3. I prefer participating in collaborative working.	3.85	1.70	11	12.1	16	17.6	8	8.8	14	15.4	25	27.5	17	18.7		
4. Even if the teacher does not ask me to, I like to revise my own writing to make sure my writing is good.	3.74	1.59	10	11.0	15	16.5	12	13.2	18	19.8	24	26.4	12	13.2		
5. I prefer to use reference tools like dictionaries and grammar books when I write.	3.84	1.70	11	12.1	14	15.4	11	12.1	18	19.8	17	18.9	20	22.0		
6. When I write in English, I like experimenting with new ideas or writing techniques.	3.58	1.68	8	8.8	26	28.6	12	13.2	11	12.1	18	19.8	16	17.6		
7. I prefer to assess my writing tasks by myself after submitting them to the teacher.	3.62	1.60	12	13.2	16	17.6	10	11.0	20	22.0	23	25.3	10	11.0		
8. I am good at writing in English.	3.85	1.73	10	11.0	16	17.6	13	14.3	13	14.3	17	18.7	22	24.2		

SD = standard deviation

F = number of teachers

% = percentage of teacher

**4.2.3.6. Students' current beliefs towards LA (second questionnaire).** The third and last part of the questionnaire intended to explore students' current beliefs about autonomous learning. The highest mean was 3.93 for students believing that learning could happen without teachers. This finding indicated that the majority of students had positive beliefs about their ability to take responsibility over their learning. The lowest mean was 3.59 for having a positive belief towards learning from different resources rather than teachers. This item had a high mean in the pre-test questionnaire at 3.74 and a lower mean of 3.59 in the post-test questionnaire. Even though there was a decrease, the mean in the post-test questionnaire was still high, and the decrease was not significant. All means were above 3.59 for all statements, compared to 3.27 in the pre-test questionnaire, which indicated that students held more positive beliefs about autonomous learning during their preparatory year than in high school. Table 4.20 shows the findings related to students' initial beliefs about LA.

**Table 4.20**

Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and Standard Deviations for Students' Current Beliefs Towards LA

Item	Mean	SD	Strongly disagree		2		3		4		5		Strongly agree	
			1										6	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. I believe that the teacher is not the only provider of knowledge*.	3.59	1.70	11	12.1	20	22.0	13	14.3	15	16.5	15	16.5	17	18.7
2. Learner autonomy is a not difficult concept to implement among Saudi learners*.	3.82	1.61	10	11.0	13	14.3	14	15.4	14	15.4	26	28.6	14	15.4
3. Learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy.	3.91	1.71	9	9.9	18	19.8	9	9.9	11	12.1	24	26.4	20	22.0
4. To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	3.63	1.76	11	12.1	21	23.1	14	15.4	11	12.1	13	14.3	21	23.0
5. I believe that teachers should not make all decisions about students' learning*.	3.64	1.72	12	13.2	18	19.8	14	15.4	10	11.0	21	23.1	16	17.6
6. Motivated language learners are more likely to practise learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.	3.65	1.64	8	8.8	22	24.2	13	14.3	16	17.6	15	16.5	17	18.7
7. The best way to receive feedback on my writing is not only from the teacher*.	3.74	1.69	12	13.2	13	14.3	16	17.6	14	15.4	18	19.8	18	19.8
8. I believe it is not difficult to learn EFL writing without a teacher*.	3.93	1.83	9	9.9	21	23.1	8	8.8	12	13.2	11	12.1	30	33.0

\* = code-reversed item; for clarity, the wording of the item has been changed to reflect the intended meaning.

SD = standard deviation

F = number of teachers

% = percentage of teacher

### **4.3. Research Question 2**

*Are there any changes in students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding LA over the course of the preparatory year?*

After the verification of the underlying structure of the questionnaire sections conducted through CFA, the next step was to examine whether practices, attitudes, and beliefs changed from Time 1 (initial) to Time 2 (current) and whether this varied according to whether students were in highly autonomous classrooms. Parametric tests were chosen after first checking that required assumptions were met. Normality of data, equality of error variances, sphericity, and equality of covariance matrices were all met in this study. The outcomes of tests to check assumptions are reported below.

In order to examine the effect of time (Time 1 = initial, Time 2 = current) and group (autonomous, non-autonomous) and to explore the interaction between them, a mixed, two-way ANOVA was conducted. The test was selected because this study had both within-(time) and between-participant (group) variables. Including both factors in the same omnibus analysis also reduced the chance of making type 1 errors. The assumptions of ANOVA were checked and are reported below.

#### **4.3.1. Assumptions for ANOVA.**

**4.3.1.1. Normality of the data.** A one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to explore the normality of the data in the first and second students' questionnaires. Table 4.21 reports the normality statistics for students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs in both the pre- and post-test questionnaires within the autonomous and non-autonomous groups.

**Table 4.21***One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality of Data*

Sample		Initial practices	Initial attitudes	Initial beliefs	Total 1	Current practices	Current attitudes	Current beliefs	Total 2
Autonomous group	N	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	1.19	0.58	1.06	1.22	0.97	0.59	1.15	1.17
	Sig.	0.12	0.89	0.21	0.10	0.31	0.88	0.14	0.13
Non-autonomous group	N	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	0.95	0.69	0.76	0.45	0.65	0.74	0.76	0.78
	Sig.	0.33	0.72	0.60	0.99	0.78	0.65	0.61	0.58
<b>Total sample</b>	N	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	1.33	0.61	1.18	1.01	1.00	0.66	1.20	0.85
	Sig.	0.06	0.85	0.12	0.26	0.27	0.78	0.11	0.47

Table 4.21 shows that all Kolmogorov-Smirnov values for both groups and the total sample were non-significant, indicating normality of distribution.

**4.3.1.2. Test of equality of covariance matrices.** Box's Test was conducted to check the equality of the variance-covariance matrices. The result was non-significant ( $P = .059$ ), which means the assumption of equality of covariance has been met.

**4.3.1.3. Equality of error variance.** In order to check the equality of error variance, Levene's test was conducted. Table 4.22 shows the results of Levene's test. Levene's test was non-significant, indicating that the group variables were equal. Hence, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met.

**4.3.1.4. Test of sphericity.** To ensure the relationship between the different pairs of conditions was similar, Mauchly's test of sphericity was conducted (Table 4.23). The results were non-significant, which indicates the assumption of sphericity has been met.

**Table 4.22**

*Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances*

Pre-/ Post-test	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Pre-test	.223	1	89	.63
Post-test	3.640	1	89	.06

**Table 4.23**

*Mauchly's Test of Sphericity*

Within-subject effect	Mauchly's W	Approx. chi-square	df	Sig.	Epsilon		
					Greenhouse-Geisser	Huynh-Feldt	Lower-bound
Time	1.000	.000	0	.	1.000	1.000	1.000

In order to look at the overall effect of group, time, and the interaction between them, ANOVA was conducted (Table 4.24),

**Table 4.24**

*Means of Both Groups at Time 1 and Time 2*

Variable	Group	Mean	Std. deviation	N
Time 1	Autonomous	82.83	14.00	47
	Non-autonomous	79.39	13.21	44
Time 2	Autonomous	93.87	14.44	47
	Non-autonomous	82.11	12.04	44

As Table 4.25 illustrates, the ANOVA results showed that both time and group had a significant effect. There was also a significant interaction between time and group indicating that each group changed differently over time. Figure 4.25 shows the interaction between the two.

**Table 4.25**

*Tests of Between-Subject Effects*

Source	df	Mean square	F	P	Partial eta squared	MSE
Groups	1, 89*	3616.509	10.209	.002	.103	354.245
Time	1,89*	3697.336	14.995	.000	.144	246.568
Time * groups	1	1024.017	4.153	.045	.045	

\* Error df

MSE = Mean square error

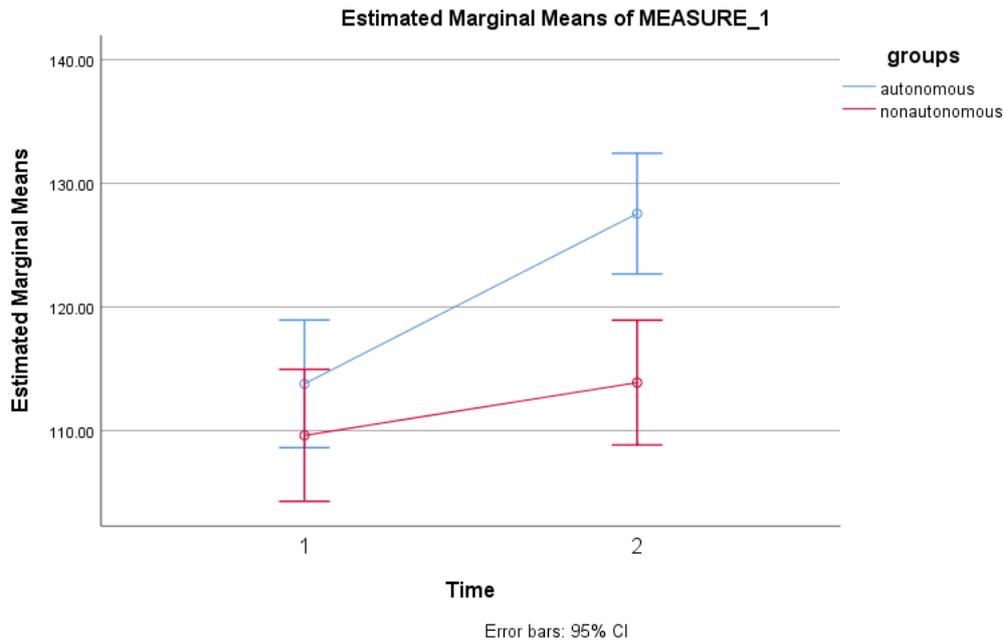


Figure 4.3. The interaction between time and group.

To further investigate the interaction between time and group, a series of post-hoc tests using a Bonferroni correction (Tables 4.26 and 4.27) were carried out. Post-hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction revealed that there was a statistically significant difference (Sig. = .002) between the autonomous group and non-autonomous group at Time 2 with a higher score for the autonomous group. A Bonferroni correction (reducing the alpha level to 0.125) for two tests was applied, and post-hoc tests were conducted.

**Table 4.26**

*Pairwise Comparisons for Group*

(I) groups	(J) groups	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.	95% confidence interval for difference	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
Autonomous	Non-autonomous	8.920*	2.792	.002	3.373	14.467
Non-autonomous	Autonomous	-8.920*	2.792	.002	-14.467	-3.373

**Table 4.27***Pairwise Comparisons for Time*

(I) time	(J) time	Mean difference (I– J)	Std. error	Sig.	95% confidence interval for difference	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
1	2	-9.019*	2.329	.000	-13.647	-4.391
2	1	9.019*	2.329	.000	4.391	13.647

**4.3.2. Sub-section of Question 2: Which aspects of learners’ practices, attitudes, and beliefs changed over time?** The researcher was interested in looking at which particular aspects of the questionnaire showed the greatest amount of change among students in their practices, attitudes, and beliefs. The previous ANOVA test was conducted on the whole questionnaire. Examining each section of the questionnaire seemed important to the researcher to explore changes over time in each of the three constructs, which were students’ practices, attitudes, and beliefs of LA. For this reason, in order to answer the sub-section of question 2 a series of mixed, two-way ANOVAs was also conducted. ANOVA was carried out to examine the effect of time (Time 1 = initial, Time 2 = current) and group (autonomous, non-autonomous), and to explore the interaction between them on each of the three sections of the student questionnaires. Simple effect tests were also conducted to deeply explore the interaction.

**4.3.2.1. Section 1: Students’ practices.** Descriptive statistics for Time 1 and Time 2 (initial and current) responses of the first section of the student questionnaire are shown in Table 4.28.

**Table 4.28***Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Practices in Both Groups at Time 1 and Time 2*

Section 1	Group	Mean	Std. deviation	N
Initial Practices	Autonomous	3.13	0.70	47
	Non-autonomous	3.09	0.76	44
Current Practices	Autonomous	3.15	0.83	47
	Non-autonomous	3.17	0.68	44

As Table 4.29 illustrates, the ANOVA results showed that there was no significant effect of time and a non-significant effect of group. There was however, a significant interaction between time and Group indicating that they developed differently over time (Figure 4.4).

**Table 4.29***Tests of Between-Subject Effects on the First Section*

Source	df	Mean square	F	P	Partial eta squared	MSE
Groups	1, 89*	.00	.00	.92	.000	.006
Time	1,89*	.11	.23	.62	.003	.491
Time * groups	1	.04	.09	.04	.001	

\* Error df

MSE = Mean square error

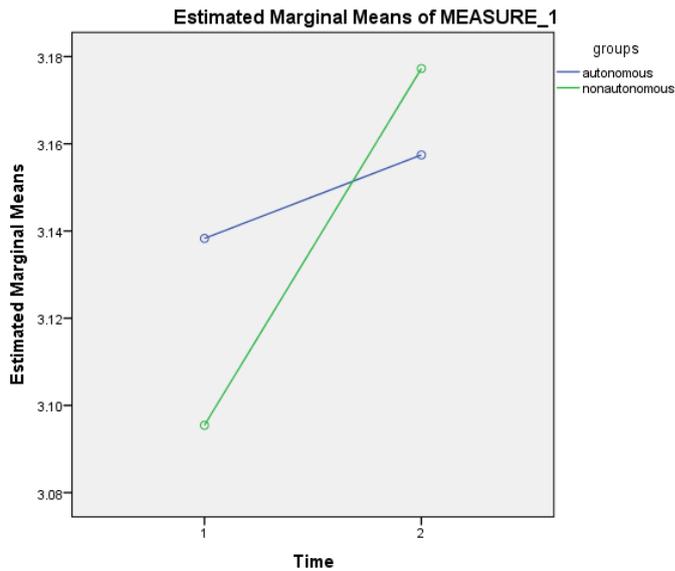


Figure 4.4. The interaction between time and group on the first section of the student questionnaire (practices).

Since the interaction was significant, a simple effect test was carried out to explore whether the autonomous group and non-autonomous group practices increased significantly over time. A paired samples t-test was conducted through the syntax. It was found that, in both autonomous and non-autonomous groups, there was no significant difference in practices between Time 1 and Time 2 (Table 4.30).

**Table 4.30**

*Simple Effect Test of Students' Attitudes in Both Groups at Time 1 and Time 2*

Group	Time	Paired samples test <sup>a</sup>					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Paired differences							
		Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference				
			Lower	Upper					
Autonomous group	Time 1	-.01	0.90	.13	-.28	.24	-.14	46	.88
	Time 2								
Non-autonomous group	Time 1	-.08	1.07	.16	-.40	.24	-.50	43	.61
	Time 2								

**4.3.2.2. Section 2: Students' attitudes.** Descriptive statistics for Time 1 and Time 2 (initial and current) responses of the second section of the student questionnaire are shown in Table 4.31. The ANOVA results, detailed in Table 4.32, showed that there was a significant effect of time and a significant effect of Group. There was no significant interaction between time and Group, however.

To further investigate the type of interaction between Time and Group, a simple effect test was conducted (Table 4.33). The results indicated that the autonomous group showed a significant difference in attitudes between Time 1 and Time 2, while the non-autonomous group showed no significant difference in attitudes sections.

**Table 4.31**

*Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Attitudes in Both Groups at Time 1 And Time 2*

Section 2	Group	Mean	Std. deviation	N
Initial attitudes	Autonomous	3.33	0.77	47
	Non-autonomous	3.13	0.81	44
Current attitudes	Autonomous	3.97	0.90	47
	Non-autonomous	3.36	0.69	44

**Table 4.32**

*Tests of Between-Subject Effects on the Second Section*

Source	df	Mean square	F	P	Partial eta squared	MSE
Groups	1, 89*	7.39	12.05	.001	.119	7.39
Time	1,89*	8.55	12.67	.001	.125	.675
Time * groups	1	1.86	2.76	.100	.030	

\* Error df

MSE = Mean square error

**Table 4.33***Simple Effect Test of Students' Attitudes in Both Groups at Time 1 and Time 2*

Group	Time	Paired samples test <sup>a</sup>					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Paired differences							
		Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error	95% confidence interval of the difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Autonomous group	Time 1								
	Time 2	-.63	1.14	.16	-.97	-.30	-3.81	46	.000
Non-autonomous group	Time 1								
	Time 2	-.23	1.17	.17	-.58	.12	-1.29	43	.201

**4.3.2.3. Section 3: Students' beliefs.** Descriptive statistics for Time 1 and Time 2 (initial and current) responses of the third section of the student questionnaire are shown in Table 4.34. Meanwhile, the ANOVA results, as depicted in Table 4.35, showed that there was a significant effect of Time and a significant effect of group. There was also a marginally significant interaction between Time and Group (Figure 4.5). Due to the interaction, a simple effect test was carried out to further examine the finding (Table 4.36). The simple effect test indicated that the change in students' beliefs within the autonomous group between Time 1 and Time 2 was statistically significant, while for the non-autonomous group it was not.

**Table 4.34***Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Beliefs in Both Groups at Time 1 and Time 2*

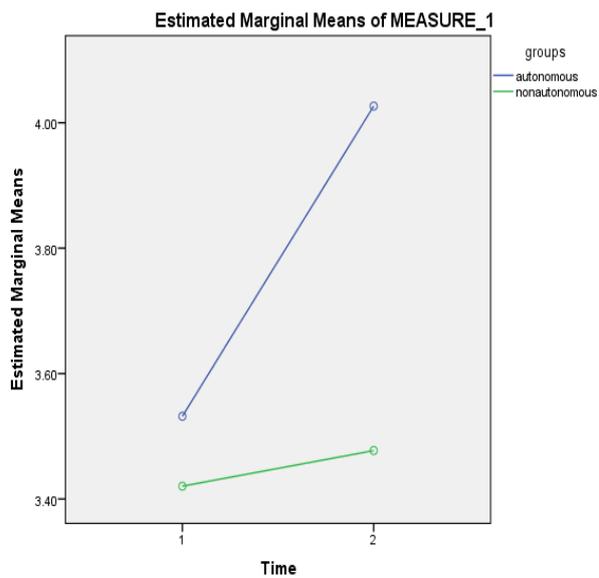
Section 3	Group	Mean	Std. deviation	N
Initial beliefs	Autonomous	3.53	0.70	47
	Non-autonomous	3.42	1.00	44
Current beliefs	Autonomous	4.02	0.97	47
	Non-autonomous	3.47	0.54	44

**Table 4.35***Tests of Between-Subject Effects on the Third Section*

Source	df	Mean square	F	P	Partial eta squared	MSE
Groups	1, 89*	4.96	6.76	.011	.071	4.96
Time	1,89*	3.45	5.42	.022	.057	.63
Time * groups	1	2.17	3.41	.068	.037	

\* Error df

MSE = Mean square error

*Figure 4.5. The interaction between time and group on the third section of the student questionnaire (beliefs).*

**Table 4.36***Simple Effect Test of Students' Beliefs in Both Groups at Time 1 and Time 2*

Group	Time	Paired samples test <sup>a</sup>						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Paired differences				Lower	Upper			
		Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference					
Autonomous group	Time 1 Time 2									
		-.49	1.09	.16	-.81	-.17	-3.09	46	.003	
Non-autonomous group	Time 1 Time 2									
		-.05	1.162	.17	-.41	.29	-.32	43	.747	

**4.3.3. Correlation between teachers' and students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs at Time 2.** To explore the relationship between teachers' and students' practices, beliefs, and attitudes, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated. Table 4.37 shows a medium to large and positive correlations between combined scores for teachers' and students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs towards autonomous learning (using Plonsky and Oswald's (2014) interpretation of effect sizes). Taking practices, attitudes, and beliefs separately, however, the correlations were small to medium. Overall, the more positive teachers were in their beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding LA, the more positive their students were in those areas as well.

**Table 4.37**

*Pearson Correlation Between Teachers' and Students' Practices, Attitudes and Beliefs in the Second Questionnaire*

Students	Teachers’ practices	Teachers’ attitudes	Teachers’ Beliefs	Teachers’ Total
	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation
Current practices	0.304**			
Current attitudes		0.381**		
Current beliefs			0.472**	
<b>Total</b>				<b>0.530**</b>

\*\* = significance at  $p < .01$ , two-tailed test

#### 4.4. Research Question 3

*How do Saudi EFL teachers perceive the barriers and supporting factors of promoting autonomous learning in writing classes?*

To answer this question, interviews were conducted with the four previously selected teachers of the two autonomous and two non-autonomous classes (Appendix I, page 352). Four teachers’ classes were selected based on their responses to the practices section in the teacher questionnaire. First, a total mean score for the second section of the questionnaire (teachers’ LA practices) was calculated for each teacher. The two classes whose teachers had the highest means were taken as the autonomous classes (Group A), and the two whose teachers had the lowest means were taken as the non-autonomous classes (Group NA). The highest means were 4.50 for Teacher A1 and 2.49 for Teacher A2. The lowest means were 1.71 for Teacher NA1 and 2.29 for Teacher NA2.

After creating codes (see section 3.12.1.1.), two main themes emerged from those codes once the reliability and validity had been checked: difficulties of promoting LA and factors that support promoting LA. The subthemes for both themes are outlined in Tables 4.38 and 4.39, respectively.

**Table 4.38***Difficulties of Promoting LA*

Sub-theme	Codes	Definition
Educational constraints	Fixed examination system	The limitation of examination system is when everything for exams is already included in the textbook, so students do not feel the need to learn beyond what is in their textbook.
	Curriculum issues	Limitations of the curriculum, such as disconnect between textbooks' topics and students' reality, neglecting students' needs and interests, no encouragement to look for more information out the textbook, and pre-determined methods of teaching curricula.
	Set assessment criteria	Fixed criteria set by the deanery in order to assess student outcomes which does not pay attention to students' needs and proficiency levels.
	Lack of learning resources	Lack of learning resources, such as computer labs, Internet connection, and classroom technology such as projectors.
Teachers' issues	Lack of awareness of the significance of LA	When teachers are not enlightened about the importance or benefits of autonomous learning.
	Difficulty of implementing LA	Implementing LA needs time and effort to prepare and apply new teaching strategies, and includes additional difficulties (e.g., large class sizes and extra work on teachers, such as invigilation and supervision work).
	Unwillingness to implement LA	When teachers refuse to implement and incorporate LA strategies in their teaching process because they do not have the desire to enhance their teaching process and prefer to stick to traditional teaching methods.
Learners' issues	Perception of teachers' role	Students' thoughts and beliefs about the role of their teachers in their learning process and what their teachers should do in the classroom.
	Dependant learning	Dependant learning happens when students fully rely on their teachers in learning, are taught using traditional teaching methods, are passive learners, and have teacher-centred classes.

Unwillingness to be independent

When students do not have the desire to take responsibility of their learning due to their lack of confidence, lack of motivation, proficiency level in EFL writing, and short-term learning goals.

**Table 4.39**

*Factors That Support Promoting LA*

Sub-theme	Codes	Definition
Encouragement	Awareness and enlightenment	How teachers help students be conscious and understand the significance of learning independently.
	Interest	Teachers' ways to engage students' attention (e.g., giving them activities from real-life situations).
	Proficiency level	Making students aware of their skill level.
	Praise	Teachers' ways of showing support and approval to students through oral feedback, hand clapping or an award of extra points.
Motivation	Interesting topics	Teachers' ways of promoting LA among students by bringing entertaining and interesting topics from students' reality to make them willing to learn.
	Excitement about learning	Learners' intrinsic interest in what they are learning.
	Gradual improvement	Students' progress throughout the semester.
Independent learning	Independent learning	Students' ability to learn freely without the need for a teacher to teach them new things and constantly guide them through the learning process.
	Taking responsibility	When students take control over and direct their learning based on their need, interest, time, and proficiency level.
	Availability of resources	Offering students learning resources (e.g., computer labs and Internet connection) to make them able to search for new information from different resources to make their learning more flexible.

Sub-theme	Codes	Definition
Using technology	Electronic devices	The use of gadgets in class to promote teaching/learning writing by using electronic dictionaries, online English teaching websites, projectors, and emails.
	Correcting mistakes independently	When teachers ask students to use technological devices (e.g., e-dictionaries) to look for corrections by themselves.
	Presenting new information	Teachers' use of technology, such as projectors and PowerPoint slides, to present new lessons.
	Goal of technology use	Teachers' ways of using technology as a tool to easily and effectively present new information or a strategy to promote LA (e.g., allowing students to use technology to self-direct learning).
Collaborative activities	Cooperative working	Activities used by teachers in their classes to engage students actively in the learning process by using group work, peer work, and class discussion.
	Active engagement	Students working together while learning and doing tasks and exercises.
Student-centred class	Active learners	Teaching methods and strategies used by teachers to shift the focus from themselves onto their students' active involvement in learning.
	Role of teachers	When teachers act as facilitators, do not dominate the class, and let students do all the work with the teachers' guidance and help.
	Activities	Activities used by teachers to actively engage students in their learning, such as collaborative working and bringing interesting topics.
Feedback	Direct types	Providing the correction for a mistake.
	Indirect types	Drawing a line under the mistake or providing a code indicating the error type.
	Written drafts	Allowing students to produce second drafts of written assignments following teacher's feedback.

Students' autonomy level    The extent to which students are autonomous enough.

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In the following, A1 and A2 refer to teachers from autonomous classes, and NA1 and NA2 to teachers from non-autonomous classes.

**4.4.1. Difficulties of promoting LA.** All teachers mentioned that there were some obstacles hindering the promotion of LA in their writing classes. Three sub-themes arose as main issues which made it difficult to implement LA in writing classes: institutional constraints, teachers' related issues, and learners' related issues.

**4.4.1.1. Institutional constraints.** All teachers agreed that there were institutional constraints hindering the promotion of LA in EFL writing classes. These constraints were related to the university's rules and regulations. Examples of such constraints were the fixed examination system, pre-determined methods of teaching curricula, and lack of learning resources. According to the teachers, these constraints prevented students from becoming independent learners and made it difficult for teachers to implement LA in their writing classes. For example, Teacher A1 stated that the main problem was the EFL curriculum itself as it did not encourage students' critical thinking; hence, it did not make them motivated to learn independently:

*Yes. For example, the examination system, everything for their exams is already included in the textbooks. They would never have new information that requires students' critical thinking. So, when students know that, they fully depend on learning what is in their textbooks without wanting to develop themselves beyond that textbook. They do not have any motivation to improve their skills.*

Teacher A1 believed that students' awareness of the limitations of this fixed examination system made them less motivated to learn beyond what was in the textbooks.

Moreover, Teacher A2 added that the current EFL writing curriculum neglected students' needs and interests. The teacher expressed how this reality could make it difficult

for teachers to promote LA in their classes as they had to follow this curriculum without considering students' needs and interests:

*Sure, the first constraint is curricula. Giving all students the same material to study with the same examination system without paying attention to their needs and interests is a big failure. At the beginning of the year, we are given curricula which have to be followed and covered. There is no encouragement for students to be autonomous. (A2)*

According to Teacher A2, students were discouraged from directing their own learning as the curriculum they learned from was pre-determined and not flexible in terms of their needs and interests.

Teacher NA1 mentioned that students' lack of interest was due to the disconnect between their textbooks and reality, which resulted in hindering their adoption of LA:

*Yes, sure, not providing resources such as computer labs, not encouraging students to be more connected to reality. Their textbooks are disconnected from their reality and culture as the topics are about Western culture, English being a Western language. They changed only the names of textbook characters, such as the name John being changed to Ali.*

In essence, Teacher NA1 declared that lack of learning resources (e.g., computer labs) could also prevent LA from being fostered. She believed that students cannot be treated as passive and unaware learners anymore and that the curriculum might be disrespectful or neglectful of students' interests in only changing names instead of changing Western topics into topics more relevant to students' culture and reality.

Lastly, Teacher NA2 mentioned that assessment criteria were hindering the promotion of LA:

*The assessment criteria assigned by the deanery are something we cannot mess with, and we have to keep that as teachers. So we teach our students what could help them only in their grades but not for lifelong learning.*

Teacher NA2 reported that she taught her students only what could help them pass their tests based on those criteria, suggesting that she did not encourage her students to look for opportunities to improve their skills but instead sought to keep to what was safe for them to pass their tests. However, she blamed the university for not providing online and technological learning resources, so she could not ask her students to do online research. She added:

*... providing resources is key. Sometimes, some students do not have technology in their homes, so you cannot ask them to do research online using a computer unless the university provides those kinds of resources. (NA2)*

According to teachers, ignoring students' needs, interests, and proficiency levels by having fixed textbooks and lessons and a fixed examination system hindered the promotion of LA in EFL writing classes. Moreover, they felt that these regulations did not usually help teachers promote LA in their classes because they were forced to follow the curricula and use teaching methods aimed at helping students to pass exams. The most frequently mentioned constraint by three teachers—Teachers A1, A2, and NA1—were textbooks, which in their view led to the fixed examination system and caused a disconnect between the textbooks and students' interests and realities.

**4.4.1.2. Issues related to teachers.** The barriers which teachers felt hindered the promotion of LA included their lack of awareness of the significance of LA, difficulty in implementing LA, and unwillingness to implement LA. Moreover, the teachers mentioned some college regulations which prevented them from promoting autonomous learning in their classes, such as extra work and large class sizes. Even though some teachers believed in the

significance of LA, some could not implement it as their personal capacities played an important role in implementing LA. Additionally, some of them might lack proper skill and training.

Firstly, regarding the difficulty of implementing LA, Teacher A2 had the following to say:

*... it depends on the teacher. It is about believing in the concept itself. Some teachers believe in the importance of LA and work hard to implement this concept in their classes. And some would find it difficult. Let's face it, implementing LA in EFL classes needs a big effort. It needs planning, resources, and working continuously to achieve. It is much easier to lecture students and act as a source of knowledge.*

This difficulty also indicated that some teachers were not motivated to take their teaching to another level and implement autonomous learning in their classes. In the view of Teacher A2, teachers chose the spoon-feeding method as it is easy and does not require extra effort. Teacher NA2 strongly believed that traditional methods of teaching were always easy to follow. She also believed that LA strategies are difficult to find and implement. However, she suggested that teachers need to first believe in the concept of autonomous learning to promote it in their classes:

*I think it is very difficult as teachers to have to look for new strategies to implement during classes. It is always a piece of cake to just come and lecture students and leave. Treating students as only receivers of knowledge is easy, but teaching them how to be autonomous is really difficult. I believe the teacher herself should believe in the importance of LA. (NA2)*

This finding suggested there were negative beliefs among non-autonomous teachers about applying new strategies to enhance their teaching process. Even though there are some easy strategies to implement in the classroom which could promote LA, such as group work and

peer feedback, she, as a non-autonomous teacher, still had more positive attitudes towards traditional methods of teaching.

Secondly, teachers' unwillingness to implement LA was also an issue with many underlying reasons. Some of the teachers identified college regulations as constraints that hinder the promotion of LA. For example, Teacher A1 said that teachers were unwilling to promote LA in their classes because of having busy schedules, with teachers being assigned other tasks besides teaching, such as supervision and invigilation, by the deanery. Even though autonomous writing strategies could be promoted inside the classroom and within the class time, her opinion indicated that teachers might not have proper time management skills. Furthermore, teachers tended to attribute not implementing LA to their workload. Teacher A1 mentioned the following:

*Teachers' busy schedules are a main reason against promoting LA, as well as large student numbers in classes. The number of students makes it really hard to focus on each student individually.*

Another issue mentioned by Teacher A1 was the large number of students in each class. As a result of large class sizes, paying attention to each students' needs and interests was difficult to accomplish. In addition, Teacher NA2 explained that she was assigned to too many tasks besides teaching, and she did not have time to employ autonomous learning strategies in her classes. She also considered that teachers have difficult jobs that require a lot of hard work, making it difficult to implement LA in writing classes:

*I have a busy schedule and a lot of things to work on. I have to lecture students in a large number of classes, correct their mistakes, and do a lot supervision work outside class, such as exam invigilation, along with marking written work. (NA2)*

Based on the above quotation, it can be seen that Teacher NA2 used the lecturing method for students, a traditional teaching method that treats them as passive learners. This finding

therefore showed that non-autonomous teachers taught their students traditionally by using the old teaching techniques. It also showed that they tended to explain their non-implementation of LA strategies in their classes with reference to university regulations. Teachers sign a contract with the university which clearly states all their duties and working hours. Thus, teachers tended to blame university's regulations instead of finding ways to improve their teaching process within those regulations.

Even though some teachers mentioned not being aware of the significance of LA, none mentioned the lack of teacher training or courses on the importance of autonomous learning and how to implement it as a reason underlying the problem. Overall, teachers' issues were related to their lack of awareness of the significance of LA, difficulty in implementing LA, unwillingness to implement LA, and demotivation. They also added that too many tasks besides teaching and large class sizes were reasons for not promoting LA. The difficulty of promoting LA and teachers' busy schedules were frequently mentioned as constraints. The difficulty of promoting LA in classes as a constraint which hinders the promotion of LA was mentioned twice by Teachers A2 and NA2—that is, by both more and less autonomous teachers. Similarly, teachers' busy schedules were mentioned twice by Teachers A1 and NA2 as a teacher-related constraint which hinders the promotion of LA, suggesting that both groups of teachers faced similar issues but that autonomous teachers had found ways to overcome them.

Teachers were also asked about their views about LA as a new concept in teaching EFL writing. Even though Teacher A1 mentioned teachers' busy schedules as a constraint when implementing LA, she was positive towards the implementation of new concepts, such as autonomous learning in teaching writing instead of traditional techniques, saying the following: *'New trends focus more on students and help them learn according to their level, interest, and availability.'*

Moreover, although Teacher A2 believed that autonomous learning strategies were difficult to implement, she believed in LA as a concept to implement while teaching EFL writing:

*Yes, sure. Because it puts the student at the heart of the learning process and not teachers. Almost all new trends now reject the concept of 'the teacher is the knowledge provider'. Passive learning is no longer encouraged and all these trends help promote autonomous learning.*

However, Teacher NA1 believed that autonomous learning itself is not enough and that it must also work well with other educational circumstances to be effective:

*I think so, but only if many things change, not only the teaching trends. For example, more flexible class timetables, availability of resources. I can't ask a student to use the Internet to look for new information if there is no Internet connection in the campus we are teaching in.*

According to quotations above, autonomous teachers and Teacher NA2 were positive towards new trends in teaching EFL writing. Even though the difficulty of promoting LA in their classes occurred for underlying reasons, they had positive beliefs. On the contrary, the non-autonomous Teacher NA1 had a negative belief about implementing new trends to improve her teaching, a belief she attributed to the university's regulations.

**4.4.1.3. Issues related to learners.** There were many issues related to learners mentioned by teachers. For example, teachers noted students' unwillingness to be independent learners. The reason for that, in the teachers' view, was students' habit of reliance on teachers. According to Teacher A1, students had a perception of the role of teachers. She believed that teachers cannot be good if they tell students to direct their own learning, and it is this habit of reliance on teachers that makes implementing LA in writing classes difficult:

*Our students are used to counting on teachers for learning. When you tell them or even practise new techniques that make them work independently, they think you are not a good teacher. They are used to learning from their teachers only.... students believe the teacher is the only provider of knowledge. They are still attached to that idea. (A1)*

These words from Teacher A1 indicated an awareness that students still suffer from having spent a long time learning through traditional teaching methods. The words also indicated that students were unaware of their role in learning as they had negative opinions about teachers who make them look for information independently. This could mean that students had a conflict between their perception of the teacher's role and their role in learning if a teacher tells them to take responsibility for their learning process.

In addition, Teacher NA2 explained that short-term goals were related to students' unwillingness to be autonomous learners. She believed that students were not interested in autonomous learning and treated EFL writing as a university course with a textbook to study and an examination to pass. This belief suggested that students were unaware of the significance of learning EFL writing and were not motivated to become autonomous learners:

*Some students are not interested in learning more than what is in textbooks as they believe they will only take English as a school subject and after that they will not use it. They do not have a motive or a long-learning goal to work on achieving it. So, their goal is a short-term goal. Also, traditional methods of teaching back in high school and even from the start of their school life have basically implanted dependency on their teachers in learning. (NA2)*

Teacher NA2 added that students were basically taught using traditional methods of teaching which consider teachers as knowledge providers and students as passive learners. According to her, this method of teaching could have made students willing to depend on

their teachers rather than being independent learners. Even though Teacher NA2 was a non-autonomous teacher, she had positive beliefs about teacher and student roles, which showed that she was aware of the concept of autonomous learning. Evidence for this is that she perceived teacher-centred classes and treating students as passive learners as a main issue which makes students unwilling to direct their own learning. Her answer when asked about why the habit of reliance on teachers was an issue was that *'learning is teacher-centred and learners are passive learners'* (NA2).

Lack of student motivation was also an issue raised by teachers. Teachers perceived lack of motivation in many areas. Teacher A1, for example, perceived lack of motivation in students' short-term learning goal, which was to have high grades rather than learn more than what is needed for exams as she expressed the view that *'... everything is connected to grades'*. Meanwhile, Teacher NA1 mentioned that students' low proficiency level in EFL writing made them less confident about their ability, which made them less motivated to direct their own learning: *'Being a low-proficiency student in practising EFL writing decreases students' self-esteem, which makes them less motivated to learn independently.'* Moreover, based on Teacher NA1's point of view, writing proficiency level affects self-esteem, which can affect student motivation. There was a relationship between these factors, in her opinion; in other words, while a low proficiency level led to low self-esteem, low self-esteem led to a low level of motivation.

Teacher NA2 also explained how students' motivation is affected, noting that learning a foreign language could affect students' personalities. She said, for example, that students usually feel shy when practising a foreign language as it is not their mother tongue. *'Students usually feel shy when they practise EFL as it is not their first language so this lack of confidence makes them feel less motivated to practise EFL'* (NA2). Similar to Teacher NA1's opinion above, Teacher NA2 suggested there was a relationship between students'

lack of confidence and motivation. When students feel shy about practising EFL, they become less confident, which eventually leads them to be demotivated about directing their own learning.

Overall, there were frequently mentioned areas noted by teachers as issues related to learners. One of them, which Teachers A1 and NA2 agreed on, was students' unwillingness to take responsibility for their learning. Both teachers perceived students' unwillingness in many factors, such as traditional methods of teaching and students' perceptions of the role of teachers. In addition, the same teachers saw a relationship between short-term learning goals and a lack of motivation. Finally, they believed that proficiency level plays an important role in students' level of motivation.

To conclude, teachers agreed there were constraints hindering the promotion of LA in their writing classes. University regulations were mentioned by teachers in many places. The most frequent educational constraint related to university regulations mentioned by teachers was the curriculum. According to teachers, the main problem with the curriculum was that it was pre-determined and had to be followed without considering students' needs and interests, which led to the fixed assessment criteria and set examination system. According to teachers, their students saw this limitation and eventually ended up wanting to pass the course without the desire to learn more and be autonomous. Moreover, all teachers, apart from Teacher NA1, had positive attitudes towards implementing new strategies to promote students' independent learning. However, they mentioned some issues related to teachers which could hinder the promotion of LA. The main issues mentioned by the teachers were related to their lack of awareness of the significance of LA, difficulty in implementing LA, and unwillingness to implement LA. Lastly, teachers shed light on students' issues which could prevent the implementation of LA. Those issues, according to teachers, were mainly tied to the many reasons students were unwilling to be autonomous,

such as being taught passively and via traditional teaching methods where they get all their knowledge from their teachers only. Teachers also mentioned students' short-term learning goal and proficiency levels as issues affecting their motivation, causing them to lose interest in being autonomous.

**4.4.2. Factors that promote LA.** Both autonomous and non-autonomous teachers identified a number of strategies for promoting autonomous learning in EFL writing classes. The most frequent factor mentioned by teachers was encouragement.

**4.4.2.1. Encouragement.** Encouragement was a factor that almost all teachers agreed would help promote LA. However, encouragement was perceived as taking many different forms. Teacher A1, for example, connected encouragement with awareness and enlightenment:

*Students have to know that what they are learning is only the base and, in the future, they have to do research and bigger projects. So, teachers enlighten and make students aware of the need to be independent, and this could be considered as teachers' encouragement.*

In her view, teachers are responsible for enlightening students and making them aware of the importance of taking control over their learning. Moreover, she implied that, as an autonomous teacher, the teacher's role is to teach students the basics, and it is the students' job to improve their learning by taking control of it. This statement showed she was aware of the concept of autonomous learning. She made a connection between encouraging students and reminding them of possible future tasks and goals. Moreover, she connected real-life activities to encouragement—in other words, making students interested in what they learn so that they feel encouraged to achieve. When asked about ways to encourage students, she revealed the following:

*I sometimes give them assignments to be completed from their real-life situations.*

*Once, I made them interview other people about different topics that interest them and bring me those interviews written. (A1)*

This comment showed she was able to overcome the previously mentioned educational constraints which hinder the promotion of LA: the fact that student textbooks included topics not relevant to their reality and interests. By making students practise real-life activities, she encouraged students to relate learning to their reality and find interesting topics. Engaging students in real-life activities and finding them interesting learning topics can be considered autonomy-promoting teaching strategies (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Similarly, Teacher A2 agreed that awareness is the basis for encouraging students.

She mentioned the following:

*I usually inform them how important it is to learn EFL nowadays and how it can affect their future and career. I try to make them aware of that. If awareness is found in students, then we have done it. (A2)*

This quotation showed that Teacher A2 believed awareness is a significant factor in encouraging students. Moreover, it showed that she, as an autonomous teacher, practised spreading awareness among her students. When asked about strategies she used to encourage students, she replied as following: *'I usually encourage them in classes. I praise their work, give them extra points, and try to find topics that match their interests'*. Like Teacher A1, she tried to overcome the curriculum issue by finding interesting topics to actively engage students in the learning process.

Helping students know their strengths and weaknesses was considered encouragement by Teacher NA1, who stated that following: *'To encourage her no matter how many mistakes she makes. To guide students to know their strengths and weaknesses'*. Even though she admitted she did not usually encourage students, she sometimes tried to raise students'

confidence by making them practise the language outside the classroom: *'I usually don't. However, I sometimes ask them to practise the language outside the classroom to be more independent and confident about themselves'* (NA1). The relationship between practising the language outside the classroom and students' level of confidence was not clear to the researcher. Teacher NA1 made a connection between teachers' encouragement and students' level of confidence, mentioning that she encouraged her students no matter how many mistakes they make, which could raise students' confidence.

Teacher NA2 believed that *'teacher's encouragement is important to promote students' autonomy'*. Like Teacher A2, Teacher NA2 perceived praise as encouragement as she stated the following: *'I use verbal praise whenever students give correct answers'*. Overall, however, she perceived encouragement only as oral praise.

To conclude, encouragement was perceived in many forms by teachers, and they all agreed that it was important in promoting student autonomy. While autonomous teachers mainly perceived encouragement as raising students' awareness, non-autonomous teachers mainly perceived it in praising students' work.

**4.4.2.2. Motivation.** Motivation also emerged as one of the most important factors that teachers believed leads to autonomous learning. Teachers perceived three factors that promote motivation and, thus, promote LA: interesting topics, excitement in learning, and gradual improvement. According to Teacher A1, motivation was usually related to excitement in learning: *'Autonomous learners are usually motivated, you can see a sparkle when they practise the language and they are excited as well to practise it'*. This quotation revealed she was aware of her students' attitudes; she could see enthusiasm in the faces of those who want to learn and practise. In addition, she identified a relationship between motivation and autonomous learning. Based on her words, motivation led students to be

autonomous learners, and autonomous learners motivated themselves to practise the language independently. In other words, it was a bi-directional relationship.

She also revealed that she motivated her students by engaging them in interesting topics so that they could learn actively: *'I bring interesting topics they would like. Even though we have to stick to the book's topics, I sometimes bring interesting topics'* (A1). This showed Teacher A1 believed that paying attention to students' interests could motivate them and thus make them take control of their learning.

As for Teacher A2, she also saw a relationship between motivation and autonomous learning. Motivation, she said, was an implemented strategy that gradually leads to improving students' skills:

*Motivation is also important. Teachers have to start motivating students gradually from the beginning until they master the skill of being independent as our students are used to depending on the teacher from primary school onwards.* (A2)

For her, it was the teacher's job to motivate students. Moreover, she was convinced that motivation could lead students to master new skills. She also made it clear that time is important in motivating students to become independent learners throughout the year as they are used to being taught using the spoon-feeding method. Therefore, she employed a strategy of gradually motivating students from the beginning of the semester. When asked about ways to motivate her students, she replied with the following:

*Students write some sentences at the beginning of the semester, then I bring in the same written materials in the middle of the semester so students can see their progress. They go like, 'Wow, teacher we really improved. I don't understand why I made a mistake like this'.* (A2)

This quotation showed that she, as an autonomous teacher, invested time and effort in her students by implementing autonomous strategies, such as gradually boosting motivation, throughout the year.

Similarly, Teachers NA1 and NA2 believed a relationship existed between motivation and LA. Teacher NA1 said, '*Autonomous learners are usually motivated and find interest in the things that they are writing about. Non-autonomous are the opposite*'. Meanwhile, Teacher NA2 said, '*Autonomous learners are usually excited and motivated, while non-autonomous learners are less motivated and not interested in learning new things*'. It was unclear whether these non-autonomous teachers meant the relationship was a bi-directional one where, for example, students' interest and motivation lead to autonomy, or vice versa. According to Teacher NA1, independent language learners were already motivated. In other words, it was less a question of the teacher helping them to become independent by increasing their motivation by giving them interesting topics and more about pre-existing motivation on their part.

Overall, both the autonomous and non-autonomous teachers believed there was a relationship between motivation and independent learning. The nature of that relationship differed however between the two groups of teachers. The main difference between the autonomous and the non-autonomous teachers was that the former believed they could help learners to become more motivated and hence autonomous, by giving interesting topics and helping students see their gradual improvement. The latter implied that learners were just motivated or they were not, and it was not the teachers' role to do anything about it.

**4.4.2.3. Independent learning.** Teachers showed a high level of awareness when asked about the definition of autonomous learning, perceiving students' independent learning as such. Teachers made a clear connection between LA and independence from the teacher in learning. Holec (1981) defined LA as '*...the ability to take charge of one's own learning*'

(p. 3). Benson (2007) and Ikonen (2013) agreed with Holec's definition of LA and stated that it was one of the most frequently used definitions by researchers. They clarified that LA, according to Holec's definition, was a learner's active engagement in the learning process, responsibility to take decisions, controlling and assessing the outcomes of the learning process. Moreover, other researchers, such as Little (1991) and Sella (2014), had a similar definition. They evolved Holec's definition so that LA also involved thinking critically and making conscious decisions about the learning process.

Teacher A1 only mentioned independence from the teacher as the essence of LA, rather than also referring to students taking responsibility and action towards their learning. Students could learn independently without help from their teachers, but it did not mean they were autonomous if they only learn what was needed in their textbooks to pass their exams without further need or desire to improve their skills. Teacher A1 defined autonomous learning as '*students' independence from their teachers in learning*'. Her definition was about independence from the teacher but did not include the active involvement of learners in their own learning.

Teacher A2 went a step further and defined autonomous learning as when '*the student has the freedom to learn by themselves and take responsibility to direct their learning. This means looking for new information by themselves*'. This definition of LA appeared similar to Benson's (2007) definition and included the role of the learner and did not neglect the role of teachers in teaching. According to A2, teachers were supposed to give their students the freedom they need to learn, which indicated that teachers should work as facilitators and not dominate the learning process; students must take responsibility for their own learning and look for new information independently from their teachers.

According to Teacher NA1, although she captured the essence of autonomous learning in students' '*feeling of responsibility*', her definition was about something perceived

and not acted. She defined LA as *'the feeling of responsibility when a student feels the responsibility to learn independently by herself'* (NA1). Students might have specific feelings or beliefs about something, but this does not necessarily mean they will follow their feelings or beliefs and act based on them as a result. The main definition of LA by Holec (1981) and Benson (2007), which was learners taking responsibility for their learning, clearly showed that students do take action (responsibility and control) regarding their learning without feeling or being aware of the importance of directing learning. The definition from Teacher NA2 thus potentially suggested that she, as a non-autonomous teacher, was not fully aware of autonomous learning meaning as a practical concept.

Teacher NA2's definition of LA was almost the same as Teacher A2's definition, but only included students' role in learning: *'I could define it as not waiting for the teacher to learn from only, as they are considered sources of knowledge. It is the student looking for the information independently'* (NA2). This definition indicated that, even though she was a non-autonomous teacher, she had a high awareness of autonomous learning. She mentioned an issue that students suffer from, which was considering teachers to be the source of knowledge, and she clearly stated that autonomous students should look for information themselves without depending on teachers only.

In sum, all four teachers mentioned students' independence from teachers as an instance of learning autonomously. However, only Teacher NA1 restricted LA to a 'perception' about learning independently, without there necessarily being an action taken to make this independent learning happen.

Teachers also mentioned many advantages to independent learning as a strategy for learning EFL writing. Among these were flexibility in learning and students' active involvement in their own learning. Firstly, active learning was mentioned by Teacher A1 as an advantage of LA:

*The most important trend in teaching writing is students' independent learning. It is about putting the student at the heart of learning process and not the teachers.*

*Independent learning does not encourage passive learning, which is what students are used to.*

Based on Teacher A1's point of view, independent learning involved engaging students in the learning process. This active involvement in the learning process prevented teachers from treating students as passive learners like in traditional teaching methods. However, Teacher A1 neglected the role of teachers for enhancing students' learning experiences.

Secondly, flexible learning was another advantage of independent learning mentioned by Teacher A2:

*It [independent learning] enables the student to learn without the need for a teacher.*

*Also, it develops students' thinking and makes them direct their learning according to their interests, needs, and level of proficiency.*

For Teacher A2, independent learning was important as students can learn based on their interests, needs, and level of proficiency, which would not typically happen in a traditional classroom. Moreover, she indicated that students could elevate their thinking while directing their own learning.

NA1 perceived an advantage of independent learning which was also mainly about flexibility in learning:

*I think the student will learn more and will not only depend on specific resources like the teacher or her book. She will be able to direct her learning in a way which suits her in timing and ability.*

This quotation suggested that independent learning offers students more opportunities for learning based on their availability and ability than if they were limited to learning in their classrooms.

Teacher NA2 connected using technology to independent learning when she was asked about the benefits of the latter:

*Umm, for example, e-dictionaries sometimes help when students are in doubt about the spelling and meaning of new words, which leads them to work independently instead of depending on the teacher only.*

From this, it is clear she believed technology is a factor in learning new things if students were unsure about the correct answer. However, even though using technology is very important in independent learning, she seemed to be narrowing the latter down to the use of technology as a temporary helping tool in the class.

In general, there was agreement among both autonomous and non-autonomous teachers about the significance of independent learning as a supporting factor in promoting students' autonomous learning in EFL writing classes. Giving students flexibility in learning and actively involving them in the learning process were the main independent learning strategies mentioned by these teachers.

**4.4.2.4. Using technology.** Due to the recent movement in technology use and new e-dictionaries in Saudi Arabia (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015), EFL teachers have become more aware of the advantages of incorporating technology into teaching EFL writing. Technology could be used to enhance the teaching process, such as via presenting new information by the projector in an effective way. This could be done by showing new information via the projector and engaging all students in a whole-class discussion about this information, which could make them more interested and enthusiastic in learning. Furthermore, technology could be specifically used as an autonomy-promoting strategy such as students independently looking for new information. Teachers connected technology with autonomous learning as students can independently search for information. Firstly, using electronic devices was related to learning through technology. For example, when Teacher A1 was asked about

ways to promote LA through technology, she replied as follows: '*e-dictionaries are used, and error correction is not done by me but by them using different resources such as online English teaching websites*'. This quotation indicated that Teacher A1 helped her students direct their own learning by themselves. She employed technology to enhance her teaching process while using autonomous learning strategies and believed it was better for students to correct themselves rather than receiving corrections directly from her. Moreover, she reported that she used technology in a beneficial way to deliver written feedback and not only while teaching and lecturing students using projectors. Her use of technology indicated that she employed technology to promote LA and not only to enhance the process of delivering new information.

When Teacher NA1 was asked about possible ways to promote LA through technology, she answered, '*I use technology such as the projector, and I make my students email me their assignments*'. She indicated that she practised the strategy of using technology in teaching writing to enhance her teaching process. Even though she was considered a non-autonomous teacher, she indicated that she used this new trend in teaching. She used technology in many ways, such as to present new information using projectors and to let her students send their assignments by email. Therefore, she must have had some positive attitudes and beliefs towards incorporating technology as a new trend in her teaching process. However, her quote indicated that her use of technology was limited and not meant to be used as an autonomy-promoting strategy. Technology practices by her included presenting new information and emailing assignments. Those practises were strategies to enhance the teaching process but not to make students independently direct their own learning.

Teacher NA2 believed that using technology such as e-dictionaries helps students have a greater sense of self-reliance:

*Using technology to work on a project, such as e-dictionaries, sometimes helps when students are in doubt about the spelling of new words and meanings, which makes them work independently instead of depending on the teacher only.*

Even though she reported that using technologies is beneficial in teaching and leads to autonomous learning, from her quote it was not clear whether she used technology to teach her students. Nevertheless, as a non-autonomous teacher, it showed she had positive attitudes towards LA. Moreover, her quote indicated that she was aware of using technology as an autonomy-promoting strategy and not only a teaching process enhancement.

Teacher A2 established a clear relationship between new trends in teaching and the use of technology. She also connected these new trends with promoting autonomous learning:

*I usually use new trends in teaching writing to help students become independent learners. I don't like using traditional ways of teaching writing, like giving them a model to follow. I use technology widely to enhance the teaching process. (A2)*

This quotation indicated that Teacher A2 considered using technology as a learning aid and tool to enhance the process of teaching writing. She also appeared to consider herself a teacher who used new trends in teaching rather than traditional methods and expressed her positive attitudes towards, and actual practice of, using technology in her classes to enhance the teaching process. However, her words also indicated that her use of technology was to enhance the teaching process in general and not as a specific autonomy-promoting strategy.

Overall, all teachers agreed that using technology enhances the teaching process. Their perspectives on using technology as an autonomy-promoting strategy rather than a general strategy to enhance the teaching process differed, however. Autonomous teachers indicated that they used technology in their classes. While Teacher A1 was using it as an autonomy-promoting strategy, Teacher A2's answer was unclear about her actual practices.

Non-autonomous teachers had different perspectives about using technology. Teacher NA1's quote indicated she used technology to enhance her teaching process but not to promote LA. On the other hand, Teacher NA2 was aware of using technology as an autonomy-promoting strategy but did not mention any practice of it.

**4.4.2.5. Collaborative activities.** Group work and peer activities were examples of collaborative working used by teachers to help students foster autonomous learning in EFL writing classes. Teachers connected students' collaborative activities with promoting LA and agreed about the significance of these activities. However, their actual practices regarding collaborative activities differed. While non-autonomous teachers used collaboration when the textbook required it, autonomous teachers used it because they saw the advantages of such activities. Teacher A1 revealed the following:

*I always use group-work activities to engage all students and bring cool examples to keep them interested. I think they are very necessary in teaching EFL writing. Students get the chance to share their information, correct each other's mistakes, and depend on their own resources to solve problems.*

Based on the quote, Teacher A1 practised group-work activities in teaching writing as she believed they were beneficial in promoting LA. She believed these kinds of activities engage students and make them interested in the learning process. In addition, she mentioned that one advantage of engaging students in the learning process through collaborative activities was active learning. Based on the concept of autonomous learning, students' interests are important in fostering LA. Moreover, engaging students in their learning is considered the essence of LA as students have the opportunity to be actively involved in their learning.

Similarly, Teacher A2 mentioned the following:

*They [collaborative activities] are very beneficial in learning because they enable students to exchange their ideas, correct each other, and support and complete each other without the need for a teacher, which makes them direct their own learning.*

She had positive beliefs about collaborative work in enhancing the teaching of writing, indicating that collaborative activities give students a chance to exchange ideas and correct each other without relying on the teacher as the only source of knowledge. According to her, collaborative activities were opportunities that teachers give to students to make them depend on themselves and discover ways of learning that do not come from teachers only. However, even though she was an autonomous teacher, it was unclear whether she practised such activities in her classes.

The non-autonomous teachers, NA1 and NA2, also mentioned they believed in the importance of collaborative activities. However, the teachers only used such activities when the textbook exercises required such collaboration. Teacher NA1 said the following:

*I sometimes use collaborative activities when the task in the textbook requires group work. I think it is helpful as students share their information and correct each other. They count on themselves to have solutions for the book's exercises.*

Meanwhile, Teacher NA2 made a similar comment:

*Yes, whenever there is an activity in the textbook that requires students to be grouped, I use it. They get to share their information with each other, which widens their knowledge, and they can receive corrections for their mistakes from their peers.*

In general, both autonomous teachers showed positive attitudes towards collaborative activities, and Teacher A1 mentioned she always used them in her writing classes. Even though non-autonomous teachers mentioned some advantages of collaborative working, their words suggested that neither used them unless required to do so by the textbook.

**4.4.2.6. Student-centred class.** To promote autonomous learning, classes need to be more student-centred. Such new teaching trends emphasise the student as an active learner rather than a passive one in teacher-centred classes; this approach eventually engages students in their own learning, which leads to autonomous learning experiences. Teachers had their own perspectives about the relationship between class-centredness and autonomous learning. There was a great difference between the types of classes reportedly conducted by autonomous and non-autonomous teachers, which clarified the level of autonomous learning practices they employed. Whilst autonomous teachers stated their classes were student-centred, non-autonomous teachers mentioned the opposite by saying their classes were mainly teacher-centred. Teacher A1 made the following comment:

*My writing classes are student-centred, as they [students] do all the work. I work as a facilitator during classes and help students but never dominate the class because I want them to direct their own learning and depend on themselves rather than on me.*

Teacher A1 made a clear distinction between teacher-centred and student-centred classes. She mentioned that student-centred classes were about actively engaging students in the learning process by letting them do all the work rather than them relying on their teachers. Moreover, she mentioned that teachers must act as facilitators rather than dominating the class in order to give students the opportunity to direct their own learning and depend on themselves.

Teacher A2 expressed a different opinion about how independent learning needs a student-centred class:

*My class is student-centred because I always use cooperative work when I teach my students something new. I use so many new activities to engage them in their own learning, such as the four corners activity, which involves spreading students into four corners according to their interests about our topic, and then we go off from*

*there. I make them participate in their learning and be active and independent learners.*

From this quotation, Teacher A2 seemed to consider her classes to be student-centred because she employed different activities to make students actively involved in the learning process, and she emphasised that she used cooperative work when teaching students something new. This quotation also implied she was aware that strategies such as cooperative work led to student-centred classes; this eventually then led to actively engaging students in their classes and promoting LA.

As for non-autonomous Teacher NA1, she was clear about what type of classes she taught:

*To be honest, my classes are usually teacher-centred. To make them student-centred, I would have to change the previously planned lessons for the lecture, and this means I would have to work more on other techniques to implement in my classes, which I don't have time for.*

These words indicated she found it difficult to make her classes student-centred. She blamed a lack of time as a barrier to developing new ways of teaching. Even though the deanery provided teachers with a teacher's book, it usually included only the basics and did not clearly prevent teachers from developing new teaching strategies to enhance the teaching process. Her quotation suggested she was convinced that promoting LA in the class was too difficult to be implemented.

Teacher NA2 had the same view of her class type as Teacher NA1 and also blamed lack of time due to busy schedules:

*I think my classes are more teacher-centred rather than student-centred. As I told you previously, I have a busy schedule and a lot of things to work on. I have to lecture students in a large number of classes, correct their mistakes, and do a lot of*

*supervision outside the class, such as exam invigilation, as well as marking written work.*

In addition, she mentioned some other reasons for not being able to make her classes student-centred. One was not recognising all aspects of her role as a teacher. In universities in Saudi Arabia, teachers do more than just teach. Their role usually also involves extra work, such as marking students' exams, correcting assignments, and invigilating exams.

In general, there was a contrast between autonomous and non-autonomous teachers' types of classes. Autonomous teachers declared their classes were mainly student-centred, and they believed in the importance of student-centredness to promote autonomous learning. They also mentioned they used certain strategies to make their classes more student-centred. On the other hand, non-autonomous teachers' classes were more teacher-centred than student-centred. The main reason they gave was the difficulty of employing strategies to make their classes student-centred due to lack of time and a busy schedule.

**4.4.2.7. Feedback.** Certain types of written corrective feedback arose as factors supporting the promotion of autonomous learning in teaching EFL writing. Whilst coded and indirect feedback were used by Teacher A1 and Teacher NA1, direct feedback was used by Teacher NA2. Coded feedback occurs when the teacher provides a code above the mistake showing the mistake type (Kuswandono, 2005). Indirect feedback involves drawing a line under the mistake, and direct feedback involves giving the correction for the mistake (Kuswandono, 2005).

Coded feedback was used by Teacher A1, who made the following statement:

*I give them [students'] coded feedback. Like I write S above a spelling mistake and VT above a verb tense mistake, and they have to correct the mistake by themselves. I sometimes give them indirect feedback as I draw a line under the mistake where*

*students know there is a mistake, and their job is to look for the correction. This makes them take responsibility for their learning.*

Teacher A1 believed that this type of written feedback helps students become independent learners as they take responsibility for looking for the correction themselves. Similarly, Teacher NA1 mentioned she used coded feedback. She stated that she asked for second drafts to ensure students looked for the corrections by themselves and worked on their mistakes. She also stated the following: *'I correct their mistakes by myself. I give them coded written feedback for the first draft, and in the second draft they have to give it back to me totally corrected'* (NA1). Thus, while Teacher NA1 was considered a non-autonomous teacher, she practised an autonomous strategy when delivering written feedback.

Teacher A2, for her part, mentioned a different type of corrective written feedback and called it descriptive feedback:

*Descriptive feedback. For example, I write 'two stars and a wish'. Two stars refers to two written things the student handled well and the wish to something the student must develop in their written work. This means I specify strengths and weaknesses that the student becomes aware of. I don't like direct feedback because it does not teach students to be independent learners. I widely use peer assessment and group assessment in my classes as well.*

This descriptive feedback could be considered an improved type of indirect and coded feedback. It incorporates encouragement, raises awareness of strengths and weaknesses, and provides motivation. Given that, this type of feedback can deliver a great number of autonomous teaching strategies which go beyond just showing where mistakes are made and what types of mistakes were. It pays attention to students' writing needs as it shows strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, it encourages students as they know what they are good at. In addition to descriptive feedback, Teacher A2 stated that peer feedback, such as asking peers

to correct each other, and group feedback, such as asking groups to exchange their writings to correct each other, were widely used in her classes. These types of written corrective feedback take more time and effort than giving coded or direct feedback. Overall, it could be concluded that she practised autonomous teaching strategies when she was delivering feedback.

Direct feedback was preferred by Teacher NA2, for a specific reason: *'I give my own direct feedback. I want them to have the correction because I am sure they [students] will not go back and look for the correct version by themselves'* (NA2). Direct feedback could be considered as the method that least promotes autonomy out of the various types of written feedback, such as coded and indirect feedback (Kuswando, 2005). As direct feedback does not require students to look for corrections independently, Teacher NA2 was the only one who practised this. She believed her students were not independent enough to correct their own mistakes. Furthermore, her choice of direct feedback implied she was sure this was best for students and that they would learn more from being given the right answer.

In general, autonomous teachers and Teacher NA1 used types of feedback that required students to look for the correction by themselves, such as coded, indirect, and descriptive feedback. Teacher NA2 declared she was not confident about her students' autonomy level where they could go back and look for the correction independently. Thus, she used direct corrections when providing feedback.

To conclude, teachers perceived barriers that hinder the promotion of LA in their writing classes firstly in institutional constraints such as fixed examination systems, curriculum limitations, pre-determined assessment criteria, and lack of learning resources. Autonomous teachers stated that curricula and examination systems were the main issues related to the university regulations. Non-autonomous teachers, however, stated that lack of resources and assessment criteria were the main institutional issues hindering the promotion

of LA. Secondly, teachers agreed that there were issues related to teachers which could prevent the implementation of LA in teaching. Whilst Teacher A1 noted that lack of awareness of significance of LA was the main issue preventing teachers from implementing LA, non-autonomous teachers and Teacher A2 mentioned that the implementation of LA was difficult as it needs time and effort and as traditional methods of teaching are always easier. Lastly, issues related to learners were mentioned by teachers. Some of those issues were students' perception of teachers' role as teachers are the only knowledge providers; learning passively; teacher-centred classes; and students' unwillingness to be autonomous due to their lack of confidence, lack of motivation, proficiency level in EFL writing, and short-term learning goals.

Teachers also had many different views regarding the possible factors that support the promotion of LA in their classes. First, encouragement was considered important in promoting LA. Whilst autonomous teachers perceived it in raising students' awareness, non-autonomous teachers perceived it in praising students work. Second, motivation was believed to be promoted among autonomous teachers. On the other hand, non-autonomous teachers implied that learners were just motivated or not. Third, all teachers agreed that independent learning was significant to support the promotion of LA. Fourth, teachers had different perspectives and practices of technology in their classes. While some used technology in order to enhance the teaching process, the rest used it as a strategy to promote LA. Fifth, collaborative work was used by autonomous teachers more often than non-autonomous teachers, who indicated they used collaborative work only when the textbook required it. Sixth, student-centred classes were significant for promoting LA. While autonomous teachers clearly declared that their classes were student-centred, non-autonomous teachers clearly stated their classes were teacher-centred. Finally, indirect feedback was provided by autonomous teachers and Teacher NA1 in order to support the

promotion of LA; however, direct feedback was provided by Teacher NA2 because she believed her students were not autonomous enough to independently look for corrections.

#### **4.5. Research Question 4**

*To what extent do Saudi EFL teachers promote students' LA in their writing classes?*

To answer this question, two observations of each of the four teachers previously selected to the two autonomous and two non-autonomous classes were conducted (Appendix F, page 347). As discussed earlier, the four teachers' classes were selected based on their responses to the practices section of the teacher questionnaire. The choice of classes was mentioned previously (see section 3.7.). Two rounds of coding were conducted for the observations (see sections 3.12.1.3.1. and 3.12.1.3.2.). Once the new version of the codebook was finalised, three main themes—autonomy-promoting strategies, cognitive techniques, and feedback—and their sub-themes arose from those codes (see Table 4.40). Those themes included both the presence and the absence of the area of interest.

**Table 4.40***Generated Codes, Emerging Themes, and Definitions of Observation*

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes	Definition
Autonomy-promoting strategies	Using technology	Electronic devices	The use of electronic dictionaries and projectors as strategies to make students look for information independently.
		Looking for new information independently	Students' own ways of using English websites and e-dictionaries to generate information by themselves based on their proficiency level and time.
		Teaching aid	The use of technology (e.g., projectors) as a way to easily and effectively deliver new lessons and not as an autonomy-promoting strategy.
		Absence of technology use	When teachers do not allow their students to access e-dictionaries and English teaching websites via their mobile phones to look for new information by themselves.
	Real-life activities	Interest in learning	When teachers substitute textbook topics with other topics that match students' reality to make them more engaged and interested in learning.
		Pre-determined writing topics	Textbook writing tasks that are developed in advance but do not match students' interests and are not connected to students' real-life situations.
		Group work	When teachers instruct students to sit in groups and work on tasks together.

Collaborative working	Class discussion	When teachers involve their students in one big class discussion and build up ideas based on students' knowledge.
	Collaboration instruction	When teachers instruct students to work together on a writing task.
	Dealing with students' inquiries	Teachers' reactions to students' questions, whether by guiding them to independently look for answers or individually answering students by giving them the direct correction.
Freedom of writing	Teachers' instructions	When teachers encourage students to write freely without depending on the linguistic structures of the lessons.
	Students' preferences	When students are allowed to follow their favourite ways of writing instead of teachers' pre-determined methods of writing.
	Restrictions on writing	Requiring the use of pre-determined linguistic structures; prohibiting the use of learning tools (e.g., e-dictionaries) and staying with textbook topics.
Cognitive techniques	Participation in decision-making	Negotiation Teachers' discussion with students about their views and opinions regarding learning needs, materials, and goals.
	Setting learning goals	Absence of setting goals There is no evidence of teachers setting goals with their students.
	Role of teacher	When teachers dominate the class as the only knowledge providers or acting as facilitators helping students direct their own learning.

Independent learning	Using technology	When students use technological devices as learning tools to independently look for new information.
	Whole-class discussion	When teachers engage all students in discussion and generate lesson content from students' ideas and knowledge.
	Collaboration	When students collaboratively work on activities in groups.
	Dealing with mistakes	When teachers respond to students' mistakes by providing direct corrective feedback or discussing them with the class.
	Rote memorising	When students depend on their previous knowledge while working on written tasks.
Planning	Timing	Teachers deciding how much time learners should spend on a written task rather than the learners deciding.
	Planning techniques	Planning outlines, mind mapping, and brainstorming.
Motivation	Praise	Teachers' ways of showing approval for and support of students' work, such as applause and oral praise.
	Interesting topics	Writing topics that make students enthusiastic and get them actively engaged in their learning.
Feedback	Mistakes discussion	When teachers discuss students' mistakes with the whole class and elicit corrections from students.
	Group feedback	When groups of students exchange their written papers with other groups in order to correct each other's work.
	Peer feedback	When students seek feedback from their peers.

**4.5.1. Triangulation.** To check the validity of the observations, the researcher employed methodological triangulation. Responses from the teacher questionnaire and teacher and student interviews were cross-checked with classroom observation data. The teacher interviews did not cover all observation areas; thus, data from student interviews were used to cover the missing observation areas. Data from the questionnaires, interviews, and observations were compared separately for each of the four teachers within the same related section.

**4.5.2. Autonomy-promoting strategies.** The observed classes were labelled A1 and A2 for autonomous classes and NA1 and NA2 for non-autonomous classes. According to the observations, the teachers used many strategies to promote LA in their writing classes, including technology use, collaborative working, and real-life activities. However, teachers' level of implementation of those strategies varied. The analysis of the autonomous group observations is presented first, followed by the non-autonomous group. Finally, possible comparisons between both groups are presented.

**4.5.2.1. Using technology.** The first autonomous teacher, A1, used technology widely in her class. During both observations, while students worked on their written tasks in class, she asked them to look for English synonyms for the words they did not understand in the questions and for new words they needed for their writing. She repeated the same instruction twice during the second observation. Students, as a result, accessed e-dictionaries and English websites via their mobile phones while working on their tasks. In addition, the teacher used the projector both times while delivering new information. She presented the content of the lesson using prepared slides.

The topic of the first lecture related to comparing big cities and towns. She presented two pictures of a city and a town, and discussed the differences with her students. As students noted differences, she tried to incorporate comparison adjectives, such as *bigger*,

*farther than, and most helpful.* She asked students to develop and discuss ideas. She then presented a table summarising the differences between short and long adjectives, as well as how to use them. In doing so, she implemented technology and engaged students in the class discussion. Although the new information (comparisons) was initially presented and explained by her, she continually engaged students in the discussion. Furthermore, she did not prevent students from using e-dictionaries to independently look for information. Indeed, she encouraged students to use technology to direct their own learning.

Her second lesson focused on how to write a well-organised paragraph about a problem and its solutions. She followed almost the same procedures as in the first observation. The students used e-dictionaries as she delivered new information by discussing slides shown on the projector. During the interview, Teacher A1 mentioned that she used technology such as e-dictionaries and English websites when teaching. Moreover, her questionnaire responses about using technology indicated that she always allowed students to use mobile dictionaries in class. Thus, the data for Teacher A1's use of technology in class were consistent. Moreover, she used technology as a strategy to make students more independent and as a teaching aid to easily deliver information. Like Teacher A1, the second autonomous teacher, A2, incorporated technology into her classes. Her students wondered about the meaning of "coherence". She asked them to look for its meaning independently by using e-dictionaries. In both observations, she clearly stated that students were allowed to use e-dictionaries and English websites to learn something related to their lecture during the class. By using technology and class discussion, students were actively involved in the learning process. Her use of technology also indicates that she used technology as a way to promote LA in her classes by making students look for information independently. A comparison of Teacher A2's interview responses with the observational data indicated that she widely used technology in her classes to help students become autonomous learners. In

addition, her questionnaire responses showed that using e-dictionaries as a form of technology was often allowed in her classes, thereby affirming the observational data.

Overall, both autonomous classes used technology during class time and were open to using mobile dictionaries in learning. Students also actively engaged in their learning by participating in discussions while receiving new information from teachers. Their use of technology indicates that they incorporated autonomous strategies while using technology, but they did rely exclusively on the use of technology to deliver new information.

In the non-autonomous group, Teacher NA1 used the projector to deliver her lessons. While delivering new lesson topics, she only read new information from the slides. There was no participation from students nor discussion about the content of the slides. She also allowed students to use e-dictionaries while working on their written tasks in class. In the first class, she made her students work in groups on the written task, and students raised many questions about the meaning of new words they wanted to use in their tasks. She thus asked them to use e-dictionaries. However, in the second observed class, she made her students work on the written tasks individually. Students asked very few questions about new words, and the teacher answered them privately. No students used their mobile phones or e-dictionaries, suggesting it was normal to not use mobile phones or e-dictionaries. She might have allowed the use of e-dictionaries in group work because it was a necessity to be able to keep up with students' inquiries. In addition, students might have felt excited while working on a written task in groups and, thus, tried to ask their teacher questions about their work in public. When working on their tasks independently, few questions were raised. Such observations suggest that students were not used to using technology to direct their own learning in their writing classes. Furthermore, they were used to getting answers to their questions from their teacher only. Teacher NA1 used the projector to deliver information in a traditional way while limiting the use of e-dictionaries. During the interview, Teacher NA1 stated that she used

technology in her classes in the form of presenting new information using the projector. Her questionnaire responses indicated that she rarely allowed her students to use technology in her classes. Thus, the observational data about Teacher NA1 using technology in class were consistent with her other responses.

Meanwhile, in both observed classes, Teacher NA2 used the blackboard to present new information. She wrote new grammatical rules on the board using chalk and explained the entire new lesson in the same way. Students were passive learners and did not have any chance to participate in the lesson. While working on the written task at the end of the lesson, students worked individually. The teacher wandered around the room in case anybody had a question. Students asked very few questions about their written tasks; the teacher privately answered any questions asked. Thus, Teacher NA2 used almost no technology in the writing class, which seemed to be a traditional teaching classroom where students were passive learners. During her interview, by contrast, Teacher NA2 showed a positive attitude and held a positive belief about using technology to promote LA. However, she made no mention about her actual technology practices in class. Meanwhile, her questionnaire responses indicated that she often allowed the use of technology in her classes. Although she was a non-autonomous teacher, she held a positive attitude towards technology use when teaching writing. Her interview and questionnaire responses contradicted the observational data. One explanation could be that two observations were not enough. Furthermore, she might have held positive attitudes and beliefs towards technology use, but did not actually practise it.

Overall, autonomous classes tended to aim to promote autonomous learning by incorporating technology when teaching writing. Teachers often used projectors and students used e-dictionaries with their teachers' approval and encouragement. Although using projectors to present new information might not be considered an autonomous teaching strategy, encouraging the use of phones to find information independently could be. Still, not

all technology use by teachers was autonomous. It depended on how they used it to lead students to direct their learning independently. By contrast, non-autonomous groups were less exposed to using technology to promote LA in writing classes. In particular, Teacher NA2 used traditional methods to teach writing, with a total absence of technology.

**4.5.2.2. Real-life activities.** During the interviews, teachers complained about the lack of connection between textbooks and students' reality. Autonomous teachers tried to connect their lesson topics with their students' interests and reality while working on written tasks. For example, Teacher A1's first observed class focused on comparisons, and the written task in the textbook required students to compare cats and dogs as humans' favourite pets. However, in Saudi Arabia, dogs are rarely allowed in houses and are not favoured due to religious beliefs; most Saudis have cats as pets. Thus, instead of using the textbook task, the teacher asked students to compare home-cooked food and ready-made food. Her second observed lesson was about the ocean being in trouble, and the written task in the textbook examined the problem of overfishing and possible solutions. The students, however, live in a city without access to the sea, and fishing is considered an activity for men only in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, instead of relying exclusively on the textbook, the teacher asked students to write about any environmental problem facing Saudi Arabia and the possible solutions. During the interview, Teacher A1 stated that she gave students real-life assignments to encourage them to learn autonomously. This result agreed with observational data.

Features of class A2 were similar to those of A1. For the first topic, a timeline of a student's life, the teacher asked students to write about this topic, which was already connected to students' reality. The second topic was the science behind laughter. Although the written task in the textbook focused on the advantages and disadvantages of laughter, which could require students to engage in scientific reasoning, Teacher A2 created a more personal link for students by asking them to write about a funny story that had happened to

them and made them laugh. During the interview, the teacher stated that her students were discouraged from directing their own learning as the curriculum was pre-determined and not flexible in terms of their needs and interests. This statement seemed to validate the observational data. However, no data related to real-life activities were found in teacher or student questionnaires in order to triangulate observational data with other qualitative data.

In summary, based on observations, the autonomous class teachers seemed to overcome the disconnect between the textbooks and students' reality by making them write about real topics related to their lives.

Regarding the non-autonomous group, the NA1 class followed the textbook tasks without a single change. Students had to write a comparison of cats and dogs, which neglected students' lack of interest of dogs in most Saudi homes. However, in the second observed class, the teacher asked students to write about the impact of water pollution and possible solutions instead of the issue of overfishing. Thus, in the first observed class, Teacher NA1 kept the textbook task as it was, but she changed the textbook task in the second observed class to use one more connected to students' reality, water pollution rather than overfishing. Teacher NA1 showed a level of autonomous promotion in the writing class by trying to connect written topics to students' reality. During her interview, Teacher NA1 stated that she encouraged students to practise the language outside the classroom in real-life situations so that they could become more independent in their learning. This result indicated that she used the concept of real-life activities in her teaching to promote LA, which validated the observational data. However, other qualitative data about real-life activities were not found in teacher and student questionnaires.

Teacher NA2 adhered to both of the textbook tasks (i.e., comparing pets and overfishing) without changing or modifying them. During the interview, she stated that she

believed implementing LA techniques was difficult and using a traditional approach by lecturing students was much easier.

In general, autonomous class teachers made an effort to adapt and modify topics to be closer to students' reality and, thus, more interesting to students while keeping the essence of the task requirements. As for the non-autonomous group, Teacher NA1 inconsistently followed the textbook, whereas Teacher NA2 followed the topics without any changes. Thus, Teacher NA2 seemed to provide the least LA-promoting class among those observed in terms of using technology and real-life activities.

**4.5.2.3. Collaborative working.** Collaborative working occurred mainly in the form of group work among autonomous teachers. During both observations of Teacher A1's classes, students participated in group work while completing the textbook writing task at the end of the lecture. During the interview, the teacher validated these data when she mentioned that she always used group work in classes. Her questionnaire responses also indicated that she was very positive towards practising collaborative activities in her writing classes. Teacher A1 used a projector to present the question first and asked students to organise themselves in groups to work collaboratively. Students worked in groups on their task for 20 minutes, per the teacher's instruction. When the teacher instructed students to work in groups, students immediately arranged their seats to form groups. They seemed aware of the strategy, as if they had experienced it before. In both observed classes, students only worked collaboratively on the writing task at the end of the lesson. When students were collaboratively working on their written tasks, the teacher wandered among them and acted as a facilitator, guiding those groups who needed help and praising groups who were doing well. Such data suggested that Teacher A1 often used group work and that students were familiar with this autonomous technique when learning writing. Moreover, the teacher seemed to be

effectively employing student groups as students were full of excitement while working collaboratively.

In the second autonomous class, Teacher A2 did not clearly use any collaborative work among students during the first observation. She used the projector to present the instructions for the writing task at the end of the lesson. She then told students to independently work on the task. However, she used another form of collaborative working, student discussions, as she involved students in class discussions while presenting new information at the beginning of the lesson. When she asked students about their answers and guesses, she encouraged them to build their ideas upon their peers' answers. Most of the students were excited and involved in discussion as one big group. In the second observed class, the teacher asked students to work in groups to complete the textbook writing task at the end of the lecture. Students worked in groups for 15 minutes, as the teacher instructed. During the interview, Teacher A2 shared positive attitudes and beliefs about collaborative activities for promoting LA. These interview responses supported the observational data. However, in her questionnaire response, she held negative attitudes towards practising collaborative working in her classes. There was no clear reason behind this discrepancy.

Overall, it could be said autonomous classes were consistently exposed to collaborative working, mainly in the form of group working and class discussion.

Regarding the non-autonomous group, NA1 in the first observed class, students worked in groups to complete the textbook writing task. Their teacher informed them they had 15 minutes to finish working on the task in groups. However, in the second observed class, no collaborative work was evident. Teacher NA1 explained this inconsistency in using collaborative activities during the interview. She mentioned that she used collaborative activities only when the textbook included them as an exercise. Her questionnaire responses

indicated that she was neutral towards practising collaborative work in the writing class as she put 'neutral' for all items about collaboration.

Teacher NA2 did not use any type of collaborative activities with students in either observed class. Students were asked to work on their written tasks alone. Even the class discussion was almost entirely missing. The interview with Teacher NA2 revealed that she did not use collaborative work in her classes unless the textbook required it, which explains why no collaborative work was observed in her classes. She also held a negative view towards practising collaborative work in writing classes. Based on her questionnaire response, she mentioned she did not use collaborative activities to teach her students.

The responses indicated an inconsistency in employing collaborative activities to promote LA in writing classes in the non-autonomous classes, whereas autonomous classes were more positive towards practising collaborative activities. Collaborative work took two forms: group work and class discussions. No other forms of collaborative activities (e.g., peer teaching, simulations, or games) were observed.

**4.5.3. Cognitive techniques.** The researcher observed several cognitive techniques, including freedom of writing, participation in decision-making, the setting of learning goals, independent learning, planning, and motivation.

**4.5.3.1. Freedom of writing.** Freedom of writing was mainly considered in relation to how students worked on textbook tasks. Teacher and student interviews made it clear that both felt obligated to follow certain writing criteria in exams. During the observations, the researcher looked to see whether students had the following freedoms: choosing their preferred way of writing, following different techniques of writing, and using different tools, models, and structures in writing. Given the inherent difficulty of judging whether students wrote freely or not and whether they follow their preferred ways or teachers' ways, the observations of students' freedom of writing was done based on teachers' attitudes and their

actual words and directions towards students' writing process. In the autonomous group, Teacher A1 clearly asked students to maintain the structure of the newly explained structure in both observed classes. She explained to students that they should follow the structure of comparison paragraphs when writing about both problems and solutions. There were other 'correct', required ways to use different types of writing structures. For example, her structure included a problem and its solution in each body paragraph. A different approach would be to include all problems together in one body paragraph and then their solutions in a second body paragraph. However, students were not allowed to follow their preferred structures when writing. The teacher's determination to follow a specific structure could be due to exam criteria, which teachers previously mentioned were an institutional constraint that hindered the promotion of LA (see Section 1.1. Institutional constraints). During interviews, low and high proficiency students mentioned that they were always following the teacher's ways of writing because doing so guaranteed high grades. However, Teacher A1 indicated on the questionnaire that she always gave students freedom in their writing. Her practice however differed from her reported practices, although it was not clear why that was the case.

Teacher A2 followed a completely different approach to that of Teacher A1. Teacher A2 had a positive attitude towards students' freedom in writing in both observed classes. For example, while explaining task questions, she told students that they were free to use whatever structure they preferred as long as they produced well-written material. In the second observed class, one student asked the teacher whether it was acceptable to use another way to structure her paragraphs. The teacher told the student to follow whatever structure she preferred as long as the answer effectively addressed the question. In the student interviews, both high and low level students in this class revealed that they preferred to use the teacher's approach to writing, which contradicts the teacher's instructions to use their preferred ways

of writing. Thus, although the students were free to choose their approach in writing, they chose the safe path and followed the teacher's way. On the questionnaire, Teacher A2 indicated that she sometimes allowed her students to write freely.

In summary, a discrepancy emerged between the autonomous teachers. Although Teacher A1's actual practice inhibited students' freedom of writing, Teacher A2 encouraged it. Teacher A1's less autonomous practice regarding giving students freedom in writing might be due to her beliefs about the impact of freedom of writing on students' exam scores. Meanwhile, Teacher A2's encouragement of freedom of writing could be due to her beliefs regarding the significance of students' freedom in writing for improving writing.

In the non-autonomous groups, students were clearly asked to adhere to the teachers' writing structures. In both of her observed classes, Teacher NA1 asked students to follow the explained steps exactly and apply them to the writing task. Thus, the teacher gave no indication that students had freedom of writing; in both observed classes, she asked students to write only as they were taught in the lecture. Similarly, all interviewed students in the non-autonomous group agreed that maintaining their teachers' structure was better than writing freely. In the teacher questionnaire, Teacher NA1 stated that she rarely allowed her students to write freely whereas Teacher NA2 mentioned that she often allowed her students to write freely.

To summarise, only one autonomous teacher, Teacher A2, encouraged students to write freely, and in line with her stated practices. The remaining teachers demonstrated a non-autonomous approach towards writing and did not show any encouragement of students' freedom of writing.

**4.5.3.2. Participation in decision-making.** Students had many opportunities to participate in decision-making while learning writing, such as asking teachers about their

preferred ways of writing, their views on study materials, their opinions about the process, and the learning atmosphere. Students' participation in decision-making was assessed by observing negotiations between teachers and students. While observing the four classes, the researcher identified no discussion or negotiation between teachers and students about their interests, views, or preferences for learning writing. This could be due to the limited number of observations. However, the absence of participation in decision-making was also identified in student interviews when they mentioned that teachers made all learning decisions on their behalf. All interviewed students in both groups stated that teachers made their learning decisions, and the students believed this was better as teachers know best. In the teacher questionnaire, Teacher A1 indicated that she always allowed her students to participate in making decisions. Teacher A2 indicated that she often did so. Non-autonomous teachers stated they sometimes involved students in decision-making. These responses contradicted the students' interview responses and what was observed.

**4.5.3.3. *Setting learning goals.*** The class observations revealed no evidence of students setting their writing goals in either autonomous or non-autonomous groups. During the interviews, some students mentioned that their teachers worked with students to set lesson-related goals. However, the observation data revealed no support for these assertions. Again, this could be due to the limited number of observations as each class was observed only twice. However, in addition, six of the eight students interviewed in the two groups declared they did not set goals with their teachers. The autonomous teachers declared on the questionnaire that they always asked their students to set learning goals, whereas non-autonomous teachers reported rarely doing so.

**4.5.3.4. *Independent learning.*** The researcher observed students learning independently from teachers. The researcher looked for opportunities that teachers provided to encourage their students to independently look for new information, such as using learning

resources (e.g., e-dictionaries, English websites, peer and group discussions) to direct their own learning while their teachers acted as facilitators.

In the autonomous classes, Teacher A1's students experienced independent learning in both observed classes. For example, students participated in group discussions while completing the written task. They also used their mobile phones to find new words and information. Although the teacher presented the new lesson using the projector, students independently directed their own learning while working on the group task. Their teacher walked around the classroom and offered comments and feedback when asked. In the interview, Teacher A1 mentioned that she always used group-work activities to help her students direct their own learning. She also stated that she used technology to teach students writing. According to her questionnaire responses, she self-reported that she always allows students to take control over their learning. Meanwhile, Teacher A2 engaged students in a whole class discussion at the beginning of the lecture while she was presenting the new topic. Students kept discussing and building new information based on this discussion. This could be considered as a form of independent learning as students tried to learn from the learning opportunities offered. In addition, although the first observed class did not include group work, the teacher asked students to work on their writing tasks independently. She helped out those who asked for her guidance. The researcher observed that, as students worked on their writing tasks independently, they regularly used their mobile phones to check words and information they needed. In the second observed class, students participated in group work. They used their mobile phones to look for new information and discussed it together while working on the task. The teacher circulated throughout the classroom to make sure that all students engaged in the learning together. Furthermore, when she noticed mistakes in students' works, she asked questions, drawing students' attention to their mistakes. When students noticed their mistakes, she left them to work on them independently. During her

interview, she underscored the importance of collaborative activities. She also stated that she widely used technology in classes. When she responded to the questionnaire, she stated she always allowed students to take control when learning to write.

In summary, the observations indicated that autonomous teachers promoted LA in their writing classes by using independent learning techniques. They encouraged their students to take control over their learning and directed it by using technology, group work, and class discussion strategies.

As for the non-autonomous group, Teacher NA1 allowed independent learning in her first observed class. She asked students to practise group work, using e-dictionaries as a form of technology and group discussion while working on the writing task. Although she was a non-autonomous teacher, she used independent learning techniques very clearly in her first observed class. However, in her second observed class, the teaching method was completely traditional, and students were neither involved nor encouraged to control their own learning. The teacher presented and explained all information. No strategies or techniques encouraging independent learning were observed in the second class. There was no clear reason behind the significant discrepancy between Teacher NA1's two classes. As it was a non-autonomous class, the researcher expected to see a lack of autonomous techniques. However, two observations were not enough to judge the level of the autonomous environment of the class. During her interview, Teacher NA1 stated that she used collaborative activities when they were required in the textbook. In addition, she believed in the importance of grouping students for learning. Based on her questionnaire responses, she never let students take control over their learning. These responses also indicate a discrepancy with her practice of collaborative work.

Regarding NA2, the class was teacher-centred. Students worked on textbook tasks alone. They were not allowed to use e-dictionaries while working on their writing tasks.

Students were not involved in any kind of discussion (e.g., peer discussion, group discussion). Teacher NA2 told students to work on the writing task using their previous knowledge and the new lesson presented by her. Thus, the teacher encouraged memorisation as a way of learning. Moreover, she used the spoon-feeding method to teach students. Students had no opportunity to control their learning and learn independently. However, in the interview, Teacher NA2 stated she used collaborative work when the textbook required it. She also believed in the importance of technology in learning. Nevertheless, she did not mention whether she used technology or not in her classes. She also declared that her classes were more teacher-centred than student-centred. In the questionnaire responses, she indicated she never let students take control over their learning.

Overall, a discrepancy emerged among the observed classes of the non-autonomous group when it came to encouraging students to take responsibility for and control over their learning. The first non-autonomous class experienced independent learning in the first lesson, but not the second. In contrast, the second autonomous class was not exposed to any independent teaching strategies at all.

In general, the researcher observed evidence of efforts to promote LA among autonomous classes in the forms of encouraging students' independent learning and finding opportunities for students to direct their own learning without their full reliance on teachers. However, the non-autonomous group showed the least promotion of independent learning in their classes, with some variation across teachers.

**4.5.3.5. Planning.** Planning was assessed in the observations according to whether teachers promoted the use of planning before students engaged in writing in class. Planning included teachers' requests for and reminders to students to work on specific tasks before they started writing.

Teacher A1's first observed lecture was about comparisons. She clearly requested students to plan before writing. She orally repeated the structure of comparison paragraphs shown on the projector to the groups of students and reminded them to take 3 minutes to plan before they started writing. She made no mention of planning procedures, and students did not ask about how to plan, suggesting that students might have been introduced to planning as an autonomous writing technique in previous lectures. During the second lecture, after students grouped together to start working on their tasks about problems and solutions, their teacher again asked them to take 3 minutes to plan before they started writing.

Similarly, Teacher A2 asked students to take some time to brainstorm before they started writing. She did not give further details about the brainstorming technique, meaning she might have previously introduced students to brainstorming as a way of planning, especially as students raised no questions about how to do it. The second lecture's writing task was about laughter; students worked on it in groups. Once they were in their groups, students were told that the teacher would introduce a new planning method—namely, mind mapping. She drew a mind map on the board and asked students to participate in completing the mind map. She explained the significance of mind mapping before writing and how to do it. The whole class was involved in the discussion with the teacher and kept participating and adding ideas. After finishing the mind mapping, Teacher A2 asked students to spend five minutes doing their own mind maps. After five minutes, she asked them to start writing in groups based on the mind map they had drawn.

Overall, both autonomous teachers promoted planning in their classes. The planning took various forms, including structuring paragraphs, mind mapping, and brainstorming. During the interviews, a discrepancy was noted between students in the autonomous group in their planning use. Teacher A2's students clearly stated that they used planning based on the teachers' instructions whereas Teacher A1's students were inconsistent in their answers. In

the questionnaire, Teacher A1 indicated she always made her students plan before they started writing. Teacher A2 declared that she often did so.

On the other hand, no obvious evidence about incorporating planning in writing was observed in the non-autonomous classes, although in the second lesson Teacher NA1 made a quick revision about how to write the written task. She reminded students about the problem–solution paragraph structure, which was written on the board. She then informed them to follow that structure while writing. Students did not have the chance to plan their work themselves based on their interest and proficiency level. They were given a ready-made template which they had to complete with their information. Although the teacher gave her students a ready-made writing plan, that plan did not actively involve students in their learning. High proficiency students in the non-autonomous group indicated that they used planning in specific conditions (e.g., teachers’ instruction) in their interviews. However, low proficiency students indicated they did not use planning in their writing class. In the questionnaire, Teacher NA1 indicated she rarely made her students plan before they started writing whereas Teacher NA2 said she sometimes let her students plan.

To conclude, planning was promoted in autonomous classes by the teachers incorporating different teaching strategies, such as brainstorming. In contrast, non-autonomous classes did not practise planning during the observed lessons.

**4.5.3.6. Motivation.** During the interviews, teachers identified three factors that promote motivation: interesting topics, excitement for learning, and gradual improvement. The researcher observed interesting topics in autonomous teachers’ writing classes, as previously discussed (see section 4.4.2.2.). In addition, praise as a form of encouragement could be considered a technique that increases students’ motivation. The researcher frequently observed praise being used in the autonomous classes. Teacher A1 used oral praise, such as ‘well done’, ‘excellent job’, and ‘very good’; she also asked students to

applaud colleagues who answered correctly. These forms of praise were used twice in the first observed class and three times in the second observed class (two oral praises and one applause). Teacher A2 also used praise as a technique to enhance motivation. She used oral praise twice in each of the observed classes. Thus, both autonomous classes used techniques to enhance motivation, such as interesting topics and oral praise. The questionnaire responses indicated that Teachers A1 and A2 had very strong beliefs about the significance of motivation in developing LA. No interview data were available about motivation.

As for the non-autonomous class, Teacher NA1 changed the writing task to a more interesting one in the second observed class. She orally praised students twice in both observed classes. However, Teacher NA2 did not try to motivate her students in any way. Both Teachers NA1 and NA2 had a neutral response on the questionnaire when asked about the significance of motivation in promoting LA. No interview data were available about motivation from these teachers

Ultimately, observations indicated that motivation was mostly promoted by using techniques such as praise and interesting topics, which was evident in both autonomous classes and NA1. In contrast, NA2 showed no practice of any form of motivation at all.

**4.5.4. Feedback.** Feedback occurred in different ways, including group feedback, peer feedback, and teachers' feedback. The description of feedback types was based on observations during and after the students' completion of the written textbook task at the end of the lesson. In this section, group feedback within both groups is addressed first, followed by peer feedback and finally teachers' feedback.

The researcher observed group feedback in both of Teacher A1's observed lessons. In the first observed class, group feedback occurred after students worked on the written task in groups. The group feedback took a different form than exchanging written materials among groups. The teacher used her mobile phone to take a picture of every group's written work

and then showed four groups' written examples on the projector. Then, the teacher discussed the mistakes with the students. She also asked them to correct those mistakes together as a class discussion. In the second observed class, Teacher A1 asked students to exchange their written tasks with other groups. Each group worked collaboratively to correct other groups' mistakes and then returned the papers. Teacher A2's first observed class did not include any group feedback. However, in the second observed class, the teacher asked her students to work on the written tasks in groups and then exchange their papers to correct other groups' mistakes. Overall, the autonomous group used group feedback in writing classes in a positive way. Teacher A1 used a different form of delivering group feedback (i.e., showing groups' written work on the projector and discussing mistakes collaboratively) whereas Teacher A2 used exchanging papers as a form of group feedback.

In the non-autonomous group, Teacher NA1 asked groups to exchange their written work and correct each other's mistakes in the first observed class. However, in the second observed class, no group feedback was used. Teacher NA2 used no group feedback in either observed lesson.

In summary, group feedback was used inconsistently. The autonomous group was exposed to more group feedback than the non-autonomous group. Both groups used exchanging papers as a common form of group feedback. There was no mention of group feedback in teacher or student interviews or the teacher questionnaires.

Furthermore, none of the four classes practised peer feedback; this could be due to the limited number of observations. In the interviews, the autonomous group students stated that they regularly sought peer feedback. Students in the non-autonomous group provided mixed responses. NA2 Student H declared she did not use peer feedback unless the teacher asked her to. The remaining students did not provide clear responses about whether they used peer feedback because they wanted to or because their teachers instructed them to do so. The

teacher questionnaire also showed a lack of consistency related to peer feedback. For example, autonomous teachers indicated they always made their students practise peer feedback whereas Teachers NA1 and NA2, respectively, indicated that they sometimes and rarely used peer feedback in their classes.

Regarding teachers' feedback, autonomous teachers used class discussion as a way to provide feedback. Meanwhile, non-autonomous teachers collected students' papers at the end of the lecture to correct them. Teacher and student interviews mentioned types of teacher feedback on students' homework whereas the observational data focused on types of feedback given during class. The teacher questionnaire did not include types of teacher feedback during the lecture.

The data indicate an important difference among groups in terms of providing feedback. The autonomous classes seemed to embrace group feedback and teachers' feedback in the form of class discussion. The non-autonomous classes seemed to have much less practice with group feedback, and they did not use teachers' feedback during lectures. Finally, peer feedback was not observed during the lessons.

#### **4.6. Research Question 5**

*To what extent do learners develop an autonomous approach to writing within the two types of classrooms studied?*

To answer this question, interviews were conducted with eight students from the four previously selected classes (Appendix G, page 352). Two students from each class (autonomous and non-autonomous) were chosen based on their writing proficiency level, one with a high and one with a low level. This resulted in interviewing a total of eight students from the four classes. Students were selected based on their scores from the first draft of their first writing assignment, which was marked by their teachers and then checked by the

researcher to ensure consistency in the marking process. The researcher collected the 10 highest marks and the 10 lowest marks from each class and chose two learners for each proficiency level.

Interviews were conducted with the chosen students at the end of the semester. They were asked mainly about their writing process in the two class types. The first autonomous class was labelled A1, the second autonomous class A2, the first non-autonomous class NA1, and the second non-autonomous class NA2. To maintain anonymity, students were named after their group, class, and proficiency level. High-proficiency students were titled Student H and low-proficiency students were titled Student L. Thus, 'A1 Student H' refers to the high-proficiency student in the first autonomous class, while 'NA2 Student L' refers to the low-proficiency student in the second non-autonomous class.

Validity and reliability for students interviews analysis was checked by following the same procedures as those for teacher interviews. A codebook was created and went through three rounds (see section 3.12.1.2.). After the reliability and validity of these codes were checked, three main themes emerged: pre-writing strategies, during-writing strategies, and post-writing strategies. The themes, sub-themes, and codes are listed in Table 4.41.

**Table 4.41***Writing Strategies*

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes	Definition
Pre-writing strategies	Planning	Brainstorming	A way to gather and generate ideas used before writing starts.
		Timeline of writing	A way of arranging ideas and setting a possible timing to work on a written task by allocating time to work on each paragraph.
		Random writing	When students write randomly without any planning before writing starts.
	Goal setting	Personal goals	Personal goals are based on students' needs and interests.
		Lesson-related goals	Goals set by teachers based on the curriculum and related to achieving lesson goals.
		Goal-setting opportunities	Chances given by teachers for students to express goals based on their needs and interests.
	Decision-making	Level of confidence	Students' level of confidence about their teachers always being right about learning decisions they make.
		Ultimate goal	Students' reasons for completing the unity task.
		Neglecting students' needs	Teachers' decisions which are only lesson-related and do not consider students' needs, strengths, and weaknesses.
During-writing strategies	Freedom of writing	Staying safe	When students prefer to write following their teachers' methods to avoid making mistakes.
		Evaluation criteria	List of assessment points teachers follow, assigned by the deanery to correct students' written work.
		Rote memorising	When students memorise their teachers' linguistic structures and try to apply them on written tasks.
	Group work	Learning actively	When students are engaged in their learning process by grouping to work on a written task together.
		Excitement in learning	Joyful and interesting learning atmosphere among students when working as groups on a written task.
		Sharing information	Students working together to share information, exchange ideas, and correct each other's mistakes.
	Technology use	Using electronic devices	When electronic devices such as e-dictionaries and projectors are used as tools to promote LA among students.

		Flexible learning	Students learn chances based on their time, proficiency level, interests, and needs.
		Independent learning	When students depend on their own use of technology to learn/work on a written task without the need to learn from teachers.
	Assessment	Teachers' role in correcting mistakes	Students' perceptions of teachers' role in providing direct correction as it is teachers' job to teach and correct the students.
		Revision	Students' revising their written work before submitting it to the teacher
		Personal writing goals	When students have personal goals based on their interests and needs, and they evaluate their work by themselves in order to achieve those goals.
Post-writing strategies	Written corrective feedback	Direct feedback	When teachers directly provide a correction for their students' mistakes.
		Indirect feedback	When teachers provide codes showing the error type or draw lines under the mistake so that students can look for the correction by themselves.
		Inability to use feedback	When students do not react to their teachers' feedback and never look for corrections based on their teachers' feedback.
		Avoiding uncertainty	When students prefer their teachers' direct correction on mistakes rather than indirect ones that require the students to search for the correction by themselves.

**4.6.1. Pre-writing strategies.** As mentioned above, students were named after their class and level of writing proficiency. In the following section, analysis of the autonomous classes is conducted first, followed by an analysis of the non-autonomous classes.

Differences between the two groups are then discussed.

In the phase of pre-writing, a few strategies—such as planning, goal setting, and decision-making—arose among students.

**4.6.1.1. Planning.** As for the autonomous group, the high-level student (A1 Student H) in the first autonomous class agreed that planning before writing was an important strategy she used: *'Yes, I do [plan] and I do a timeline to help me arrange my writing by starting with important things like main ideas, introduction and conclusion, and related thoughts'*. For her, planning helped her properly manage time to ensure she was adding main ideas and structuring her paragraphs well. This indicated she was aware of the importance of planning. She had positive beliefs and practices in terms of LA. On the other hand, the high-level student from the second autonomous group (A2 Student H) did not practise planning unless required to, saying, *'I do sometimes when my teacher tells us to do so'*. Even though she was a high-proficiency student and studied in an autonomous class, she engaged in less practice of this autonomous strategy than A1 Student H, showing there was no consistency in planning practices between the autonomous classes among high-level students.

As for low-level students in the autonomous group, A1 Student L said, *'No, I write randomly. Because I think I will lose time planning'*. This previous quote could indicate she was unaware of the meaning and concept of planning as she thought she would lose time if she planned. On the contrary, though, planning helps students arrange ideas, which eventually saves time during the writing.

In response to the same question, A2 Student L said, *'I usually don't, but when our teacher asks us to, I try to arrange my ideas and do brainstorming'*. The fact that she said

she would plan and brainstorm if asked by her teacher indicated she could have a positive attitude towards these practices. Overall, the answers of the four students showed that there was a discrepancy in attitudes and practices towards planning. A2 Student H and A2 Student L seemed similar to each other.

In the non-autonomous group, both high-level students reported that they used planning. The student in the first autonomous class said, *'If it's a school subject, I do. If I want to write in general, I don't'*. This indicated she had prior knowledge of planning and practised it for school subjects. However, it was unclear why she would plan for school-related writing but not for general writing. The other high-level student in the second autonomous class stated, *'If I have time and the teacher asked me to do it, I do'*. She mentioned she would practise planning as an autonomous writing strategy under some conditions, such as having enough time and if the teacher asked her to do it. This indicated planning was not a priority for her while working on a writing task. In addition, it indicated she believed planning takes time, which is not necessarily true since planning saves time as it allows for arranging ideas at the beginning to keep the writing process smooth (Reeve, 2005).

According to these high-level students within the non-autonomous group, planning was used in specific circumstances, such as having enough time, planning for a school-related written task, or upon the teacher's request. However, both low-level students in the non-autonomous group said they did not use planning as a strategy before writing, without giving reasons. Overall, then, it could be said that high-level students within the non-autonomous group practised planning, but low-level students did not. It could thus be concluded that the level of writing proficiency had a relationship with planning as an autonomous writing strategy. Moreover, when comparing the autonomous and non-autonomous groups, it emerged that students in the former were more exposed to planning than the latter.

**4.6.1.2. Goal setting.** Setting goals is an autonomous writing strategy implemented by students alone or with their teachers before writing in order to make them aware of their needs and writing goals. Goals could be personal related to students' goals or general goals related to writing lessons set by teachers. Regarding goal setting, A1 Student H said, *'Yes, we do. Our teacher makes us remember the goal during the lecture. Those goals are related to our lesson'*. This indicated that students were reminded of the lesson goals throughout the lesson. Moreover, according to the previous quote, these goals were general and related to the lessons, not to students' personal writing goals. General goals of this type indicated that students' writing needs were less important than goals for the class as a whole. Even though students practised setting goals, it was the teacher who decided the learning goal. A2 Student H had a different response: *'I don't do that. Because I am very good at English writing, so I feel I don't need to'*. This showed she did not set goals as she thought she was good enough not to need to use this strategy. It further indicated a belief that setting goals leads to improving writing skills. However, based on her quote, she also believed that setting goals was unnecessary for high-proficiency students.

When asked about goal setting and whether they used it, both low-level students in the autonomous group said they did not. Even though A1 Student H mentioned previously that she used the goals set by her teacher, A1 Student L, who was in the same class, said she did not adopt her teacher's goals. This negative answer could be due to lack of motivation because of being a low-level student. It could also indicate that lesson-related goals were not important to students as the goals did not tackle their needs and interests.

Low-level students in the non-autonomous group declared they had never set goals with their teachers. This was to be expected as their teachers were non-autonomous. However, NA1 Student H said, *'I don't with my teacher. But I do by myself'*. Her answer could indicate that her teacher did not try to introduce students to goal-setting strategies or

discuss writing goals. Nevertheless, she was positive about goal setting and independently used it, which highlighted her awareness of goal setting as an autonomous writing strategy. This could be connected to her writing skill level. As a high-level student, she was more motivated to independently use autonomous writing strategies. It could therefore be suggested that students' autonomy could be developed in spite of what teachers do due to high proficiency levels.

In general, apart from two students who set writing goals, most students in the two groups neither set writing goals nor were exposed to set them by teachers, according to students' answers in the interviews. Moreover, it could be deduced that none of the non-autonomous teachers practised setting goals with their students, nor did they teach their students about it. Only one autonomous teacher was reported by students to set goals with them, but these were related to the lesson and not to students' writing needs.

**4.6.1.3. Decision-making.** Making decisions about students' ways of writing was discussed with students. Such decisions could be made based on negotiation between teachers and their students about following specific writing structures and models. Students should be involved in making decisions about their preferred ways of writing, and teachers should address students' needs, strengths, and weaknesses while negotiating with them about their preferences (Nunan, 1996). However, it emerged from students that teachers seemed to be making all the decisions on students' behalf. Thus, when asked who made the decisions, A1 Student H said, *'The teacher does. The advantages are fewer mistakes and sometimes teachers' ways are more helpful and make us make a few mistakes rather than a lot of them. And she always knows best'*. Even though her teacher was an autonomous teacher who might have been expected to encourage students' freedom of writing, the teacher made decisions about their learning. The student believed that teachers always know best and that following her teachers' ways ensured she made fewer mistakes. Even though this was a high-level

student in an autonomous class, she was unable to make decisions about her writing and thus lost an opportunity to learn more about her strengths and weaknesses and how to independently overcome writing obstacles. A2 Student H responded in a similar fashion:

*My teacher. She knows best as she teaches us how we can achieve a good score. I can write my own way, but I get afraid I'll lose marks if I haven't followed her way as she has a specific writing rubric.*

From this quotation, this student appeared to have had the chance to write freely using her preferred way but chose her teacher's way because she was afraid of losing marks. The answers of the two students showed that, even though these were high-level students in autonomous classes, they preferred to follow their teachers when making decisions about their own writing. The students also did not believe in themselves as much as they believed in their teachers. There could be a number of reasons for this. For example, it could be due to students' lack of confidence and their perceived need to adopt a safe strategy.

Alternatively, it could be due to teachers not encouraging students to make decisions on their own and write freely.

As for low-level students within the autonomous group, A1 Student L answered, *'The teacher does. She knows the best decision for us. And her decisions are always correct'*. Meanwhile, A2 Student L said, *'The teacher does. She gives us the most important things we have to include in our writing so we can guarantee good grades in exams'*. This made it clear that all autonomous teachers made decisions about their students' learning without paying attention to students' needs, strengths, and weaknesses. Thus, even the autonomous teachers believed they were in charge and that their decisions were better for their students than the students' own decisions. Students of both high- and low-proficiency levels were convinced that teachers' decisions were good for the students' ability to pass exams.

Turning to the non-autonomous group, NA1 Student H mentioned an interesting combination about making decisions about her writing: *'I make my decision based on the teacher's decision and try to combine them. Because I can write better if I do it freely my way, and I can guarantee scores by following the teacher's guidelines'*. She was the only student of the eight who actually independently made decisions, believing that by combining her own and her teacher's ways she could improve her writing. She might have combined both ways because she was aware of her strengths and weaknesses. Following the teachers' ways could also ensure she did not lose marks. This practice showed that the student was confident about her skills and did not fully rely on her teacher. For her part, when answering the same question about participating in decision making, NA2 Student H replied, *'The teacher. It's good that she gives us what helps us in our subject. It isn't good as sometimes we have needs the teacher doesn't care about, like our difficulties in writing'*. This response clearly showed that the student was aware of the importance of participating, alongside her teacher, in decisions about her own writing. She also added that students' needs were neglected when teachers made decisions without students' participation. Nevertheless, although the student suggested it was not always right for teachers to make decisions, she mentioned they had to follow their teachers' ways as they were helpful for passing the writing course.

Regarding low-level students in the non-autonomous class, both students said the teacher was responsible. NA1 Student L specified this was *'because she follows guidelines which help us pass the subject'*, while NA2 Student L answered that it was because *'she knows better than us'*. Both students clearly stated they were satisfied with their teachers making writing-related decisions on their behalf as they believed their teachers understood their needs better than they did.

Overall, the students' answers highlighted that teachers from both groups made decisions about their students' writing. There were no significant differences between students of different proficiency levels regarding their role and that of their teacher in making decisions about the students' writing. There was no mention of participation or negotiation between students and their teachers about students' preferred ways of writing. In addition, the teachers, even the autonomous ones, neither attempted to introduce their students to decision-making strategies nor practised such strategies with students. All students reported their satisfaction when their teachers made decisions on their behalf as they believed that following the teacher's decision would guarantee them passing the writing course. A possible reason for not implementing decision-making strategies in writing classes could be teachers' lack of confidence about their students' independence and ability to independently make decisions. Furthermore, students' primary goal of passing the writing course made them follow their teachers as this could guarantee success. Finally, it could be said, according to students' answers, which clearly showed they were sure their teachers were always right, that the old habit of reliance on teachers from previous educational stages may have made students unaware of their own role in independently leading their learning and left them still believing that teachers are knowledge providers.

**4.6.2. During-writing strategies.** Based on students' interviews, 'during writing' included three strategies: freedom of writing, group working, and using technology. As previously mentioned, autonomous group responses are firstly discussed, followed by the non-autonomous group responses. Differences between both groups are then addressed.

**4.6.2.1. Freedom of writing.** There are more than two ways for students to work on a writing task. One is to write freely using their preferred ways of writing, such as using their own structure and own language without following any model, and the other is to keep to the teacher's linguistic structure and guidelines, such as what content to include. Writing freely

is considered an autonomous writing technique as it gives students a chance to practise writing by using their knowledge to independently improve their skills. They have the opportunity to direct their own learning without being forced to follow only what they already know and have been taught. In the interviews, there were a few discrepancies between students with regard to their perspectives about writing freely or following their teacher's linguistic structure. In the autonomous group, A1 Student H said, *'I think it is better to do both because I can improve myself by trying to write with new structures and stay safe by using the teachers' structures as they are always correct'*. Her words indicated an awareness of the importance of independent writing for improving her writing skills. Nevertheless, she believed it was also important to follow the teachers' structures as this would keep her safe and ensure she properly performed the task. Similarly, A2 Student H stated that she was afraid to lose marks if she did not follow the teachers' structures: *'Yes, it is always good to stick to teachers' structures because the teacher has an evaluation form which includes what teachers have given to us. So I want to get good grades by following her structures'*.

As for the low-level students in the autonomous group, they also preferred to follow teachers' structures. However, one of them, A1 Student L, mentioned a reason for writing freely: *'I prefer to follow [the] teacher's structures to guarantee grades. But I don't remember them, and that's why I write randomly'*. Even though this student indicated she wrote randomly, the main reason was not to direct her own learning but because she could not remember her teacher's structure while writing. Her quote indicated that she used memorising in learning, and when she forgot her teacher's structure, she wrote randomly. This showed that memorising as a traditional learning method is not always a good approach. In general, all students within the autonomous group preferred following their teachers' methods rather than writing freely.

In the non-autonomous group, both high- and low-proficiency students agreed that following teachers' structures was better than directing their own writing. NA1 Student L gave the following reason: *'Sticking to the teacher's structure is better. But I cannot do that, so I write using my own structure'*. She mentioned her low proficiency level was an obstacle for not being able to follow teachers' structures. It could therefore be said that low-proficiency level and dependence on memorising while learning were obstacles for not following teachers' structures.

Overall, most students in both groups showed positivity towards following their teachers' linguistic structures rather than writing independently based on the students' own needs, strengths, and weaknesses. The main reason students gave for this positivity was that they felt teachers were always correct and that this would guarantee the students correctly completed the task. They thought that if instead they wrote freely using their preferred way, they would not be assured of correctly doing the task and thus passing the course. Based on their responses, it could be said that the habit of reliance on teachers and considering them as the only knowledge providers was still an issue for students. They showed more confidence in their teachers than in themselves; that might be because they had not been given opportunities to independently direct their own learning in previous educational levels.

**4.6.2.2. Group work.** Group work appeared as a strategy teachers used in their writing classes to make students more engaged in the process of learning to write in English. All students mentioned they experienced group work while working on written tasks in their classrooms. Working in groups enables students to learn actively together by collectively involving them while working on their written tasks (Thawabieh, 2017). High-level students within the autonomous group were very positive towards group work. A1 Student H stated, *'Sharing information is always helpful. I sometimes get new information and am able to write correctly through the help of others'*. Similarly, A2 Student H said, *'Yes. Because it*

*excites us and makes it easy for us to learn and share knowledge*'. These quotations indicated the students were positive towards working in groups as they had the opportunity to correct each other and share information, and they also found it stimulating. It could be said, therefore, those students found an active learning environment helpful and enjoyable. Low-level students in the autonomous group agreed that group work was helpful for similar reasons. A1 Student L said it was because group work *'minimises mistakes and we benefit from each other'*, and A2 Student L said it was because *"we can avoid mistakes and share our information and learn from each other"*. These quoted showed that being actively involved in the writing process through group work gave low-level students new learning opportunities, which included being able to minimise making mistakes, learning from each other, and sharing information.

As for the non-autonomous group, high-level students were positive towards group work for the same reasons as the autonomous group students. Especially, these students believed that working in groups made them more aware of mistakes they did not know about. The high-proficiency students respectively said the benefits were *'to have new ideas and correct mistakes we didn't know existed'* (NA1 Student H) and *'sharing information and correcting mistakes'* (NA2 Student H). However, low-proficiency students stated that group work did not help them improve their writing skills. According to NA1 Student L, group work *'helps the teacher with time'*. Although her non-autonomous teacher used this strategy with students, the student was not fully aware of the possible advantages from working in groups. She considered group work only as a method her teacher used to properly manage time. Similarly, NA2 Student L mentioned she did group work only *'because the teacher tells us to'*. These two quotations suggested that low-level students in the non-autonomous group lacked awareness about the advantages of working in groups. Moreover, the quotes

indicated that, even though students were exposed to group work, they did not see its benefits, unlike the other students.

In general, all high-level students within the two groups agreed that group work was beneficial for learning writing for a number of reasons, including excitement, sharing knowledge, and correcting each other's mistakes. All of these reasons helped students become active learners and thus take control over their learning, in their own view. Only low-proficiency students within the non-autonomous class were unaware of the significance of group work in improving their writing skills. Overall, all students stated that their teachers practised group work in teaching writing, indicating that this autonomous writing strategy was widely used by both autonomous and non-autonomous teachers.

**4.6.2.3. Technology use.** Using technology was mentioned by students as a strategy that helped with their writing. Most students agreed they used e-dictionaries. The high-proficiency students in the autonomous group respectively stated that they used '*online websites to get new information and e-dictionaries*' (A1 Student H) and '*spelling checkers, grammar corrector websites, and e-dictionaries. It makes it easy to learn whenever and however I want without the need for teachers*' (A2 Student H). A2 Student H mentioned she preferred using such strategies in learning writing because technology helped her learn independently, in her favourite ways and at times that suited her.

As for the low-level students in the autonomous group, they also reported using e-dictionaries while working on written tasks. A1 Student L said she used '*e-dictionaries to know the meaning of difficult words*' and A2 Student L that she used '*e-dictionaries when the teacher asks us about the meaning and sometimes spelling of new words*'. Even these low-level students mentioned they used technology in learning. According to them, it was a strategy to use when they wanted to learn something new. These quotations suggested students have a level of independence from their teachers in learning writing.

In the non-autonomous group, high-proficiency students had positive attitudes towards using technology during writing. NA1 Student H said she used e-dictionaries to learn new words and their meanings, that she used an '*e-dictionary to correct my spelling sometimes*'. This showed that the high-proficiency students used e-dictionaries to avoid mistakes. However, low-proficiency students stated they did not use technology when writing. This fact could indicate that high-proficiency students were more positive towards using technologies to independently direct their learning. It also showed that low-proficiency students were either unaware of the benefits of technology when learning writing or were not encouraged to use it.

In general, most students in both groups were positive towards using technology in writing as they felt it helped them learn independently. Overall, technology in its different forms was widely used among most of students from the different autonomous groups. Most students were also aware of its usage and benefits in directing their own learning. However, low-level students in the non-autonomous group were unfamiliar with using technology when learning writing.

**4.6.3. Post autonomous writing.** The phase of post autonomous writing included using assessment and written corrective back as techniques employed after finishing writing the written task to evaluate the written work and correct it.

**4.6.3.1. Assessment.** In the interview, while discussing students' awareness and practice of autonomous writing techniques, assessment as a technique was directly asked about. Assessment is considered a key factor in clarifying students' writing goals and making them aware of their progress (Farahani, 2014). It is a process where students' writing performance is evaluated. There are many types of assessment, such as peer and group assessments, but only self-assessment and teachers' assessment are discussed here as they were the only types mentioned by the students. There were different perspectives and

practices of this technique among students. In the autonomous group, A1 Student H said of self-assessment that she *'rarely do[es]. I don't have time and because our teacher always corrects our mistakes'*. This statement suggested she was unaware of self-assessment and its benefits as a writing technique. Additionally, she was unaware of her role in assessing her writing progress, outcomes, and main goals, and she relied on her teacher to correct her mistakes. The statement also indicated that, in her opinion, her teacher was responsible for correcting students' mistakes. When asked about assessment as a writing strategy, the high-level student in the second autonomous group, A2 Student H, said the following: *'Yes, I sometimes do [assess my written work]. When the written assignment isn't easy, I revise my work by using dictionaries and asking peers. I think in the future it would be good not to make the same mistakes again'*. The quotation showed a clear understanding of self-assessment. Even though she mentioned she used self-assessment mainly in revision, revision could be used while evaluating the progress of her writing. According to her, asking peers was also crucial when using assessment as it helped improve written work. Finally, she mentioned she had a writing goal, which was to avoid committing the same mistakes. It could therefore be indicated that having writing goals has a relationship with self-assessment as she self-assessed her work only because she had a goal, which was to become a better writer. However, this relationship was less clear among low-proficiency students than among high-proficiency students.

On the other hand, low-level students in the autonomous group did not self-assess their written work. A1 Student L stated, *'I don't. English is difficult for me and it will take me ages to learn it, that's why I just want to pass this subject'*. This quotation indicated that being a low-proficiency student was connected to not conducting writing self-assessments. In addition, the quotation showed she had a short-term learning goal, passing the subject, which further suggested she did not care about using writing techniques that would help her

direct her own learning. Another low-level student in an autonomous class, A2 Student L, stated, *'I usually don't. Because I write and give it to my teacher to correct'*. Her statement clearly showed how she counted on her teacher to evaluate her progress. It also indicated a narrow practice of assessment by both the student and her teacher because assessment is a process of judgment, evaluation, and modification of strategies in order to reach writing goals (Farahani, 2014).

High-level students in the non-autonomous group indicated they practised self-assessment. When asked whether she practised assessment, NA1 Student H said, *'Yes, I usually do with all my assignments. I can learn and discover more about my mistakes if I revise them and avoid making them again'*. NA2 Student H, for her part, said, *'I sometimes do. If I have a graded assignment to submit, I try to revise it before submitting it to the teacher'*. These statements indicated that, even though they were taught in non-autonomous classes, the two students were independent enough to assess their written work by themselves. The students also declared they had a self-assessment goal, which was evaluating their progress and making changes in order to produce a good piece of writing. As for the low-level students in the non-autonomous groups, they said they did not use assessment as a writing technique. This fact could indicate that writing proficiency level affected students' practice of self-assessment.

In general, there were many different perspectives regarding assessment in writing. What was mainly noticed was that high-level students in the non-autonomous group were more autonomous than those in the autonomous group. High-proficiency students in the non-autonomous group and A2 Student H showed positive practices of self-assessment which were mainly related to revision. However, even though the high-proficiency students mentioned they practised self-assessment for their personal goals, there was no mention of their teachers' role in showing students how to use self-assessment. On the other hand, low-

level students and A1 Student H believed it was their teachers' job to correct their mistakes. Their reasons for not using assessment in writing were mainly related to their short-term learning goals and blurred perspective about their role and their teachers' role in assessment as a writing technique.

**4.6.3.2. Written corrective feedback.** Written corrective feedback was mentioned as a strategy used by students which might or might not involve autonomous behaviour. Written corrective feedback was delivered to students by another party, such as their teacher or their peers, after students completed the written task in order to judge, correct, and comment on the quality of their written work. Two types of written feedback were mentioned by students: peer feedback and teacher feedback. Students also discussed their perspectives on these two types of feedback and their ways of responding to corrective feedback. Below, students' responses to teacher feedback are first analysed, and then their responses to peer feedback are analysed.

High-level students in the autonomous group declared they sought their teachers' corrective feedback as this made them aware of mistakes they did not know about. A1 Student H said, *'I respond [to the teacher's feedback] positively as I underline the feedback and go back to it to stop me from making the same mistake again'*. A2 Student H, meanwhile, said, *'I try to learn more about the mistake, so I don't make it again. And sometimes if I don't understand it, I ask my teacher about it'*. These statements suggested that both students were aware of the importance of teacher feedback in improving their written work. However, neither student showed a great sense of self-directed learning; the first student only revised her mistakes, and the second asked her teacher instead of independently looking for the information.

As for the low-level students in the autonomous groups, they had different perspectives on the direct corrective feedback provided by their teachers. A1 Student L, said,

*'She gives us the corrections for each mistake. I read her correction and I sometimes don't know why it was corrected this way'*. A2 Student L, for her part, said, *'I get direct feedback, and I like it because it gives the correction without the need to guess the correction, and my correction might be wrong even if corrected my mistake'*. This statement made it clear that their autonomous teachers used direct corrective feedback when responding to students' mistakes. Also, according to A1 Student L, direct feedback was not always helpful as she did not always understand why her teacher gave certain corrections for her mistakes. Based on their responses, it was not very clear what students do with the feedback to ultimately render it effective. However, there appeared to be greater autonomy among high-level students rather than low-level students of the autonomous group.

As for the students in the non-autonomous classes, they all stated they preferred receiving direct feedback from their teachers, but for different reasons. The students also mentioned how they responded to this type of feedback. When the high-level students were asked about their preferred form of feedback, NA Student H said, *'Direct feedback as it makes it easier for me to know the correction'*, and NA2 Student H said, *'Direct feedback because it clearly shows what the correction is'*. These responses demonstrated that, although they were high-level students, they preferred direct feedback as it was easy to know the correction, and there was no need to depend on their own actions to look for the information. About responding to teachers' direct feedback, NA1 Student H said, *'I just read it and familiarise myself with it in order to avoid making the mistake again'*, while NA2 Student H said, *'I read it and learn where my type of mistake was to avoid it'*. These responses showed that the students processed feedback at a surface level compared to how the autonomous high-proficiency students process it. They further suggested that the students had a level of autonomous learning as they tried to take responsibility for their learning to avoid making the same mistakes again.

As for the low-proficiency students, they had different perspectives about their teachers' feedback. Even though they both agreed they preferred teachers' direct feedback, they did not show a strong response. NA Student L said, *'To be honest, I don't do anything. Those mistakes never happen again. I keep making new mistakes, so it never ends'*. For her part, NA2 Student L said, *'I don't do anything. I don't know why'*. These responses showed the two students did not bother to respond to this type of feedback.

Overall, teachers' direct written corrective feedback was preferred by all students in both groups. All teachers in both groups used direct feedback, according to the interviewees. Students had different reasons and responses to it. All students except the low-level students in the non-autonomous group mentioned they familiarised themselves with their mistakes. From this, it could be suggested that proficiency level plays an important role in the response to direct teacher feedback as it enables students to take responsibility for their learning. Students were asked about types of written corrective feedback. However, there was no mention of other preferred or used types of written corrective feedback, such as coded and indirect feedback.

As for peer feedback, there were discrepancies among autonomous group students. Even though they sought peer feedback to different extents, they mostly had the same reasons for seeking it. A1 Student H said, *'I always do. Because we can share our experience and help each other present good written work'*. A2 Student H, however, said, *'Sometimes I do. To share information and help each other'*. A1 Student L had a similar response, saying, *'Sometimes. Because I want her to help me and correct my mistakes'*. A2 Student L, meanwhile, said, *'Sometimes they are better than me so I can have my writing free of mistakes because of their information'*.

As could be seen, then, both high- and low-proficiency students in the autonomous groups sought peer feedback on a regular basis. The main difference between high- and low-

proficiency students was that high-level students felt positively about peer feedback because it helped them help each other and share information, whilst low-level students felt positively about it because it helped them avoid making mistakes. It could be said that proficiency level affected the reasoning behind preferring peer feedback. Moreover, A1 Student H indicated she always used peer feedback, while the other students mentioned they only sometimes did. This could indicate that A1 Student H had benefited from peer feedback more than the others.

However, it was unclear whether the autonomous teachers asked students to do so or whether it was done of their own accord. The responses showed that students were aware of the peer feedback strategy and its advantages. Additionally, the responses showed that students were responsible for directing their own learning using autonomous types of written corrective feedback.

Non-autonomous group students, meanwhile, sought peer feedback to a different extent. NA1 Student H responded, *'Yes [ I seek peer feedback]. Because she might be better than me and can correct my mistakes. Sometimes our peers' words stick in our minds more than teachers'*. NA2 Student H said, *'Usually not. But if the teacher asks us to do it, we do'*. NA1 Student L, for her part, said, *'Not always. When I have an assignment to submit, I try to ask my peers to correct my work, so I can have a decent grade on that'*. However, NA2 Student L simply said *'no'*.

Overall, in the non-autonomous group, there was no consistency between high- and low-proficiency students regarding the use of peer feedback. The responses indicated that students' proficiency level of autonomy-promoting practices might be reasons for this inconsistency. Notably, teachers' practice of asking students to provide peer feedback was not the main reason behind students' seeking peer feedback. This fact was supported by comments from students in the first non-autonomous class. Both high- and low-level students in that class indicated they sought peer feedback and believed it was helpful for their

own reasons, such as learning from peers and correcting mistakes to have better grades. Regarding high- and low-level students in the second non-autonomous class, they sought peer feedback less than the first class; the high-level student indicated she only used peer feedback if asked by her teacher, while the low-level student indicated she did not use peer feedback. In general, students in the non-autonomous group showed they used peer feedback less frequently than the autonomous group students. This could indicate that the teachers' levels of autonomous practices might be a reason for students using peer feedback as an autonomous strategy as part of written corrective feedback.

To conclude, it could be seen that discrepancies existed among students in their approaches to autonomous writing within both groups. Students' writing proficiency level seemed to have a strong connection with practising autonomous writing strategies and techniques. However, even though teachers' practices of such autonomous strategies appeared to have a big impact on students' autonomous experience, in some areas, students in the non-autonomous group were exposed to autonomous strategies almost the same amount as students in the autonomous group. For example, in using technology, high-level students in the non-autonomous group indicated they used technology almost to the same degree as high-level students in the autonomous group. Regarding group work, high-level students in both groups had the same awareness about its significance. Finally, planning was used by high-level students in both groups and included many forms and levels, such as revision.

#### **4.7. Research Question 6**

*In what ways does learner writing develop in autonomous and non-autonomous classes?*

To answer this question, the researcher collected three writing samples from eight students from the four previously selected classes. Two students were chosen from each class (autonomous and non-autonomous), for a total of eight students, based on their writing

proficiency level; one showed a high level of proficiency, while the other showed a low level. Proficiency levels were determined based on students' scores on the first draft of their first writing assignment, as marked by their teachers. The researcher then verified the scores to ensure consistency in the marking process by following the same marking criteria given by the deanery to the teachers on papers. The researcher collected the 10 highest marks and 10 lowest marks from each class, listed all marks in order, and then picked one student from the very top and one from the very bottom to represent the high and low proficiency levels, respectively. The researcher collected writing samples from the chosen students three times during the semester: at the beginning (October 2018), in the middle (November 2018), and at the end (December, 2018), with a different topic addressed at each time point. The first topic was *favourite sport*, the second was *I need a vacation*, and the last was *laughter*.

In order to have a broader view on the development of students' writing over time in both groups, data from students' writing samples were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Based on the literature and previous knowledge, the researcher had predetermined categories for the analysis process of written mistakes.

**4.7.1. Qualitatively analysing students' written mistakes.** This section covers the qualitative analysis of students' writing samples. It discusses the types of feedback teachers provided to their students and the nature of students' mistakes. Furthermore, it sheds light on missing writing criteria by teachers and students' mistakes which were neglected by their teachers. A deductive approach was followed when qualitatively analysing writing samples. As mentioned earlier, the researcher had predetermined categories for the analysis process of written mistakes. Therefore, a deductive analysis involved the researcher looking for specific categories as they were found in the collected data. As the writing samples were already in a written and textual form, the researcher initiated the analysis by getting familiar with the data. This phase included highlighting, labelling, and making marginal notes on the writing

samples. She then manually categorised all writing samples with the same process used for coding. All categories were used to create codes with definitions. In order to check the reliability, categories with all samples were sent to a peer reviewer who was an EFL lecturer at a Saudi university. The researcher and the peer reviewer checked the overlaps in the categories and texts and made changes based on discussion. Once the reliability had been checked, two main categories emerged from the samples: types of teachers' responses to students' writing and types of students' written mistakes (Table 4.42).

**Table 4.42***Categories, Sub-categories, and Codes of the Analysed Texts*

Category	Sub-Category	Code	Definition
Types of teachers' responses to students' writing	Corrective feedback	Direct corrective feedback	Teachers' written corrections to students' mistakes.
		Indirect corrective feedback	Underlining written mistakes indicating an occurrence of a mistake.
	Missing writing criteria	Word count	Students were required to write between 50 and 80 words.
		Task completion	Teachers' comments regarding whether students kept to the main required idea of the task.
	Final score	Teachers' final grade on students' writing.	
Types of students' written mistakes	Mistakes addressed by teachers	Spelling	A typographical error made by students when typing their words.
		Grammar	A misplaced modifier, an inappropriate verb tense, subject-verb disagreement, and sentence fragments.
		Punctuation	Missing marks (e.g., full stop, comma, and brackets) used in writing to separate sentences and their elements, and to clarify meaning.
	Mistakes neglected by teachers	Capitalisation	Starting names and first words in each sentence with small letters.
		Vocabulary range	Limited use of vocabulary and continually repeating the same words.
		Coherence	The connection of ideas.

*4.7.1.1. Teachers' responses to students' writing.* The analysis showed the types of written corrective feedback, including both direct and indirect feedback, that teachers gave and writing criteria required by the deanery from teachers but not addressed by teachers. The writing criteria were attached to each written task; teachers, after correcting students' writing, were required to indicate how fully students met the criteria. Teachers had to indicate word count, comment on task completion, and note the final score to inform students of how well they followed the writing criteria.

*4.7.1.1.1. Teachers' corrective feedback.* Teachers provided two main types of written corrective feedback to their students: direct and indirect feedback. Both autonomous and non-autonomous teachers made their students deliver two drafts of their writing assignments, so two drafts of 24 writing samples were collected. The analysis of all teachers' corrections was made based exclusively on students' first drafts as second drafts did not include any teachers' comments, only a big tick sign to indicate completion. Students incorporated all of their teachers' corrections in the second drafts. In this section, autonomous teachers' corrections are addressed first, followed by the non-autonomous teachers' corrections.

Teacher A1 provided indirect corrective feedback to both high- and low-proficiency students for the first two written assignments; for the third one, direct corrective feedback was provided via corrections above the mistakes. For example, the teacher underlined two words in the phrase "my favourite sport is Basketball" in the low-level student's first paper, indicating that the first word needed a capital letter while basketball should start with a lowercase letter. For the high-level student, the teacher underlined a spelling mistake in the phrase 'players come clouser when they play'. Teacher A1 provided indirect feedback without giving a code indicating the type of error. The students needed to present the second drafts with corrections based on the indirect feedback detailed above. For the third topic,

laughter, Teacher A1 provided direct written corrective feedback to both high- and low-proficiency students. For instance, the high-proficiency student made the following grammatical mistake in her sentence: ‘When I laugh, my face turn\* (turns) red.’ The teacher wrote the correction ‘turns’ above the student’s grammatical mistake. However, Teacher A1 was not consistent in providing specific written corrective feedback. According to her interview response, she claimed that she gave her students coded feedback in order to help them be independent learners. Although she might have provided coded feedback on students’ other written tasks, no such coded feedback was evident on the three collected writing samples. With regard to Teacher A2’s written corrective feedback, she consistently provided indirect feedback on all three tasks. She underlined words and phrases on students’ papers to indicate they had made a mistake without giving a code to indicate which type of mistake. On the second task (i.e., I need a vacation), the low level student wrote “I want to explore new placeis”. Teacher A2 underlined the word “placies” to indicate a mistake had been made but again did not mention the type. Although Teacher A2 mentioned during her interview that she liked to provide what she called “descriptive feedback”, the analysed texts showed no sign of such feedback. During the interview, she explained that descriptive feedback is mainly showing students two strong points and one weak point about their writing in order to make them aware of their writing strengths and weaknesses.

Overall, the autonomous teachers seemed to provide mainly indirect corrective feedback, with the exception of one task for which Teacher A1 provided direct feedback. On their second drafts, students had corrected all of the mistakes identified by their teachers. Their second drafts were all amended correctly based on their teachers’ remarks, and no significant difference was found between high and low level students regarding receiving direct versus indirect feedback. Their teachers drew a big tick sign on students’ second drafts to indicate that students had addressed all of their corrections well. This could suggest a level

of students' autonomy as students returned all their tasks corrected. Moreover, it could also suggest that autonomous teachers practised an autonomy promoting strategy while providing an indirect feedback letting students correct their mistakes independently.

Regarding non-autonomous teachers, Teacher NA1 gave indirect corrective feedback to both students on all tasks. During her interview, the teacher stated that she gave her students coded feedback to help them understand the type of mistake so they could correct it on their second drafts. For example, on the third topic (i.e., laughter), the low level student wrote: "there is many things that make me laugh". Teacher NA1 underlined two mistakes separately (i.e., capitalisation of the sentence and a grammar mistake where the verb should be plural) to indicate that they were two different types of mistakes. Meanwhile, Teacher NA1 underlined the word "swimming" in the high level student's first topic paper: "When my friends come to my house, we like to swimming together." The underlining indicated there was a mistake but did not indicate the type of mistake made. Teacher NA1 choice of indirect feedback suggests that an autonomy promoting strategy was used by a non-autonomous teacher. Using indirect feedback seemed to have no impact on students' mistakes as mentioned above (section ... analysing samples quantitatively). However, there was no evidence found by the researcher whether this type of feedback had an impact on students' level of writing autonomy.

According to Teacher NA2, she was consistent in providing direct corrective feedback to students at both levels on the three collected tasks. During the interview, she stated that she provided direct feedback as she was not sure her students were autonomous enough in their learning. She declared that she was not sure that her students would go back and check for the correct answer by themselves. As a result, she was convinced that direct corrective feedback was the most appropriate type when responding to students' mistakes. For instance, on the second task, the low level student wrote: "I ^ interested in travelling." Teacher NA2 added

(am) between “I” and “interested”. In addition, the low level student made some capitalisation and punctuation mistakes on the first collected task, writing “i like to dance i enjoy dancing.” The teacher provided the correction (I) above the small letter “i” and added a full stop between the two sentences.

As these examples demonstrate, there were discrepancies between the non-autonomous teachers when providing written corrective feedback. Although Teacher NA1 provided indirect corrective feedback, Teacher NA2 provided direct corrective feedback.

To conclude, only two types of written corrective feedback, direct and indirect, were provided by both autonomous and non-autonomous teachers. The teachers used indirect corrective feedback most often; Teachers A2 and NA1 used it on all tasks while Teacher A1 used it on two out of three tasks. Although the teachers mentioned using other types of feedback during the interviews, such as coded and descriptive feedback, such types were not evident in the analysed texts. Meanwhile, Teacher NA2 was the only teacher who actually gave the type of feedback she stated in her interview response — namely, direct corrective feedback. Thus, there was a clear discrepancy between teachers’ beliefs and their actual practices in providing written corrective feedback. The reasons behind this discrepancy were not clear to the researcher.

*4.7.1.1.2. Missing writing criteria.* Teachers were responsible for assessing specific writing criteria and making their students aware that these criteria were used when correcting written tasks. These criteria included teachers’ final score on students’ writing, teachers’ comments on the main idea of the written task, and teachers’ comments on the word count as students were required to write between 50 and 80 words per task. However, the researcher’s analysis found that teachers did not assign a final grade for students’ tasks. Moreover, they provided no feedback indicating students’ level of understanding regarding the main idea of the task. In terms of word count, although the assignments were to include between 50 and

80 words per task, teachers made no comments whatsoever on the number of words. The table teachers used to comment on these criteria remained empty. It was not clear to the researcher why there was a total lack of commenting despite the deanery requiring the teachers to provide such feedback as a final check-up.

Regarding the final score on students' writing, it could be argued that the writing assignment grades were not necessary for the final course score. The assignments were part of the course requirements that were completed throughout the year but not graded. Moreover, it is possible that, because students were required to provide a second (corrected) draft, teachers did not focus on grading their students' earlier writing drafts. In terms of students' understanding of the main idea of the task, the researcher noticed that, despite the lack of teachers' feedback, all students stayed on topic when writing about the main idea of the task. Finally, although word count was also not addressed, the researcher noted that all students wrote between 50 and 80 words, as required.

Thus, despite the deanery requirement for the teacher to assess these criteria, the teachers did not address them. Yet students' writing samples still seemed to adhere to the criteria. The lack of comments on the criteria could be attributed to many reasons, as will be covered in the discussion chapter.

**4.7.1.2. Students' written mistakes.** Two sub-categories related to students' written mistakes emerged in the analysis: (a) students' mistakes addressed by their teachers (e.g., spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalisation), and (b) students' mistakes neglected by their teachers (e.g., coherence, range of vocabulary). The first sub-section, students' mistakes addressed by their teachers, was previously analysed quantitatively. This sub-section will also be addressed qualitatively to have a wider exploration of the students' written mistake types. The second section of students' mistakes neglected by teachers will be only qualitatively analysed. The reason behind analysing the second sub-category qualitatively is

that those mistakes were not clearly mentioned, stated, or corrected by their teachers; thus, the mistakes cannot be quantified. Furthermore, coherence and range of vocabulary as criteria also cannot be quantified. These areas are better qualitatively addressed in order to have a boarder view of their nature and how teachers' respond to them.

*4.7.1.2.1. Students' mistakes addressed by teachers.* While correcting the writing tasks, teachers addressed certain writing mistakes that students made. These included spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalisation mistakes.

Almost every low-proficiency student from both the autonomous and non-autonomous groups made a spelling mistake on each writing sample, whereas high-proficiency students from both groups made very few spelling mistakes. The teachers provided different types of feedback on those mistakes based on their preferences, as previously discussed (see section 4.4.2.7.), although they provided the same type of feedback to both low- and high-proficiency students. Thus, students' level of proficiency was not the main factor for choosing a certain type of feedback. Examples of low-proficiency students' spelling mistakes include the following (student labels were mentioned in section 3.6.4.). A1 student L wrote "everyone needs a time in there lives to rest"; the teacher provided feedback by underlining the word "there". A2 student L wrote "sport is important becouse it makes me fit"; the teacher underlined the spelling mistake. In the non-autonomous classes, NA1 student L wrote "I always laugh with my frinds", and Teacher NA1 underlined the spelling mistake. However, when NA2 student L wrote "I want to go to difrint places", the teacher directly corrected the mistake by providing the correct spelling of the word "different" above the mistake.

Similar to spelling mistakes, low proficiency students made more grammatical mistakes than high proficiency students. An example of such a mistake by the low proficiency student in Teacher NA2's class was: "Dancing make me feel to relax". Teacher

NA2 wrote the correction “Dancing makes me feel relaxed” above the sentence, omitting the preposition “to”. However, when the low proficiency student in Teacher NA1’s class wrote “everyone need vacation”, the teacher corrected the two mistakes by underlining the word “need” to indicate a grammatical mistake and adding the sign ^ before the word vacation to indicate a missing article.

Most students did not make punctuation mistakes. They wrote short sentences and separated them with full stops. Punctuation mistakes were mostly made by low proficiency students. For example, one punctuation mistake by a low proficiency student on the third task was “First of all I laugh when I see silly things”. Teacher A1 added a comma after the phrase “first of all”. On the second task, the same student wrote “For these reasons I need a vacation”. Here, Teacher A1 added ^ after the phrase “for these reasons”, indicating the need for a comma. It was the student’s responsibility to figure out the mistake and correct it.

All of students’ capitalisation mistakes in the analysed texts involved using a small letter at the beginning of a sentence. As with other types of mistakes in this sub-theme, low proficiency students made the majority of mistakes. For Example, when a low level student wrote “also, I need to improve my language”, Teacher A2 underlined the first word to indicate a mistake. It was the student’s responsibility to determine the type of mistake and correct it.

The analysis indicated that proficiency level played an important role in making written mistakes. Students had the chance to complete the writing tasks individually at home and had access to tools to improve their writing and overcome their writing mistakes. Nevertheless, high proficiency students seemed to make fewer mistake than lower level students. Low proficiency students could have minimised the number of mistakes if they had used a dictionary to check their spelling, for example. After analysing the writing samples, it

was not clear to the researcher that proficiency level played an important role in students' level of autonomy.

4.7.1.2.2. *Students' mistakes neglected by teachers.* The second sub-theme was students' writing mistakes neglected by teachers on the written tasks. These mistakes mainly related to students' range of vocabulary and coherence. Despite the occurrence of such mistakes, teachers in both groups did not address or comment on them.

Regarding the range of vocabulary, low-proficiency students used a lot of repetition, using the same words in the same task. Using a wide range of vocabulary means that students not only can express their own thoughts on paper but also can operate more efficiently in both active and passive skills (Aljamhour, 1996). Thus, using a wide range of vocabulary is important for coherent writing. Most high-proficiency students' writing seemed coherent, whereas low-proficiency students' writing was less so due to the lack of vocabulary range and repetitive word use, resulting in less connected ideas in their writing. Thus, their writing was less coherent than that of high-proficiency students. Coherence as a criterion in this study was mainly about connection and flow of ideas; thus, it was analysed based on those factors. Although high proficiency students seemed able to use a wider range of vocabulary than low proficiency students, as evidenced by the latter's use of a limited range of vocabulary and repeated word, teachers in both groups failed to address these issues in their feedback on students' texts. The issue of coherence was completely neglected by teachers. The following examples highlight the differences in coherency and wide range of vocabulary use between high and low proficiency students in both groups:

For the vacation-related task, high proficiency A1 student H wrote: "I need a two week vacation every year. Vacation is very important to people because they can have their own time to relax and forget about work pressure. I am planning to travel in my next vacation." The low level student in the same class wrote: "I need [a] vacation. Vacation is

good. Vacation make[s] people relax. I need to relax.” The high proficiency student made more complex sentences and used a wider range of vocabulary to express her thoughts. Moreover, she managed to make a connection between her ideas by starting with a topic sentence and then providing supporting sentences. On the other hand, the low level student kept repeating the words “vacation” and “relax” in short, disjointed sentences, thereby limiting the flow of ideas. These students were in the same autonomous class (i.e., A1), yet studying in an autonomy-promoting class did not seem to have an effect on their use of a variety of vocabulary.

In the second autonomous class A2, for the third task the high proficiency student wrote: “When I laugh, my laughter attracts people’s attention because I clap my hands and shout.” The low level student in the same class wrote: “I always like [to] laugh. I laugh with my friends. I laugh with my family. Children make me laugh.” As in the previous example, the difference between the high and low proficiency students in terms of the use of a wider range of vocabulary was clear. Moreover, the low proficiency student’s flow of ideas was more limited than that of the high proficiency student. The teacher completely ignored the issue of repeating the same words when correcting their written tasks and gave no feedback on the high proficiency student’s usage of a wide range of vocabulary and coherence to encourage her or point to her strengths in her writing.

In the non-autonomous group, the high proficiency student in class NA1 wrote: “Swimming is important in our lives. It helps improve our appearance and health. It also helps reduce stress and depression by 80%.” The low level student in the same class wrote: “I like [to] play football. Football is good for me. I play football with my friends. I watch football with my family.” Again, the high proficiency student demonstrated coherent writing by using a wider range of vocabulary whereas the low proficiency student seemed stuck in a limited range of vocabulary, which made her writing less connected. Similarly, in the second

autonomous class NA2, the high proficiency student wrote: “Sports are important in our lives. I am lucky to have a favourite sport. I really enjoy playing football.” The low proficiency student wrote: “Dancing is fun. I dance with my friends. I dance with [the] girls in [of my] family. I dance Arabic [dances]. I dance Egyptian [dances].” Once again, a clear discrepancy exists between the high and low proficiency students, with the former using a greater variety of vocabulary and more coherence of ideas.

Thus, teachers in both groups failed to address two main writing issues: range of vocabulary and coherence of ideas. The analysis indicated that some students had problems with these issues, yet their teachers provided no relevant feedback. Although the analysis demonstrated that high proficiency students in both groups wrote much better than lower proficiency students within the same groups, the effect of group—whether autonomous or not—had less impact than the proficiency level in terms of using a wide range of vocabulary and coherent ideas. In other words, being in an autonomy-promoting class was not a key factor for promoting writing autonomy among students.

Moreover, teachers did not provide students with constructive feedback about their writing; rather, they indicated a mistake or provided a correction without further comment. Teachers could be promoting autonomy in their classes by using different types of activities. However, when it comes to writing, it seemed teachers did not provide feedback efficiently. The students wrote their tasks at home and had the chance to use available learning resources, such as e-dictionaries, to improve their use of vocabulary, for instance. However, low proficiency students made the same kinds of mistakes on all three tasks—namely, a limited use of vocabulary and disconnected ideas. Low proficiency students in both autonomous and non-autonomous classes kept repeating the same words within their writing and relied on short, disconnected ideas. This finding suggests that studying in an autonomy-promoting class does not affect students’ level of autonomy, especially for low proficiency students.

Moreover, Teachers did not employ written corrective feedback as an autonomy promoting strategy when responding to students' writing. This could be attributed to many reasons, as will be discussed in the discussion chapter.

**4.7.2. Quantitatively analysing students' written mistakes.** This section presents the quantitative approach which was adapted in order to gain an overview of the development and changes of students' written mistakes over time across autonomous and non-autonomous groups. This section tracks changes in students' writing development, and four main categories of written mistakes were included in the analysis: grammar, spelling, capitalisation, and punctuation. Descriptive statistics for all types of mistakes within the two groups are given in Table 4.43. Grammatical mistakes were misplaced modifiers, inappropriate verb tenses, subject-verb disagreement, and sentence fragments. All pieces of writing were almost the same length. As students were required to write between 50 and 80 words, the researcher double checked the word count and counted the examples from the same mistake. The repetition of the same example of the same mistake was also counted. All of the students' writing ranged between 50 and 80 words.

Within both autonomous and non-autonomous groups, there was a slight development in grammar (Table 4.43). The lower the mean indicated the fewer mistakes students made. For instance, the mean of the first task was 2.25, but the mean for the third task was 1. This decrease showed that students made fewer grammatical mistakes over time. Similarly, capitalisation and punctuation mistakes decreased over time. However, means of students' spelling mistakes were inconsistent. Spelling mistakes went up at Task 2 with a mean of 2.13 but then dramatically went down at Task 3 with a mean of 1. This implied that students' spelling improved over time. The standard deviation was more than three decimals in all mistakes except for the grammatical mistakes in the second task and the spelling mistakes in

the third task. This indicated that most students' written mistakes were different and spread out from the mean.

To further and separately investigate each mistake in the autonomous and non-autonomous groups, means for each group were calculated (Tables 4.44 and 4.45, respectively). Regarding the autonomous group, grammatical mistakes decreased over time. For instance, the mean in the first task was 2, but the mean for the third task was 0.75. These reduced means indicated students' writing was becoming more accurate over time. Similarly, spelling, capitalisation, and punctuation mistakes were lessened over time. This reduction in students' writing mistakes could indicate that being in an autonomous class affected students' writing development in the area of grammatical accuracy. Teachers' types of feedback on students' mistakes was therefore also explored. Autonomous Teachers A1 and A2 provided indirect corrective feedback in all tasks, except for Task 3, in which Teacher A1 gave direct feedback. Indirect written corrective feedback could be an autonomy-promoting strategy in which students take responsibility over their mistakes and independently look for the information. This strategy could underly the increase in grammatical accuracy for the students in the autonomous classes.

The standard deviation varied in students' scores in both groups. Regarding the non-autonomous group, the standard deviation was slightly higher than for the autonomous group. For example, the autonomous group had seven scores of three decimal places, and the largest one was 1.708; conversely, the non-autonomous group had eight scores of three decimal places, and the largest was 2.309. Moreover, the lowest standard deviation in the autonomous group was 0.577, whereas in the non-autonomous group, the lowest was 0.957. These statistics indicated that students' scores were more varied in the non-autonomous group and showed more variation in the mean than in the autonomous group.

Within the non-autonomous group (Table 4.45), punctuation and grammatical mistakes were reduced over time. However, means for spelling and capitalisation mistakes were inconsistent. Regarding spelling mistakes, students made more spelling mistakes in Task 2 than in Task 1. But in Task 3, they made the fewest mistakes among all tasks. Capitalisation mistakes were also inconsistent as students showed improvement over Task 2 but then made more mistakes in Task 3. To conclude, there was no clear evidence that learning in non-autonomy-promoting classes fails to improve students' writing.

Non-autonomous teachers' feedback was mainly indirect in nature from Teacher NA1 and direct from Teacher NA2. The smaller and inconsistent improvements in accuracy in the non-autonomous groups may be attributable to the type of written corrective feedback provided by teachers and to the wider classroom climate in which autonomy was promoted to a lesser extent than it was in the autonomous classes.

In order to explore the effect of proficiency on students' writing development, students were grouped by proficiency level, and means for mistakes were calculated. In all aspects of written mistakes, high-proficiency students showed a consistent improvement across the three time points (Table 4.46). On the contrary, Table 4.47 shows that low-proficiency students' mistakes were inconsistent over time. Regarding grammatical mistakes, there was a big decrease from a mean of 3.25 in the first task to a mean of 1.75 in the second task. Meanwhile, the mean was 2.00 in the third task. These varying means showed inconsistency in reducing mistakes. According to spelling mistakes, the third task showed a big improvement from the first two tasks to the third one, marking the biggest improvement among all mistakes. Even though the number of capitalisation mistakes went down from the first task, they remained the same in the second and third tasks. Even though punctuation mistakes were slightly reduced in the third task, they remained the same number as the first task. These results could suggest two things. Firstly, proficiency level had an effect on

reduced number of mistakes over time. Secondly, studying in an autonomy-promoting class did not seem to have a big effect on reducing lower-proficiency students' written mistakes.

**Table 4.43***Means of Students' Mistakes in Both Groups*

	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3
	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar	Spelling	Spelling	Spelling	Capitali sation	Capitali sation	Capitali sation	Punctu ation	Punctu ation	Punctu ation
Mean	2.25	1.38	1.00	2.00	2.13	1.00	2.00	1.25	1.13	1.88	1.75	1.38
Std. deviation	1.282	0.744	1.195	1.309	1.727	0.926	1.512	1.165	1.553	1.126	1.669	1.768
Minimum	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	0	0	0
Maximum	4	2	3	4	5	2	4	3	3	3	5	4

**Table 4.44***Means of Students' Mistakes in the Autonomous Group*

	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3
	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar	Spelli ng	Spelli ng	Spelli ng	Capital isation	Capitali sation	Capitali sation	Punctu ation	Punctu ation	Punctu ation
Mean	2.00	1.50	.75	2.25	2.00	1.00	2.25	1.25	.75	1.50	1.25	.75
Std. deviation	1.414	.577	.957	1.708	1.414	.816	1.500	1.500	1.500	1.291	.957	.957

**Table 4.45***Means of Students' Mistakes in the Non-Autonomous Group*

	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3
	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar	Spelling	Spelling	Spelling	Capitalisation	Capitalisation	Capitalisation	Punctuation	Punctuation	Punctuation
Mean	2.50	1.25	1.25	1.75	2.25	1.00	1.75	1.25	1.50	2.25	2.25	2.00
Std. deviation	1.291	0.957	1.500	0.957	2.217	1.155	1.708	0.957	1.732	0.957	2.217	2.309

**Table 4.46***Means of High-Proficiency Students, Autonomous and Non-Autonomous Groups Combined*

	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3
	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar	Spelling	Spelling	Spelling	Capitalisation	Capitalisation	Capitalisation	Punctuation	Punctuation	Punctuation
Mean	1.25	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.75	0.25	0.75	0.25	0.00	1.00	0.50	0.00
Std. deviation	0.957	0.816	0.000	0.816	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.000	0.816	0.577	0.000

**Table 4.47***Means of Low-Proficiency Students, Autonomous and Non-Autonomous Groups Combined*

	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3
	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar	Spelling	Spelling	Spelling	Capitali sation	Capitali sation	Capitali sation	Punctu ation	Punctu ation	Punctu ation
Mean	3.25	1.75	2.00	3.00	3.50	1.75	3.25	2.25	2.25	2.75	3.00	2.75
Std. deviation	0.500	0.500	0.816	0.816	1.291	0.500	0.957	0.500	1.500	.500	1.414	1.500

## **5. Discussion of the Findings**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter summarises and discusses the study findings concerning teachers' and students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding autonomous learning in EFL writing classes; teachers' perceptions of the barriers to and promoting factors in terms of LA in writing classes; and the development of writing autonomy among students. This chapter uses the principles of constructivism theory to explore EFL teachers' and students' perceptions and practices, and the changes related to them in this study. The concept of constructivism posits that knowledge is an active construction in human activity. Moreover, constructivism rejects teacher-centred teaching and focuses on the role of learners in directing their own learning (Benson, 2000; Benson, 2001; Benson & Voller 1997).

The findings make it clear that teachers and students were aware of the concept of autonomous learning, and promoting it in writing classes took the form of many strategies, such as collaborative working and student group work. However, it was clear from the teachers' views that there were issues that hinder the promotion of LA in writing classes. Moreover, there was a discrepancy among teachers between their beliefs and the actual LA practices used in their writing classes.

### **5.2. Reminder of the Nature of the Study**

An explanatory, mixed-methods research design was used along with the case study approach, which included four main types of data collection tools: teacher and student questionnaires and interviews, students' writing samples, and classroom observations. Quantitative data were collected through teacher and student questionnaires. A teacher questionnaire was administered to 16 teachers at the beginning of the academic year. Four teachers were chosen based on their responses to the practices section in the questionnaire for later participation in other aspects of the study. A student questionnaire was distributed

twice, at the beginning and end of the preparatory year, to 91 students in the four selected classes. Qualitative data were gathered from teacher and student interviews, classroom observations, and student writing samples. Four Saudi EFL teachers and their writing classes participated in this study. Eight high- and low-proficiency students from the four classes were interviewed, and their writing samples were collected and analysed. The interpretation of the results in this study primarily focus on changes among teachers' and students' perceptions and practices in terms of autonomous learning between the start and end of the preparatory year. Moreover, the interpretation focused on how students' writing skill and writing autonomy are developed and promoted in Saudi EFL writing classes.

The following research questions guided this study:

- 1) What are Saudi EFL teachers' and students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding LA?
- 2) Are there any changes in students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding LA over the course of the preparatory year?
- 3) How do Saudi EFL teachers perceive the barriers to and supporting factors for promoting autonomous learning in writing classes?
- 4) To what extent do Saudi EFL teachers promote students' LA in their writing classes?
- 5) To what extent do learners develop an autonomous approach to writing within the two types of classrooms studied?
- 6) In what ways does learner writing develop in autonomous and non-autonomous classes?

### **5.3. Research Question 1**

The first research question asks about Saudi EFL teachers' and students' beliefs, attitudes, and practices related to autonomous learning. This question was answered by

asking both teachers and students to respond to questionnaires. The following two sub-sections discuss, in detail, the results obtained from these questionnaires in terms of teachers' and students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding LA and their related sub-themes.

**5.3.1. Teachers' practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding LA.** According to the data, at the beginning of the preparatory year, teachers reported a low use of nearly half the practices, which was an unexpected result as the preparatory-year EFL curricula require activities and exercises that engage students in autonomy-promoting strategies. These practices were mainly related to the strategies that teachers implemented in EFL writing classes to promote autonomous learning, such as collaborative working, freedom of writing, peer feedback, and participation in decision-making. Teachers claimed to be promoting LA among students by allowing students to take control of their writing development. Teachers also said that they often helped their students discover ways to improve their writing. However, helping students discover their own strengths and weaknesses and conduct self-evaluations and self-assessments was the least reported strategy among teachers.

These contradictions in their practices regarding autonomous learning strategies indicate that, although teachers claimed to promote LA in their classes, they did not practise certain related strategies considered to promote LA in writing classes (Lazăr, 2013; Sullivan & Lindgren, 2002). Lazăr (2013) argued that it was hard for teachers in Romania to evaluate and cater to their students' needs as well as their strengths and weaknesses. That was due to teachers' lack of time and the need for extra preparation. The similar finding in the current study could be attributed to the same reasons, as well as to teachers simply not really knowing how to use teaching strategies in promoting LA in writing classes. It could be argued that teachers do not practise such strategies because of personal, behavioural, contextual and environmental influences. For example, according to Bailey (2013), teachers' qualifications or years of experience, school policies, favourable teaching strategies and the

economic status of the school are all factors that affect teachers' practices. Teachers' cognition could also be included as an affecting factor. For example, self-awareness and self-reflection, perceptions, assumptions, beliefs and attitudes are some of the cognitive factors that influence teachers' practices (Borg, 2003). Lazăr also argued that in order to be able to cater for students' needs and strengths and weaknesses, textbooks, curricula and even teachers' beliefs have to be changed. She recommended that Romanian teachers should develop their students' metacognitive skills by familiarising them with their abilities and incorporating more autonomous teaching strategies, such as self-assessment and evaluation, into their teaching. As both Romania and Saudi Arabia have tended to follow the same traditional teaching approach, in spite of curriculum reform, Lazăr's recommendations could be appropriate for Saudi teachers as well.

However, the finding from the current study contradicts Stasiakiewicz's (2014) results in a study with Spanish EFL teachers. According to Stasiakiewicz (2014), students' self-assessment was widely practised by these EFL teachers and was required within the EFL curriculum itself. The difference in the results between Stasiakiewicz's study and the current study could be due to the different educational contexts between the populations studied (i.e. Spanish versus Saudi EFL teachers). For example, it was mentioned in the former study that Spanish teachers gave their students proper guidance in self-assessment when they were teaching them. Moreover, it was mentioned that Spanish students were required to apply self-assessment at each stage of learning. Another possible reason behind this difference in teachers' practices of self-assessment could be that students' self-assessment was not a criterion the deanery required of the teachers in the current study, while it was in the Spanish study. In addition, teachers in the present study had a negative attitude towards self-assessment, as will be discussed later.

Regarding their attitudes, overall, the teachers in the current study had positive attitudes towards LA strategies. As a reminder, attitudes are hypothetical constructs that represent a person's like or dislike for anything; whereas beliefs are assumptions and convictions people hold to be true based on past experiences. Teachers were encouraging about letting students seek new information by themselves, the significance of LA and their role in supporting students' autonomy. Thus, teachers were aware of the significance of LA and their role in supporting it. Even though Al-Seghayer (2014) mentioned that the teaching style among Saudi high school students was mainly teacher-dependent, this study showed the opposite. However, an explanation might be that Al-Seghayer's (2014) study was outdated and conducted before the curricula amendments, which were made by the Ministry of Education.

Regarding self-assessment, the data of the current study indicated that teachers had an unfavourable attitude towards students' self-assessment in promoting their LA. This result could be related to teachers not practising self-assessment. This could be attributed to teachers' lack of awareness and time and their need to prepare for administering student self-assessment activities.

This resulting lack of teachers practising student self-assessment contradicts the findings of Farahi (2015), who stated that teachers had very positive attitudes towards student self-assessment. Such a discrepancy could be due to the study contexts as Farahi's study was conducted in Cyprus. For instance, Farahi indicated that self-assessment is implemented across different educational levels in Cyprus, meaning that, by college level, self-assessment was a familiar strategy among teachers and students. In addition, the teachers in Farahi's study reportedly wanted to implement self-assessment but did not feel it was completely feasible. This suggests that teachers in his study were aware of the significance of LA and

had other issues which prevented it from being feasible, although these were not outlined by the author.

By contrast, Saudi EFL teachers might have been more realistic and seen the difficulty of achieving self-assessment. One of these difficulties could be due to cultural factors. For example, teachers and students at all educational levels in Saudi were used to teachers being assessors of students' progress. This is despite the fact that curriculum reforms require Saudi students to reach the stage of being independent and taking more control over their learning and thus, being able to assess their own work. Moreover, teachers may not have been properly trained or have been familiar with the process of implementing student self-assessment. As a result, they have had a negative attitude towards it and do not practise it.

Another key finding was the teachers' belief that Saudi learners were ready to take responsibility for their learning and adapt to new Western learning concepts, such as LA. This result contradicts the data gathered by Alrabai (2017), who claimed that Saudi EFL teachers believed that their students were passive, dependent learners who lacked responsibility for taking control of their learning. Possible reasons behind this discrepancy could be that, in Alrabai's (2017) study, the sample was EFL teachers from different nationalities at different educational levels, so his study did not explore Saudi EFL teachers' beliefs in a Saudi context only. It matters that the previous study included different cultures as the Saudi educational context is influenced by its own culture. For example, teacher control over students' learning is embedded in the Saudi culture where traditionally, before the curriculum reforms, teachers were given full authority by the Ministry of Education to lead students' learning, which is different from what happens in some other cultures (Shah, Hussain, & Nasseef, 2013).

The finding of this study also noted a clear discrepancy between teachers' beliefs about LA and their actual stated LA practices within the same questionnaire. Teachers

reported a low use of nearly half the practices, in which six items had a mean of below three. By contrast, none of the items in the teachers' beliefs section had a mean below three. Thus, although the teachers held strong positive beliefs about LA, they were not practising its strategies as strongly as they believed.

This finding is consistent with the data obtained from Kaymakamoğlu (2018) and Aguirre and Speer (2000), who argued that teachers' beliefs are not always translated into their actual practices. However, Kaymakamoğlu's (2018) and Aguirre and Speer's (2000) studies differed from the current study by using observations and interviews to collect data rather than surveys. So, regardless of the different data collection methods in both studies, the findings are still the same across them. This agreement in the results clearly shows that teachers' beliefs do not always play an important role in their actual behaviour. This could be attributed to the fact that Saudi EFL teachers were aware and enlightened about LA but lacked the personal capacity and motivation to practise what they believed in. During the interviews, the teachers mentioned many clear reasons that hindered the promotion of LA in their writing classes.

The research literature suggests that teachers' practices are varied. Inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs and actual practices happen as a result of many factors. According to Pajares (1992), teachers' practices depend on many factors such as the classroom situation, social factors and even teachers' lives outside the school. Moreover, Karaagac and Threlfall (2004) mentioned that the work setting is always the main cause of using different practices. Also, Liljedahl (2008) argued that there was no relationship between teachers' beliefs and practice intentions. The inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and practices is supported by Vygotsky's constructivism theory. Vygotsky's (1978, 1981) social learning approach created a relationship between beliefs and actions with a social view as it accredits the role of contextual factors on behaviours. By contrast, this finding rejects Fishbein and Ajzen's

(1975) theory of reasoned action (TRA), which suggests that people's behaviours are determined by their beliefs. Instead, from Vygotsky's (1981) perspective, cultural means are considered a key factor and influence practices more than beliefs.

The concept of teacher autonomy came to the surface after analysing teachers' practices. This study concluded that there is a relationship between teachers' autonomy and students' autonomy. Calderhead (1996) declared that teachers' practices, attitudes in the classroom and pedagogical knowledge are vital elements in teacher autonomy. In addition, Cotterall (1995) found that autonomous teachers who facilitate learners to set personal goals monitor and reflect on the learners' performance. Autonomous teachers in this study tried to incorporate autonomous strategies into their lessons, such as collaborative working and encouragement. Their efforts to incorporate such strategies helped students feel in control; hence, students were more willing to be autonomous. This agrees with Lamb (2009), who indicated that such strategies are beneficial in making students independent learners. Conversely, the lack of autonomous practices among non-autonomous teachers leads students to become less autonomous compared to students in autonomous classes.

**5.3.2. Students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding LA.** What was surprising from the findings is that students had been exposed to LA at the high school level; moreover, they held positive attitudes and beliefs regarding it. This result contradicts data gathered by Alrabai (2017), who found, through a questionnaire, that Saudi EFL students in high schools had low levels of autonomy, were not aware of it as a concept, and had not been exposed to it. A possible reason behind this contradiction is that the new EFL school curricula in 2018, as set out by the Saudi MOE, added greater requirements for the use of some autonomous strategies, such as collaborative working. This current study offers new results that are more up to date with the MOE's new curricula.

The findings of the present study also showed that this sample of Saudi students who had attended high schools held positive attitudes towards LA when learning EFL. This result agrees with Khalil and Ali's (2018) study, which found that the majority of 265 Egyptian secondary school students held positive attitudes towards autonomous learning. A possible reason behind this agreement is that the study was conducted in 2018 when new EFL strategies were widely implemented and replacing traditional ones. Although Khalil and Ali's study was conducted in a different educational context (i.e., a high school), it had similar results to this study. An example of the educational context difference is that, as Khalil and Ali declared in their study, Egyptian students start studying EFL at an early age, starting in primary school rather than in intermediate school like Saudi students because learning a foreign language is easier at early ages. Furthermore, technical high school in Egypt includes intensive EFL and provides a good English base; this intensity is not the case for Saudi students, who are taught comparatively much less EFL.

Similar to those related to practices and attitudes, the findings for beliefs showed that students in the present study had positive beliefs about autonomous learning during high school. Althaqafi (2017) gave a reasonable explanation for this positivity. Even though it was believed that Saudi school students cannot lead their own learning due to cultural reasons, Aljasir (2009) and Althaqafi both mentioned that the traditional learning views of Saudi educational context are now outdated. They also added that, even though the concept of autonomous learning is relatively new in Saudi, teachers and students are now more aware than ever of the importance of independent learning because of the learning revolutions spurred by technology and the Internet. Cultural issues, as noted by Aljasir, such as teachers' authority in classes and being the only source of knowledge, played crucial roles in creating unfavourable beliefs regarding independent learning. However, Althaqafi made it clear that

the new educational reforms in Saudi are changing these outdated views and that students are now expected to go along with the new trends in EFL learning, such as LA.

#### **5.4. Research Question 2**

The second research question compared students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs at the start and end of the preparatory year. This question was answered using two questionnaires distributed to students: one at the beginning of the preparatory year and the second at the end of the year. For the analyses, the classes were divided into an autonomous and a non-autonomous group, based on the responses of their teachers to the teacher questionnaire. The data shows that the autonomous group had a statistically significant increase in positivity towards autonomous learning by the end of the preparatory year. By contrast, however, students did not show a greater level of autonomy in their actual practices. Notably, their teachers also held positive views about LA but did not strongly practise them in reality. Meanwhile, the non-autonomous group showed no significant change between the beginning and end of the preparatory year in any of the questionnaire sections.

No previous studies have compared students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs after high school and over the course of the preparatory year, especially in the Saudi EFL context. This study therefore contributes to the existing knowledge by shedding light on the two types of writing classes studied, observed, and analysed in their natural contexts without the involvement of a fixed treatment or experiment. The literature revealed some comparative studies conducted under specific circumstances, such as Merç's (2018) study. One key difference, however, is that Merc's study was conducted within a different learning environment (i.e., the Turkish educational system). It also had an 'autonomy class' as an experimental group, where autonomous strategies were taught to examine their effect on Turkish undergraduate students' learning habits. While the present study included autonomous classes, no intervention was conducted, and teachers followed their normal

practices, each choosing whether to employ autonomy-promoting strategies. However, although Merç's study was different, it identified similar findings to those in this study. He identified a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups, in favour of the former, regarding students' learning habits. Hence, both studies, one a formal intervention, the other taking the form of a 'natural experiment' (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 12) in which the outcomes of naturally occurring phenomena are compared, add to the body of evidence that suggests autonomy-promoting teaching creates greater positivity towards autonomy among learners. Regarding the consistency in students' practices before and after the preparatory year, that is, showing no statistically significant changes, Szöcs's (2017) study also found that his students' practices did not change. He found that students held positive beliefs about autonomous learning but showed a low level of practising autonomous strategies. Yet Szöcs's (2017) study and this one did have several differences. For example, Szöcs's (2017) study did not compare data from before and after secondary school, but once, within one timescale. However, the similar findings of both studies could be attributed to students' awareness of something they do not practise. This discrepancy between beliefs and practices has been widely discussed in the literature. Possible reasons for such a discrepancy could be the educational system, classroom contexts, time, resources, the influence of culture, teaching constraints, contextual factors such as social context and institutional curriculum and the assessment system (Ajzen, 2002; Flores, López, Gallegos, & Barojas, 2000; Pajares, 1992). However, such studies focused on the discrepancy in teachers' beliefs and practices, not students'. It could be argued that students in the present study were driven by their short-term goal of learning how to write, which was clear while conducting interviews with them. This had a greater impact on them than any factors affecting teachers' practices. Students, in their interviews, clearly stated that their main goal was to achieve high grades and pass the course. This short-term learning goal could be a key reason behind the

inconsistencies in students' beliefs and practices. Moreover, although the students were exposed to autonomous learning in high school, they were not exposed to a fully autonomy-promoting experience during the preparatory year. Evidence of this was the inconsistency of autonomous teachers' implementation of autonomy-promoting strategies, as observed during their writing classes. Furthermore, many autonomous strategies, such as identifying strengths and weaknesses, were totally neglected by teachers, and students were not introduced to them. Another significant reason could be neglecting students' needs and teaching them based on their proficiency levels. Neglecting their needs can make students less motivated and less aware of their ability, which may lead to them being passive learners.

The study showed that students were aware of LA and their role in directing their own learning. This finding supports what constructivism theory proposes, namely that students construct knowledge, which is their awareness and cognition, based on meaningful experiences. Learners' learning interests, needs and levels are the meaningful experiences that students are able to construct in themselves if they are aware and actively involved in their learning processes.

### **5.5. Research Question 3**

The third research question explored teachers' perceptions of the barriers to and factors supporting the promotion of autonomous learning in writing classes. This question was answered by interviewing the four teachers of the selected classes—namely, two autonomous and two non-autonomous teachers. The discussion of this question is divided into the following two sub-sections: barriers hindering the promotion of LA and factors supporting the promotion of LA.

**5.5.1. Barriers to promoting LA.** Although the new EFL curricula in Saudi encourages the promotion of LA, the university educational system somehow hinders actual

promotion of LA, according to the teachers interviewed. The fixed examination system and curriculum issues were highlighted in the findings.

Teachers declared that the fixed examination system required students to memorise information without giving them the chance to think freely and critically. According to the teachers, students knew this limitation of the examination system but only cared about learning what was included in the textbooks in order to guarantee a good grade to pass the course. Teachers were also aware of this limitation. As a result, the teachers provided the information students needed to pass the exams. These findings confirm the findings of Halabi (2018), which noted that teaching for an exam was a major obstacle to promoting LA in Saudi universities. Halabi's study was similar to the current study in many ways. For instance, Halabi included surveys and interviews to collect data and conducted the study in a female EFL centre at a Saudi university. However, she interviewed students about these barriers to understand them from the students' point of view, whereas the current study did not ask students about possible barriers of LA, although both teachers and students shared and confirmed this belief. According to the students in Halabi's study, the fixed examination system has limitations in that it controls students' knowledge. At the same time, teachers in the present study also showed that they did not always adhere to the textbook in their teaching, suggesting they felt positivity towards autonomous learning. Even though students and teachers can implement LA without paying attention to the fixed examination system, teachers stated that their students felt that they were under pressure to pass the subject, as teachers clearly stated in the interviews of the present study. As a result, the students kept on learning and studying only for the exams. The teachers in this study also mentioned curriculum issues. Alrabai (2017) and Alhareth and Al Dighrir (2014) claimed that EFL curricula in Saudi educational contexts promote rote learning among students while neglecting other approaches to learning that require thinking and understanding. The new

EFL curricula in Saudi Arabia include autonomy-promoting activities within EFL textbooks (Almusharraf, 2019). These textbooks clearly include LA and require students to implement strategies such as collaborative working, peer feedback, individually searching for information online and critical thinking, and in some activities, students are required to participate with their teachers in decision-making. However, teachers in the current study differed in their views on how far the curricula content promoted LA. For example, according to teachers, the university EFL curriculum did not pay attention to students' needs, interests or levels, eventually making them less motivated to learn. Also, the new EFL curricula's learning content, based on teachers' responses, included topics disconnected from students' reality. As was also found in this study, teachers incorporated collaborative working into their teaching. However, these findings suggest that including autonomy-promoting exercises, such as cooperative working, in new EFL curricula is not enough to promote students' autonomy. Curricula could need additional autonomy-promoting changes that also pay attention to students' needs, levels and interests.

The EFL teachers also highlighted some of their own issues that hindered the promotion of LA. The findings revealed that teachers' lack of awareness of the significance of LA was an important issue. For instance, some teachers mentioned that teachers' lack of awareness was a major issue. They mentioned that teachers should familiarise themselves with the importance of implementing autonomous learning strategies in their classes and believe in their significance and impact on promoting their students' LA. Scholars (Borg, 2003; Calderhead, 1996; Duarte, 1998) made an assumption about teachers' pedagogical knowledge and cognition. This assumption indicates that teachers' practices in their classrooms are influenced by their origins, which are shaped by knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes and their social interactions gathered over their years of teaching experience. According to Shulman (1987), teachers' pedagogical knowledge is constructed from their

social experiences and mental beliefs. This finding about teachers' lack of awareness regarding LA agrees with what is proposed by the theory of constructivism, which can be applied to teachers' knowledge as well as learners'. Teachers' knowledge is constructed through their cultural beliefs and previous learning and teaching knowledge, which developed through their social interactions with students. These former beliefs, cognition and knowledge constructed in teachers make them teach based on them and could lead to some limitations, such as a lack of awareness of LA.

However, this finding about teachers' lack of awareness contradicts those of Khalil and Ali (2018), whose study, also using teacher interviews, showed that EFL teachers were totally aware of LA and its significance. Their study also revealed that even though teachers were aware of LA as a concept, they were uncertain about its impact on students. They believed that it was important, but they also believed that it was a Western concept, which could not be easily implemented in Egyptian schools. By contrast, teachers in the current study, based on their questionnaire responses, commented that LA as a concept could be easily implemented within Saudi EFL classes but that teachers needed more awareness of its significance to promote it effectively. Possible reasons behind these differences include the fact that Khalil and Ali's (2018) study on high school students was conducted in an Egyptian educational context. Khalil and Ali clearly stated that Egyptian schools still do not recognise students' right to have a voice and that teachers did not want to give up their authority in classes, whereas the new Saudi EFL curricula are encouraging students to be independent learners.

Another finding about constraints hindering the promotion of LA was teachers' unwillingness to implement it in their classes. This finding concurs with those of Yasmin and Sohail (2017) and Halabi (2018), which indicated that teachers' unwillingness was an issue hindering the promotion of LA. However, the reasons behind these similar findings differed.

For example, according to Yasmin and Sohail (2017), teachers' unwillingness to promote LA stemmed from their fear of losing authority. In the current study, teachers' unwillingness to promote LA, in their view, was an issue related to their busy schedules and the ease of using traditional methods to teach. Meanwhile, according to Halabi (2018), a reason behind teachers' unwillingness to promote LA was their lack of proper training in autonomous learning. The current study added different factors that the EFL deanery in Saudi universities should consider to overcome the barriers related to teachers' unwillingness regarding the implementation of LA. Another key finding, from teachers' perceptions, about constraints hindering the promotion of LA, related to students being over-reliant on their teachers due to their previous perception of teachers' roles as the only knowledge provider. Alonazi (2017) similarly mentioned that students were used to being taught only by their teachers, and, consequently, they became dependant and unaware of their role in learning. However, Alonazi's (2017) study was quantitative and used only a questionnaire, whereas the current study used interviews to acquire a broader view of the issue. Furthermore, Halabi (2018) found that students lacked motivation because they spent 18 hours a week in EFL classes. The current study built a detailed view of students' issues hindering the promotion of LA as perceived by teachers. The reasons included students' lack of confidence and motivation, short-term learning goals and low writing proficiency levels, which can lead to low self-esteem.

Even though teachers provided evidence, in observations, questionnaires and interviews, that they taught their students in ways aligned to constructivism, which calls for students' cooperative working and their active engagement in learning, they neglected the core of constructivism. Teachers, according to constructivism, should act as organisers and assessors who evaluate students' learning processes and outcomes. Also, teachers should stimulate students' motivation and interest. In addition to that, teachers should address

students' needs, levels, strengths and weaknesses and learning goals. These issues seemed not to have been fully addressed by the teachers of the study. For example, teachers never discussed with their students their writing weaknesses and strengths. They did not ask their students for their opinions about the learning process or study materials that they used, invite them to participate in decision-making or ask them to set their learning objectives. LA is basically linked to constructivism theory as learners should be actively engaged in their learning in order to construct knowledge.

**5.5.2. Factors that promote LA.** The findings of this study revealed various factors supporting the promotion of LA, including encouragement, motivation, collaborative working, and written corrective feedback, which teachers reported as helping to promote LA in their classes. In a similar study by Almusharraf (2018), teachers perceived encouragement to be an important factor for promoting LA. However, the current study offered a deeper explanation: Encouraging students occurs in different ways, such as praising, making students interested in learning, and making them aware of their proficiency levels, strengths, and weaknesses.

Motivation was also widely discussed in this study and was perceived as a key factor in promoting LA in EFL writing classes. Teachers perceived motivation as being the idea of introducing interesting topics and making students excited about learning. This result agrees with Alsahli's (2019) finding. However, Alsahli adapted an experimental design in order to examine the impact of motivation on LA. The current study is exploratory and used both quantitative and qualitative data to acquire a broader understanding of LA in EFL writing classes. Therefore, the findings of this study added more aspects compared to Alsahli for understanding and clarifying motivation in autonomous classes. For example, this study declared that motivation was mainly perceived in terms of finding interesting topics, thereby motivating students and enabling them to experience excitement in the learning environment.

In addition, the current study found that teachers believed collaborative work helped them to promote LA in their writing classes. Yasmin and Naseem (2019) similarly found that teachers believed collaborative work plays a significant role in promoting LA in EFL classes. Although these authors collected data using a teacher questionnaire, they conducted the study in Pakistan, which is a different educational context than the current study. One possible reason for the similarity in findings is that the recent global attention on EFL autonomous learning as a teaching trend has caused EFL teachers to develop more positive beliefs about autonomous strategies, which minimise teachers' time and effort when delivering information to students. Moreover, in the past, Saudi and Pakistan shared almost the same educational culture where females were not allowed to study. This similarity, however, could be the reason the two studies had similar findings. While Yasmin and Naseem's study only reported what teachers believed, the current study gave insights into how these beliefs were translated into practice in the observation section (see section 4.5.2. on autonomy-promoting strategies).

The findings of this study indicated that teachers believed that providing certain types of written corrective feedback help promote students' autonomy in writing. Westmacott (2017) conducted a study about the impact of feedback types on students' autonomy. She found that indirect feedback made students more active as they applied their existing knowledge to correct their errors or look for the correct answer if they did not have it. She argued that direct feedback is an unambiguous and immediate response that makes students passive and less motivated to learn more. Another study conducted in Vietnam by Pham and Iwashita (2018) demonstrated, through pre- and post-tests, that indirect written corrective feedback developed students' autonomy in EFL writing. Although, by contrast, the current study was not an intervention, and instead explored teachers' preferences and perceptions, both studies together lend weight to the argument that indirect feedback can contribute to developing student writing autonomy

A noticeable finding in the teachers' responses was that student-centred classes were considered one of the main factors promoting LA in EFL writing classes, a view that is supported by experimental studies such as Kassem (2018). Kassem, also working in a Saudi university, examined the effect of a student-centred class on students' autonomy and found a significant difference between the control group and the experimental (i.e. student-centred class) group. The current study discussed in detail the teachers' roles, students' roles and teaching methods in terms of engaging students actively in classes; it also explained the difficulties and challenges facing Saudi EFL teachers while trying to make their classes student-centred and how they try to overcome the challenges. These details could give a broader view of the Saudi EFL writing class context and its challenges and obstacles in order to overcome them while adopting a student-centred class approach.

All of these findings reported by teachers about encouraging students, making them work collaboratively and providing indirect feedback in order to make their students look for information independently can be considered the core of constructivism theory. As mentioned previously, constructivism theory is mainly about making students direct their own learning by actively engaging them in their learning processes.

#### **5.6. Research Question 4**

The fourth research question asks about Saudi EFL teachers' implementation of autonomous learning strategies in their writing classes. This question was answered by observing the four teachers' writing classes twice. The following four sub-sections discuss the results from the classroom observations in terms of teachers' methods and conducted strategies for promoting LA.

**5.6.1. Using technology.** The most evident finding from the observations is that autonomous teachers seemed to consider that delivering new information via projectors was

an autonomy-promoting strategy. Even though using projectors to deliver new information might not be the most beneficial autonomous strategy, teachers, in their interviews, considered using projectors an autonomous strategy and practised it in their classes. Teachers also allowed their students to use their mobile phones to look for answers. Meanwhile, non-autonomous teachers inconsistently incorporated technology as an autonomy-promoting strategy. A review of the literature showed that many studies examined the impact of technology on improving a specific language skill, but not many studies explored the impact of technology on promoting autonomous learning in writing classes. Furthermore, no studies were found that explored teachers' practices in terms of using technology in their classes as autonomous techniques.

The closest study found was by Hazaea and Alzubi (2018), who examined the impact of mobile-assisted learning on LA in the reading context. The current study differs from their study in many ways. Hazaea and Alzubi examined the effect of using the WhatsApp application and the Google search engine on students' autonomous reading. Their interviews with students indicated that students' LA was improved by using such applications on their mobile devices. The current study's finding adds to the literature that technology as an autonomy-promoting strategy has not been well-implemented in writing classes. The evidence demonstrates that technology was used in two main forms: projectors and students' mobile phones. Projectors might be considered a teaching aid that help deliver the information easily, but they do not necessarily make students responsible for their own learning. Meanwhile, according to teachers, using mobile phones can help students be in charge of independently looking for information based on their needs and proficiency levels, which is consistent with Hazaea and Alzubi's findings.

However, in the current study, the use of mobile phones was also not always fully implemented in writing classes. Teachers allowed their students to use mobile phones to look

for spellings and vocabulary while writing. This practice seemed to be limited, however, and was not really helping students gain a sense of directing their own learning. It can be argued that technology could be used in many other ways to help students become autonomous learners, but there is no evidence of other applications of technology. For example, a double channel model for developing LA suggests that students could use technology through being provided with e-courses, e-monitoring, e-revision, and e-forums to socially facilitate students' interactions online (Alharbi, 2017). The limitation, mentioned in the current study, of using technology to promote LA could be due to teachers' lack of awareness about the effective incorporation of technology. Moreover, teachers might not have the necessary resources, such as computer labs, to encourage their students to control their own learning through the use of technology.

**5.6.2. Collaborative working.** The findings of the current study also revealed that autonomous teachers consistently used collaborative activities with their students, whereas non-autonomous teachers did not. Although textbook topics sometimes required collaborative activities, non-autonomous teachers did not consistently use such activities. This inconsistency in using a collaborative approach could be due to teachers' lack of expertise in knowing how to engage in such activities as the preparation of collaborative activities requires time and effort. Moreover, teachers might not be aware of the significance of collaboratively engaging their students in learning.

Many studies have examined how collaborative working impacts LA. However, exploring teachers' practices through classroom observations in Saudi EFL writing classes has not been a popular topic of research. A recent study by Paudel (2019) set in Nepal demonstrated a different finding than the current study. In his study, teachers still followed traditional methods of teaching and did not implement autonomous strategies, such as collaborative activities, in their classes. Paudel further revealed that students were unable or

not ready to independently direct their own learning. These results contradict those of the current study, which demonstrated that autonomous teachers were willingly implementing autonomous strategies, such as collaborative working, into their writing classes. Moreover, students in the current study were excited and interested while participating in collaborative activities.

Other studies, such as those by Misir et al. (2018); Turan (2016); and Yasmin and Naseem (2019) were mainly about examining how collaborative work impacts LA and exploring teachers' perspectives on collaborative working. The current study adds to the knowledge and provides an updated resource on collaborative work practices in Saudi EFL writing classes not yet found in the literature. Moreover, the current study was conducted in a pre-determined classroom situation in which teachers had the freedom to decide whether to conduct autonomous strategies. Based on the theory of constructivism, students learn better in real-life situations and when they socially construct knowledge by themselves (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Oxford, 1990; Thanasoulas, 2000). Collaborative working helps students engage in their learning process with each other to construct knowledge in themselves and exchange ideas; therefore, collaborative working helps them learn better. The role of teachers in this situation, according to constructivism, is to help students learn actively by giving them chances to practice collaborative working and taking responsibility of their learning.

**5.6.3. Motivation.** Lamb (2001) indicated that there is a relationship between motivation and LA. He mentioned that motivation is vital in the implementation of LA because, when learners get some control over their learning, they become motivated. The current study revealed that motivation was mostly promoted by using techniques such as praising students, engaging them in discussion, and providing interesting learning topics. However, motivation-promoting strategies used by teachers were found more often in autonomous classes than in non-autonomous classes. One reason that non-autonomous

teachers might have failed to use motivation-promoting strategies with their students is their lack of awareness about the significance of motivation in promoting LA.

A study by Schumacher and Ifenthaler (2018) examined the significance of motivation, its effect on LA, or the relationship between them; these studies were conducted in different educational contexts, such as different countries or school levels. In addition, these studies were not conducted in a natural educational context through classroom observation or for the purpose of exploring EFL writing classes as a first step. Instead, they used questionnaires and interviews.

The current study adds a broader view of motivational practices in the Saudi EFL context, based on observations from the literature. For instance, teachers' implementation of motivational practices included praising students and adjusting learning topics to make them more interesting for students. This finding does not indicate whether these practices are right or wrong. Rather, it suggests that curriculum designers could take advantage of such practices and incorporate them into textbooks more, for several reasons. First, autonomy-promoting strategies were practised by teachers willingly and not required by the curricula as they changed some learning topics to suit students' learning interests. Second, as teachers already know the importance of motivation, they could become more aware of motivational practices that could be easily implemented in each lesson.

This study suggests that the relationship between motivation and LA is causal. Teachers tried to motivate their students to engage actively in learning; thus, the students became independent learners. According to Deci and Ryan's theory of motivation (1985), extrinsic motivation is a drive to behave in certain ways based on external rewards and in pursuit of external rewards. Teachers in this study tried to find external sources of encouragement, such as praising their students to motivate them. Ryan and Deci (2008) distinguish between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Autonomous

motivation comes from internal sources and, for individuals, includes motivation from extrinsic sources. Controlled motivation is comprised solely of external influences, such as fear, praise and punishment. Although intrinsic motivation should come from students, teachers help students find it by shaping the external environment in an inspiring way. Meanwhile, students felt motivated and tried to participate more when their teachers praised them. However, it is worth noting that even though students showed excitement when their teachers motivated them using different strategies, there were some areas of uncertainty. For example, it was not totally clear whether students were permanently motivated to take control over their learning or temporarily motivated because their teachers praised them. Thus, it was not clear which type of motivation was found in the students.

**5.6.4. Setting learning goals and participating in decision-making.** A surprising finding of this study is that teachers' efforts to set learning goals with their students and students' participation in decision-making were totally missing. Nearly half of the teachers claimed in their questionnaire responses that they practised the setting of learning goals with their students. However, no such practices were found during observations of the four classes, each of which were observed twice. With regard to students' participation in decision-making, most of the interviewed students made it clear that their teachers made all of the students' learning and writing decisions. Students were also satisfied that their teachers were making learning decisions on their behalf. These findings agree with results of Lamb's (2009) findings. He determined that English secondary school learners wanted to have chances to make decisions about their own learning but were restricted from doing so by their teachers. In addition, some of his participants recognised they needed support in decision-making and favoured teachers' advice rather than their own. These strategies could have been missing from the observations in the current study for several reasons. First, it could be due to the limited number of observations conducted in this study. Second, the

teachers might not have had time to implement such strategies for a large number of students. Teachers previously mentioned that planning for such autonomous strategies takes time and effort, and they already had other tasks to complete, such as invigilation and supervision. Although teachers believed in the significance of autonomous learning (see section 4.4.2.3. on independent learning), they did not seem to practise such strategies to promote LA among their students. Third, the limitation of culture might also have had an effect on teachers not asking students for their views and opinions about the learning process. For example, Kubota (1999) mentioned that the Western culture promotes individualism, self-expression, and critical thinking. The Saudi culture, conversely, promotes memorisation and is considered a conservative society that gives teachers full authority in their predominant role of directing students' learning processes (Alharbi, 2017).

Many studies were found that explored the factors promoting autonomous learning in different contexts and that investigated teachers' and students' perspectives of such factors (Vahidnia & Fatemi, 2015). For example, according to Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), teachers believe that it is vital to allow students to make decisions to promote LA. However, no study was found that explored the absence or presence of such factors in a Saudi EFL context. The current study demonstrated that setting goals and engaging students in decision-making were not fully taken into consideration by teachers. Even the EFL textbooks did not incorporate such strategies to be implemented by teachers, this study could be a basis for the future wider exploration of EFL classes and curricula. Further, other studies could benefit from the findings of this study and try to examine the impact of such strategies in a Saudi context.

Constructivism as a theory suggests that learning independently requires students' perspectives on knowledge acquisition and their active involvement in learning (Palfreyman & Smiths, 2003; Thanasoulas, 2000). The results of this study showed that students did not get opportunities to set goals and make decisions about their own learning. Teachers

assumed the responsibility of making decisions on behalf of their students, as they neglected students' needs and taught them the way the teachers wanted. The teacher's role, based on constructivism, should be to assess students' learning processes by addressing those students' needs and goals. Teachers should also act as organisers and engage students in making their own decisions about learning. The opposite of constructivism is what transpires when teachers neglect students' decisions and freedom to establish their own learning goals.

### **5.7. Research Question 5**

The fifth research question investigated the Saudi EFL students' autonomous writing development in the autonomous and non-autonomous classes. This question was answered by interviewing a total of eight high- and low-proficiency students from both groups. The findings related to this question are discussed next.

The discussion of this question is divided into the following three sub-sections based on neglected autonomy-promoting strategies by teachers and students' understanding of these factors. These strategies are also considered significant in promoting writing autonomy. The strategies mentioned by students and that are the focus of this section are planning, freedom of writing, and assessment.

**5.7.1. Planning.** Planning was a topic of discussion among students. They revealed that planning was not a popular strategy implemented by them or their teachers, although the autonomous group indicated that they were more exposed to planning prior to writing than the non-autonomous group. Most students in both groups indicated that they did not plan unless their teachers asked them to do so. This could indicate that students were unfamiliar with the significance of planning. In addition, waiting for their teachers' instructions before writing shows that the students might be unaware of students' own role in learning to write. One reason behind the discrepancy in planning among both groups could be the lack of teachers' awareness of planning methods and their significance. Teachers' capacity to invest

their time and effort to make planning happen could also be a reason they did not always ask students to plan before writing.

The findings from the current study concur with those from a study by Tran and Duong (2018), who demonstrated that students did not plan before writing because they doubted the usefulness of the planning. This belief could be due to them being unaware of the significance of planning. Although the findings are similar, Tran and Duong's study differed from the current one as it was conducted in a Vietnamese context. According to Ganza (2008) and Scharle and Szabo (2000), teachers should be helping their students become autonomous as students cannot do it effectively by themselves. This could explain why students in the current study felt the need for their learning to be directed by their teachers. The findings of this study could therefore help teachers and curriculum designers become more aware of the reasons that students do not engage in planning.

**5.7.2. Freedom of writing.** The findings of this study were surprising as most students in both groups mentioned that they did not prefer to write freely even when they had the choice. Even the students in the autonomous groups preferred to maintain their teachers' linguistic structures. In fact, students showed a total neglect for their proficiency levels and needs while writing as they preferred to follow the teachers' guidelines. This neglect could occur due to students' need to pass the course and the fact that they trusted their teachers more than themselves. Moreover, students could be uncertain about the appropriate style of writing that they should be following.

According to Dickinson (1987), autonomous students are totally responsible for directing their own learning based on their proficiency levels, needs, and interests. This responsibility, in the current study, failed to materialise when students did not prefer to write freely and instead favoured their teachers' ways of writing. A study by Dwee and Anthony (2017) mentioned that giving students freedom of choice was considered a strategy to help

foster LA. Many other studies mentioned that freedom of choice was a main factor in helping students foster LA. The current study, however, had a different finding: students were unwilling to write freely. This finding might be due to students' uncertainty about their proficiency levels or doubts about their abilities, affirming Tran and Duong's (2018) finding that some students were not confident enough to write freely and, instead, followed teachers' directions and previous methods. Students' preference for following their teachers' ways of writing is the total opposite of what the theory of constructivism proposes. Constructivism refuses teacher-centredness and focuses on students' active role in constructing knowledge (Palfreyman & Smiths, 2003; Thanasoulas, 2000). When students do not pay attention to their own needs, proficiency levels, and interests and instead follow their teachers' ways of writing, they do not become independent learners.

**5.7.3. Assessment.** The findings of this study revealed that self-assessment and teacher assessment were the only types of assessment conducted among students in both groups. There was, however, a discrepancy in students' use of assessment. The level of proficiency seemed to be related to self-assessment as the high-level students self-assessed themselves more than the low-level students. There was no clear and consistent relationship between proficiency level and attitudes towards autonomy, nor between proficiency, group, and practices in relation to autonomy. Thus, on the one hand, high-proficiency students in the non-autonomous group practised self-assessment more than high-level students in the autonomous group; at the same time, the high-proficiency student in the A2 class was shown to have a positive attitude towards self-assessment. Contradicting that, most of the low-level students in both groups held negative beliefs about self-assessment and thought it was their teachers' job to evaluate students' writing. This finding is similar to those of Sharma et al. (2016), who stated that high-proficiency students are more motivated to self-assess themselves. This motivation could be due to students' confidence in their ability and

proficiency level for evaluating their own work. In the current study, a possible reason students did not self-assess their work on a regular basis could be their lack of awareness about the concept of self-assessment. Furthermore, they might not have had the ability to self-assess if they were unfamiliar with how to self-assess their work. Such reasons are similar to findings by Leach (2012) and Thawabieh (2017), who mentioned some barriers to students' self-assessments. Thawabieh demonstrated that effective self-assessment requires training students in how to implement self-assessment. However, the purpose of his study was to compare teacher assessments and self-assessments; he did not explore students' perceptions of self-assessment before implementing it. It was a quasi-experimental study and was not conducted in a natural educational context.

Another surprising finding of the current study was that most students, even those who assessed themselves, believed that it was the teachers' responsibility to assess students' work. This belief could be due to students' perspectives of their teachers' roles in learning. One possible reason students preferred having their work assessed by teachers is the teachers themselves. It is possible to hold teachers somewhat responsible for not familiarising their students with self-assessment and how it is done. Harlen (2004) mentioned that teachers play a wider role in promoting students' self-assessment. Alrabai (2018) mentioned that the Saudi culture affects students' perceptions of EFL learning. Saudi students are taught that teachers are knowledge providers who dominate the learning process, while students are passive information receivers. Such an understanding could affect students' own beliefs about the teachers' roles as well.

### **5.8. Research Question 6**

The sixth research question investigated the ways in which learners' writing develops in autonomous and non-autonomous classes. This question was answered by analysing eight high- and low-proficiency students selected from both groups. Their writing samples were

collected three times throughout the semester, and the analysis of the writing samples was conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The analysis revealed that the number of written mistakes declined over time in the autonomous group and was inconsistent in the non-autonomous group. For instance, some types of mistakes declined, and others did not. More importantly, students' proficiency levels had an impact on their improvement in accuracy in both groups. High-proficiency students showed more consistent improvement over time than low-proficiency students in both groups.

The review of the existing literature found very few studies that explored students' written mistakes in both types of classes, and few of the identified studies were recent. However, an interesting study conducted by Akmilia et al. (2017) explored students' improvements in their writing based on indirect written feedback. Grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalisation mistakes were addressed in their study, and they found that indirect feedback increased students' awareness of their mistakes and levels and led them to acquire other autonomous strategies, such as monitoring their writing progress. These results concur with the results of the current study. In this study, autonomous teachers seemed to consistently provide indirect feedback, and their students' results showed improvement. However, Akmilia et al.'s study did not include direct feedback as a type of written feedback. Moreover, their study only qualitatively analysed students' written documents. The findings of the current study could be linked to what constructivism theory proposes: As students get the chance to take responsibility for leading their own learning by independently looking for answers based on their levels, availability, and needs, students construct their own knowledge (Palfreyman & Smiths, 2003).

Moreover, the findings of this study proposed the idea of the impact of proficiency level on students' progress. In general, high-proficiency students in both the autonomous and

non-autonomous groups showed an improvement in their writing. It could be argued that, in this study, proficiency level and being taught in an autonomy-promoting class had a positive impact on students' writing. There are many studies in the literature about the relationship between students' proficiency level and their level of autonomy. However, no study explored the writing progress of students with different proficiency levels in autonomous and non-autonomous classes. Moreover, no existing studies have analysed students' writing samples. Instead, existing studies administered student questionnaires and interviews. For instance, a study by Ezzi (2018) investigated the relationship between students' level of autonomous learning and their proficiency level in EFL. She found that there was no statistically significant correlation between them, results that contradict those of the current study. However, her study was mainly about the relationship between proficiency level and LA, while the current study is mainly about students' improvement of their writing in autonomy- and non-autonomy-promoting classes, which led to the finding regarding the impact of proficiency level on students' mistakes. Other contrasting findings were observed in Dafei's (2007) study. He revealed that, while a high-proficiency level was statistically and significantly correlated to students' autonomy level, a low-proficiency level had no statistical and significant correlation to students' level of autonomy. In the current study, it can be argued, based on the theoretical view of Dickinson and Wenden (1995) and on students' results, that studying in an autonomy-promoting class leads to an increase in students' written accuracy levels and an improvement in learning outcomes.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1. Introduction

This concluding chapter summarises the findings of the study and provides answers to the research questions (section 6.2). Along with key findings, section 6.2 presents how this study contributes to the knowledge on this topic. Next, there is a discussion of the limitations of the study (section 6.3). Then, section 6.4 considers implications and recommendations for institutions and teachers. Finally, section 6.5 suggests some areas for future research.

### 6.2. Key Findings

**6.2.1. First research question.** The first research question asked, “What are Saudi EFL teachers’ and students’ practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding LA?” The following sub-sections outline the key results (i.e., teachers’ and students’ practices, attitudes, and beliefs in terms of LA).

**6.2.1.1. Teachers’ practices, attitudes, and beliefs.** The teachers who participated in this study reported low implementation of autonomous practices in their writing classes. The new EFL writing curricula also encourage both teachers and students to implement autonomous strategies. On the one hand, teachers claimed that they allowed their students to take control of their learning. Furthermore, other autonomous teaching practices, such as facilitating students’ learning processes, were frequently practised among EFL teachers, according to their questionnaire responses. However, teachers also reported low implementation of other autonomous strategies, such as helping students discover their own strengths and weaknesses, and using self-evaluations and self-assessments. Moreover, encouraging students to discover new writing techniques and seek peer feedback was not implemented by more than half of the teachers. This limited deployment of LA strategies suggests that curricula designers need to not only incorporate such strategies more explicitly into course design but also pay more attention to why teachers are not implementing the

strategies. Teachers could benefit from training sessions that demonstrate how these strategies can be integrated into their writing classes on a practical level as well.

Regarding teachers' attitudes towards autonomous learning in EFL writing classes, the means for all the autonomous strategies included in the questionnaire were high as they were over 3 on a 6-point scale. This statistic indicates that teachers were generally positive regarding LA. Nevertheless, this positivity in their attitudes contradicts their stated practices. For instance, teachers reported limited use of nearly half of the autonomous strategies in the questionnaire, despite their favourable attitude towards all the LA strategies. This contradiction again suggests that the deanery needs to provide better support to enable teachers to translate their positive attitudes into actual classroom practices. Moreover, teachers' reasons for not practising LA strategies in their classes—including lack of awareness of the significance of LA, their busy schedules and extra work, and large numbers of students in the classroom (see section 4.4.1.)—should be taken into consideration by the deanery and curricula designers. The teachers' positive beliefs regarding LA offer a useful foundation for the implementation of LA in classes, which the deanery could build upon by allowing greater flexibility regarding assessment requirements, such as providing teachers with regular training courses about the recommended and manageable way to implement LA. Such an approach could be done by giving teachers courses on how to use technology in a way that helps promote LA, rather than just acting as a knowledge delivery tool. Moreover, reducing the large number of students in the classrooms would allow teachers to pay more attention to students' needs, proficiency levels, and interests. In addition, encouraging teachers to implement LA in their classes by raising their awareness about LA significance seems important. Such awareness could be achieved by training teachers and regularly observing and offering feedback on their performance. With time, teachers could consider

autonomous learning a natural way of teaching, as has been the case with traditional methods of teaching, such as lecturing students and passive learning.

Finally, autonomous learning is often considered to be a Western concept (Kubota, 1999), which could therefore make it difficult to implement in contexts such as Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, this study concluded that teachers strongly believe that LA is adaptable to Saudi classes. Saudi teachers also believed that their learners are capable of taking responsibility for and control of their own learning. Therefore, one contribution of the current study is to demonstrate that autonomous learning has relevance for a broader range of educational contexts than previously believed.

**6.2.1.2. Students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs in high school.** Even though students' lack of exposure to LA in high school was expected, it was shown that they experienced a fair amount of autonomous learning prior to university entry. It is worth mentioning, however, that the main type of feedback students had experienced at school was from their teachers. In addition, students were not all allowed to use technology as a tool to help them find new information. Their practices during high school suggest that students are able to be independent learners as they were exposed to LA. Moreover, with regards to attitudes developed in high school, students showed positive attitudes towards LA strategies. For instance, they favoured using new writing techniques and ideas, which might suggest that they had a relatively high level of confidence in writing. Most of them, however, lacked confidence in their English proficiency, which was reflected in the mean score (below 3) for the sample as a whole.

Similar to their practices and attitudes, students showed an awareness of the importance of LA when it came to writing. For instance, they strongly believed that they should participate in decision-making regarding their learning. Saudi students in pre-university education have been found not to place much value on participation in decision-

making (Ahmad, 2014; Al-Seghayer, 2014). This is attributed to the traditional rote learning and teacher-centred classes which have been the main teaching method in the Saudi context. The lack of decision-making practices starts early with Saudi students in intermediate schools and continues through high school, which has made students follow their teachers rather than participate with them (Alrabai, 2017; Tamer, 2013). To conclude, students in the present study generally held positive beliefs and attitudes towards LA and its implementation in their classes in high school.

**6.2.2. Second research question.** The second research question asked, “Are there any changes in students’ practices, attitudes, and beliefs regarding LA over the course of the preparatory year?” This section compares students’ initial and current practices and their attitudes and beliefs regarding LA in the autonomous and non-autonomous groups. It also investigates the effect of time and group on these variables.

**6.2.2.1. Students’ practices, attitudes, and beliefs in the preparatory year.** With regard to students’ practices, attitudes, and beliefs in their preparatory year, students clearly were used to receiving other types of feedback, other than that from their teachers, which was not the case when they were in high school. Feedback is crucial when learning to write (Ferris, 1999; Truscott, 1996), and therefore this finding from the current study is an important one. Students were exposed to other types of feedback, such as group feedback during the preparatory year, a type of feedback that is encouraged within LA. In general, based on students’ questionnaire means for their LA practices at the start and end of the preparatory year, students were more exposed to the experience of autonomous learning during the preparatory year than in high school. In regard to students’ attitudes towards LA at the end of their preparatory year, this study demonstrated that students were more confident about their proficiency levels compared to how they felt at the beginning of the year. Students also showed a more positive attitude towards independently looking for

information. Notably, students strongly believed that they could direct their own learning by the end of the preparatory year. Even though they held positive beliefs about LA at the start of the year, their mean scores had increased by the end, which indicates that the preparatory year enhanced these positive beliefs. These results therefore indicate that the preparatory year had a positive impact on students' beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding LA.

**6.2.2.2. Changes in students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs from Time 1 (initial) to Time 2 (current).** The key result in relation to the effect of time and group was that there was a significant effect of both and a significant interaction between time and group, with higher scores in the questionnaire as a whole for the autonomous group at the end of the year compared to the non-autonomous group. However, what was interesting, when looking at each section separately, is that students' reported practices in both groups did not change over time, whereas there was a statistically significant increase in the scores for attitudes and beliefs regarding LA for the students in the autonomous group. The non-autonomous group showed no significant differences in each questionnaire section. This result suggests that studying in an autonomy-promoting class helps students become more independent learners. To back up these results, the relationship between teachers' and students' practices, beliefs, and attitudes was explored. It was found that, overall, the more positive teachers were in their beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding LA, the more positive their students were in these areas as well. These results suggest that beliefs and attitudes are more easily changed than practice, but that teachers' attitudes and beliefs do influence those of students.

**6.2.3. Third research question.** The third research question asked, "How do Saudi EFL teachers perceive the barriers to and supporting factors for promoting autonomous learning in writing classes?" This section explores the factors that support and impede the implementation of autonomous learning in EFL writing classes. According to teachers who participated in this study, the main obstacles were related to the directions imposed by the

deanery and to teachers' and students' awareness and willingness to promote autonomous learning in the classroom. Teachers showed positive beliefs and attitudes regarding LA, but they claimed they did not practise it as, in their view, the deanery had the final call when it comes to students' grades, the determination of teaching methods, the fixed examination system, and the curriculum itself, which gives little attention to students' needs and interests. All of these issues were raised by teachers in the interviews. These issues could lead teachers and students to be unwilling to implement LA. Therefore, teachers' and students' unwillingness to implement LA seems to be related, at least in part, to the strict rules they are required to follow, suggesting that increased flexibility by the deanery is desirable.

The clearest finding to emerge from this study about factors supporting the promotion of LA by teachers is that encouraging students to be autonomous in their learning is a wide concept that includes familiarising students with their proficiency levels, strengths, and weaknesses; finding interesting topics for them; engaging them collaboratively; connecting them to reality; and making them aware of and enlightened by the significance of being autonomous students. Through this finding, the study demonstrated that teachers had a great deal of awareness about autonomous learning. Therefore, the deanery should use this information to its advantage and help its teachers have more control over their teaching by allowing flexible teaching methods and different assessment criteria, and actively engaging students in their own learning by modifying the curriculum topics to suit the students' interests and needs.

**6.2.4. Fourth research question.** The fourth research question asked, "To what extent do Saudi EFL teachers promote students' LA in their writing classes?" This section explores the implementation of LA in two types of EFL writing classes: an autonomous group and a non-autonomous group. Two main findings about the promotion of LA in EFL writing classes were demonstrated in this study. Firstly, the presence of certain autonomous

strategies, such as collaborative working and technology use, was observed. Even though using technology as an autonomous strategy was not fully implemented, teachers showed their willingness to incorporate it. This fact suggests that teachers need more training courses on how to take full advantage of technology as an autonomous strategy in teaching students. This study also discovered that some teachers, the non-autonomous ones, were not implementing collaborative working even though students' textbooks sometimes required it. This fact indicates that teachers need to be fully aware of the significance of collaborative working in teaching students. Moreover, teachers could be provided with training courses on how to effectively implement collaborative work as they may just not know how to do so. As some textbook exercises required students to work collaboratively and some teachers did not implement this, the deanery should pay attention to teachers' practices and understand the reasons behind them.

Secondly, this study shed light on the absence of some of the most significant autonomous strategies in EFL writing classes. During the observations, students' participation in decision-making and teachers' setting of goals with their students were totally missing. This result was also confirmed by the students when they were interviewed. The absence of these strategies suggests that both teachers and curricula designers should consider these significant autonomous learning strategies when teaching and reforming curricula. Saudi students have demonstrated in this study that they are well aware of LA as a concept and its significance, and they showed positive attitudes and beliefs towards it. Thus, it rests on teachers' shoulders to encourage students to participate in a fully autonomous experience while learning and being taught.

**6.2.5. Fifth research question.** The fifth research question asked, "To what extent do learners develop an autonomous approach to writing within the two types of classrooms studied?" This section explores the development of students' writing autonomy in both the

autonomous and non-autonomous groups. Based on the interview responses, it was clear that teachers were still leading students' writing. Even though teaching EFL writing was not entirely teacher-centred, students' writing was not autonomous and was mainly based on their teachers' directions and guidelines. For instance, most of the interviewed students declared that they did not plan before they wrote. Another surprising finding is that students did not prefer to write freely and followed teachers' linguistic structures because students wanted to be safe and achieve high grades. These issues need to be addressed by teachers and the deanery. It could also be said that all these issues are connected. For example, different proficiency-level students in both types of groups did not plan and, instead of following their own methods, preferred to follow their teachers' ways instead. The fixed examination system and the pre-determined methods of teachers could be the main issue. It could therefore be concluded that the type of class, autonomous or non-autonomous, did not have a big impact on students' writing autonomy. However, the type of class did impact students' writing skills, as will be discussed in the next sub-section.

**6.2.6. Sixth research question.** The sixth research question asked, "In what ways do learners' writing develop in autonomous and non-autonomous classes?" What was clear from the findings is that the accuracy of students' writing improved in the autonomous group more than in the non-autonomous one. It was also clear that proficiency level played a role in students' writing development as high-proficiency students showed more improvement than low-proficiency students. The results of this study provide evidence of the significance of promoting LA inside EFL writing classes. This suggests that teachers should consider the importance of LA strategies and implement them in their classes. Furthermore, and most importantly, when qualitatively analysing students' writing tasks for this study, it became clear that some criteria, such as writing coherence, were not addressed by teachers; vocabulary range was also neglected. As a result, students' writing tasks were not well

connected, and a limited range of vocabulary was used, which made most of the writing weak. Coherence and vocabulary range are important writing criteria in order to produce a good piece of writing (Albeshar, 2012), yet students did not even have the chance to be taught about these criteria. Instead, mistakes—such as those relating to grammar, punctuation, spelling, and capitalisation alone—were addressed by the teachers. This fact shows a limitation in terms of correcting students' writing tasks. Mistakes such as grammar and punctuation were at the centre of teachers' corrections, whereas other writing criteria were totally neglected.

### **6.3. Limitations of the Study**

One key limitation is that its sample is limited to EFL teachers and students, specifically Saudi female teachers and students in their preparatory year at a Saudi university. Although this study is limited to the preparatory year in a Saudi University, it is worth saying that, according to the Saudi MOE's website, all English language centres for preparatory years in Saudi universities teach the same curricula and follow the Saudi MOE regulations regarding teaching preparatory-year students. Therefore, the findings could have implications for other universities in Saudi Arabia, although whether they would apply beyond that context is unclear. Another limitation could be the small number of participants. Even though the study sample is limited, however, the qualitative data used in this research will help provide a more rounded picture for promoting LA in Saudi universities.

Moreover, this study only explored the attitudes and beliefs regarding LA held by EFL teachers and students; the support for and barriers to promoting LA; and teachers' practices in writing classes. Hence, the relevance of the study in terms of other LA areas and for other language skills is limited. Little (1990) stated that LA is difficult to achieve and measure as a concept because it can manifest in many different ways.

Another limitation could be the short time difference between pre- and post-questionnaire periods, as the first questionnaire was distributed in October and the second in December. However, it is worth noting that the questionnaires were about the learning strategies conducted before and throughout the semester and not about students' enjoyment of the experience. Moreover, the researcher was the only one who observed the lessons; this may have created subjective bias.

In addition, researcher positionality might be a limitation in this study. As the researcher had previous experience with LA and had reflected on it, this could have made the researcher look for specific information through specific questions about students' and teachers' beliefs, attitudes and practices. However, the researcher has tried to overcome this limitation and widen the exploratory scope of LA by looking for what was missing from the literature on LA in Saudi EFL writing classes—most notably, the implementation of different autonomous strategies in those classes.

It is also possible that some participants were not totally frank when they responded, especially students who may have felt reluctant to be anything but positive about their teachers. Similarly, teachers might have felt that they were being evaluated and therefore gave inaccurate responses. However, the participants were assured by the researcher that their identities would remain anonymous and that this study was for exploring LA in EFL writing classes and not for judging them (see section 3.11.).

## **6.4. Implications and Recommendations for Institutions and Teachers**

**6.4.1. Institutions.** This study outlines the following implications for institutions, such as deaneries:

- 1) The evidence from this study suggests that teachers need professional training courses regarding their classroom practices and that professional development opportunities should be given to teachers.

- 2) Technology as an autonomous strategy was not fully implemented by both teachers and students. Technological resources, such as computer labs and online learning systems, should be available for both teachers and students. Moreover, training courses should be provided for both groups in order to make the use of such resources more effective.
- 3) The deanery must solve issues related to teachers' extra workload and large class sizes, which could affect the quality of teaching.
- 4) The deanery must modify the EFL writing curriculum to make it more suitable for students' needs, interests, and levels.
- 5) The fixed examination system and pre-determined methods of teaching should be modified. It was clear that the deanery forces teachers to strictly follow guidelines, which made both students and teachers unwilling to implement LA strategies.
- 6) Even though the deanery widely controls the teachers' methods, the deanery could provide clear guidelines for teachers' classroom practices. As seen in this study, the teachers in the autonomous group implemented LA in their classes. As a result, their students' writing improved, and the positive beliefs and attitudes of the students also increased by the end of the year. However, the different teaching approaches and practices make it clear that students have unequal access to autonomy-promoting classes and the benefits they potentially bring for learning. However, even though autonomous teachers were implementing autonomous techniques more than non-autonomous ones, there were still missing autonomous strategies, such as self-assessment and students' participation in decision-making. Thus, the deanery should pay attention to the issues neglected by both autonomous and non-autonomous teachers.

**6.4.2. Teachers.** A number of important implications for teachers' practice emerged from the current study:

- 1) As teachers play a significant role in promoting LA among their students, teachers are advised to pay more attention to neglected autonomous strategies, such as asking their students about their views and allowing them to participate in decision-making.
- 2) It is recommended that teachers give students opportunities to take control of their learning. For EFL writing in particular, allowing students to write freely is desirable. While this study showed that students preferred to follow their teachers' methods, teachers could engage students more in their own learning by encouraging them to write freely, perhaps by setting writing assignments about topics that really interest students and by giving credit to imaginative content.
- 3) Collaborative working should be implemented by teachers as it allows students to actively engage in the learning process.
- 4) Teachers are advised to pay attention to assessment as this was totally neglected among students in this study. As self-assessment, when students monitor and evaluate their own learning, is very significant, teachers are advised to implement it more often. More importantly, they need to teach their students how to assess their own work.
- 5) Teachers must consider students' preferred ways of learning. As this study showed, some teachers were still teaching using the traditional method of lecturing students and following a teacher-centred teaching approach. Thus, teachers must keep themselves up to date with new trends in the teaching of EFL writing.

- 6) Feedback is an important aspect in the learning of EFL writing. Teachers could incorporate more types of feedback, such as peer and self-assessment, rather than only giving teacher feedback. This study indicated that teacher feedback was the main and almost the only feedback delivered to students.

### **6.5. Future Research**

- 1) This study explored teachers' and students' practices, attitudes, and beliefs in the preparatory year. It would be useful to conduct a study exploring the perceptions of college deans. Doing so might grant a deeper understanding that uncovers the barriers hindering the promotion of LA.
- 2) This study explored LA in EFL writing classes at the university level. Exploring LA in other EFL skills and within different educational levels might be useful in having a complete picture of the implementation of LA in Saudi EFL classes.
- 3) It would be useful to conduct a study on a larger sample. As this study used qualitative and quantitative tools, another technique, such as focus groups, might be considered to encourage more interaction among the participants.
- 4) It would be interesting to compare the results of this study with another study conducted in a private Saudi university that has an American or British educational setting and context.

### **6.6. Contribution to Knowledge**

7. The results of this study will help the deanery improve the educational process by shedding light on the constraints that hinder the promotion of LA. Teachers' and students' views about LA constraints could play a key role in improving the educational process. The deanery has the authority from the MOE to systemise the educational process. By taking into consideration and paying attention to teachers'

and students' views about the barriers that slow down student learning processes, teaching and learning processes will be improved and better outcomes will follow.

8. This study will help teachers by offering an explanation of the nature of LA, strategies to implement it and effective methods to implement those strategies.
9. This study will be a resource for educators, researchers and professionals who are interested in exploring autonomous learning in Saudi EFL writing classes, as it thoroughly describes the autonomous experience in Saudi EFL classes.
10. The results of this study will provide the Saudi MOE and policymakers with new insights and ideas to be adopted when developing curricula.
11. This study contributed to knowledge on the use of LA in Saudi EFL writing classes. As it explored teachers' and students' views on LA in writing classes, it demonstrated that most teachers and students were aware of LA as a concept. However, it also demonstrated that some of the autonomous strategies were not fully and effectively implemented in a way that enhanced students' autonomy in writing. Thus, there is a lack of understanding concerning the essence of LA. For instance, technology was not used as an autonomy-promoting strategy, but as an information delivery tool. Moreover, some significant autonomous strategies were missing, such as student participation in decision-making, freedom of writing and self-assessment. These results painted a clear picture of the autonomous experience in Saudi EFL writing classes. The results also indicated that there is a need to implement these autonomous strategies more effectively through professional training courses.

#### **11.6. Reflections on the Research**

This study utilised a case study mixed method research design. The goal behind this was to thoroughly explore the areas that were not covered in the literature on LA in Saudi EFL writing classes. Six tools served as the instruments of this study: teacher and student

questionnaires, teacher and student interviews, classroom observations and writing samples. It was not easy to collect data for all of these tools. However, it was necessary to collect as many data as possible in order to achieve the goals of this study. When collecting data, it was essential for the researcher to be organised if they wanted to avoid being overwhelmed and unfocused. It is worth mentioning that teachers and students were cooperative during this research. However, students could have felt obligated to praise their teachers when interviewing them and could have hid some information. Moreover, during classroom observation, teachers may have practiced some autonomous strategies, as they reported in the questionnaire that was distributed at the beginning of the semester. Teachers may have felt that they should incorporate some autonomous strategies. For this reason, teacher interviews followed the observations. The researcher did not want teachers to feel obligated to practice a different teaching style than the one they were actually using. Overall, the data collection phase was smooth despite the fact that so many data had to be collected.

As for the data analysis stage, it was easy until the point where a change was needed in one of the methods of analysing quantitative data. The researcher analysed student questionnaires using T-tests. After reading about other methods in quantitative analysis and discussing the issue with the researcher's supervisors, it was decided to change the T-test into a two-way ANOVA. This stage was overwhelming, as the work of two months was discarded. However, this obstacle had good outcomes. The researcher was ignorant when it came to different methods of analysing data. Now, the researcher is proud that she is able to conduct both qualitative and quantitative analyses.

For future projects, a few issues should be taken into consideration. As this study focused on EFL writing, students' written samples were collected and analysed. However, students' written samples deserve more focus and could be the centre of

attention in future research. Another possibility to take into consideration for future research is to conduct a study on the dean and other people in charge rather than teachers and students. Furthermore, the other EFL skills—reading, listening and speaking—could be included in future research.

Researcher positionality was a limitation in this study. Teachers in this study might have had previous opinions about the researcher, which could have affected the collected data. However, the researcher assured the teachers that this study was not about judging their methods of teaching or evaluating their teaching process. Observations were also subject to researcher positionality. Although the researcher tried to be objective and collect the data related to the observation sheet, a second observer could have helped neutralize this subjective element. In spite of these limitations, the study has provided insights into learner autonomy within EFL writing classes which it is hoped will improve both understanding and practice in this important area of learning

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## Appendix A

### Teacher Questionnaire

Dear EFL teacher,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my current study about Saudi EFL writing classes. This questionnaire intends to explore teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices in EFL writing classes.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Part 1:

Background information:

1. Which is your highest qualification?  
\_\_BA, \_\_ MA, or \_\_ PhD.
2. How long have you been an EFL teacher at this university?  
\_\_0–4 years, \_\_5–9 years, \_\_10–14 years, \_\_ 15–19 years, \_\_ 20–24 years, or \_\_ 25+ years.

#### Part 2:

Please indicate how often you do what is mentioned in each of the following statements. Please mark one choice in each row.

(Never = 1 / Rarely = 2 / Sometimes = 3 / Often = 4 / Always = 5)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. I ask students to set their own learning goals.					
2. I allow students to take control over their writing development.					
3. I ask my students to do peer feedback.					
4. I ask for students' views on the study materials we use.					
5. In the beginning of the academic session, I help students identify their own strengths and weaknesses in their writing					
6. I ask students to evaluate their progress in learning EFL writing during the session.					
7. My EFL writing classroom is largely teacher-centred.					

8. When a student has a difficulty in writing, I suggest she seek help from her peers.					
9. I ask students to make a plan before they write.					
10. When students do English writing, I encourage them to experiment with new writing techniques.					
11. I ask my students to self-assess their written tasks.					
12. I help students discover ways to improve their EFL writing.					
13. I give students the freedom to choose their preferred way of writing.					
14. Using mobile dictionaries is allowed in my classroom.					

### Part 3:

Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements. Please mark one choice in each row.

(Strongly disagree = 1 / Strongly agree =6)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. How well students develop in EFL writing is solely my responsibility.						
2. I prefer to follow traditional methods in teaching EFL writing.						
3. I prefer my EFL classes to be learner-centred.						
4. I prefer to act as a facilitator in my EFL writing classes rather than a giver of information.						
5. I prefer to let students seek out information by themselves.						
6. I prefer to let students decide what they should do by themselves.						
7. In my EFL writing classrooms, I prefer to take decisions on the basis of negotiation and agreement with learners.						
8. I prefer to teach students EFL writing through collaborative working.						
9. I believe it is important for the teacher rather than learners to correct written work.						
10. When learners make mistakes in their writing, I prefer to write in the correct version myself.						

**Part 4:**

Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements. Please mark one choice in each row.

(Strongly disagree = 1 / Strongly agree = 6)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Making students' responsible for their learning is difficult to do in EFL writing classes.						
2. Individuals who lack responsibility for controlling their learning are not likely to be effective language learners.						
3. Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.						
4. Autonomous learning cannot be promoted in teacher-centred classrooms.						
5. Learner autonomy is a concept which is difficult to implement among Saudi learners.						
6. Motivated language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than learners who are not motivated.						
7. The teacher has an important role to play in supporting students' independent learning.						
8. To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.						
9. Learner autonomy means that learners are responsible for their learning.						
10. Learner autonomy can be promoted in EFL writing classes by implementing just a few strategies.						
11. I believe that students' reliance on teachers is the main problem for students' EFL writing.						
12. I believe that asking learners to collaborate with each other leads them to become responsible for their own learning.						
13. I believe self-assessment helps students become autonomous learners.						

## Appendix B

### Student First Questionnaire

Dear EFL students,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my current study about Saudi EFL writing classes. This questionnaire intends to explore students' beliefs, attitudes, and practices in EFL writing classes.

Name and class: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Part 1:

Please indicate how often you do what is mentioned in each of the following statements. Please mark one choice in each row.

(Never = 1 / Rarely = 2 / Sometimes = 3 / Often = 4 / Always = 5)

Questionnaire Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1. In high school, most of the activities in EFL classes were led by the teacher rather than by learners.					
2. In high school, I used to learn EFL only from the teacher.					
3. In high school, I used to develop my EFL writing skills by myself.					
4. In high school, I was taught using activities such as group working, collaborative working, etc.					
5. In high school, I was allowed to make decisions about my EFL learning with the teacher.					
6. In high school, if I did not understand something, I tended to ask the teacher rather than learn it by myself.					
7. In high school, I used to evaluate how well I had done in EFL writing.					
8. In high school, I was not allowed to use technology when I wanted to look for new information.					
9. In high school, the only way of receiving written feedback was from my teacher.					
10. In high school, my EFL teacher encouraged me to look for new information by myself.					

#### Part 2:

Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements. Please mark one choice in each row.

(Strongly disagree = 1 / Strongly agree = 6)

Questionnaire Statements	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. I prefer to look for information from different sources rather than from my teacher only.						
2. I like to keep a record of my study, such as keeping a diary, writing a review, etc.						
3. I seek feedback from my classmates if I have difficulty in writing.						
4. I prefer participating in collaborative working.						
5. Even if the teacher does not ask me to, I like to revise my own writing until I am satisfied with it.						
6. I prefer to use reference tools like dictionaries and grammar books when I write.						
7. I prefer to use my own way of generating writing ideas rather than the teacher's way.						
8. When I write in EFL, I like experimenting with new ideas or writing techniques.						
9. I like to look for chances to practise writing outside the classroom.						
10. I prefer to assess my writing tasks by myself after submitting them to the teacher.						
11. I prefer to learn EFL writing skills only from the teacher.						
12. I am good at writing in English.						

### Part 3:

Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements. Please mark one choice in each row.

(Strongly disagree = 1 / Strongly agree = 6)

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. I believe that the teacher is the only provider of knowledge.						
2. Individuals who lack responsibility for controlling their learning are not likely to be effective language learners.						
3. Learner autonomy is a concept which is difficult to implement among Saudi learners.						
4. Learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy.						

5. To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.						
6. The teacher has an important role to play in supporting students' independent learning.						
7. Learner autonomy means that learners are responsible for their learning.						
8. I believe that teachers should make all decisions about students' learning.						
9. Motivated language learners are more likely to practise learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.						
10. Collaborative working could improve learning EFL writing.						
11. The best way to receive feedback on my writing is from the teacher.						
12. I believe it is difficult to learn EFL writing without a teacher.						

## Appendix C

### Student Second Questionnaire

Dear EFL students,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my current study about Saudi EFL writing classes. This questionnaire intends to explore students' beliefs, attitudes, and practices in EFL writing classes.

Name and class: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Part 1:**

Please indicate how often you do what is mentioned in each of the following statements. Please mark one choice in each row.

(Never = 1 / Rarely = 2 / Sometimes = 3 / Often = 4 / Always = 5)

Questionnaire Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1. In the preparatory year, most of the activities in EFL classes were led by the teacher rather than by learners.					
2. In the preparatory year, I was taught EFL writing only by the teacher.					
3. In the preparatory year, I used to develop my EFL writing skills by myself.					
4. In the preparatory year, I was taught using activities such as group working, collaborative working, etc.					
5. In the preparatory year, I was allowed to make decisions about my EFL learning with the teacher.					
6. In the preparatory year, if I did not understand something, I tended to ask the teacher rather than learn it by myself.					
7. In the preparatory year, I used to evaluate my outcomes.					
8. In the preparatory year, I was not allowed to use technology when I wanted to look for new information.					
9. In the preparatory year, the only way of receiving written feedback was from my teacher.					
10. In the preparatory year, my EFL teacher encouraged me to look for new information by myself					

#### **Part 2:**

Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements. Please mark one choice in each row.

(Strongly disagree = 1 / Strongly agree = 6)

Questionnaire Statements	1	2	3	4	5	6

1. I prefer to look for information from different sources rather than from my teacher only.						
2. I like to keep a record of my study, such as keeping a diary, writing a review, etc.						
3. I seek feedback from my classmates if I have a difficulty in writing.						
4. I prefer participating in collaborative working.						
5. Even if the teacher does not ask me to, I like to revise my own writing until I am satisfied with it.						
6. I prefer to use reference tools like dictionaries and grammar books when I write.						
7. I prefer to use my own way of generating writing ideas rather than the teacher's way.						
8. When I write in EFL, I like experimenting with new ideas or writing techniques.						
9. I like to look for chances to practise writing outside the classroom.						
10. I prefer to assess my writing tasks by myself after submitting them to the teacher.						
11. I prefer to learn EFL writing skills only by the teacher.						
12. I am good at writing in English.						

**Part 3:**

Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements. Please mark one choice in each row.

(Strongly disagree = 1 / Strongly agree = 6)

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. I believe that the teacher is the only provider of knowledge.						
2. Individuals who lack responsibility for controlling their learning are not likely to be effective language learners.						
3. Learner autonomy is a concept which is difficult to implement among Saudi learners.						
4. Learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy.						
5. To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.						
6. The teacher has an important role to play in supporting students' independent learning.						
7. Learner autonomy means that learners are responsible for their learning.						
8. I believe that teachers should make all decisions about students' learning.						
9. Motivated language learners are more likely to practise learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.						

10. Collaborative working could improve learning EFL writing.						
11. The best way to receive feedback on my writing is from the teacher.						
12. I believe it is difficult to learn EFL writing without a teacher.						

## Appendix D

### Student First Questionnaire (Arabic Translation)

استبيان الطالبات الأول

اسم الطالبة .....

عزيزتي طالبة اللغة الإنجليزية، شكراً لموافقتك على المشاركة في دراستي الحالية حول الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية في الفصول الدراسية السعودية. يهدف هذا الاستبيان إلى استكشاف معتقدات الطالبات واتجاهاتهن وممارساتهم العملية تجاه استقلالية الطالبة في دروس كتابة اللغة الإنجليزية. استقلالية الطالبة تعني تحكم الطالبة واخذها المسؤولية في تعلمها للغة الإنجليزية.

الجزء الأول: يرجى الإشارة إلى عدد المرات التي تقومين فيها بما هو مذكور في كل من العبارات التالية. يرجى وضع

علامة اختيار واحدة في كل صف (ابداً = 1 / نادراً = 2 / أحياناً = 3 / غالباً = 4 / دائماً = 5)

1	2	3	4	5	بيانات الاستبيان
					في المرحلة الثانوية ، معظم الأنشطة في دروس اللغة الإنجليزية كانت تقاد من قبل المعلمة وليس من قبل الطالبات
					في المرحلة الثانوية ، تعلمت الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية فقط من قبل المعلمة
					في المرحلة الثانوية ، اعتدت على تطوير مهارات الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بنفسي
					في المرحلة الثانوية ، تعلمت استخدام أنشطة مثل العمل الجماعي ، والعمل التعاوني ، ... إلخ
					في المرحلة الثانوية ، سمح لي باتخاذ قرارات حول تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بالاشتراك مع المعلمة
					في المرحلة الثانوية ، إذا لم أفهم شيئاً ، فإنني أسأل المعلمة بدلاً من أن أتعلمه بنفسي
					في المرحلة الثانوية ، اعتدت تقييم نتائجي
					في المرحلة الثانوية ، لم يسمح لي باستخدام التكنولوجيا عندما أردت البحث عن معلومات جديدة
					في المرحلة الثانوية ، كانت الطريقة الوحيدة لتلقي التغذية الراجعة الكتابية هي بواسطة معلمتي
					في المرحلة الثانوية ، شجعتني معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على البحث عن معلومات جديدة بنفسني

الجزء الثاني: يرجى الإشارة إلى مدى موافقتك أو موافقتك على كل عبارة من العبارات التالية. يرجى وضع علامة

اختيار واحدة في كل صف. ( لا أوافق بشدة = 1 / أوافق بشدة = 6)

1	2	3	4	5	6	بيانات الاستبيان
						أفضل البحث عن المعلومات من مصادر مختلفة بدلاً من معلمتي فقط
						أحب الاحتفاظ بسجل لدراساتي ، مثل الاحتفاظ بمفكرة ، وكتابة مراجعة ... إلخ
						أسعى للحصول على المساعدة من زميلاتي إذا واجهت صعوبة في الكتابة
						أفضل المشاركة في العمل التعاوني
						أنا أحب مراجعة واجباتي الكتابية حتى أكون راضية عنها حتى اذا لم تطلب المعلمة مني ذلك
						أفضل استخدام الأدوات المرجعية مثل القواميس وكتب تعليم القواعد النحوية عند الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية
						أفضل استخدام طريقي الخاصة لتوليد الأفكار بدلاً من طريقة المعلمة
						عندما اكتب باللغة الإنجليزية ، أحب تجربة أفكار جديدة أو تقنيات الكتابة الأخرى
						أحب أن أجد فرص لممارسة الكتابة خارج الفصول الدراسية
						أفضل تقييم كتابتي الإنجليزية بنفسي بعد تقديمها إلى المعلمة
						أفضل تعلم مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية فقط من قبل المعلمة فقط
						أنا جيدة في الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية

الجزء الثالث: يرجى الإشارة إلى مدى عدم موافقتك أو موافقتك على كل عبارة من العبارات التالية. يرجى وضع علامة

اختيار واحدة في كل صف. ( لا أوافق بشدة = 1 / أوافق بشدة = 6 )

1	2	3	4	5	6	بيانات الاستبيان
						أعتقد أن المعلمة هي المصدر الوحيد للتزود بالمعرفة
						الطالبات اللواتي لا يتحملن مسؤولية التحكم في تعلمهن غير المرجح أن يكن متعلمات فعالات للغة الإنجليزية
						استقلالية الطالبة هو مفهوم يصعب تنفيذه بين الطالبات السعوديات
						توفر الفصول الدراسية المتمحورة حول الطالبة ظروفًا مثالية لتطوير استقلالية الطالبة
						لكي تصبح الطالبات مستقلات ، يجب عليهن تطوير القدرة على تقييم تعلمهن

						تلعّب المعلمة دورًا مهمًا في دعم التعلم المستقل للطالبات
						استقلالية الطالبة تعني أن الطالبات هن المسؤولات عن تعلمهن
						أعتقد أنه يجب على المعلمات اتخاذ جميع القرارات المتعلقة بتعلم الطالبات
						من المرجح أن تمارس طالبات اللغة المتحمسات استقلالية التعلم أكثر من المتعلمات غير المتحمسات
						العمل التعاوني يمكن أن يحسن تعلم الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية
						أفضل طريقة لتلقي ردود الفعل على كتابتي هي من المعلمة
						أعتقد أنه من الصعب تعلم كتابة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بدون معلمة

## Appendix E

### Student Second Questionnaire (Arabic Translation)

استبيان الطالبات الثاني

اسم الطالبة.....

عزيزتي طالبة اللغة الإنجليزية، شكراً لموافقتك على المشاركة في دراستي الحالية حول الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية في الفصول الدراسية السعودية. يهدف هذا الاستبيان إلى استكشاف معتقدات الطالبات واتجاهاتهن وممارساتهم العملية تجاه استقلالية الطالبة في دروس كتابة اللغة الإنجليزية. استقلالية الطالبة تعني تحكم الطالبة واخذها المسؤولية في تعلمها للغة الإنجليزية.

الجزء الأول: يرجى الإشارة إلى عدد المرات التي تقومين فيها بما هو مذكور في كل من العبارات التالية. يرجى وضع

علامة اختيار واحدة في كل صف (ابدا = 1 / نادرا = 2 / أحيانا = 3 / غالبا = 4 / دائما = 5)

1	2	3	4	5	بيانات الاستبيان
					في السنة التحضيرية ، معظم الأنشطة في دروس اللغة الإنجليزية كانت تقاد من قبل المعلمة وليس من قبل الطالبات
					في السنة التحضيرية ، تعلمت الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية فقط من قبل المعلمة
					في السنة التحضيرية ، اعتدت على تطوير مهارات الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بنفسني
					في السنة التحضيرية ، تعلمت استخدام أنشطة مثل العمل الجماعي ، والعمل التعاوني ، ... إلخ
					في السنة التحضيرية ، سمح لي باتخاذ قرارات حول تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بالاشتراك مع المعلمة
					في السنة التحضيرية ، إذا لم أفهم شيئاً ، فإنني أسأل المعلمة بدلاً من أن أتعلمه بنفسني
					في السنة التحضيرية ، اعتدت تقييم نتائجي
					في السنة التحضيرية ، لم يسمح لي باستخدام التكنولوجيا عندما أردت البحث عن معلومات جديدة
					في السنة التحضيرية ، كانت الطريقة الوحيدة لتلقي التغذية الراجعة الكتابية هي بواسطة معلمتي
					في السنة التحضيرية ، شجعتني معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على البحث عن معلومات جديدة بنفسني

الجزء الثاني: يرجى الإشارة إلى مدى عدم موافقتك أو موافقتك على كل عبارة من العبارات التالية. يرجى وضع علامة

اختيار واحدة في كل صف. ( لا أوافق بشدة = 1 / أوافق بشدة = 6 )

1	2	3	4	5	6	بيانات الاستبيان
						أفضل البحث عن المعلومات من مصادر مختلفة بدلاً من معلمتي فقط
						أحب الاحتفاظ بسجل لدراساتي ، مثل الاحتفاظ بمفكرة ، وكتابة مراجعة ... إلخ
						أسعى للحصول على المساعدة من زميلاتي إذا واجهت صعوبة في الكتابة
						أفضل المشاركة في العمل التعاوني
						أنا أحب مراجعة واجباتي الكتابية حتى أكون راضية عنها حتى إذا لم تطلب المعلمة مني ذلك
						أفضل استخدام الأدوات المرجعية مثل القواميس وكتب تعليم القواعد النحوية عند الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية
						أفضل استخدام طريقتي الخاصة لتوليد الأفكار بدلاً من طريقة المعلمة
						عندما اكتب باللغة الإنجليزية ، أحب تجربة أفكار جديدة أو تقنيات الكتابة الأخرى
						أحب أن أجد فرص لممارسة الكتابة خارج الفصول الدراسية
						أفضل تقييم كتابتي الإنجليزية بنفسي بعد تقديمها إلى المعلمة
						أفضل تعلم مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية فقط من قبل المعلمة فقط
						أنا جيدة في الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية

الجزء الثالث: يرجى الإشارة إلى مدى عدم موافقتك أو موافقتك على كل عبارة من العبارات التالية. يرجى وضع علامة

اختيار واحدة في كل صف. ( لا أوافق بشدة = 1 / أوافق بشدة = 6 )

1	2	3	4	5	6	بيانات الاستبيان
						أعتقد أن المعلمة هي المصدر الوحيد للتزود بالمعرفة
						الطالبات اللواتي لا يتحملن مسؤولية التحكم في تعلمهن غير المرجح أن يكن متعلمات فعالات للغة الإنجليزية
						استقلالية الطالبة هو مفهوم يصعب تنفيذه بين الطالبات السعوديات

						توفر الفصول الدراسية المتمحورة حول الطالبة ظروفًا مثالية لتطوير استقلالية الطالبة
						لكي تصبح الطالبات مستقلات ، يجب عليهن تطوير القدرة على تقييم تعلمهن
						تلعب المعلمة دورًا مهمًا في دعم التعلم المستقل للطالبات
						استقلالية الطالبة تعني أن الطالبات هن المسؤولات عن تعلمهن
						أعتقد أنه يجب على المعلمات اتخاذ جميع القرارات المتعلقة بتعلم الطالبات
						من المرجح أن تمارس طالبات اللغة المتحمسات استقلالية التعلم أكثر من المتعلمات غير المتحمسات
						العمل التعاوني يمكن أن يحسن تعلم الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية
						أفضل طريقة لتلقي ردود الفعل على كتابتي هي من المعلمة
						أعتقد أنه من الصعب تعلم كتابة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بدون معلمة

Appendix F

Observation Form

**Date and time:**

**Class:**

**Teacher:**

**Number of observations:**

Practices in classroom	√ or X	Technique used (if any)	Number of times	Amount of time	L1/L2	Resources	Comments
Using dictionaries is allowed in classroom.							
Using technology is allowed in classroom.							
Using diaries and self-reports to keep track of learning progress.							
Giving students tasks from real-life situation.							

Motivating students to direct their own learning by themselves.							
Collaborative working is used when working on tasks.							
Asking students to set their own learning goals.							
Asking for students' views on the used study materials.							
Asking students to evaluate their progress in learning EFL writing during the session.							
Students look for new information by themselves.							

New information is delivered by the teacher.							
Asking students to make a plan before they write.							
Encouraging students to practice new writing techniques.							
Giving students the freedom to choose their preferred way of writing.							
Feedback on Classroom's Tasks							
Group feedback is used.							
Peer feedback is used.							
Self-assessment is used.							
Teacher feedback is used.							

## Appendix G

### Student Interview

1. Do you plan before you write? If yes, how, and if no, why not?
2. Have you ever set goals with your teacher before writing? Did it go well? Why or why not?
3. When you write, do you think it is better to stick to the linguistic structures taught by the teacher? Why or why not?
4. Do you assess your own work? How often? If often, what are the advantages, and if seldom, why not?
5. Do you keep a diary or journal to keep a track of your writing learning? If yes, why?
6. Do you evaluate your writing? If yes, how so? If no, why?
7. Do you seek the teacher's written feedback? If yes, what type?
8. How do you usually respond to the teacher's feedback? Why?
9. Do you ask your peers for their written feedback? If yes, why? If no, why not?
10. Do you work as a group when working on a written task? Why?
11. Do you use technology when you write? If yes, how so?
12. Do you use dictionaries or text books when you write?
13. Who makes decisions about the way you write? If teacher, what are the advantages and disadvantages?
14. What motivates you to learn more writing techniques?

## Appendix H

### Student Interview (Arabic Translation)

1. هل تخطط قبل أن تكتب؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، فكيف إذا كان الجواب بلا ، لماذا؟
2. هل سبق لك أن حددت أهدافاً مع معلمك قبل الكتابة؟ هل سرت الامور على ما يرام؟ لما و لما لا؟
3. عندما تكتب ، هل تعتقد أنه من الأفضل التمسك بالهياكل اللغوية التي يدرسها المعلم؟ لما و لما لا؟
4. هل تقيم عملك الخاص؟ كم مرة؟ إذا كانت غالباً ، ما هي المزايا ، إذا كانت نادرة ، فلماذا لا؟
5. هل تحتفظ بمذكرات أو مذكرات لتتبع تعلم كتابتك؟ إذا كانت الإجابة نعم ، لماذا؟
6. هل تقيم كتاباتك؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، فكيف؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بلا ، فلماذا؟
7. هل تلتزم ملاحظات المدرس المكتوبة؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، أي نوع؟
8. كيف ترد عادة على ملاحظات المدرس؟ لماذا؟
9. هل تطلب من زملائك ملاحظاتهم المكتوبة؟ إذا كانت الإجابة نعم ، لماذا؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بلا ، فلماذا؟
10. هل تعمل كمجموعة عند العمل في مهمة مكتوبة؟ لماذا؟
11. هل تستخدم التكنولوجيا عند الكتابة؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، فكيف؟
12. هل تستخدم القواميس أو الكتب المدرسية عند الكتابة؟
13. من يتخذ القرارات بشأن الطريقة التي تكتب بها؟ إذا المعلم ، ما هي مزايا و عيوب؟
14. ما الذي يحفزك لتعلم المزيد من تقنيات الكتابة؟

## Appendix I

### Teacher Interview

1. Do you think learner autonomy is important?
2. How would you define learner autonomy?
3. What do you know about promoting learner autonomy in EFL teaching?
4. Do you think promoting learner autonomy in EFL writing classrooms is easy or difficult? Why?
5. Are there any constraints from the dean and the university regulations that hinder the development of learner autonomy (LA)? What are they?
6. Are there any new strategies that you apply in your EFL writing teaching? What are they?
7. What are the factors that support promoting LA in writing classrooms?
  
8. In your opinion, what are the barriers in promoting LA in EFL writing classroom?
9. What do you think the role of teachers in promoting students' autonomy should be?
10. Do you encourage students to become more autonomous in or outside the classroom? If yes, how? If no, why not?
11. Does the teaching and learning environment in Saudi educational system help or hinder the development of autonomy? In what ways?
12. Do you find any differences between the autonomous and non-autonomous learners regarding their performance? What are they?
13. Do you find any differences between the autonomous and non-autonomous learners?
14. In your opinion, what are students' responsibilities in learning EFL writing?
15. Do you consider that you promote learner autonomy in your EFL writing classes? If yes, how? If no, what are the reasons for not promoting learner autonomy in your classroom?
16. What are reasons that teachers do not encourage students' LA?
17. How do you usually give feedback? Why do you use this type?
18. What are the techniques you use to teach writing EFL?
19. Why do not you use the other types of feedback, such as direct or coded?
20. What do you consider your classroom, teacher-centred or student-centred? How?
21. Are students allowed to make decisions about their learning? If yes, please give examples.
22. Do you engage your students in deciding their favourite ways of learning new EFL writing skills? If yes, how? If no, why not?
23. How do you assess whether the learners are autonomous?
24. Do you motivate your students? If yes, how? If no, why not?
25. How do you encourage your students?
26. Do you use group working and collaborative activities in teaching EFL writing classroom? If yes, do you think it is useful and in what ways? If no, why not?
27. Do you think that new trends in TEFL encourage promoting LA?

## Appendix J

### Teacher Interview (Arabic Translation)

1. هل تعتقد أن استقلالية المتعلم مهمة؟
2. كيف تعرف استقلالية المتعلم؟
3. ماذا تعرف عن تعزيز استقلالية المتعلم في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؟
4. هل تعتقد أن تعزيز استقلالية المتعلم في الفصل الدراسي للكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية أمر سهل أم صعب؟ لماذا؟
5. هل هناك أي قيود من عميد الجامعة واللوائح التي تعيق تطوير استقلالية المتعلم؟ ما هم؟
6. هل هناك أي استراتيجيات جديدة تطبقها في تدريس الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؟ ما هم؟
7. ما هي العوامل التي تدعم تعزيز استقلالية الطلاب في كتابة الفصول الدراسية؟
8. في رأيك ، ما هي العوائق التي تحول دون الترويج للغة الإنجليزية في فصول الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية؟
9. ما هو برأيك دور المعلمين في تعزيز استقلالية الطلاب؟
10. هل تشجع الطلاب على أن يصبحوا أكثر استقلالية داخل الفصل الدراسي أو خارجه؟ إذا كانت الإجابة نعم ، فكيف؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بلا ، فلماذا؟
11. هل البيئة التعليمية والتعليمية في النظام التعليمي السعودي تساعد أو تعوق تطور الحكم الذاتي؟ بأبني طريقة؟
12. هل تجد أي اختلافات بين المتعلمين المستقلين وغير المستقلين فيما يتعلق بأدائهم؟ ما هم؟
13. هل تجد أي اختلافات بين المتعلمين المستقلين وغير المستقلين
14. في رأيك ، ما هي مسؤوليات الطلاب في تعلم الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية؟
15. هل تعتقد أنك تعزز استقلالية المتعلم في فصول الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؟ إذا كانت الإجابة نعم ، فكيف؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بلا ، فما هي أسباب عدم تعزيز استقلالية المتعلم في غرفة الصف الخاصة بك؟
16. ما هي أسباب عدم تشجيع المعلمين للطلاب
17. كيف يمكنك عادة إبداء الرأي؟ لماذا تستخدم هذا النوع؟
18. ما هي الأساليب التي تستخدمها لتدريس كتابة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؟
19. لماذا لا تستخدم أنواع أخرى من ردود الفعل مثل المباشرة أو المشفرة؟
20. كيف تعتبر فصلك ، محوره المعلم أو محوره الطالب؟ كيف؟
21. هل يُسمح للطلاب باتخاذ القرار في تعلمهم؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، يرجى إعطاء أمثلة؟

22. هل تشرك طلابك في تحديد طرقهم المفضلة لتعلم مهارات الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؟ إذا كانت الإجابة نعم ، فكيف؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بلا ، فلماذا؟
23. كيف تقيمون ما إذا كان المتعلمون مستقلين أم لا؟
24. هل تحفز طلابك؟ إذا كانت الإجابة نعم ، فكيف؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بلا ، فلماذا؟
25. كيف تشجع الطلاب؟
26. هل تستخدم العمل الجماعي والأنشطة التعاونية في تدريس الفصل الدراسي لكتابة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، فهل تعتقد أنها مفيدة وبأي طرق؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بلا ، فلماذا؟
27. هل تعتقد أن الاتجاهات الجديدة في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية تشجع على استقلالية الطلاب؟

## Appendix K

### Student Information Sheet

**Project title:** Autonomous Learning in Saudi Writing Classroom: Teachers' and Students' Perceptions, Beliefs, and Attitudes

Dear Participant,

I am a PhD student at the University of Reading, UK. You are invited to participate in this research study about learner autonomy in EFL writing classes. Learner autonomy is students taking responsibility for their learning.

Please take the time to read the following information carefully to know more about the research.

#### ***What is the study?***

This research forms the basis of a PhD project, which I am undertaking at the Institute of Education, University of Reading in the UK. It aims to explore teachers' and students' beliefs, attitudes, and practices of learner autonomy in EFL writing classes.

#### ***Why have I been chosen to take part?***

You are invited because you are in your first semester in the preparatory year at the English Language Center (ELC), the level of which is the base of the research. Your participation will help the researcher to explore more about students taking responsibility for their learning EFL in the Saudi educational system.

#### ***Do I have to take part?***

No, participation is entirely voluntary. Taking part or not will not influence your college grades in any way, and information will not be shared with individual teachers. If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. You will be still free to withdraw at any time and without giving any reason by contacting me, the Project Researcher, Abrar Owaidah, Tel.: \_\_\_\_\_, Email: [a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk).

#### ***What will happen if I take part?***

The participation in this study will involve completing two short questionnaires, one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end of the semester. Each questionnaire will take around 20–30 minutes to complete within class time. Questionnaires will be about students' beliefs, attitudes, and practices of learner autonomy. Each questionnaire will be in Arabic. The researcher will collect some of your writing assessments to explore how your writing develops over the semester. You will be taught as usual and observed in your normal writing classes on 3–5 occasions.

#### ***What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of taking part?***

There are no anticipated disadvantages in taking part in the study. Taking part will not influence your college grades in any way, and information will not be shared with individual

teachers. You may find it useful to reflect on how you develop your English writing skills, and the study will provide useful information for the teaching of writing in the Saudi context.

***What will happen to the data?***

Any data collected will be held in strict confidence, and no real names will be used in this study or in any subsequent publications. The data collected in the study will provide the basis of my PhD thesis. The thesis will be published in hard copy and electronic format, which will be housed at the Institute of Education at the University of Reading. The data and the analysis of the data may also be used to produce articles, books, and conference papers, and presented at conferences and lectures. In any of these formats, I reassure you that the identity and anonymity of all participants will be protected. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations). In order to protect the anonymity of each participant, pseudonyms will be used to ensure participants cannot be identified. All electronic data will be held securely in password-protected files on a non-shared PC, and all paper documentation will be held in locked cabinets in a locked office.

***What happens if I change my mind?***

You can change your mind at any time, without any problems, by contacting the researcher. If you change your mind after the data collection is complete, we will discard all the data.

***What happens if something goes wrong?***

In the unlikely case of any concerns or complaints, you can contact my supervisor, Professor Suzanne Graham, at the University of Reading, Tel.: [s.j.graham@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.j.graham@reading.ac.uk) Email:

***Where can I get more information about this study?***

If you would like more information, please contact Abrar Owaidah.  
Tel.:

Email: [a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk)

I sincerely hope that you will agree to participate in this study. If you do, please complete the attached Consent Form and return it to me, Abrar Owaidah, at the above email address.

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University of Reading's Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The university has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Signed:

Abrar Owaidah  
Dated: 21 March 2018

Appendix L

Student Consent Form

**Project title:** Autonomous Learning in Saudi Writing Classroom: Teachers' and Students' Perceptions, Beliefs, and Attitudes

I have read the information sheet about the project and received a copy of it. I understand what the purpose of the study is and what is required of me. All my questions have been answered.

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please tick as appropriate:*

- |  |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|
| 1. I agree for classes I am involved in to be observed:  | _____ | _____ |
|  | Yes   | No    |
| 2. I agree to complete the two questionnaires:   | _____ | _____ |
|  | Yes   | No    |
| 3. I agree to give my writing samples to the researcher  | _____ | _____ |
|  | Yes   | No    |
| 4. I agree to be interviewed:  | _____ | _____ |
|  | Yes   | No    |
| 5. I agree that this interview is being audio-recorded:  | _____ | _____ |
|  | Yes   | No    |
| 6. I agree to the use of anonymised quotations from the interviews in written reports/publications | _____ | _____ |
|  | Yes   | No    |

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of researcher taking consent: Abrar Owaidah

Researcher email address: [a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk)

## Appendix M

### Teacher Information Sheet

**Research title:** Autonomous Learning in Saudi Writing Classroom: Teachers' and Students' Perceptions, Beliefs, and Attitudes

Dear Teacher,

I am a PhD candidate at the University of Reading, UK. As part of the data collection stage of my thesis, I am writing to invite you to take part in a research study about learner autonomy in EFL writing classes. Learner autonomy is students taking responsibility for their learning.

#### ***What is the study?***

You have been invited to take part in this project because I am looking to explore EFL writing classes across a range of different teachers and their students in the preparatory year, a level which you teach at the English Language Centre (ELC) at Taibah University. The study will explore students' and teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices about implementing autonomous learning in classrooms. It is hoped that recommendations can then be made regarding how we can best help teachers and students in EFL writing. A total of approximately 220 potential participants have been invited to take part in this study, including 200 students and 20 teachers.

#### ***Do I have to take part?***

It is entirely at your discretion whether you participate. You may also withdraw your consent to participation at any time during the project by contacting me, the Project Researcher, Abrar Owaidah at Tel.:                      Email: [a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk). This will not incur any repercussions for you.

#### ***What will happen if I take part?***

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to attend an interview with the researcher, lasting approximately 45 minutes. You will have the choice as to whether to be interviewed in Arabic or English. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed with your permission. Interviews will be about exploring autonomous learning in EFL classes. The transcription will then be shown to you, in order for you to check its accuracy and confirm that you still consent for its contents to be used. The information gathered will be used by the researcher for data analysis. Also, you will be requested to complete a short questionnaire (taking approximately 20–30 minutes). The questions will be in English, but the Arabic translation will also be provided. The questionnaire will be about teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices of learner autonomy in EFL classes. A small number of teachers will also be observed in their teaching of writing, approximately 3–5 times over 3 months. These observations will focus on how writing is taught and will not make any judgments about the quality of the teaching.

In addition, students in your class will be asked to complete two questionnaires during class time, which would last for 20–30 minutes, one at either end of the semester. Consent will also be obtained in advance from students. Samples of their written work may also be requested.

#### ***What are the risks and benefits of taking part?***

The information given by the participants in the study will remain confidential and will only be seen by the researcher and the supervisor listed at the top of this letter. You will be

assigned an identification number (ID), and this will be the only reference used to distinguish your responses from those of other participants. This ID will in no way be associated with your name. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published.

I anticipate that the findings of this study will be useful for teachers when planning how they teach vocabulary.

***What will happen to the data?***

Any data collected will be held in strict confidence, and no real names will be used in this study or in any subsequent publications. The data collected for this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you, the students, or the college to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. The participants will be assigned a number, and this will be used to refer to them in all records. The research records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer. Only the researcher and supervisors will have access to them. In line with the university's policy on the management of research data, anonymised data gathered in this research may be preserved and made publicly available for others to consult and re-use. The results of this study will be presented at national and international conferences, and included in written reports and articles. We can send you electronic copies of these publications if you wish.

***What happens if I change my mind?***

You can change your mind at any time, without any repercussions, by contacting the researcher. If you change your mind after the data collection is complete, we will discard all the data.

***What happens if something goes wrong?***

In the unlikely event of any concerns or complaints, you can contact my supervisor, Professor Suzanne Graham, at the University of Reading, Tel: \_\_\_\_\_, Email: [s.j.graham@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.j.graham@reading.ac.uk).

***Where can I get more information about this study?***

If you would like more information, please contact Abrar Owaidah.  
Tel.:

Email: [a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk)

I sincerely hope that you will agree to participate in this study. If you do, please complete the attached Consent Form and return it to me, Abrar Owaidah (Email: [a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk)).

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University of Reading's Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The university has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Signed:

、  
Abrar Owaidah  
Dated: 21 March 2018

Appendix N

Teacher Consent Form

**Project title:** Autonomous Learning in Saudi Writing Classroom: Teachers' and Students' Perceptions, Beliefs, and Attitudes

I have read and had explained to me the Information Sheet relating to this project.

I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet, insofar as they relate to my participation.

I understand that I will be interviewed and that the interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. I also understand that I will complete a questionnaire, and I agree that my classroom could be chosen to be observed. I understand that I will let my students complete two questionnaires, and I agree to let the researcher have my students' writing samples.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from this project at any time, without giving a reason and without repercussions.

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying Information Sheet.

*Please tick as appropriate:*

I consent to being interviewed:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	No
I consent to this interview being audio-recorded:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	No
I consent to be observed teaching:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	No
I consent to completing the questionnaire:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	No
I consent to give my students' writing samples to the researcher:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	No
I consent to let my students complete the researcher's two questionnaires:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	No
I consent to the use of anonymised quotations from the interviews in written reports/publications:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	No

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of researcher taking consent: Abrar Owaidah. Researcher email address:

[a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk)

## Appendix O

### College Dean Information Sheet

**Research Project:** ‘Autonomous Learning in Saudi Writing Classroom: Teachers’ and Students’ Perceptions, Beliefs, Attitudes, and Practices’

**Research and Supervisors:** Abrar Owaidah (researcher); Professor Suzanne Graham; Dr Daisy Powell (supervisors)

Dear Sir,

I am writing to invite the English Language Centre (ELC) at your college to take part in a research study about implementing autonomous learning in writing classes.

#### *What is this study?*

This research forms the basis of a PhD project, which I am undertaking at the Institute of Education, University of Reading in the UK. It aims to explore teachers’ and students’ beliefs, attitudes, and practices in relation to learning autonomy.

#### *Why has this centre been chosen to take part?*

I selected the ELC as the site of my research because I have worked as a lecturer in Taibah University (Almahd Branch). I am therefore familiar with the college’s regulations and work environment. Consequently, I feel that the ELC, which offers the Preparatory Year (PY) to all students at the college, would be the best place for me to conduct my study amongst learners who will be exposed to different learning methods after graduating from high school.

#### *Does the centre have to take part?*

There is no obligation for the centre to participate. This is entirely voluntary, and the participants have the right to withdraw at any time by contacting Abrar Owaidah (the researcher) at Tel.:                      Email: [a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk). There will be no repercussions resulting from withdrawal for them or for anyone else concerned.

#### *What will happen if the centre takes part?*

Subject to your agreement, participation in this study will involve interviews, observation, the completion of questionnaires, and analysis of some written work. Questionnaires will be administered to 20 teachers and students in four classes. Students will complete a first questionnaire at the beginning of the academic year and a second one at the end of the semester, both during their English classes. Twenty teachers will complete one questionnaire at the start of the semester. Each questionnaire will take approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. Four teachers will be interviewed at the beginning of the academic year. The interview will take approximately 20 minutes at a time and place to suit teachers and will be audio recorded, with their permission, and later transcribed. Four teachers and their classes will be selected for observation, in order to give insights into a range of classes. The classrooms to be observed will be chosen based on teachers’ responses to the questionnaire. Observation of classes will be conducted several times (3–5 times) during the semester. The focus of the observation will be on the teachers’ writing instruction practices and will not involve any judgment of the teachers or students. Students’ writing samples will be collected several times from the four classes in order to track their development.

### ***What are the risks and benefits of taking part?***

There are no risks associated with taking part in this study. The information provided by the participants will be kept strictly confidential and will only be seen by the researcher. It will not be possible to identify you, the teachers, the students, or the centre in any published report resulting from this study, and information about individuals will not be shared with the centre. I anticipate that the findings from this study will be useful for helping students to improve their writing knowledge and for teachers in planning their writing teaching.

### ***What will happen to the data?***

Any data collected will be held in strict confidence, and no real names will be used in this study or in any subsequent publications. Research records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer. Only the researcher and supervisors will then have access to these records. No identifiers linking you, the participants, or the centre to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. The participants will be assigned a number, and this will be used to refer to them in all records. All interview recordings will be destroyed after the end of the research. My academic supervisors will have access to the transcripts and test results, but I will be the only person accessing the original recordings. In line with the university's policy on the management of research data, anonymised data gathered in this research may be preserved and made publicly available for others to consult and re-use. The results of the study will be presented at national and international conferences, and in written reports and articles. We can send you electronic copies of these publications if you wish.

### ***What happens if I change my mind?***

You can change your mind at any time without any repercussions. If you change your mind after the data collection has been completed, we will discard all data gathered at the centre.

### ***What happens if something goes wrong?***

In the unlikely case of any concerns or complaints, you can contact my supervisor, Professor Suzanne Graham, at the University of Reading, Tel.: Email:  
[s.j.graham@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.j.graham@reading.ac.uk).

### ***Where can I get more information?***

If you would like more information, please contact Abrar Owaidah.  
Tel.:

Email: [a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:a.a.a.owaidah@pgr.reading.ac.uk)

I sincerely hope that you will give your consent for the centre to participate in this study. Should this be the case, please complete the attached consent form and return it to the researcher, Abrar Owaidah, at the above email address.

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University of Reading's Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The university has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely.

Abrar Owaidah

College Dean Consent Form

I have read the Information Sheet about the project and received a copy of it.

I understand what the purpose of the project is and what is required of me. All my questions have been answered.

Name of College Dean: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the college: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please tick as appropriate:**

I consent to the involvement of my college in the project as outlined in the Information Sheet.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix P

### Ethical Approval Form University of Reading

University of Reading  
Institute of Education  
Ethical Approval Form A (version May 2015)



Tick one:

Staff project: PhD\_  EdD \_\_\_\_\_

Name of applicant(s): Abrar Owaidah

Title of project: 'Autonomous Learning in Saudi Writing Classroom: Teachers and Students' Perceptions, Beliefs, Attitudes and Practices'

Name of supervisor (for student projects): Professor Suzanne Graham; Dr Daisy Powell

**Please complete the form below including relevant sections overleaf.**

	YES	NO	
<b>Have you prepared an Information Sheet for participants and/or their parents/carers that:</b>			
a) explains the purpose(s) of the project	✓		
b) explains how they have been selected as potential participants	✓		
c) gives a full, fair and clear account of what will be asked of them and how the information that they provide will be used	✓		
d) makes clear that participation in the project is voluntary	✓		
e) explains the arrangements to allow participants to withdraw at any stage if they wish	✓		
f) explains the arrangements to ensure the confidentiality of any material collected during the project, including secure arrangements for its storage, retention and disposal	✓		
g) explains the arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent for this	✓		
h) explains the arrangements for providing participants with the research results if they wish to have them	✓		
i) gives the name and designation of the member of staff with responsibility for the project together with contact details, including email. If any of the project investigators are students at the IoE, then this information must be included and their name provided	✓		
k) explains, where applicable, the arrangements for expenses and other payments to be made to the participants		✓	
j) includes a standard statement indicating the process of ethical review at the University undergone by the project, as follows: 'This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct'.	✓		
k) includes a standard statement regarding insurance: 'The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request'.	✓		
<b>Please answer the following questions</b>			
1) Will you provide participants involved in your research with all the information necessary to ensure that they are fully informed and not in any way deceived or misled as to the purpose(s) and nature of the research? (Please use the subheadings used in the example information sheets on blackboard to ensure this).	✓		
2) Will you seek written or other formal consent from all participants, if they are able to provide it, in addition to (1)?	✓		
3) Is there any risk that participants may experience physical or psychological distress in taking part in your research?		✓	
4) Have you taken the online training modules in data protection and information security (which can be found here: <a href="http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/Staffpages/imps-training.aspx">http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/Staffpages/imps-training.aspx</a> )?	✓		
5) Have you read the Health and Safety booklet (available on Blackboard) and completed a Risk Assessment Form to be included with this ethics application?	✓		
6) Does your research comply with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research?	✓		
	YES	NO	N.A.
7) If your research is taking place in a school, have you prepared an information sheet and consent form to gain the permission in writing of the head teacher or other relevant supervisory professional?	✓		
8) Has the data collector obtained satisfactory DBS clearance?			✓

9) If your research involves working with children under the age of 16 (or those whose special educational needs mean they are unable to give informed consent), have you prepared an information sheet and consent form for parents/carers to seek permission in writing, or to give parents/carers the opportunity to decline consent?			✓
10) If your research involves processing sensitive personal data <sup>1</sup> , or if it involves audio/video recordings, have you obtained the explicit consent of participants/parents?	✓		
11) If you are using a data processor to subcontract any part of your research, have you got a written contract with that contractor which (a) specifies that the contractor is required to act only on your instructions, and (b) provides for appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect the data?			✓
12a) Does your research involve data collection outside the UK?	✓		
12b) If the answer to question 12a is "yes", does your research comply with the legal and ethical requirements for doing research in that country?	✓		
13a) Does your research involve collecting data in a language other than English?	✓		
13b) If the answer to question 13a is "yes", please confirm that information sheets, consent forms, and research instruments, where appropriate, have been directly translated from the English versions submitted with this application.	✓		
14a. Does the proposed research involve children under the age of 5?		✓	
14b. If the answer to question 14a is "yes": My Head of School (or authorised Head of Department) has given details of the proposed research to the University's insurance officer, and the research will not proceed until I have confirmation that insurance cover is in place.			✓
<b>If you have answered YES to Question 3, please complete Section B below</b>			

Please complete **either** Section A **or** Section B and provide the details required in support of your application. Sign the form (Section C) then submit it with all relevant attachments (e.g. information sheets, consent forms, tests, questionnaires, interview schedules) to the Institute's Ethics Committee for consideration. Any missing information will result in the form being returned to you.

<b>A:</b> My research goes beyond the 'accepted custom and practice of teaching' but I consider that this project has <b>no</b> significant ethical implications. (Please tick the box)	✓
Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g. teachers, parents, pupils, etc.	
The participants of this study will be preparatory year students from the English Language Centre in Taibah University and their core English teachers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For the pilot study: 5 teachers, 50 students aged 18-20.</li> <li>- For the main study: 20 teachers, 250 students aged 18-20.</li> </ul>	
Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words noting:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. title of project</li> <li>2. purpose of project and its academic rationale</li> <li>3. brief description of methods and measurements</li> <li>4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria</li> <li>5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)</li> <li>6. a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.</li> <li>7. estimated start date and duration of project.</li> </ol>	
Autonomous Learning in Saudi Writing Classrooms: Teachers' and Students' Perceptions, Beliefs and Attitudes	
This study aims to explore teachers' and students' beliefs and attitudes towards learner autonomy (LA) which means students' taking responsibility for their learning. It also aims to explore the development of students' writing with and without autonomous learning as well as exploring the barriers and supporting factors around promoting LA in EFL writing classrooms. The research questions are:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are Saudi EFL teachers' and students' beliefs and attitudes towards learner autonomy?</li> </ol>	

<sup>1</sup> Sensitive personal data consists of information relating to the racial or ethnic origin of a data subject, their political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, sexual life, physical or mental health or condition, or criminal offences or record.

2. To what extent do Saudi EFL teachers promote students' learner autonomy in their writing classes?
3. Are there any changes in students' practices in learner autonomy before and after preparatory year?
4. How do Saudi EFL teachers perceive the barriers and supporting factors of promoting autonomous learning in writing classes?
5. To what extent do learners develop an autonomous approach to writing within the two types of classrooms studied?

Different instruments will be used in this study to answer the research questions. Four main tools will be employed: observations, questionnaires, and interviews, in addition to students' writing samples. The attached student consent form and the questionnaire are in English, however, the Arabic versions for both documents will be provided for students.

In the main study, teachers and students will be asked to complete a questionnaire, asking questions around their beliefs, attitudes and practices in respect of learner autonomy in writing. Based on teacher responses, four classes will be selected for further study. Two will be chosen where the teacher expresses positive attitudes and use of autonomous learning practices for writing, and two where the teachers' attitudes/practices are negative towards learner autonomy. These four classes will then be followed over a period of three months. Methods of teaching and strategies to teach writing will be observed over four classes. Interviews will be conducted with the teachers to explore their attitudes further. Samples of writing will be taken from all students for the first time to be selected based on their different abilities. two students' samples from each class will be collected every three weeks, (eight samples selected to give a range of abilities students from the four classes), in order to explore how writing develops with and without learner autonomy practices. students whose samples will have been collected will be requested to conduct an interview (approximately 30-40 minutes) about some of their writing samples.

The writing activities are a part of standard teaching provision for the students, but the participation in this study is voluntary, with the right to withdraw without repercussions at any time during the project.

There are no risks associated with taking part in this study. The information given by the participants will be kept strictly confidential and will only be seen by the researcher. It will not be possible to identify the staff, students or college in any published report resulting from this study.

The study instruments will firstly be piloted. The estimated start date of the pilot study is during the Summer term in May 2018, directly after receiving ethical approval. This process is likely to take four weeks. The main study will be conducted in the First Term of Saudi academic year which starts September 2018 until December 2018. The second pilot study for students interview will be conducted before the main study in Sep 2018.

**B:** I consider that this project **may** have ethical implications that should be brought before the Institute's Ethics Committee.

Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g. teachers, parents, pupils etc.

Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words.

1. title of project
2. purpose of project and its academic rationale
3. brief description of methods and measurements
4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria
5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)
6. a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.
7. estimated start date and duration of project

**C: SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT:**

**Note:** a signature is required. Typed names are not acceptable.

I have declared all relevant information regarding my proposed project and confirm that ethical good practice will be followed within the project.

Signed:

Print Name: Abrar Owaidah

Date 21 March 2018

