## Perception and attitude of Saudi EFL learners towards independent English language learning strategies

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to explore the perception and attitudes of Saudi Arabian university students towards independent English language learning, a recent addition to their EFL curriculum. The study also seeks to understand the effectiveness of various teaching and learning methods in this context. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving a questionnaire survey and subsequent semi-structured interviews. The participants were second-year university students enrolled in the English department during the 2021-2022 academic year. The questionnaire, designed by the researcher, comprised 14 questions with preset responses based on a five-point Likert scale. The results revealed a generally positive attitude towards independent learning strategies. However, 51.4% of respondents were neutral about the use of independent learning as opposed to traditional teaching methods. Regarding learning materials, 35.2% found the independent learning approach convenient. Despite the overall positive attitude, it was observed that several students struggled to understand the concept of independent learning and how to effectively implement it. The study recommends that schools and educators collaborate to enhance students' familiarity and comfort with various forms of self-directed study. It is suggested that educators provide students with self-study resources, guidance for autonomous learning, assistance in planning their learning process, and methods to improve their communication skills and track their progress.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature by exploring the attitude of Saudi Arabian EFL students towards independent learning. It also investigates the student-teacher relationship within this context, the student's familiarity with independent learning practices, and their overall experience, providing new insights into the implementation of independent learning in EFL instruction.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, several studies have emphasized the importance of implementing independent learning practices to enhance the linguistic performance of EFL (English as a foreign language) students (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Schunk, 1990; Zimmerman, 1990). However, not much is known on the attitudes of EFL students towards independent and autonomous learning practices and styles. Understanding students' perceptions of independent learning is crucial for comprehending student-teacher relationships, the roles of teachers and students, and how students utilize independent learning materials and tools (Alharbi, 2015). These factors are considered critical for the successful integration of independent learning into EFL instruction.

Despite numerous studies focusing on improving the linguistic performance of EFL students in Saudi universities in recent decades (e.g., (Alhujayri, 2014; Alkahtani, 2016)), students' language acquisition continues to fall below

expectations (Alharbi, 2015). This issue negatively impacts graduates' learning outcomes, linguistic competence, and employability, which are highly valued in the labour market. Considering the rapid changes occurring globally, the complexity of this problem increases, making conventional teaching methods inadequate. New strategies need to be developed and implemented.

Independent learning practices in Saudi higher education institutions aim to enhance academic performance, increase student motivation and confidence, develop students' awareness of their potential and limitations, and promote independent thinking. It is acknowledged that embracing non-traditional teaching methods is crucial to produce graduates who can adapt to change and excel in the job market. As a result, many universities, colleges, and programs have incorporated independent learning methods into their teaching practices to enhance students' language abilities.

Students need to understand the nature of independent learning and how to make it a successful experience. Independent learning goes beyond students simply working on their own. Students need to recognize that it is a comprehensive process that requires close collaboration between students and instructors. Successful independent learning relies on strong relationships between students and teachers, as well as students' ability to effectively utilize available educational resources (Winne, 2011; Winne, 2018). In other words, students need to acquire necessary skills for independent learning to develop their study skills and self-management techniques, making their learning more effective and less stressful.

The present study examined the following research queries to delve deeper into this assertion:

1. What is the perception of EFL students towards the student-teacher relationship in the scope of independent learning?
2. To what degree are students acquainted with the methods of independent learning?
3. How do EFL students assess their comprehensive experience with independent learning?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been conducted across different fields to explore the benefits of adopting independent learning approaches to individuals' learning (Lawson, Vosniadou, Van Deur, Wyra, & Jeffries, 2019; Roberts, Mayer, Steiner, Bayard, & van Loon, 2019; Seufert, 2018; Sweller, Van Merrienboer, & Paas, 1998). While the concept of learner autonomy is not new, it has received significant attention in the field of English language education in the past three decades (Ismail, Nikpoo, & Prasad, 2023). However, the precise definition of "learner autonomy" is often confused with "self-regulation" and can be challenging to articulate (Palfreyman & Benson, 2019). In a learning environment, autonomy refers to a student's ability to set their own learning goals and take responsibility for their own education. This does not imply that autonomous learners have no interaction with teachers or that they are completely independent. They are also dependent on teachers to cultivate a conducive learning environment and receive proper guidance. Here, the greatest amount of responsibility will rest with the students. Learner autonomy is a principle that encourages students to assume the greatest amount of responsibility for what and how they learn (Little, 2022). In contrast, autonomy can be defined as "the ability to make one's own decisions; independence from the control of others".

### 2.1. Learner's Attitude and Motivation

There is no doubt that the attitude and motivation of the student are interconnected. Those with a genuine motivation to learn a new language can acquire proficiency with relative ease. In this way, a learner's optimistic outlook may also speed up the achievement of their objective. In his work, Gardner (2008) asserted that attitudes are a crucial factor in foreign language learning success. According to Gardner (2008), motivation and attitudes are commonly viewed together because motivation has attitudinal outcomes and attitudes have motivational properties. In this way, a learner's optimistic outlook may also speed up the achievement of their objective. In his work, Gardner

asserted that attitudes are a crucial factor in foreign language learning success. According to Gardner (2008), motivation and attitudes are frequently viewed together because motives have attitudinal outcomes and attitudes have motivational properties. All motives contain at least one biological push or internal motivation and cultural pull or external motivation (Bolduc, 2000). Intrinsic motivation occurs when there is no apparent external motivation. External motivation, in turn, results from the presence of obvious external rewards.

It can be said that attitude is both cognitive and affective and that it is not a natural talent but rather something that is acquired through experience. It can be revised and altered in light of the experience. Attitudes can be divided into negative attitudes and positive attitudes. Progress and success result from having a positive attitude. The student with a negative attitude typically states, "I can't," whereas the student with a positive attitude consistently states, "I can." Additionally, attitudes towards the target language can be divided split into three categories: a) specific attitudes towards the community that speaks the target language; b) attitudes towards the language to be learned; and c) attitudes towards language learning and language in general (Stern, 1991). According to Keller's (2012) statement, "Believe in yourself," a positive attitude is crucial for everything. Follow your dreams with the utmost determination and courage. Remember, attitude is everything!"

## 2.2. Learner Cognitive and Metacognitive Learning Strategies

Learning a language is a holistic process, therefore, cognitive psychologists argue that it cannot be broken down into a study of the stimulus-response relationships that occur during learning a language. In the classroom, learning and instruction are frequently analyzed from a cognitive perspective, considering the numerous cognitive and metacognitive processes that students engage in while learning. A "cognitive process" refers to the mental activities and operations that individuals engage in when they acquire, process, store, and retrieve information. Metacognition is the process of managing, reflecting on, and gaining an understanding of one's own cognitive processes. Metacognition has received wide attention in the various domains of education (Maasum & Maarof, 2012).

It is challenging to assess the relationship between cognition and metacognition, as well as cognitive and metacognitive techniques (Mehrdad, Ahghar, & Ahghar, 2012). Metacognition was typically regarded as a higher-order cognitive function because it involved the evaluation and management of the learning process. The first three of the six characteristics of information processing, which included extracting, differentiating, monitoring, browsing, chaining, and initiating, matched metacognitive methods. In addition to writing, reasoning, comprehension, problem-solving techniques, organizing techniques, and self-control techniques, the Wentworth Institute classified metacognitive techniques under a variety of other categories. The direct group and the indirect group are the two primary categories of learning techniques. The first is actively engaged in the learning process, which requires cognitive processing, whereas the second is only indirectly engaged in the acquisition of a second language (Oxford, 1990). Indirect strategies included both cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Oxford, 1990). According to Alkahtani (2016), metacognitive techniques include preparation, monitoring, and evaluation, while cognitive strategies consist of organization, rehearsal, and elaboration.

## 2.3. Student-Teacher Relationship

Over the years, research has extensively examined the various ways in which attention has been given to the interactions between instructors and students, using different frameworks and paradigms (Reynolds & Gloria, 2013). In a student-centred classroom, the emphasis is on empowering students to acquire innovative knowledge through their own creativity. Unlike a teacher-centred classroom, where the instructor holds the primary role, a student-centred approach grants students a more active and hands-on experience. However, this does not diminish the

importance of the teacher's role entirely. In student-centred classrooms, students' reliance on the instructor is reduced compared to teacher-centred classrooms.

Teachers can aid students in identifying their needs and establishing a safe learning environment. Considering the modern concept of the teacher-student relationship, the teacher must act as a facilitator and design communicative activities. Analysis of a learner's needs is a crucial step in making learning fruitful and efficient. Learners may seek the teacher's assistance to conduct a more effective needs analysis. It is believed that a safe learning environment is another important factor in enhancing the level of learner autonomy. As such, to generate a safe learning environment for the student, the instructor can do a variety of things. The facilitator is responsible for appropriately guiding, instructing, motivating, and directing the students. He must help the student uncover his positive skills and qualities. It could provide him with the motivation, courage, and self-assurance he needs to perform his duties flawlessly. Teachers can develop a variety of communicative activities to stimulate and engage students in the practice of new language-learning techniques.

### 2.4. Independent Learning in EFL

The purpose of Ostrowska's (2015) research is to illuminate why and how learner autonomy is emphasized in the UAE's university preparation program. Using an exploratory-interpretive methodology, this case study investigates how educators and students respond to a personalized learning log. In addition, researcher investigated how educators and students perceived the Independent Learning Log about their own definitions of independence (Doebel, Dickerson, Hoover, & Munakata, 2018; Lucenet & Blaye, 2014, 2019; Perry, 2019; Roebers et al., 2019). According to the data, it appears that students are cast in subservient roles within their teachers' discourse, while teachers are portrayed as learning controllers and agents.

Alfalah (2015) researched the ability of undergraduate students majoring in English in Saudi Arabian universities to participate in self-directed learning strategies. Findings showed that students have incorrect beliefs about the learning activities they are required to complete. On the other hand, they provided evidence that they were capable of engaging in self-directed learning activities. More importantly, Alhujayri (2014) studied the practices of English teachers in Saudi Arabian secondary schools, focusing on the strategies and activities used to foster learner autonomy. This study revealed that Saudi English instructors promote independent learning in the classroom through the use of interactive language and a child-centred teaching approach. The study also revealed that teachers promote learner autonomy without making a conscious effort or having a clear goal in mind.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Research Methods

In this study, a questionnaire and an interview were used to investigate EFL students' perspectives on the autonomous learning method, their understanding and use of metacognitive and cognitive learning techniques, their self-directed learning style, and the reasons and areas in which they need the instructor's assistance while engaging in independent learning. To investigate the relationship between two or more variables, a correlational research design was employed. This research design encompasses various elements that serve as guidelines for conducting the study, including the research approach, research design, and data collection method (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Myers, 2019). The chosen research design consisted of an interview-based correlational quantitative and qualitative approach.

### 3.2. Research Participants

The participants in this study were second-year students at the university who were enrolled in the English department during the 2021-2022 academic year. Specifically, participation was open to students who had registered for the Reading and Listening Skills class. At the time of data collection, there were a total of 280 male and female students actively enrolled in both sections combined.

A non-proportional random sampling method was employed to select a sample of 140 students, with 70 males and 70 females. This sample was chosen in a manner that ensured a normal distribution. A total of 35 students were unable to complete the questionnaire, while five students chose not to participate. Ultimately, 100 students participated in the survey; therefore, the final sample consisted of 100 students (n = 100).

### 3.3. Instruments

To gather information, a questionnaire and an interview instrument were employed . The goal of this study was to test the hypothesis that semi-structured interviews and questionnaires can be used to generate useful data that can be used to evaluate students' attitudes and levels of comprehension concerning different methods of independent study. Based on prior studies, the researcher devised a questionnaire for the survey, which comprised a total of 14 statements with predetermined answers. For each question, a Likert scale with five points ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" was used in the construction of the answer options (strongly agree). Despite this, to guarantee that the information presented is accurate, three professionals in the fields of education and evaluation validated the content coverage, language appropriateness, and usability. In addition to this, exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) were conducted with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 22 (SPSS v.22) to validate the unidimensional of the items and scales used in a pilot study that included twenty new students from the population but not included in the sample. Cronbach's alpha, which was found to have a statistically acceptable value of 0.821, was utilized in an analysis of items to determine item reliability.

### 3.4. Ethical Consideration

To prioritize the needs, rights, desires, and values of the participants, written informed consent was obtained for all research instruments used in the study. Educational research has traditionally been exempt from formal ethical oversight, as it typically involves low-risk research. As this study poses no risks to participants, their concerns were taken into account. The study aims to contribute to educational research rather than creating an assessment tool.

To ensure confidentiality and maintain data ownership, the researcher personally administered the questionnaire and conducted the interviews. This approach was chosen not only for ethical considerations but also to foster a direct connection between the researcher and the participants, as the study focused on understanding the language needs of Saudi students and the impact of British academic culture on them. Participants were assured that their responses would be treated as confidential and used exclusively for the purposes of this study. These conditions were communicated to participants in both Arabic and English, verbally and in writing. Additionally, participants were informed that the data collected would be solely owned by the researcher and would not be accessible to any third parties.

### 3.5. Data Collection and Analysis

After receiving approval from the dean's office, permission for data collection from the head of the English department and class teachers was obtained. All selected students were informed about the study's objectives in class and given the option to withdraw their participation at any time before data analysis. For the analysis of questionnaire-based data, the first step was selecting a statistical program suitable for analyzing the collected numbers. SPSS, widely recognized in empirical social science research, was chosen as it is considered one of the most reliable programs for obtaining accurate answers. The analysis of interviews involved seven stages: 1) organizing the data; 2) immersing in the data; 3) generating categories; 4) coding the data; 5) interpreting and identifying themes; 6) exploring alternative understandings; and 7) documenting the findings. During the coding and categorization process, participants' responses were thoroughly examined and compared. The coding process involved providing detailed explanations of categories and focusing on elements that facilitated sorting. The researcher manually

transcribed all interviews and highlighted key concepts that contributed to answering the research questions, organizing them into categories and themes.

Throughout the data collection process, ethical considerations were prioritized, ensuring data accuracy, integrity, and transparency in reporting the methods used. The aim was to obtain reliable and valid data that contributes to understanding cognitive and metacognitive learning competencies among Saudi EFL independent learners.

## 4. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

### 4.1. Statistical Analysis

The study involved a total of 100 participants. Descriptive statistics for the questionnaire statements are presented in Table 1. The Likert scale utilized in the questionnaire ranged from "strongly agree" (0.01-1.00) to "strongly disagree" (4.01-5.00). Four statements had the highest mean scores, suggesting that independent learning approaches are perceived as more effective than traditional methods by students. According to the questionnaire responses, students found independent learning to be beneficial in terms of improving their English proficiency, convenience, and overall usefulness. To provide further clarification, the Likert scale statements were categorized into specific areas, including the relationship between independent learning strategies and the respondents' gender and age, the effectiveness of independent learning, and the challenges faced by students. The data collected from EFL student observations and interviews were then correlated with the questionnaire results. The Chi-Square Test was employed to examine the association between participant gender and the effectiveness of independent learning approaches. Eight statements demonstrated a significant correlation ($p < 0.05$) between the use of independent learning approaches and increased preference, convenience, independence, English learning, and creative and critical thinking. However, six statements showed no significant correlation ($p > 0.05$) between participant gender and the creation of a study plan, teacher involvement, or encountered obstacles when employing independent learning approaches.

### 4.2. Overall Experience of EFL Learners with Independent Learning

The importance of independent learning becomes evident when these methods are employed for creating study plans, prioritizing them over traditional learning approaches, enhancing English language education, fostering greater independence, ensuring teacher accessibility, increasing convenience, and improving analytical and critical thinking skills. To examine the distribution of responses, the questionnaire statements were analyzed to determine frequencies and percentages.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of Likert scale statements.

|  | Items | Range | Minimum | Maximum | Mode | Mean | Std. deviation | Results |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I prefer the independent learning mode to the traditional class teaching mode | 4 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2.47 | 0.987 | |
| 2 | I can select materials suitable for me to learn for my independent learning | 4 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2.85 | 1.373 | |
| 3 | My English has increased through independent learning. | 4 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2.77 | 1.150 | |
| 4 | I know clearly that in independent learning one makes a detailed study plan including the content and pace. | 4 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2.26 | 1.115 | |
| 5 | I feel that I can learn independently without a teacher's supervision. | 4 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 2.25 | 1.060 | |

| | Items | Range | Minimum | Maximum | Mode | Mean | Std. deviation | Results |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | I know clearly that if I encounter difficulties or problems in independent learning, I should turn to my teacher and classmates. | 4 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2.16 | 1.083 | |
| 7 | I often monitor the carrying out of my independent study plan | 4 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 3.26 | 1.134 | |
| 8 | I think the teacher should tell me explicitly about independent learning methods | 4 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2.29 | 1.015 | |
| 9 | I hope to continue to learn independently shortly of English learning. | 2 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 2.08 | 1.137 | |
| 10 | I think teachers should test students' independent learning achievement regularly. | 4 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 2.18 | 1.106 | |
| 11 | I can adapt myself to the tertiary-level English independent learning mode. | 4 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2.61 | 1.309 | |
| 12 | I can improve my analytical, critical and creative thinking during the independent study | 3 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 2.11 | 0.931 | |
| 13 | I think independent learning is important to learn English | 4 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2.54 | 1.096 | |
| 14 | I can never learn English Independently | 4 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2.32 | 1.140 | |

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of EFL learners reporting a positive experience with independent learning. The results indicate a positive response to the implementation of independent learning strategies. Instead of traditional teaching methods, 51.4% of respondents were agnostic regarding the use of independent learning. In terms of the selection of learning materials, 35.2% of respondents agreed that this mode of education is convenient. The independent learning mode improves English proficiency and learning, according to 42.6% of respondents. 63.4 per cent of respondents agreed to continue independent learning shortly; 28.2 per cent were indifferent. 47.2 per cent of respondents agreed to adopt the independent learning mode for English at the tertiary level, while 31% remained neutral. During independent learning, 59.2% of participants observed improved critical and analytical thinking, while 36.6% were neutral. In addition, 50.7% of respondents were neutral regarding the significance of independent learning in English learning. Therefore, it appears that the overall experience of EFL students with independent learning practices is positive.
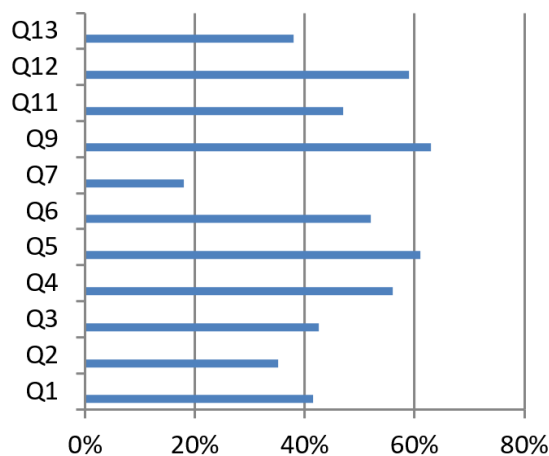


**Figure 1.** EFL learner's positive experience with independent learning.

### 4.3. Hindrances Encountered by EFL Learners in Independent Learning

The challenges that EFL students face when attempting to adopt independent learning were brought to light by three of the responses provided to the questionnaire. As can be seen in Figure 2, a majority of respondents (Q.10, 69%) think that teachers should regularly evaluate their students' achievements in independent learning and that teachers should provide more information about methods and techniques for independent learning. The findings were not entirely conclusive in terms of whether or not it is possible to learn English on one's own; while 45.8% (Q.14) of respondents expressed no opinion either way, 50.1% (Q.8), thought that English cannot be learned on one's own.
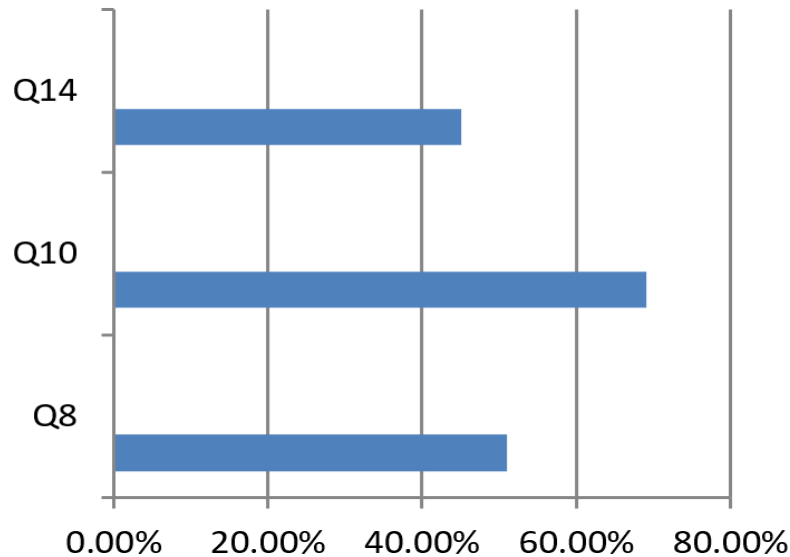


**Figure 2.** Percentages of hurdles encountered by EFL learners in independent learning.

### 4.4. Link between Teachers and Students in Independent Learning

The findings show that 60.6% of participan held the belief that they were capable of learning independently without the supervision of the teacher, while 31% were agnostic regarding this possibility. 52.1% of participants agreed with the statement that the link between students and teachers is still necessary because they were able to turn to their teachers whenever they encountered any hurdle in independent learning. In addition, 51.4% of students indicated that it is the role of teachers to explain different methods of independent learning. In addition to this, 69% of participants thought that teachers should carry out appropriate activities to check the independent learning achievements of their students. Therefore the responses of the EFL students suggest that there is a significant link between instructors and students in the process of independent learning.

### 4.5. Students' Familiarity with Independent Learning Practices

To assess the level of students' familiarity with independent learning practices, the correlation between gender and student familiarity was examined using the Pearson correlation. The objective was to determine the extent to which students are acquainted with independent learning practices. The results indicated that most of the Pearson correlation values exceeded 0.01, suggesting that there was no significant correlation between age and the questions asked. However, one statement revealed a noteworthy correlation between gender and significance, reaching a statistically significant level of 0.01.

### 4.6. Interview Results

It would appear that the ability to study the English language on one's own is one of the most challenging obstacles that English language students must overcome. This presents an even greater obstacle for Saudi students; whose education was heavily reliant on the instruction they received from their teachers. The students in the Saudi

education system are not required to work independently, learning English on one's own can be a difficult task for these students. According to what was discussed in the interview, the vast majority of students were confused about what they were supposed to be doing in the independent class. During the interview, the researcher noticed that the students were disinterested in working and bored, which gave the impression that this was the first time that the students had been put in a similar circumstance.

During the interviews, learners were allowed to talk about their experiences with independent learning and were encouraged to do so. They were initially questioned regarding the challenges when they engaged in self-directed learning. The vast majority of learners who are learning have expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that they were only given access to a small selection of different tools for independent study, some of which might not be useful depending on the specifics of the situation. Others expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that there was a disconnect between the materials that are picked or chosen by professors and the interests that they have. This was something that was brought up by several different learners. They reported that, because of this, it was challenging for them to maintain the motivation necessary to engage in self-directed learning. They acknowledged that increasing their knowledge of topics personally significant to them would pique their interest and inspire them.

Second, they were asked how the independent study mode facilitated language development. Some students were dissatisfied that some professors discouraged them from using technology and internet tools, such as laptops and cell phones, in the classroom. In writing courses, for instance, students expressed a desire to be permitted to use mobile devices and computers, as their use enables them to produce higher-quality work. In addition, they suggested that the institution establish and promote peer-led linguistic and conversation groups that allow students to practice their language skills.

As the learning process for students in this context is gradual, it is crucial to provide them with a clear understanding of the rationale behind independent work. This explanation is necessary for them to comprehend the purpose of engaging in independent study, which is aimed at aiding their progress in English studies. This explanation is the most plausible way to account for this phenomenon. Independent work is a novel learning method for Saudi students and can be considered a cultural aspect of learning. However, the findings indicate that the majority of participants encounter challenges with this approach. It is worth noting that not all students face the same difficulties, as only a small number of students expressed a positive attitude towards independent study, potentially due to their prior familiarity with it. This discovery was particularly interesting.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Results of the study indicate that integrating and utilizing independent learning modes in Saudi universities present some obstacles. A significant obstacle is the student's perception that the delivery of language skills in classrooms is primarily the responsibility of the teacher. They must realize that a teacher's role is merely to guide and coach. There is also the issue that many students believed they can learn English without the assistance of their professors, which is a significant obstacle to learning. This obstacle can be surmounted by reassuring students that independent learning does not undermine the role of educators. The implication is that students cannot independently become independent learners. Rather, they require guidance from their teachers on how to learn. Students must recognize that teachers play a crucial role in their education. As a solution, it can be suggested that teachers discuss with students their needs and progress, provide continuous feedback, suggest materials, and assist with learning planning.

In turn, teachers should abandon traditional teaching strategies and encourage students to become independent learners. To this end, teachers should involve students in the selection of resources and instructional materials, as well as the development of instructional content, allowing them to select topics of interest and teaching them how to learn independently and effectively. EFL teachers need to encourage their students to study and practise the language outside of class. They should also encourage their students to utilise technology and internet resources, such as

language-learning blogs, Blackboard, YouTube, and documentaries. Teachers should clearly communicate to their students that their primary function in the classroom is to facilitate learning, rather than to provide all the answers. Students need to understand that they bear the responsibility for their own educational growth. Additionally, departments and colleges should offer guidance to students on effective study techniques and utilizing available resources to improve their language skills. It is highly encouraged that advising services be easily accessible to students (Dofs & Hobbs, 2011).

Because Saudi EFL students acquire knowledge through linguistic means, it is essential to comprehend and cater to their unique learning styles as well as the specific language-learning techniques they employ in language instruction (Halabi, 2018). This information will also help expand our understanding of how different learning styles influence language proficiency among Saudi EFL students. With this knowledge, Saudi English instructors and others invested in EFL education in the country can do a better job of assisting students in acquiring English by taking into account their unique preferences about their preferred learning methods and approaches used to complete tasks and absorb information. Saudi educators should prioritize raising students' awareness of their preferred learning methods and guiding them on how to regulate their approach to learning English. This will enable students to become more effective, self-directed, independent, and accountable in implementing their own learning preferences (Halabi, 2018). Equally important is addressing each student's unique expectations and needs.

To foster autonomous language learning, students should receive ongoing instruction on how to plan, organize, and assess their own learning. Empowering learners to have a greater say in choosing topics, approaches, and sequencing of their language learning is crucial. Encouraging students to set personal goals, plan their study sessions, develop individual learning styles, evaluate their progress, and prepare for future educational stages are essential components (Alrabai, 2017).

It is evident that teaching students in a manner that helps them make connections between their learning and their goals, as well as real-world situations while emphasizing critical thinking and comprehension over repetitive memorization, will greatly support students in efficiently achieving their objectives. To begin, it is necessary to assess the learning preferences and language-learning practices of Saudi EFL students. This entails understanding the psychological processes that influence their language acquisition preferences and practices, as well as identifying the learning factors that impact language acquisition in both domains. Moreover, creating a conducive classroom environment for EFL study requires supporting the growth of Saudi students and aiding them in improving their language acquisition efficiency (Alrabai, 2017). Additionally, it is important to define autonomous learning styles and language-learning practices and examine their potential impact on language learning and instruction. This information can be valuable for Saudi stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and curriculum designers, as it sheds light on effective strategies within an English classroom setting (Al-Seghayer, 2021). Educators should also explore ways to familiarize students with various educational approaches that are available to them for acquiring new knowledge (Halabi, 2018). Regular exposure to successful language-learning techniques can motivate students to learn English as a foreign language to make better use of such methods. By assisting students in identifying techniques that align with their learning styles and goals, teachers can encourage the adoption of structured approaches instead of haphazard ones.

## 5.1. Limitations

The study's results are specific to Saudi EFL independent learners and may not be readily applicable to other learner groups or cultural settings. Factors such as cultural heritage, educational structure, and language learning experiences can vary, restricting the applicability of the results. Additionally, the sample might not fully represent the broader population, potentially leading to skewed outcomes. Lastly, the study heavily depends on self-reported data, which is prone to individual perceptions and interpretations. Learners might provide responses they believe are socially acceptable or expected, possibly introducing biases in the data and affecting the accuracy of the conclusions.

*5.2. Significance of Study*

This study has several important implications, including enabling educators to develop customized interventions and teaching methods. By aligning teaching strategies with learners' cognitive processes and metacognitive skills, educators can enhance learning outcomes and promote self-directed learning. The study's findings can contribute to the creation of EFL curricula and materials that cater to the needs of Saudi learners. By integrating effective cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies into the curriculum, educators can encourage independent learning and equip learners with the skills needed for successful language acquisition. Saudi EFL learners may encounter specific cultural and contextual challenges that affect their cognitive and metacognitive learning abilities.

By investigating these factors, the study can illuminate the unique needs and experiences of Saudi learners, leading to more culturally sensitive and contextually suitable teaching approaches. In general, exploring the cognitive and metacognitive learning abilities of Saudi EFL independent learners is important as it can lead to the development of customized instructional approaches, improved language proficiency, increased learner autonomy, and a deeper understanding of language learning processes in a specific cultural and contextual setting.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this study, students' perception and attitudes regarding autonomous learning were investigated, as were their previous learning experiences and levels of familiarity with various learning practices. Participants who were studying English as a Foreign Language were given a survey that consisted of a questionnaire that was designed to evaluate their sense of agency in the classroom, their capacity to determine and prioritise learning priorities, and their awareness of the gaps that existed between their own abilities and those of their teachers. The findings made it abundantly clear that a great number of students, have difficulty understanding the concept of independent study and how they should implement it. Even though they are very enthusiastic and have a positive attitude towards it, this is still the case.

It is proposed that Saudi institutions of higher education develop methods for managing language learning through autonomous study modalities. They must bridge the gap between classroom learning and extracurricular activities. It is the responsibility of educators to instil in their students the self-directed learning skills necessary for independent study success. Blackboard systems should be utilised to their full potential in the classroom so that teachers can provide students with access to resources for self-study, offer advice and recommendations for independent learning, assist with lesson planning, improve student communication, and closely monitor their performance.

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