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**Investigating Students' Attitudes toward  
Autonomous Learning**

**The Case of First Year EFL Students at the University of Ghardaïa**

*A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Didactics*

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# Dedications

*We affectionately dedicate this modest work...*

*To our beloved parents, whose unconditional love, endless sacrifices, and prayers have paved the way for our academic journey and sustained us through every challenge.*

*To our families, brothers, and sisters, for being our constant anchor, offering continuous support and encouragement when it was needed most.*

*To our esteemed professors at the University of Ghardaïa, who illuminated our paths with knowledge and guidance.*

*And to all those who believe in the power of education and autonomous learning, we share this milestone with you.*

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## **Abstract:**

The Algerian LMD (Licence, Master, Doctorate) framework has placed autonomous study and student self-regulation at the center of academic success. However, newly enrolled university students often face a profound "pedagogical shock" when moving from the teacher-dependent environment of secondary school to the autonomous expectations of higher education. This study investigates the attitudes, readiness, and contextual barriers regarding learner autonomy among first-year Licence EFL students at the University of Ghardaïa. This quantitative descriptive study gathered data using a Likert scale questionnaire consisting of 28 items administered to 54 first year EFL learners. Students' perceptions were evaluated across the cognitive, metacognitive, behavioral, and affective domains. Empirical evidence suggests that a distinct "Autonomy Paradox" exists. Cognitively, students displayed considerable knowledge of their roles as learners and great readiness to foster autonomous learning behaviors. In terms of behavior, the evidence demonstrates that students consistently display strong informal autonomy in out-of-class situations, using digital technologies and other Internet resources to interact with English. Despite such readiness, significant affective and contextual constraints exist in the context of academic settings. However, considerable anxiety manifests as a protective fear of making mistakes, continued dependency on validation by teachers, and a preference for direct teaching. Such psychological constraints are compounded by structural obstacles such as the examination culture prevalent in many institutions and the lack of material resources, all of which favor passive rote learning. Findings highlight the need for explicit autonomy skills training rather than mere conceptual expectations. In conclusion, practical recommendations have been given by this dissertation to university teachers on how best to teach, including scaffolding in class, use of technology to facilitate academic research, and changes in testing procedures to accommodate learning.

**Keywords:** Learner Autonomy, Student Attitudes, EFL first-year students, LMD System, Pedagogical Shock, University of Ghardaïa.

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## **List of Abbreviations:**

**A:** Agree

**ABC:** Affective, Behavioral, Cognitive

**CLT:** Communicative Language Teaching

**D:** Disagree

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**ELT:** English Language Teaching

**ICT:** Information and Communication Technology

**L2:** Second Language

**LMD:** Licence, Master, Doctorate

**MSI:** Metacognitive Strategy Instruction

**N:** Neutral (Likert Scale) / Number of Participants (Statistics)

**Q:** Question

**SA:** Strongly Agree

**SD:** Strongly Disagree

**SMART:** Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

**TBL:** Task-Based Learning

**TBLT:** Task-Based Language Teaching

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## **General Introduction:**

The practice of language teaching and learning for decades was based on the notion that knowledge can be treated like a commodity, which should be distributed in the classroom setting. Within this paradigm, the teacher was in the central position, both literally and metaphorically, while the student's role was that of a consumer of knowledge who had nothing else to do but consume, remember, and reproduce the information received during exams. Even though this scheme might have been valid at the time, the realities of EFL teaching and learning today call for a reconsideration of those roles. Knowledge acquisition cannot occur only within the boundaries of a limited number of weekly classroom hours, since it needs constant work from one's part.

Accepting this reality, educational authorities around the world have strived to reshape institutions of higher learning by creating learner-centered learning institutions. In Algeria, such structural change has been defined through the introduction of the LMD program. The architectural core of the LMD framework is designed around the concept of personal student work (*travail personnel*), implicitly demanding that learners move from the periphery of educational responsibility to its absolute center. Under this system, the university student is no longer expected to be a passive recipient of knowledge, but an active manager of their own cognitive development.

However, the transition from a structural mandate to a psychological reality is rarely seamless. At the University of Ghardaïa, first-year Licence EFL students face a profound linguistic and cultural dislocation upon entry. Having spent years navigating a highly structured, teacher-reliant secondary school environment, what can be described as the "Baccalaureate culture", these young adults are suddenly propelled into a university ecosystem that takes self-regulation for granted. This abrupt shift frequently induces a form of "pedagogical shock," characterized by a cognitive mismatch: while students intellectually understand that they must take charge of their learning, they remain affectively anchored to the safety net of constant teacher validation.

Compounding this issue is the paradox of the modern digital era. Today's Algerian learners exhibit an unprecedented level of independence in their private lives, leveraging digital

tools, social media, and streaming platforms to engage with English autonomously for entertainment and social purposes. Yet, a clear friction exists when attempting to translate this "social autonomy" into "academic autonomy". When faced with research tasks, critical analysis, or independent study, the familiar habits of dependence resurface, often manifested as anxiety, a defensive fear of making mistakes, and a demand for explicit, detailed guidance from the instructor.

To design pedagogical interventions that effectively bridge this gap, educators cannot rely on abstract, Western-centric theories of autonomy. Instead, we must ground our understanding in the empirical realities, cultural perceptions, and material conditions of the local Algerian context. This thesis seeks to unpack this dynamic by investigating the exact nature of the attitudes, readiness, and barriers that define the first-year EFL experience at the University of Ghardaïa.

### **Statement of the Problem:**

The implementation of the LMD system at the University of Ghardaïa presumes that incoming students possess a baseline capacity for autonomous study. In practice, however, first-year Licence EFL students encounter an immediate operational deficit. The transition from the secondary school environment, where learning is often characterized by rote memorization and direct instruction to the university level requires a sophisticated set of metacognitive skills that many first-year students have not been trained to use.

This creates an Autonomy Paradox. Students are intellectually aware that their success depends on independent effort, yet they experience deep affective resistance when the teacher attempts to recede from the center of the classroom. This resistance is further complicated by external constraints, such as limited institutional resources and a deeply entrenched exam-focused evaluation culture that inadvertently rewards dependency. Consequently, there is an urgent need to empirically assess where student readiness stands, what specific psychological and contextual anchors are keeping them tethered to a model of dependence, and how their existing digital habits can be academicized to close this transition gap.

### **Research Questions:**

- 1: What are the attitudes of first-year EFL students at the University of Ghardaïa toward autonomous learning?
- 2: To what extent are these students ready to take charge of their own learning?
- 3: How does the shift from secondary school to university affect first-year students?

### **Research Hypotheses:**

- 1: Students will demonstrate positive attitudes but will still rely heavily on the teacher.
- 2: Digital tools play a significant role in fostering student Autonomy.
- 3: The transition from secondary school to higher education often introduces first-year students to a distinct pedagogical shift, which can complicate their initial adaptation.

### **Aims of the Study:**

The main aim of this research is to explore and identify the complex profile of the modern Algerian learner during the first year of university. More specifically, the study aims to:

1. To measure the cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral readiness of the participants through structured data collection.
2. To identify the main difficulties that students face when transitioning from secondary school to university
3. To provide practical and contextually relevant pedagogical recommendations, including classroom support strategies and assessment reform, to help educators at the University of Ghardaïa promote meaningful learner autonomy.

### **Significance of the Study:**

While learner autonomy has been studied extensively in global literature, its expression is deeply sensitive to local cultural and institutional contexts. This study contributes to the field by providing a localized empirical account of autonomy within a southern Algerian university

setting. By highlighting the specific challenges of the University of Ghardaïa, the findings offer valuable insights for local educators, curriculum designers, and policy-makers working to optimize the delivery of the LMD system. Furthermore, by conceptualizing smartphones and digital spaces as potential learning environments rather than distractions, this study redefines the discussion surrounding digital autonomy in the Algerian EFL context.

### **Methodology and Research Design:**

To answer the research questions, this study used a quantitative descriptive design. The target population is strictly limited to first-year EFL students at the University of Ghardaïa. Data was collected from a sample of 54 participants using convenience sampling.

The primary research tool was a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. It included 28 items designed to evaluate the learners' perceptions across cognitive, metacognitive, behavioral, and affective domains. The survey was distributed both in person and online via Google Forms. Finally, the responses were compiled in Microsoft Excel and analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages to measure the students' attitudes toward autonomous learning.

### **Structure of the Dissertation:**

The dissertation is organized into three interrelated chapters:

- **Chapter One: Theoretical Perspectives on Learner Autonomy** establishes the conceptual framework of the study. It explores the definitions and dimensions (cognitive, metacognitive, affective) of autonomy, traces the historical shift toward learner-centered pedagogy, and contextualizes these ideas within the specific cultural and structural realities of the Algerian LMD system.

- **Chapter Two: Research Methodology and Design** outline the empirical architecture of the study. It details the selection of the quantitative descriptive research design, describes the target population and sampling techniques of first-year Licence students at the University of Ghardaïa, explains the design and piloting of the Likert-scale questionnaire, and addresses the ethical safeguards implemented during data collection.

- **Chapter Three: Empirical Findings and Pedagogical Implications** present the statistical results of the questionnaire across five thematic sections. It provides a detailed analysis of the data, links the numbers back to the lived realities of the classroom, discusses the implications of the identified Autonomy Paradox and concludes with practical pedagogical recommendations and institutional strategies to foster autonomous learning.

# **Chapter One: Literature Review**

## **Introduction:**

For decades, language teaching has often been characterized by teacher-centered practices. Students in this traditional model were often positioned as relatively passive recipients that were expected only to absorb and reproduce information for exams. However, contemporary approaches in language pedagogy have gradually shifted this focus. Today, the emphasis is on **learner-centered approaches** that value active participation, critical thinking, and the student's ability to lead their capacity to take responsibility for their own learning processes.

This shift focuses on **learner autonomy**, in which Holec (1981) defined it as the learner's ability to take charge of their own learning. This definition marked an important conceptual shift, emphasizing the role of learners from passive listeners into active participants who set their own goals, choose their strategies, and evaluate their own progress.

Autonomy can be considered a crucial component in the context of **English as a Foreign Language (EFL)**. A high level of proficiency is unlikely to be achieved exclusively within classroom settings; it requires independent effort and consistent practice in real-world situations. Students who engage with English outside formal hours are far more likely to achieve permanent progress.

In spite of that, a clear gap still exists between theory and actual classroom practice. Many students are not fully prepared to take responsibility for their own learning, especially those who come from a highly structured teacher-centered educational backgrounds. For this reason, understanding students' attitudes becomes essential. If learners' perceptions of autonomy are not taken into account, efforts to implement it in practice are likely to remain limited. Accordingly, this study seeks to examine learner's attitudes toward autonomy in order to better connect theoretical principles with classroom realities.

Consequently, this chapter is devoted to reviewing and discussing the theoretical foundations of learner autonomy, it explores its core definitions, characteristics, and dimensions, before examining the specific challenges and pedagogical shifts required within the EFL context, particularly within the Algerian higher education system.

## **1.1. The Concept of Learner Autonomy:**

### **1.1.1. Definitions and Core Concepts:**

Learner autonomy has become an important focus in language education, mainly since the late twentieth century, when teaching practices began to move away from teacher-centered approaches toward more interactive and learner-centered ones. Within this shift, researchers such as Holec (1981), Little (1991) and Benson (2011) have emphasized the importance of learners taking a more active role in their own learning. In general, learner autonomy is the ability to take responsibility for different sides of learning process, and this involves setting personal learning goals, choosing appropriate strategies, monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes.

One of the earliest and most widely cited definitions was proposed by Holec, whose work is often considered the foundation of all research on learner autonomy. According to Holec (1981, p.3), learner autonomy simply refers to “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”, this definition highlights the core idea that learners should not simply depend on teachers for all their knowledge. Instead, they should develop the ability to manage their own learning activities. Holec further explained that "taking charge" involves several key responsibilities. A student must be able to determine what their learning objectives are such as improving specific language skills. They must also be able to select the right learning materials and methods to achieve that objective, monitor the process as they practice, and finally evaluate the results to see if they succeeded. His work marked an important turning point because it shifted the attention of researchers from what teachers do at the front of the classroom to what learners themselves are capable of doing.

Building upon Holec's ideas for practical application, Little (1991) expanded this idea by emphasizing the cognitive dimension of learning, with a particular focus on reflection and awareness of one’s own learning processes as key elements in developing autonomy. According to this scholar, there is a close relationship between how well an individual can use self-reflective practices to analyze their own learning experiences, and the level of autonomy they will achieve. Thus, according to Little, "autonomous" learners are individuals who have developed a profound understanding of how each person learns best, as a result, allowing these learners to make knowledgeable, thoughtful decisions regarding what methods or approaches

would work most effectively for them. A second critical point made by Little, is that the notion of learner autonomy cannot be misunderstood as learning in total isolation. Autonomous learning occurs through interactions with others including teachers, peers, and the overall educational environment. The educator thus plays a crucial role in supporting and guiding the learner as they continue to progress toward autonomy.

Another highly influential perspective is offered by Phil Benson, who further broadened the understanding of learner autonomy by examining the different dimensions of "control" that learners may exercise. Benson (2011) suggests that autonomy involves varying degrees of control over three main aspects of learning. The first is control over the management of learning activities (like planning a study schedule). The second is control over the cognitive processes involved in learning (like knowing how to memorize vocabulary or structure a sentence). The last one is taking control over the content of learning (like choosing to read an article about sports instead of politics because it is more interesting to the student). From this perspective, learner autonomy is not a black or white matter. It is a dynamic flexible ability that can gradually develop depending on the learner's experience and the educational context they are in.

Taken together, these three major perspectives demonstrate that learner autonomy is a complex and multidimensional concept that is not just one simple skill. But it also involves independence (Holec, 1981), critical reflection (Little, 1991), and active control over the learning process (Benson, 2011). Understanding these core concepts is essential for exploring how learner autonomy can be practically developed in EFL classrooms, and it provides the important background to understand how students recognize their part in shaping how they learn.

### **1.1.2. Characteristics of an Autonomous Learner:**

Learner autonomy can be more easily understood when it is examined in relation to how an autonomous learner operates in real-life learning situations, the concept is often associated with a set of characteristics that enable learners to take responsibility for their own learning. Autonomous learners are not simply students who remain passive in the classroom and complete assigned tasks quietly. Instead, they are characterized by attitudes, skills, and behaviors that allow their learning process to be guided and managed effectively. In language

education, these characteristics have been widely discussed, with active engagement, strategic awareness, and reflective thinking being consistently emphasized in the literature.

A strong sense of responsibility is commonly identified as one of the key features of autonomous learners. According to Holec (1981), decision-making regarding various aspects of the learning process can be undertaken by autonomous learners. Through this sense of responsibility, classroom participation is extended beyond passive listening. Active involvement in personal development is encouraged, and reliance solely on teacher correction is reduced. Learning needs are identified independently, and goals are established to address areas of weakness.

The use of effective learning strategies is also considered essential. Learning is not approached in an unstructured manner, but is instead organized through the application of various strategies that support planning, monitoring, and regulating study time. Study schedules may be created, relevant learning materials may be selected from online sources, and different memorization techniques may be experimented with. As noted by Little (1991), strategic awareness is closely linked to reflection on the learning process. Critical thinking about learning practices is applied, and when a strategy proves ineffective, adjustments are made and alternative methods are tried. In this way, continuous improvement is facilitated over time.

Motivation is regarded as another central element in learner autonomy. A high level of intrinsic motivation is typically demonstrated by autonomous learners, as English is pursued out of genuine interest and a desire for improvement. External factors such as grades or punishment are not the primary driving forces. As stated by Benson (2011), a sense of ownership over learning is developed when control over the learning process is exercised. This sense of ownership contributes to persistence, even in the presence of difficulties.

Finally, collaborative learning is also valued within autonomous learning processes. Although autonomy is associated with independence, isolation is not implied. Opportunities for feedback and support are provided through interaction with teachers and peers, which further supports the development of autonomy, through cooperative classroom activities, confidence in expressing ideas is strengthened and reflection on learning is encouraged. Overall, responsibility, strategic use of learning methods, motivation, reflective thinking, and collaborative engagement are considered defining features of autonomous learners.

### 1.1.3. Dimensions of Autonomy:

To understand how autonomy works inside the mind of a student, scholars usually divide it into different dimensions. The concept of autonomy in language learning is widely recognized as multidimensional, encompassing cognitive, metacognitive, and affective aspects. These three dimensions interact constantly to shape the learner's capacity to take charge of their own learning.

The cognitive dimension refers to the actual, practical strategies and mental processes that learners employ to interact with the language. This highlights the mental steps that enable learners to complete tasks, process new vocabulary, and translate ideas. According to Cotterall (1995) and Benson (2011), when a student actively decides to use a dictionary, guess the meaning of a word from context, or repeat a phrase to improve their pronunciation, they are exercising cognitive autonomy.

The metacognitive dimension builds on this by focusing on higher-order thinking processes. Metacognition is often described as "thinking about thinking." It emphasizes the learners' awareness of their own learning habits. This includes the ability to critically assess their own strengths and weaknesses. For instance, an EFL student who recognizes, "I am strong in writing, but I hesitate when speaking," demonstrates metacognitive awareness. This insight allows them to adjust strategies and regulate their engagement with learning materials, prioritizing oral practice (Little, 1991).

Meanwhile, the affective dimension addresses the emotional aspects of learning. This includes motivation, self-confidence, anxiety levels, and emotional resilience. Researchers recognize that learners' attitudes and feelings significantly influence their willingness to try new things, experiment with the language, make errors, and persist despite challenges (Dam, 1995; Ushioda, 2007). In the EFL context, the affective dimension plays a crucial role. A student may understand all the grammar rules (cognitive) and recognize the need to practice speaking (metacognitive), yet if they fear making mistakes in front of their classmates (affective), they are unlikely to act autonomously.

These dimensions are interconnected, shaping and influencing each other. A learner's emotions can affect how effectively they apply cognitive strategies, while thoughtful

metacognitive reflection can reduce anxiety and enhance motivation. Moreover, contextual factors, including classroom culture and the extent of teacher support, play a crucial role in either fostering or limiting autonomy across all three dimensions.

#### **1.1.4. Levels of Autonomy:**

It is very important to note that autonomy in language learning is generally a relative state, a classroom cannot be simply divided into autonomous learners and non-autonomous learners, instead of that, it is a progressive continuous sequence. It is more accurate to view autonomy as a series of levels that students advance through with academic growth (Nunan, 1997).

At the lowest level of learning, learners may show only minimal independence. For instance, they might be very good students that follow all the teacher's instructions carefully, complete their homework on time, and pay attention in class. However, they have not begun to participate in setting goals, tracking progress, or assessing outcomes yet. In these situations, the responsibility for learning remains largely external, as the learners here rely heavily on the educational authority of the teacher since instructional decisions are fully teacher centered.

A higher level of autonomy can be seen when learners begin to make some choices about their learning, even if they are small choices. As in the case of when a teacher gives them a list of few topics for an essay, and the student chooses one. This reflects an emerging form of autonomy that remains closely guided by the teacher. This idea is close to the view proposed in the early literature by Holec (1981) and Little (1991), who saw autonomy as a slow progression from teacher control to learner control. It also matches Littlewood's (1999) distinction between "reactive" and "proactive" autonomy. As in reactive autonomy, learners exercise autonomy, but strictly within the framework and activities defined by the instructor.

At the most advanced level, learners reach proactive autonomy. At this stage, they are able to identify their own language needs, set realistic goals, select their own strategies, and evaluate the final outcomes with very little external guidance. This reflects a strong form of self-direction and self-regulation (Benson, 2011; Nunan, 1997). In university-level EFL classrooms, these levels of autonomy are clearly evident. Many first-year students enter with habits formed under the exam-focused environment of high school, placing them at the initial

stage of autonomous learning. Advancing through these levels requires time, structured support, and instructional adjustments, enabling students eventually to take charge of their academic research and language learning.

### **1.1.5. Autonomy vs Independence:**

Although the terms autonomy and independence are often used alternately in everyday conversations about language learning, many educational scholars have pointed out that they do not mean exactly the same thing. Understanding the difference between them is crucial for teachers.

Independence, usually refers to the ability to carry out tasks on one's own, without relying on the teacher's direct presence or intervention (Benson, 2011), for example, if a teacher assigns grammar exercises as homework and the student completes them alone, the student is working independently. Nevertheless, Henri Holec (1981) and Phil Benson (2011) explain that working alone does not necessarily mean learning autonomously. If the teacher chooses the exercises, sets the deadline, and provides the only correction and grade, the student has little control over the learning process.

Autonomy, by contrast, is a more complex psychological and educational concept. It reflects the learner's internal capacity to manage their own learning, including making thoughtful decisions about goals, content, strategies, and assessment (Little, 1991), he emphasizes that true autonomy involves deep reflection, critical awareness, and self-regulation. Thus, an autonomous learner is actively engaged in controlling the learning process, not simply isolated from the teacher.

On the other hand, overemphasizing independence can create a misleading impression of the learner as fully self-reliant, which may be both unrealistic and counterproductive. In reality, most learners, even very advanced ones, benefit greatly from guidance, collaboration, and institutional support. True autonomy is often developed through interdependence, working together with teachers and peers in a structured environment to build confidence and responsibility (Benson, 2007; Littlewood, 1996). This distinction is crucial for research on student attitudes, as confusing autonomy with being left entirely to study alone can lead learners to view it negatively.

## **1.2. Learner Autonomy in the EFL Context:**

To fully grasp the current state of EFL instruction, it is necessary to examine how learner autonomy actually operates within the classroom. The concept itself is not entirely new; it has roots in adult education and political philosophy, and it gained significant traction in language teaching during the late 1970s and early 1980s. When Holec (1981) defined it as the ability to take charge of one's own learning, it implied that autonomy is not an innate talent you are born with. Instead, it is an acquired capacity that must be actively nurtured and taught within the educational environment. In the context of foreign language acquisition, this means that EFL programs need to provide students with both the methodological skills and the psychological strategies necessary to take charge of their own language learning.

### **1.2.1. The Historical Shift to Learner-Centered Approaches:**

The transition toward autonomous learning represents a major paradigm shift in global educational philosophy. For many decades, foreign language teaching was completely dominated by traditional, teacher-centered approaches. Methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method and Audiolingualism were the standard everywhere. In these historical models, classrooms were structured around a strict, top-down hierarchy. The teacher held complete authority and controlled the knowledge, while students were largely passive, expected only to memorize and reproduce information.

Historically, traditional approaches like Grammar-Translation Method did little to foster genuine communicative competence. Students might master verb conjugations for written exams, yet they frequently lacked both the motivation and the practical skills needed to use English effectively in real-life contexts, in these traditional settings, students developed a strong habit of cognitive dependence, they expected the teacher to determine the entire syllabus, select every reading text, point out all the relevant linguistic rules, and provide the final evaluation (Benson, 2011). Since the learning process was completely directed by the teacher, students rarely developed a sense of personal ownership over their education.

As societal needs evolved, it became increasingly important to prepare students for lifelong learning, revealing that memorization alone was insufficient, this shift prompted the

adoption of learner-centered approaches. Approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and, more recently, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) set the groundwork for autonomy, these methods emphasize active student participation, collaborative discussion, and real-life communication. In a truly learner-centered classroom, both teachers and students share responsibility for the learning process. Through activities that require analysis, problem-solving, and the expression of personal ideas, students build the critical thinking and self-motivation necessary for academic success at the university level.

### **1.2.2. The Evolution of the Teacher's Role:**

A widespread misconception about autonomous learning is that it makes the teacher redundant or unnecessary. On the contrary, in autonomous learning frameworks, the role of the teacher undergoes a deep and complex transformation. Rather than acting as traditional knowledge transmitters or authoritative figures who dictate every single step of the lesson, educators are expected to take on more dynamic roles, serving as facilitators, learning advisors, and resource coordinators (Voller, 1997).

This pedagogical shift actually demands much more effort and skill from the educator. Teacher presence remains essential, especially in the early stages of fostering autonomy. Students moving from secondary education, where guidance is intensive and instruction often revolves around passing standardized exams such as the Baccalaureate, are typically unprepared for the sudden demands of autonomous learning at the university level. Research clearly indicates that if learners are granted complete autonomy without adequate scaffolding and support, they quickly become overwhelmed. This leads to decreased motivation, high anxiety, and sometimes higher dropout rates (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012).

Therefore, effective facilitation requires educators to adopt several multifaceted responsibilities:

First, teachers need to function as Instructional Designers, creating learning environments and tasks that encourage independent inquiry and critical thinking rather than simple memorization.

Second, they must serve as “Methodological Trainers”. Before students can manage their learning, they must know how to learn. The teacher’s responsibility evolves into explicitly training students in learning strategies, such as how to take effective notes, how to infer meaning from context, and how to practice speaking fluently (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Third, teachers should take on the role of “Counselors,” offering continuous psychological support to help students overcome dependence on the teacher and develop the confidence to make independent learning decisions (Voller, 1997).

Ultimately, the teacher’s goal in an autonomous EFL setting is a delicate balancing act: providing enough support to prevent frustration, while slowly stepping back to allow the learner to take ownership of their linguistic development (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012).

### **1.2.3. Contextual and Cultural Factors Influencing Autonomy:**

Implementing learner autonomy is not just a matter of adjusting the syllabus; it involves a complex interplay of contextual, social, and cultural factors. The concept of autonomy originally emerged from Western educational philosophies, which traditionally place a very high value on individualism, critical thinking, and self-direction. Still, trying to apply these Western principles universally often results in significant friction, particularly in educational contexts that have historically relied on teacher-dependent, collective, or highly centralized cultures (Littlewood, 1999).

In numerous EFL contexts, including the Algerian educational system, early-stage instruction largely follows a traditional teaching paradigm. From a young age, students are socialized into a system where the teacher is perceived as the unquestioned authority figure. In such environments, a "good student" is often defined strictly as one who listens quietly, follows instructions perfectly, respects the teacher's authority, and memorizes content to reproduce it on examinations. Learners are almost never encouraged to question the material or guide their own study. As a result, when students reach higher education (the Licence and Master levels), they frequently enter the university accustomed to a "spoon-feeding" academic culture, where passive reception is prioritized over active, self-directed inquiry.

Such a strong habit of dependence renders the sudden move toward autonomous learning at the university level especially difficult for learners to navigate. Because students have spent their formative years relying completely on teachers, they naturally expect university professors to take full responsibility for planning the coursework, providing all the necessary handouts, and giving explicit instructions for exams (Palfreyman, 2003). When a university teacher attempts to transfer some of this responsibility to the students, for instance, when students are asked to choose their own research articles or create a presentation independently, they may perceive this not as an opportunity for empowerment but as a sign that the teacher is neglecting their responsibilities.

Therefore, when investigating students' attitudes toward autonomous learning, it is very important to recognize that resistance to autonomy is usually not a sign of laziness or a lack of intelligence. But it is a reflection of a complex cultural mismatch. Fostering autonomy requires a massive psychological shift in how students perceive their academic identities. Educators and institutions must acknowledge these cultural barriers and provide structured, culturally sensitive support (Canh, 2017; Manzoor et al., 2023; Orawiwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017) to help learners gradually unlearn their dependence.

#### **1.2.4. Challenges:**

Although learner autonomy is theoretically compelling, its practical implementation in EFL classrooms is frequently limited by interconnected challenges, which can be categorized as psychological, institutional, and pedagogical.

The first major difficulty is psychological and stems from the students' past experiences. Because many learners have long been educated in teacher-centered systems, they initially associate "good learning" with clear instruction, direct correction, and constant teacher control. They do not naturally associate learning with personal initiative (Benson, 2011; Little, 1991). In such settings, asking students to plan their learning or evaluate their own progress can cause high levels of anxiety and discomfort, especially for learners who lack confidence in their English proficiency. This problem is often amplified by motivational problems. Autonomy requires consistent, continuous daily effort. Without the immediate external pressure of a teacher checking their homework, some learners simply lack the discipline to continue

practicing (Ushioda, 2007).

Institutional constraints also create massive challenges. Teachers often work in environments with large, overcrowded classes, rigid syllabi that must be finished by a certain date, and curricula driven entirely by final exams. These institutional constraints provide minimal opportunity for personalized learning or reflective engagement within the classroom. In many EFL contexts, this means that autonomy remains an abstract ideal rather than a daily classroom reality (Benson, 2011; Cotterall, 1995).

Furthermore, there is a pedagogical challenge regarding how teachers understand autonomy. Autonomy is sometimes misunderstood as total independence. This misunderstanding can lead teachers to withdraw their support too early, leaving students stranded before they have the skills to manage learning responsibly (Dam, 1995; Littlewood, 1999). Teachers themselves may also encounter difficulties if they have not been sufficiently trained in didactics to design autonomous learning tasks or provide formative feedback. As a result, implementing autonomy is a slow, difficult developmental process that requires patience from both students and teachers.

### **1.2.5. Pedagogical Approaches to Promote Learner Autonomy:**

To overcome the above stated challenges, educators must use specific pedagogical approaches to promote learner autonomy. These approaches are grounded in the idea that autonomy develops best when learners are gradually given meaningful responsibility within a highly supportive and structured environment.

TBLT is one of the most effective approaches. In a task-based classroom, students are given a communicative problem to solve in English (such as planning a trip or debating a topic). Because the focus is on completing the task rather than just repeating grammar rules, learners have to use language purposefully. This encourages them to collaborate, negotiate meaning, and make decisions together, which builds autonomy naturally (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 1997). Similarly, Project-Based Learning can foster autonomy by requiring learners to investigate a topic over a period of several weeks. They must collect information, synthesize sources, and present their findings. This consistent effort naturally promotes proactive engagement,

problem-solving, and time management.

Reflective pedagogy is another crucial approach. Teachers can use tools like learning journals, self-assessment sheets, and student portfolios. These tools force learners to stop and think about their progress. By regularly writing down what they struggled with and what they succeeded in, students develop the metacognitive awareness needed to make informed decisions about their future learning (Dam, 1995; Little, 2007).

Finally, collaborative learning plays a huge role. Even though autonomy is sometimes wrongly associated with working alone, group discussions, peer feedback, pair and group work actually support autonomy. Peer interaction encourages students to exchange varied learning methods and promotes self-reliance, significantly reducing their constant dependence on the teacher as the sole source of knowledge (Holec, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978). Across all these approaches, the teacher remains essential as a guide who models strategy use and gradually transfers control to the students.

### **1.2.6. The Role of Technology in Fostering Learner Autonomy:**

In the modern era, technology has become one of the most influential tools for fostering learner autonomy. Its greatest power lies in its ability to extend learning far beyond the physical walls of the classroom, giving students exceptional control over the pace, content, and way of their engagement with the English language.

In discussions of autonomy, technology is not seen as a substitute for the teacher. But it is a means of expanding the learner's opportunities to act independently. Digital platforms, mobile applications, online dictionaries, YouTube videos, and podcasts all provide massive access to authentic language input, which allows learners to tailor their exposure to English based on their exact personal interests and proficiency levels (Holec, 1981; Benson, 2011). If a student loves sports, they can read English sports articles and if they need to work on pronunciation, they can listen to native speakers on podcasts.

Furthermore, Web 2.0 tools encourage students to move from just consuming language to actively producing it. Through blogs, social media, and language exchanging apps, students

can interact with real people in the real world, and this technological integration facilitates autonomy and expands it far beyond the classroom.

However, it is really important to recognize that simply having a smartphone or an internet connection does not automatically guarantee that a student will become autonomous. As Autonomy also requires a high degree of digital literacy and metacognitive awareness. Without proper guidance, students may use technology in a passive manner, such as endlessly scrolling through videos without actively paying attention to their main goal of acquiring the language. That is why the role of technology is most effective when it is blended with classroom instruction, where the teacher helps students learn how to use digital tools purposefully to enhance their language skills.

### **1.2.7. Individual Differences in Learner Autonomy:**

Although autonomy is often promoted as a universal goal, it is important to recognize that each learner is unique. Factors such as personality, learning preferences, and previous academic experiences significantly shape how a student responds to autonomous learning (Ushioda, 2007), in a typical university-level EFL classroom, some students readily embrace independence, while others struggle without continuous guidance from the teacher.

Psychological factors like self-efficacy, which is the belief a student has in their own ability to succeed, are critical here. If a student has a low self-efficacy, they will likely have a negative attitude toward autonomy because they do not trust themselves to make the right decisions. They feel "safe" only when the teacher is leading the way. On the other hand, students with high self-efficacy are usually more willing to experiment, take risks with the language, and try out new digital tools on their own (e.g., Orawiwanakul & Wichadee, 2017).

Gender and age can also be factors, though the research on this is mixed. Some studies, such as those by Macaskill and Taylor (2010), suggest that more mature students like those in a Master's level, show higher levels of autonomy because they have a clearer vision of their future careers. For example, the motivation of a Master's student in didactics is no longer just about passing an exam; it is about becoming a professional teacher. And this shift in **instrumental motivation** often leads to a more positive attitude toward self-directed study.

### 1.2.8. The Link Between Autonomy and Language Proficiency:

There is "chicken and egg" relationship exists between learner autonomy and language proficiency. Several researchers (Benson, 2011; Cotterall, 1995) suggest that a threshold level of linguistic competence is often a necessary for the exercise of genuine autonomy. For instance, if a learner's vocabulary and grammatical knowledge are significantly limited, engaging with authentic materials, such as academic articles or digital media that may result in cognitive frustration rather than self-directed growth. Consequently, a higher degree of language proficiency serves as an enabler, providing students with the necessary tools to navigate independent learning resources effectively.

However, the opposite is also true: practicing autonomy leads to higher proficiency. When students take charge of their learning, they spend more time "in the language." Instead of only hearing English for a few hours a week in a lecture hall, autonomous learners are listening to podcasts while commuting, reading news in English, and using apps to practice. This extra exposure naturally leads to better fluency and a larger vocabulary. For this reason, promoting autonomy is not just a "nice idea", it is a practical necessity for reaching an advanced level of English.

### 1.3. Students' Attitudes Toward Autonomous Learning:

Now, we have explored the theoretical side of autonomy, we must look at the human side which is **attitudes**, in didactics, an "attitude" is generally defined as a person's inner feelings, biases, or convictions about a specific topic (Cotterall, 1995), attitudes are important because they directly influence behavior. If a student has a negative attitude toward autonomous learning, perhaps because they think the teacher is being **lazy** by asking them to do a project, they will not put in the effort required for the task to be successful.

Researchers (e.g., Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960) usually divide attitudes into three components:

- **The Cognitive Component:** What the student knows or believes about autonomy (e.g., "I believe that working alone helps me remember vocabulary better").

- **The Affective Component:** How the student feels about it (e.g., "I feel anxious when the teacher doesn't give us the answers").
- **The Behavioral Component:** How the student actually acts (e.g., "I regularly search for extra grammar exercises online").

In the EFL context, many studies (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Canh, 2017) have shown that students often have a **mixed attitude**, they might cognitively believe that autonomy is good for their future, but affectively, they still feel a strong need for the teacher's approval and correction, this conflict is especially common in contexts like Algeria, where the transition from the teacher-led in high school system to the self-directed at university system is very sudden.

#### **1.4. Learner Autonomy in the Algerian Higher Education Context:**

To understand why learner autonomy is such a critical area of pedagogical focus in our country today, we must examine the LMD (Licence, Master, Doctorate). When Algeria adopted this system, one of the main goals was to move away from the old way of teaching, where the teacher did everything. The LMD system was designed to put the student at the center, it introduced things like **personal work** and research projects to encourage students to look for information themselves instead of just waiting for the lecture.

But, in the Algerian EFL context, there is often a gap between what the law says and what actually happens in the classroom.

##### **1.4.1. The Transition from Secondary School to University:**

One of the biggest hurdles for autonomy in Algeria is the Baccalaureate culture. For seven years (Middle and High School), Algerian students are trained to succeed in one specific way: memorizing the teacher's lessons to pass the final exam. In these stages, the teacher is the "king" of the classroom. They provide the handouts, they explain every grammar rule in detail, and they correct every mistake immediately.

When these students pass the Baccalaureate and enter the English department at the university, they face a pedagogical shock. Suddenly, a professor might say: Go to the library

and find three sources for your research, or Research the definition of Sociolinguistics on your own, because they have spent years being passive receivers, many students feel lost, they might feel that the professor is not teaching well, when in reality, the professor is trying to encourage autonomy, this transition is where most of the negative or confused attitudes toward autonomous learning begin.

### **1.4.2. The LMD System and Personal Work:**

This structural division indicates a clear institutional mandate from the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education to foster autonomous learning and reduce total reliance on classroom lectures.

In the official LMD handbooks, every pedagogical unit is defined by a specific **workload distribution**; it consists of a set volume of **presential contact hours** dedicated to formal lectures, which is systematically paired with a mandatory allocation of **autonomous personal effort**, this is a clear sign that the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education wants students to be autonomous. In our department, this is usually seen in tasks like:

- Presentations: Where students must research a topic and teach it to their classmates.
- Dissertations: Especially at the Master 2 level, where the student must choose a topic, find a supervisor, and manage a whole research project.
- ICT (Information and Communication Technology) Integration: Using platforms like Moodle or Google Classroom, where students have to download lessons and participate in forums.

While these are great tools for autonomy, they sometimes face institutional challenges. For example, many students struggle with slow internet or a lack of books in the library. If a student wants to be autonomous but doesn't have the resources, their motivation might drop.

### **1.4.3. Cultural Perceptions of the Teacher:**

In Algerian society, we have a very high respect for teachers. There is a famous saying: "He who teaches me a letter, I become his slave" While this respect is a good thing, it can sometimes make autonomy difficult, because some students feel that it is disrespectful or wrong

to question a professor or to suggest a different way of learning. They believe that the professor knows everything, so they wait for the truth to come solely from them.

To foster autonomy in Algeria, it is a must to change this mindset. And in order to facilitate that, students need to be shown that autonomy does not imply a lack of respect for the teacher; in actuality it reflects their role as active partners in their own learning. From the perspective of a Master's student specializing in Didactics, it is believed that this gap should be bridged by future teachers, and that students need to be gradually guided away from complete dependence on their teachers.

### **Conclusion:**

This chapter established that learner autonomy is central to modern English teaching. As education moves away from teacher-centered models, students must take active responsibility for their learning. According to scholars like Holec, Little, and Benson, autonomy is more than just studying alone. It requires self-awareness, decision-making, and the ability to manage the learning process.

Autonomous learners share specific traits: they take responsibility, show internal motivation, and reflect on their progress. However, autonomy is not the same as total independence. It does not mean abandoning the student. The teacher remains essential but shifts from a director to a guide, helping students gradually become self-reliant.

Despite its benefits, promoting autonomy in EFL classes faces real obstacles. Exam-focused systems and traditional learning habits make it difficult for students to take the initiative. Students accustomed to strict teacher guidance often feel uncertain or resist the change. Therefore, teachers must build autonomy slowly using interactive tasks, reflective activities, and technology.

Ultimately, autonomy only works if students accept it. If learners resist taking an active role, practical implementation will fail. This chapter provided the theoretical framework for these concepts. The following chapters will use this foundation to analyze the actual attitudes and readiness of first-year students toward autonomous learning.

# **Chapter 2: Methodology and Procedures**

## **Introduction:**

While the previous chapter laid the theoretical foundation for learner autonomy by exploring its cognitive, metacognitive, and affective dimensions, the transition from theoretical models to empirical reality requires a systematic methodological framework. As established by Benson (2011), the complex nature of autonomy demands a shift from abstract definitions to concrete investigation of how these principles manifest within specific educational settings. Consequently, this chapter bridges the theoretical framework and the empirical findings by detailing procedural choices made to investigate Algerian EFL learners' attitudes toward autonomous learning.

The objective of this methodological phase is to provide a transparent account of the research process. Investigating student attitudes-define in Chapter One as a synthesis of beliefs, emotions, and behaviors-requires a design that can effectively quantify internal perceptions. To identify general patterns of readiness, a quantitative approach was adopted to ensure objectivity. The choice that aligns with Cotterall (1995), who argues that understanding learner beliefs is an essential condition for designing effective learning strategies.

This chapter begins by detailing the research design and its rationale. It then describes the target population, sampling techniques, and the primary research instrument, which is a Likert-scale questionnaire. Finally, it outlines the procedures for data collection and analysis, before addressing the study's limitations and the ethical considerations that ensured participant anonymity throughout the process.

### **2.1. Research Design:**

To effectively investigate students' attitudes toward autonomous learning, this study adopts a quantitative descriptive research design. Researching psychological construct such as beliefs, emotions, and academic readiness requires an approach that can capture internal states objectively and systematically. In the field of applied linguistics, quantitative methods are highly valued for their ability to uncover broad trends and measure specific variables across a defined population (Dornyei, 2007). By employing this approach, the abstract dimensions of autonomy discussed in the theoretical framework can be translated into standardized, measurable data.

A descriptive design was specifically selected because the research does not aim to manipulate variables or test a new pedagogical intervention. Instead, the objective is to describe and capture the current reality of the learners' mindset within their natural educational environment. Assessing how students perceive their responsibilities, their reliance on teacher guidance, and their willingness to engage with the language outside formal instruction requires a clear snapshot of existing condition. This method allows for a detailed mapping of the prevalent cultural and academic attitudes that either facilitates or hinder the transition toward autonomy.

Within this quantitative framework, a survey-based method works as the main data collection strategy. Assembling data through a structured format permits the researcher to reach a wider sample of the student, ensuring that the findings are representative of the target context. As Creswell (2014) explains, survey research provides a numeric description of trends and opinions, which is essential when attempting to draw concrete conclusions about a specific demographic. Eventually, this structured design ensures that the investigation into learner attitudes remains strict, allowing for meaningful connections between the pedagogical principles of autonomy and actual classroom practices.

## **2.2. Population and Sample:**

The target population for this investigation involves English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students enrolled at the University of Ghardaïa. Selecting this specific demographic is essential because these learners are actively navigating education under the Algerian LMD (Licence, Master, Doctorate) system, an educational framework that officially requires a high degree of personal involvement and self-oriented study. As established in the theoretical framework, students in this context frequently experience a pedagogical shock when transitioning from the well-structured, teacher-centered environment of secondary schools to a university setting that requires more shift toward autonomy. Thus, this population will best embody the exact tension between ingrained academic dependency and institutional expectations, which makes them the most appropriate candidates for investigating attitudes toward autonomous learning.

From this broader population, a specific sample was chosen to participate in the quantitative survey. In applied linguistics research, defining an appropriate sample is critical

for ensuring that the findings can be reasonably generalized to the larger target group without requiring the participation of every individual (Dörnyei, 2007). The selected sample specifically targets first-year licence students who have recently enrolled in the Department of English. It is truly beneficial to focus on this specific academic stage, as it catches their instant reflection to a university setting that requires autonomy. In contrast to more advanced students who have already adapted to university way of studying, first-year students provide a distinctive insight on the initial attitudes toward self-regulation. Investigating this sample is vital for understanding whether their previous education has sufficiently prepared them for autonomous learning, establishing a clear baseline of their psychological and academic readiness.

The study relies on a solid sample size that accurately represents the demographic composition of the department, to achieve meaningful and statistically viable results. Ensuring some level of diversity within the sample is important for capturing a holistic understanding of the affective and cognitive dimensions of autonomy, as individual differences significantly influence academic readiness (Ushioda, 2007). By establishing a well-defined sample, the research ensures a reliable empirical foundation for analyzing the precise psychological and contextual challenges these EFL learners encounter on a daily basis.

### **2.3. Sampling Technique:**

To select participants for the survey, a convenience sampling technique was used. This non-probability approach involves selecting participants who are readily available and willing to participate. Unlike probability sampling that gives every member of the population an equal chance of selection, convenience sampling is often more practical in real educational settings. Access to full student populations is frequently limited due to timetable constraints, absenteeism, and logistical difficulties (Creswell, 2014).

In this study, the questionnaire was distributed to students who were present in-class during the data collection period, as well as those who could be reached through academic online groups. Although this approach is based on accessibility, it does not necessarily affect the quality of the data negatively. The variation in student's academic backgrounds and language proficiency levels provides a reasonably broad representation of the target populations general attitudes.

Moreover, convenience sampling aligns with the realities of the educational context that allows the researcher to collect sufficient data without disrupting students' regular academic learning.

#### **2.4. Research Instrument:**

To objectively capture participants' internal perceptions and self-reported behaviors, this study employed a structured questionnaire as the primary research instrument. Denscombe (2010) defines a research questionnaire as a systematic, written list of questions designed to gather information directly from individuals for subsequent analysis. This tool is highly valued in quantitative research because its standardized format ensures all respondents encounter the exact same questions, this consistency minimizes researcher intervention and allows for precise, reliable comparisons of the data.

Building on this, Creswell (2014) notes that questionnaires are essential survey tools for extracting numeric descriptions of trends, attitudes, and opinions from a sample, which then helps researchers understand the broader population, in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and educational psychology, this approach is particularly effective, as Dörnyei (2007) points out, questionnaires allow researchers to quickly gather a wealth of standardized data regarding learners' beliefs, motivations, and affective states, because this study focuses on students' attitudes, which are deeply internal psychological and emotional constructs, a well-designed questionnaire serves as the most pragmatic method to translate these abstract concepts into measurable, empirical data.

In order to capture the participants' internal perceptions and self-reported behaviors, a structured questionnaire was selected as a primary research instrument, which is effective tool in educational psychology and in EFL context as it allows researchers to gather large amounts of standardized data regarding beliefs, motivations, and affective factors in a short time frame (Brown, 2001), as the main focus of this study is students' attitudes, which are internal psychological factors, a well-designed survey is the most effective way to measure them.

### **2.4.1. Description of Questionnaire:**

The questionnaire was designed based on the ABC model of attitudes (Affective, Behavioral, and Cognitive) explained in the first chapter, to ensure that the responses could be measured objectively, the instrument adopts a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree", this scaling method gives participants the flexibility to express the exact intensity of their opinions, rather than forcing them into rigid yes/no questions.

The survey is divided into five sections to cover the multidimensional nature of learner autonomy, section one contain basic demographic and background information, such as age, gender, and prior exposure to private language schooling, which helps contextualize the responses, for section two, it targets the cognitive component and investigating students' core beliefs about who holds the ultimate responsibility for learning, while section three explores readiness and self-regulation representing the behavioral component by asking how students plan, monitor, and evaluate their own study habits, in section four shifting the focus to the affective dimension, assessing how students feel about the teacher's role and whether a lack of direct guidance causes anxiety, for the last one section five that addresses external factors, specifically the institutional challenges and the role of digital tools in fostering or hindering independent practice.

### **2.4.2. Validity and Reliability:**

Establishing the validity and reliability of the instrument is essential in quantitative research. Validity refers to the extent in which the questionnaire measures what it is intended to measure (Cohen et al., 2018). And to address the content validity, the initial version of the questionnaire was reviewed by the research supervisor who assessed the clarity, the relevance and the accuracy of the items. Following this review, several revisions were made to improve wording and ensure that all questions were clear and appropriate for all the participants, those related to prior English learning experiences in particular.

Reliability, in contrast, relates to the consistency of the instrument. For enhancing reliability, the questionnaire items were written in clear and accessible English that suits the participants' level. In addition to that, a number of reverse-worded items were included to reduce the risk of response bias, such as selecting the same option without carefully reading it.

These measures contribute to producing data that are both consistent and suitable for further analysis.

### **2.5. Data Collection Procedure:**

In order to increase the response rate and ensure the inclusion of a diverse sample, the data collection was executed using a mixed administrative strategy, because relying on a single method of distribution can often limit the reach of a study; therefore, the questionnaire was deployed both physically and digitally, the printed version of the survey was distributed face to face in classroom settings, this physical presence allowed the researcher to briefly introduce the purpose of the study, clarify the instructions, and motivate immediately participation, which typically helps to ensure a high completion rate.

Simultaneously, a digital version of the same questionnaire was created using Google Forms and shared across the students' official academic communication groups, this online distribution was crucial for reaching learners who were absent during the physical administration or those who prefer engaging with academic materials digitally.

By combining these two procedures, the data collection process held the practical realities of university attendance, and ensured a sufficient comprehensive dataset that accurately represents the voices of the targeted EFL community.

### **2.6. Data Analysis Procedure:**

After the data collection phase was completed, the responses were organized and prepared for the analysis. This study relies on descriptive statistics to interpret the data. Responses that are collected from both printed questionnaires and online forms were organized in a single database using statistical software that is Microsoft Excel. In order to facilitate analysis, the five-point Likert scale responses were converted into numerical values ranging from 1 to 5.

The analysis focuses on calculating frequencies and percentages for each item, providing a clear overview of how students responded to the statements. Particular attention was given to reverse-worded items, their scores were adjusted during the analysis to ensure

consistency in interpreting the direction of responses. By converting the participants' views into structured numerical data, the study aims to present the findings in an objective and accessible way to allow for a clearer understanding of students' attitudes toward autonomous learning.

## **2.7. Limitations of the Study:**

Acknowledging research constraints is essential for academic integrity and provides a realistic context for the findings. This investigation into learner autonomy at the University of Ghardaïa has three main limitations.

First, the study is restricted to a single university department. The findings reflect a specific local academic culture. Therefore, these results cannot be automatically generalized to the entire Algerian EFL population.

Second, the study relies on a self-reported questionnaire. This introduces the risk of social desirability bias. Students often want to present themselves favorably, so they may have exaggerated their actual level of autonomy to meet academic expectations.

Finally, the study is cross-sectional, meaning it captures student attitudes at a single point in time. Student perceptions evolve with experience. A longitudinal study would track these changes, but tracking students over several years falls outside the scope of a Master's thesis.

Despite these constraints, the research offers valuable insights into the current mindset of first-year EFL learners.

## **2.8. Ethical Considerations:**

Conducting ethical research is a paramount responsibility, particularly when dealing with students' personal perceptions and academic beliefs, throughout the duration of this study, strict ethical guidelines were followed to ensure the protection and dignity of all participants. Before engaging with the questionnaire, all students were informed about the nature and purpose of the research. Participation was entirely voluntary, and individuals were given the absolute right to withdraw from the survey at any point without any negative consequences to

their academic standing.

A cornerstone of the ethical framework was the guarantee of anonymity. As emphasized during the design phase and noted by the research supervisor, the questionnaire did not require participants to provide their names or any identifying information that could link their responses to their personal identities, this was crucial for fostering an environment of trust, allowing students to answer honestly and without fear of judgment. In addition, all gathered data was treated with the highest level of confidentiality, used exclusively for the purposes of this Master's thesis, and stored securely to prevent unauthorized access. These measures ensure that the study adheres to the professional standards of academic conduct in the social sciences.

### **Conclusion:**

In summary, this second chapter has detailed the methodological architecture that supports the empirical investigation of learner autonomy. By adopting a quantitative descriptive design, the study establishes a structured approach to measure and analyze the complex attitudes of EFL students at the University of Ghardaïa. Through the use of a validated Likert-scale questionnaire and a careful sampling technique, the research has moved from the theoretical foundations of the first chapter into the practical domain of data collection.

This structured approach, which includes the description of the target population and ethical safeguards, ensures that the analysis is grounded in reliable evidence. While certain limitations regarding scope and self-reporting exist, the methodology provides a solid framework for interpreting the current academic reality of Algerian learners. With the procedural steps now clearly defined, the following sections will focus on the presentation and discussion of the findings, ultimately revealing the extent to which these students are prepared to take charge of their own language learning journeys.

# **Chapter Three: Results and Discussion**

## **Introduction:**

The preceding chapters of this research established the foundational concepts of learner autonomy and detailed the methodological framework utilized to investigate this phenomenon. Chapter One highlighted that autonomy is not just a matter of studying in isolation, but kind of a complex exchange of cognitive, metacognitive, and affective dimensions where learners take conscious responsibility of their educational career. Chapter Two later on outlined the quantitative descriptive design used to capture the realities of first-year EFL students at the University of Ghardaïa, elaborating the survey-based approach utilised for data collection.

This third chapter represents the experimental core of the dissertation. Its primary objective is to transition from theoretical abstractions to practical realities by analyzing the raw data gathered from the participants. Instead of viewing the statistical results alone, this chapter attempts to weave the numbers into a coherent narrative that reflects the actual lived experiences of Algerian first year university students navigating the LMD (Licence, Master, Doctorate) system.

The chapter is structured to ensure a logical flow of analysis. It begins with a comprehensive presentation of the findings derived from the questionnaire, divided into the five thematic sections of the research instrument. Following the presentation of the raw data, A deeper analysis is provided to explain the meanings behind the percentages. This involves examining the difference between students' desire for independence and their real ability to study without direct teacher supervision.

The overall purpose of the present chapter is to provide the answer to the research questions raised and to confirm or deny the hypotheses stated in the initial parts. Based on the results achieved, the chapter proposes practical pedagogical recommendations, the aim of which is to support teachers and the designers of pedagogical proposals to create a more favorable space for the students to manage the first pedagogical shock of the university experience and to begin a journey towards true independence in the academic sphere.

### **3.1. Presentation and Analysis of the Results:**

#### **3.1.1. Section One: Demographic Profile and Educational Background:**

Before diving into the complex psychological attitudes regarding autonomous learning, it is vital to establish a clear profile of the sample population. The demographic variables of the participants provide an essential backdrop, as factors such as age, gender, and prior educational exposure heavily influence a student's readiness to adopt independent study habits.

➤ **Gender and Age Distribution:**

The initial questions of the survey sought to categorize the basic demographics of the EFL learners. The results show a balanced gender distribution, with female students representing a slight majority at 53.7%, while male students account for the remaining 46.3%. This distribution reflects the situation of first year licence students in language faculty of University of Ghardaia, where female students are usually more represented in humanities and language studies.

In terms of age, the data heavily skews toward the traditional first-year university demographic. A significant 64.8% of the respondents fall within the 18 to 19 age brackets. Another 20.4% are between 20 and 21 years old, and a smaller fraction (14.8%) are 22 or older. The dominance of the 18-19 age group is analytically crucial. It confirms that the vast majority of the sample consists of students who have very recently transitioned from the secondary education system. They enter university with learning habits developed in high school, a system mainly based on teacher-centered instruction and intensive preparation for the Baccalaureate exam. As a result, their comprehensions of autonomy are likely filtered through this recent, highly directed educational experience.

➤ **Extracurricular English Exposure and Self-Rated Proficiency:**

In order to discover how the students approach English language outside of university environment, it was also questioned whether they attended extra private English courses in private language schools. Unexpectedly, most of the students replied with the negative answer (57.4% do not attend any private courses). "Yes" got 35.2% of votes and Maybe (No Answer / Missing) - 7.4%.

The importance of this result in the University environment of teaching and learning cannot be overstated. With these students getting more than half of their language input from the curriculum offered at university, there is all the more responsibility on the university to help them become autonomous learners. If these students have not yet developed independent learning skills, their only input is the few hours they are within the university walls during the week.

Regarding self-rating in their current level of English: “Average” was the answer from the majority of people (42.6%) followed by “Good” from a significant minority (35.2%). Just “Very good” (14.8%) and “Weak” (7.4%) were given in lesser amounts. This is subjective by definition and the act of self-rating has to be linked to autonomy. The student that thinks his level is “Average” has not got a good linguistic self-esteem which can enable him to take "risky" learning actions without the teacher's support.

**Table 3.1.** Demographic Profile, Educational Background, and Self-Rated Proficiency of the Participants (N=54)

Question / Variable	Response Options	Response Options	Final Percentage (%)
Q1. Gender	Female	29	53.7%
	Male	25	46.3%
Q2. Age Distribution	18–19 years	35	64.8%
	20–21 years	11	20.4%
	22 years or above	8	14.8%
Q3. Extra Private English Courses	Yes	31	57.4%
	No	19	35.2%
	No answer	4	7.4%
Q4. Self-Rated Proficiency Level	Average	23	42.6%
	Good	19	35.2%
	Very Good	8	14.8%
	Weak	4	7.4%

### 3.1.2. Section Two: Attitudes and Core Beliefs About Autonomy:

The second section of the questionnaire delved into the cognitive and affective dimensions of the students' attitudes. This segment aimed to uncover what students think about independence, contrasting their intellectual beliefs with their emotional comfort levels.

➤ The Cognitive Acceptance of Responsibility:

The data shows that the students have a mature and progressive understanding of language learning, when responding to the statement, "I believe learning English is not solely the teacher's responsibility"(Question 5), there was overwhelming agreement, a striking 72.2% agreed with this statement (42.6% Agree, 29.6% Strongly Agree), this indicates a definitive cognitive shift, where students recognize that successful language learning requires shared effort and cannot be passively received from the teacher.

This positive cognitive stance is further solidified by the responses regarding the perceived benefits of independent study. A vast majority of the participants (64.8%) agreed that developing autonomous learning habits will significantly improve their English proficiency (27.8% Strongly Agree, 37% Agree; Question 7). They are not resistant to the concept of autonomy. On the contrary, they view it as a highly beneficial, necessary tool for their academic success. Intrinsic Motivation and External Pressure (Q6 & Q8):

The findings reveal a paradoxical relationship between student preference and behavior, when asked about motivation to complete tasks (Q6), a significant majority (72.8% combined Agree/Strongly Agree) expressed that they feel more motivated when they have autonomy over their tasks, while this is contrasted by Question 8, where 85.2% of students agreed that they engage in extra English materials primarily when an exam is imminent. This suggests that while students desire autonomy (Q6), they are currently habituated to an exam-centric model of learning (Q8). This instrumental dependence is a key barrier to true autonomy, as the students' learning efforts are currently regulated by external testing rather than intrinsic curiosity.

➤ Affective Factors and Peer Evaluation (Q10 & Q11):

The affective dimension of autonomy is complex for this sample, while 85.2% of students report feeling confident when studying English alone (Q10), 77.8% agree that university students should gradually take full responsibility for their own learning (Q11). Despite this theoretical acceptance of responsibility, the high confidence in solitary study contrasted with the heavy need for teacher guidance (discussed in other sections) indicates that students may feel "confident" only when they are not being evaluated by an authority figure.

➤ The Affective and Behavioral Contradiction: The Need for the Teacher:

Nevertheless, a deeper analysis reveals a clear contradiction between what students believe is good for them and what they prefer to do in practice. While they acknowledge their own responsibility, the reliance on the teacher remains heavily.

This tension becomes immediately apparent in the responses to Question 9: "I prefer the teacher to explain everything in detail before I start working", 81.5% of the participants agreed with this statement (46.3% Agree, 35.2% Strongly Agree), this strong preference for detailed instructions before tasks highlights an important barrier to real learner autonomy, It suggests that while students are willing to do the work themselves, they are strongly reluctant to take the initial risks involved in independent discovery, they require the teacher to map out the territory completely before they feel safe enough to explore it.

This reluctance is linked to what can be described as "pedagogical anxiety." When asked whether they feel anxious or uncomfortable studying English without direct teacher guidance (Question 12), the responses revealed a divided affective state. While 40.8% of the students expressed clear discomfort (33.3% Agree, 7.5% Strongly Agree), another significant portion (33.3%) remained Neutral, indicating deep uncertainty. This affective response is a crucial finding. It shows the impact of the transition from high school to university. Even though students want to become autonomous learners, a large segment still lacks the emotional security to do so confidently, while a third remains completely hesitant and unsure of their independent capabilities.

**Table 3.2.** Students' Attitudes, Core Beliefs, and Affective Responses Toward Learner Autonomy (N=54)

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q5	0.0%	0.0%	27.8%	42.6%	29.6%
Q6	6.8%	0.0%	20.4%	59.2%	13.6%
Q7	0.0%	0.0%	35.2%	37%	27.8%
Q8	0.0%	3.7%	11.1%	51.9%	33.3%
Q9	0.0%	7.4%	11.1%	46.3%	35.2%
Q10	0.0%	7.4%	7.4%	50%	35.2%
Q11	3.7%	5.6%	12.9%	46.3%	31.5%
Q12	11.1%	14.8%	33.3%	33.3%	7.5%

### 3.1.3. Section Three: Learner Readiness and Self-Regulation Strategies:

Whereas the above established that students approach autonomy positively, the current section discusses whether students are sufficiently equipped with means and learning strategies for taking responsibility of their learning. Self-regulation is one crucial component of autonomy. Students can hardly implement their willingness to learn without learning to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning processes.

#### ➤ Goal Setting and Self-Evaluation:

The data regarding goal setting (Q13) presents a surprisingly optimistic view. A total of 79.6% of the participants agreed that they can set clear and achievable goals for learning English. This high percentage indicates that the students do not view themselves as directionless. They believe they can guide their own learning. Similarly, in Question 16, 66.7% of students claimed to evaluate their own progress after completing a task.

#### **Analysis:**

This sense of readiness is an important finding, indicating that the first-year students at the University of Ghardaïa have a high level of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997),

believing that one can do a task is a necessary first step toward actually doing it. But the researcher should note a possible tendency for participants to overestimate their abilities. While students believe they are evaluating their progress, they may be doing so in a very informal, unstructured way that lacks the professional rigor required for university-level language mastery.

➤ The Strategy Gap: Planning and Methodological Flexibility:

A more nuanced picture emerges when we look at the practicalities of time management (Q14) and method switching (Q17). Regarding time management, the disagreement rate rises to 22.3%. This is one of the highest "disagree" marks in the survey.

**Analysis:**

This reveals a clear "Metacognitive Gap." Students know what they want (goals), but they struggle with the how (scheduling and discipline). In the secondary school system, a student's time is almost entirely managed by the institution and the teacher. Upon entering the university, the sudden responsibility of managing "free hours" for personal work becomes a source of failure. Furthermore, while 90.7% of students say they would switch study methods if one fails (Q17), their limited exposure to diverse learning strategies (noted in Section One) suggests they may not actually know which alternative methods are available to them. They have the flexibility of mind, but perhaps not the "toolbox" of techniques.

➤ Metacognitive Awareness and Self-Regulation (Q15 & Q18):

The data demonstrates a clear gap between the will to learn and the skill to do so, in Q15 64.8% of students report being able to accurately identify their own strengths and weaknesses. However, Q18 shows that only 57.4% feel capable of knowing exactly how to learn without teacher dependence.

Analysis: This drop is crucial, it shows that most students are aware of their weaknesses in English (Q15), a significant portion of the cohort lacks the "how to" knowledge the specific, actionable learning strategies required to bridge those gaps independently (Q18). This validates

the need for explicit instruction in learning strategies at the University of Ghardaïa, as student self-awareness alone is insufficient without the methodological tools to enact change.

**Table 3.3.** Learner Readiness, Goal-Setting Capabilities, and Self-Regulation Strategies  
(N=54)

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q13	3.7%	0.0%	16.7%	44.4%	35.2%
Q14	0.0%	22.3%	18.5%	38.9%	20.3%
Q15	0.0%	3.7%	31.5%	48.1%	16.7%
Q16	0.0%	9.3%	24%	50%	16.7%
Q17	0.0%	5.6%	3.7%	68.5%	22.2%
Q18	0.0%	14.8%	27.8%	44.4%	13%

### 3.1.4. Section Four: Redefining the Teacher's Role and Classroom Support:

This section represents the heart of the "pedagogical shock" mentioned in the literature review. It explores the students' expectations of their instructors and how they view the power dynamic within the university classroom.

The Teacher as a Guide, not a Dictator, the responses to **Question 19** and **Question 20** show a modern perspective on pedagogy, both statements received a mean score of 4.32, which is interpreted as "Strongly Agree". Specifically, 92.6% of students believe the teacher's primary role should be to guide them toward independence. Furthermore, 90.7% prefer a model where the teacher provides clear instructions followed by independent work.

#### **Analysis:**

These results illustrate the "traditional" image of the Algerian teacher as an absolute authority figure, which is fading in the minds of the new generation. These students do not want a "Sage on the Stage" who delivers long, uninterrupted lectures. Instead, they prefer a "Guide on the Side." They are asking the teacher to step back and give them more space to learn independently. This is a positive indicator for the LMD system, as it shows that the student

body is philosophically aligned with the system's goals of autonomous learning.

➤ **The Safety Net: The Reality of Dependence:**

The data from **Question 22** provides a sobering contrast to this desire for independence. Despite their wish for "guidance," 64.8% of students explicitly agreed with the statement: "I still require the teacher's support before I can truly learn independently" (44.4% Agree, 20.4% Strongly Agree). Only 9.3% disagreed.

**Analysis:**

This is the Autonomy Paradox, the students want to be independent cognitively, but they feel they cannot be independent behaviorally without a safety net, this reflects a strong reliance on external validation. In the Algerian context, where the stakes of exams are high, students fear that autonomous learning might lead to incorrect learning. They view the teacher as a Guardian of Correctness.

This suggests that, for these first-year students, autonomy is seen as a partnership with the teacher rather than an independent process. They are not looking for a teacher-less environment; they are looking for a teacher supported transition. This confirms the views of scholars like Little (1991) and Benson (2011), who argue that autonomy is often a socially mediated process rather than an isolated one.

➤ **Collaborative Learning as a Bridge:**

The data for Question 21 (Collaborative activities help me become more autonomous) shows a highly divided perspective. While a portion of students (40.7%) see the value of peer work, a nearly identical segment (40.8%) expressed active skepticism (31.5% Disagree, 9.3% Strongly Disagree), while another 18.5% remained strictly neutral.

**Analysis:** This suggests that students still heavily equate valid learning with the vertical relationship (Teacher to Student) rather than the horizontal one (Student to Student). If they are to become truly autonomous, they must learn to rely on their peers as resources. The massive hesitation and skepticism here indicate that many students do not yet see their classmates as

reliable sources of knowledge, reinforcing their singular dependence on the instructor as the only acceptable source of information.

**Table 3.4.** Student Expectations Regarding the Teacher's Role, Support, and Peer Collaboration (N=54)

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q19	0.0%	0.0%	7.4%	53.7%	38.9%
Q20	0.0%	0.0%	9.3%	50%	40.7%
Q21	9.3%	31.5%	18.5%	29.6%	11.1%
Q22	0.0%	9.3%	25.9%	44.4%	20.4%

### 3.1.5. Section Five: Challenges, Context, and Technology:

This final section of the questionnaire shifts the focus from the students' internal psychological state to the external environment. It examines how the digital world, the physical resources at the University of Ghardaïa, and the overall educational system in Algeria either support or hinder the development of autonomy.

➤ **The Digital Leap: Technology as a Catalyst for Autonomy:**

The most striking results in the entire study are found in the students' relationship with technology. According to the data from **Question 23**, a massive 81.5% of students actively use digital tools such as YouTube, mobile apps, and specialized websites to improve their English (42.6% Agree, 38.9% Strongly Agree). As, in **Question 24**, 74% of respondents believe they can learn English effectively by relying entirely on online resources.

#### **Analysis:**

This suggests the existence of what we might call "Parallel Autonomy". While students appear hesitant and dependent within the traditional classroom setting, they are highly proactive and self-directed in the digital sphere. This indicates that the problem is not a lack of "ability"

to be autonomous, but rather a lack of "transfer" from digital habits to academic habits. In the online world, there is no fear of being "wrong" in front of a teacher; there is only exploration and immediate feedback. For the first-year EFL student, the smartphone is not just a communication tool; it is their primary laboratory for independent language practice.

➤ Systemic and Material Barriers:

Despite their digital enthusiasm, students are acutely aware of the obstacles placed in their path by their environment. **Question 25** reveals that 75.9% of students feel that a lack of resources, specifically poor internet connectivity and a lack of physical books, strongly limits their ability to study autonomously.

**Analysis:**

This is a crucial contextual reality at the University of Ghardaïa. We cannot discuss autonomy as a purely psychological trait without acknowledging the material conditions of the learners. If a student has the "will" to search for extra materials but lacks the "bandwidth" or library access to do so, their autonomy is effectively silenced. This creates a sense of frustration where the student's intentions are high, but their execution is physically restricted.

➤ The Exam-Centric Culture (Q26):

Furthermore, regarding the "Exam-Focused" nature of the system (Question 26), while the mean score of 3.19 might initially seem "Neutral," the underlying data reveals a significant obstacle. Specifically, **46.3%** of students explicitly agreed (**35.2% Agree, 11.1% Strongly Agree**) that current English tests reward memorization over independent work.

**Analysis:** In the Algerian LMD context, there is constant pressure to perform in terminal exams. This data confirms that this pressure often leads to "Surface Learning," where students focus on memorizing what the teacher says to pass the test rather than engaging in "Deep Learning," which requires independent inquiry. The system, perhaps unintentionally, rewards dependence by prioritizing standardized, memorized outputs over individual learning processes, making true autonomy difficult to achieve.

➤ Institutional Affordances and Infrastructure (Q27):

The investigation into the learning environment yielded a critical negative result regarding physical infrastructure, only 35.2% of students agreed that the university library and facilities provide a supportive environment for independent research, while 57.4% actively disagreed or strongly disagreed (Q27).

**Analysis:** This is perhaps the most significant structural barrier identified in this research. Learner autonomy is not just a psychological state; it is an affordance of the environment, the data from Q27 suggests that the students' lack of independent learning is partly a reaction to an environment that does not fully facilitate it. If physical access to resources is perceived as inadequate, students are forced to rely on the teacher as the primary information carrier, thereby reinforcing the dependence that the LMD system aims to discourage.

➤ Future Professional and Academic Relevance (Q28):

Finally, Question 28 yielded the highest level of consensus in the entire survey, with an exceptionally high mean score of 4.56. An overwhelming majority of 88.9% of the participants expressed explicit agreement (68.5% Strongly Agree and 20.4% Agree) that mastering learner autonomy is crucial for their future academic and professional careers.

**Analysis:** This overwhelming consensus represents a crucial psychological foundation for pedagogical change. It clearly demonstrates that first-year university students do not suffer from a lack of appreciation for independent learning; rather, they are acutely aware of its long-term necessity in both higher education and the modern job market. The core issue is therefore not a lack of willingness, but a lack of practical capability. Students fully recognize the target destination but require explicit strategy training and institutional support to safely cross the bridge from high-school dependence to active, self-regulated university learning.

**Table 3.5.** Technological, Environmental, and Institutional Factors Impacting Autonomous Learning (N=54)

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q23	5.6%	5.6%	7.3%	42.6%	38.9%
Q24	0%	9.3%	16.7%	46.3%	27.7%
Q25	5.6%	11.1%	7.4%	44.4%	31.5%
Q26	3.7%	31.5%	18.5%	35.2%	11.1%
Q27	11.1%	46.3%	7.4%	24.1%	11.1%
Q28	0%	1.9%	9.2%	20.4%	68.5%

### 3.2. Discussion of the Findings:

The data gathered in this study provides a multi-layered perspective on the state of learner autonomy among first-year EFL students at the University of Ghardaïa. When we synthesize these findings, five major themes emerge that define the current academic reality of these learners: the Cognitive-Behavioral Gap, the Legacy of the Baccalaureate, the Digital-Institutional Divide, the Socio-Economic Infrastructure, and the projection of Autonomy as a Path to Lifelong Learning.

#### 3.2.1. The Cognitive-Behavioral Gap: Willingness vs. Readiness:

The most prominent finding is the disconnect between what students believe and how they act. As shown in Section Two, students intellectually accept that learning is their own responsibility. They have moved away from the "Passive Recipient" identity of the past. However, Section Three and Four show that they lack the self-regulatory discipline and the emotional confidence to act on those beliefs.

This gap is not a sign of laziness. Instead, it is a sign of Transition. According to Holec's framework, autonomy is a "double capacity". It requires both the will (motivation) and the ability (strategies). Our participants have the will, but their ability is still being formed, they are in a state of Potential Autonomy, the seeds are there, but the environment has not yet provided the right scaffolding to help them grow. They set goals (Q13), but they struggle to manage time

(Q14), which suggests that their autonomy is currently more wishful than practical.

### **3.2.2. The Legacy of the Baccaalaureate and the Pedagogical Shock:**

We must look at these first-year students as survivors of a highly rigid secondary education system. For years, their success was measured by how well they could replicate the teacher's words in the Baccaalaureate exam. Upon entering the University of Ghardaïa, they are suddenly told to be independent and do personal work.

The results from Question 9 and 22, where students demand detailed explanations and teacher support are the direct symptoms of this Pedagogical Shift. Students rely heavily on the teacher because the teacher is the only facilitator of success they have ever known. This confirms the literature provided in our earlier chapters: autonomy in the Algerian context is not hindered by a lack of academic capability, but by a cultural habit of dependence. To move forward, the university should treat the first year not only as a period of language learning, but also as a phase where students gradually move away from habits of dependence and become more autonomous learners.

### **3.2.3. The Digital-Institutional Divide:**

There is a fascinating contrast between how students behave with a textbook versus how they behave with a smartphone. The high scores in Section Five regarding YouTube and online resources suggest that when students are in a "non-judgmental" digital space, they are naturally autonomous.

This leads to a critical discussion: Why is the classroom seen as a place for dependence while the internet is seen as a place for independence? It seems the Power Dynamic is the key. In the classroom, the teacher holds the grades and the authority. Online, the student holds the Play and Pause buttons, this study suggests that the "Teacher's Presence" might actually be inhibiting the very autonomy they are trying to promote. By being too "helpful" and giving too much detail (Q9), teachers may be accidentally reinforcing the students' belief that they cannot do it alone.

### **3.2.4. The Socio-Economic and Institutional Infrastructure:**

Beyond the psychological and pedagogical factors, the findings from Section Five (Q25 and Q26) highlight a critical environmental dimension of autonomy. A significant majority of students (75.9%) identified the lack of material resources as a primary barrier. This finding shifts the discussion from "autonomy as an internal capacity" to "autonomy as an affordance of the environment".

As suggested in the literature (e.g., Benson, 2011), autonomy does not exist in a vacuum; it requires a supportive infrastructure. In the context of Ghardaïa, the "Digital Divide" is not a lack of skills, since students are highly tech-savvy, but a lack of stable connectivity and physical library resources. When students believe they can learn effectively online (Q24) but are blocked by poor internet (Q25), it creates a state of "forced dependence". They are essentially tethered to the teacher not because they lack the desire to explore, but because the teacher is the only reliable source of information available when the technology fails. Furthermore, the neutral but concerning response to the "exam-focused system" (Q26) reinforces the idea that the institution's own rules may be punishing the very independence it claims to encourage. If the reward system (grades) only recognizes the reproduction of lecture notes, the student's motivation to engage in "un-graded" autonomous research remains low.

### **3.2.5. Autonomy as a Path to Lifelong Learning:**

The overwhelming agreement in Question 28 (Mean 4.53) regarding the future benefits of autonomy connects this study to the concept of Lifelong Learning. The students at the University of Ghardaïa view autonomy not just as a "classroom trick" to pass English modules, but as a vital survival skill for their future professional lives.

This alignment between student ambition and the goals of the LMD system is a powerful finding. It mirrors the arguments made in the provided research on "E-learning contexts" (Khan et al., 2022), which posits that the modern learner must be a "perpetual navigator" of information. Our participants realize that the English language is constantly evolving, and a teacher cannot accompany them into their future workplaces. This high level of "Instrumental Motivation" suggests that if the university can provide the right methodological training now,

the students are emotionally prepared to take those skills into their careers as teachers, translators, or international professionals.

### **3.3. Answering Research Questions and Hypotheses:**

The primary aim of this research was to investigate the attitudes and readiness of first-year EFL students toward autonomous learning. By synthesizing the quantitative data and the subsequent discussion, we can now provide definitive answers to the study's core questions.

#### **Research Questions and Findings:**

##### **Research Question 1: What are the attitudes of first-year EFL students at the University of Ghardaïa toward autonomous learning?**

The findings show that students have a mixed attitude. They are ready mentally but hesitant emotionally.

**Cognitively (Mentally):** The attitude is positive. Students understand that they are responsible for their own success and that independent study improves their language proficiency (Q5, Q7). They do not expect the teacher to simply give them all the answers.

**Affectively (Emotionally):** The attitude is cautious. Students still rely on the teacher for guidance and reassurance (Q12, Q22). They want autonomy as a goal, but they fear making mistakes during the process without immediate correction.

##### **Research Question 2: To what extent are these students ready to take charge of their own learning?**

Student readiness varies depending on the area:

**Technological Readiness:** High. Students learn independently through digital platforms like YouTube and apps. They have the digital skills to find resources and practice English outside of class.

**Metacognitive Readiness:** Low to Moderate. While students can set broad learning

goals (Q13), they struggle to manage their time and follow regular study plans (Q14).

**Methodological Readiness:** Developing. Students are willing to try new learning methods (Q17), but they lack experience with varied learning strategies. They want to try new approaches but are unsure how to start.

**Research Question 3: How does the shift from secondary school to university affect first-year students?**

The transition causes a sudden change in educational expectations. Students experience a pedagogical shock because university requires independent study, whereas high school was entirely teacher-led. This transition creates anxiety, causing students to fall back on passive learning habits.

**Verification of Hypotheses:**

**Hypothesis 1: Students will demonstrate positive attitudes but will still rely heavily on the teacher.**

**Status:** Validated. The data from Sections Two and Four illustrates this autonomy paradox. Students want the freedom to choose, but they prefer that freedom to be structured and guided by the instructor.

**Hypothesis 2: Digital tools play a significant role in fostering student autonomy.**

**Status:** Validated. Section Five confirms that technology is the primary area where students practice autonomy. It connects classroom learning to their daily lives.

**Hypothesis 3: The transition from secondary school to higher education often introduces first-year students to a distinct pedagogical shift, which can complicate their initial adaptation.**

**Status:** Validated. The high percentage of students who demand detailed teacher explanations before starting tasks (Q9) shows a clear habit carried over from the teacher-centered culture of secondary school.

### **3.4. Recommendations and Pedagogical Implications:**

The results of this study are not merely statistical observations; they serve as a diagnostic tool for the improvement of English language teaching (ELT) within the Algerian university context. The high cognitive willingness of students contrasted with their affective dependence on the teacher suggests that the current pedagogical approach requires a structural shift; to facilitate this transition toward genuine learner autonomy, the following multidimensional recommendations are proposed for instructors, curriculum designers, and institutional policymakers.

#### **3.4.1. Integration of Explicit Metacognitive Strategy Instruction (MSI):**

The data from Section Three revealed a significant Metacognitive Gap, where students express a desire to set goals but struggle with the practicalities of time management and methodological flexibility. As a result, it is recommended that the first-year curriculum include explicit training in learning how to learn, rather than assuming that students will naturally develop study habits, teachers should dedicate classroom time to the modeling of cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

This instruction should move beyond theoretical explanations of autonomy and into practical workshops, for instance students can be taught how to use SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time bound) to break down the massive task of learning English into manageable weekly targets. In addition, instructors should introduce various self-assessment tools, such as learner diaries or reflection checklists, which encourage students to monitor their own progress, by making the process of learning as visible as the content of the lesson, the university can help students transition from being passive consumers of information to active managers of their own cognitive development.

#### **3.4.2. Redefining the Teacher's Role through Scaffolding:**

The findings from Section Four highlight an Autonomy Paradox where students ask for guidance but fear the loss of the teacher's safety net, to address this pedagogy at the University of Ghardaïa should adopt a Scaffolding Model (based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development). Autonomy should not be viewed as an all-or-nothing state, but as a gradual

release of responsibility.

In the initial weeks of the first semester, the teacher may remain a central figure, providing detailed instructions and frequent feedback, nevertheless, as the semester progresses, the instructor must intentionally recede from the center of the classroom, this can be achieved by moving from direct lecturing to task-based learning (TBL), where the teacher's role is transformed into that of a facilitator and counselor, by providing students with choice menus, where they can choose between different topics or types of assignments, teachers can foster a sense of ownership without causing the pedagogical shock that often occurs when students are left entirely to their own devices too early.

### **3.4.3. Leveraging and Academicizing Digital Autonomy:**

The massive engagement with digital tools (YouTube, apps, websites) reported in Section Five suggests that students are already autonomous in their private lives. The pedagogical challenge is to bridge the gap between Social/Entertainment Autonomy and Academic Autonomy. Educators should not view smartphones as distractions but as personal learning environments.

It is recommended that instructors use blended learning approaches that require students to select and organize their own digital learning resources, for example instead of providing a single reading text, a teacher might ask students to find three different digital sources (a video, a blog post, and an article) on a specific topic and compare them, this encourages students to apply their existing digital habits to academic inquiry. Furthermore, the university should consider creating a Digital Resource Hub or a dedicated online platform where students can access supplementary materials even when physical library access is limited, thereby mitigating the resource barriers identified in Question 25.

### **3.4.4. Shifting the Assessment Paradigm:**

The neutral but significant response to the exam-focused system (Q26) indicates that the current evaluation culture at the university may be a major deterrent to autonomy. When grades are based solely on the reproduction of lecture notes, students are incentivized to remain dependent on the teacher's every word.

To foster autonomy, the assessment system must begin to reward the **process of learning** rather than just the final product, this could involve the introduction of **Learning Portfolios**, where a portion of the final grade is based on a student's documented independent work, self-reflections, and extra-curricular English engagement. By valuing the effort, a student makes outside the classroom, the institution sends a clear message: independence is not just a suggestion; it is a core academic requirement.

### 3.5. Suggestions for Future Research:

Based on the insights and limitations identified during this study, the following pathways are suggested for future academic inquiry:

➤ **Adopting Mixed Methods:** Future studies would benefit from incorporating qualitative instruments, such as classroom observations, student reflective journals, or semi-structured interviews. This would help researchers compare quantitative data and better understand the psychological changes students experience.

➤ **A Longitudinal Approach:** Conducting a longitudinal study on a group of EFL students from the first year of their Licence education until their graduation will be helpful for exploring the dynamics of learner autonomy development in LMD.

➤ **Investigating Teacher Perspectives:** Exploring the attitudes, readiness, and pedagogical beliefs of university instructors themselves would provide a more complete picture. Understanding the challenges teachers face when trying to implement learner-centered strategies is vital for creating effective teacher-training programs.

➤ **Comparative Studies:** Future researchers could conduct comparative analyses between different universities in Algeria, such as comparing northern and southern institutions to assess how regional differences and institutional resource allocation influence student self-regulation.

### 3.6. Final Word:

Developing learner autonomy goes far beyond merely being a structural requirement for the LMD system or another passing educational trend; rather, it is an essential foundation for

the continued development of the learner. As understood by the interviewees, learner autonomy is intrinsically tied to future academic success and career success amid globalization. For the University of Ghardaïa and other universities in Algeria, investing the necessary time in developing the meta-cognitive skills and self-regulation of the learners is really important for bringing a complete transformation of the learning process, helping learners move away from passive consumers of information to independent scholars will enable them to thrive both inside and outside university walls.

### **Conclusion:**

This chapter investigated the attitudes and readiness of first-year EFL students at the University of Ghardaïa toward autonomous learning. The data shows that modern Algerian learners face a conflict. They are caught between the teacher-centered habits of their past and the independent demands of their future.

The results confirm that students understand their new role. They know the responsibility for learning has moved from the teacher to the student. They accept the LMD system and use technology independently. However, they still face emotional and practical barriers. They fear making mistakes, rely heavily on teacher approval, and lack actual study strategies. This creates a "transition gap." The students want to be independent, but they do not yet have the skills to do it.

The research also proves that moving from the high school Baccalaureate system to the university causes a "pedagogical shock." Students ask teachers to explain everything in detail because they feel insecure in this new environment. Furthermore, the findings show that autonomy depends heavily on the surrounding environment. A lack of material resources and the pressure of an exam-focused system force students to stay dependent on their teachers.

Ultimately, first-year EFL students at the University of Ghardaïa do not need to be told to be autonomous; they need to be trained. By applying the proposed recommendations, such as strategy training and exam reform, the university can help students turn their willingness into actual independence. As the students themselves noted (Q28), mastering autonomous learning is not just about passing university exams. It is a necessary skill for their future professional careers.

# General Conclusion

## **General Conclusion:**

This study began with a fundamental premise: the structural implementation of the LMD system in Algerian higher education cannot achieve its intended success without a parallel psychological shift in the learners it serves. Through the imposition of independent study and personal work, the university environment unconsciously places an implicit burden on the student to take responsibility right away for his or her own intellectual growth. It is the aim of this research to explore the actual experience of this shift through an analysis of the attitudes, preparation, and obstacles faced by first-year Licence EFL students in Ghardaïa.

The findings from this study offer a complex picture of the modern Algerian learner. First, the information gathered suggests that entering first-year students do not lack any preparation; instead, there is a particular cognitive-behavioral dissonance. On a cognitive level, learners show a high degree of self-awareness regarding their educational responsibilities. They are conscious that language development goes beyond the classroom and that the onus of learning has moved from the lectern to their desks. Additionally, outside the classroom environment, they also display high behavioral independence. They can skillfully use technology, online resources, and media to access English for enjoyment and entertainment purposes.

However, the core contribution of this thesis lies in identifying the "Autonomy Paradox" and the "pedagogical shock" that occurs when these students try to apply their independence to an academic setting. Moving from the highly regimented Baccalaureate culture, in which everything is determined by the teacher, to one in which students are expected to be more autonomous, leads to very real affective barriers. Students feel anxious according to the data, specifically in terms of fearing failure and depending on external validation from their teachers. While students display a certain amount of confidence in digital settings, this attitude tends to dissolve when faced with actual tasks, with students preferring instead to receive direct instruction. The affective conflict is also exacerbated by various contextual barriers, namely the limited physical resources available as well as the predominant use of exams as a form of assessment.

Ultimately, the results of this study show that first-year EFL students at the University of Ghardaïa do not need to be told to be autonomous, rather they need to be systematically trained to be autonomous, as fostering learner independence is not about abandoning students

to their own devices, but it is actually about transforming the teacher's role from a primary source of information into a supportive facilitator. Through scaffolded classroom learning, design of blended learning activities that transform personal digital use into academic research skills, and assessment reform that emphasizes learning rather than exams alone, the university will be able to help these learners bridge this transitional gap effectively.

### **Limitations of the Study:**

While this research provides valuable insights into the realities of the Algerian EFL classroom, several limitations must be acknowledged to contextualize the findings:

- **Methodological Scope:** The study relied primarily on a quantitative, self-reported questionnaire. While this design allowed for an objective, structured analysis of general trends among the 54 participants, self-reported data can sometimes reflect what students believe they should feel rather than their actual classroom behavior.
  
- **Institutional Focus:** This investigation was limited to first-year Licence EFL learners at the University of Ghardaïa. In view of the differences in education facilities, learner profiles, and university culture in Algeria, the results cannot be wholly generalized to larger universities and other regions in the country.
  
- **Temporal Constraint:** The study only took into account the attitudes of the students during one time period during the first year of studying. The longitudinal aspect was ignored because the study was concerned only with the beginning year, ignoring the development of attitudes into second and third years.

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## Appendices:

### Questionnaire: EFL Students' Attitudes toward Autonomous Learning:

#### Participant Instructions:

This questionnaire is designed and administered for academic research purposes. It aims to explore your attitudes, readiness, and challenges regarding independent English learning. Please, read each statement carefully and tick (✓) the option that best reflects your honest opinion. Be assured that your answers will be kept anonymous and confidential.

Thanks in advance

#### Scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Neutral (N), 4 = Agree (A), 5 = Strongly Agree (SA)

#### Section One: Background Information

1. **Gender:**  Male  Female

2. **Age:**  18–19  20–21  22 or above

3. **Have you ever taken extra English courses at a private language school?**   
Yes  No

4. **How would you rate your current English proficiency level?**

Weak  Average  Good  Very Good  Excellent

Section Two: Attitudes Toward Autonomous Learning					
Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. I believe learning English is not solely the teacher's responsibility.					
6. I feel more motivated when I can choose how to complete an English task.					
7. I think that developing autonomous learning habits will significantly improve my English.					

<b>8. I enjoy looking for extra English materials outside the classroom.</b>					
<b>9. I prefer the teacher to explain everything in details before I start working.</b>					
<b>10. I feel confident when I study English on my own.</b>					
<b>11. University students should gradually take full responsibility for their own learning.</b>					
<b>12. I feel anxious or uncomfortable when I have to study English without direct teacher guidance.</b>					
<b>Section Three: Readiness and Self-Regulation</b>					
<b>13. I am capable of setting specific, achievable goals for my English learning.</b>					
<b>14. I regularly plan and organize my study time for English.</b>					
<b>15. I can accurately identify my strengths and weaknesses in the English language.</b>					
<b>16. I evaluate my own progress after completing a learning task.</b>					
<b>17. When a specific study method does not work for me, I quickly try another one.</b>					
<b>18. I know exactly how to learn English outside the classroom without depending on the teacher.</b>					
<b>Section Four: The Role of the Teacher and Classroom Support</b>					
<b>19. The teacher's primary role should be to guide students toward becoming independent learners.</b>					

<b>20. I learn best when the teacher provides clear instructions and then allows me to work independently.</b>					
<b>21. Collaborative activities (pair/group work) help me become more autonomous.</b>					
<b>22. I still require the teacher’s support before I can truly learn independently.</b>					
<b>Section Five: Challenges, Context, and Technology</b>					
<b>23. I actively use digital tools (apps, websites, YouTube) to improve my English.</b>					
<b>24. I believe I can learn English effectively relying entirely on online resources.</b>					
<b>25. A lack of resources (e.g., poor internet, lack of books) strongly limits my ability to study autonomously.</b>					
<b>26. The exam-focused educational system makes it difficult for students to become truly autonomous.</b>					
<b>27. I believe the teacher must always remain the main source of knowledge in the classroom.</b>					
<b>28. Being an autonomous learner will greatly benefit my future academic studies and professional career.</b>					

**Online Questionnaire’s link:**

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeY3FWWww0M2zTsWQTcXxGPay\\_S--Q5cpls9t-TxiSOQgf-Bw/viewform?usp=sharing&ouid=116554427258169192166](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeY3FWWww0M2zTsWQTcXxGPay_S--Q5cpls9t-TxiSOQgf-Bw/viewform?usp=sharing&ouid=116554427258169192166)

## ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف واقع استقلالية التعلم لدى طلبة السنة الأولى لغة إنجليزية بجامعة غرداية في ظل نظام الـ LMD وتسعى الدراسة إلى فهم "مفارقة الاستقلالية" لدى الطالب؛ فبالرغم من وعي الطلبة بأهمية الاعتماد على النفس وقدرتهم العالية على استخدام التكنولوجيا لتعلم الإنجليزية خارج الجامعة، إلا أنهم يواجهون "صدمة بيداغوجية" تعيق نقل هذه المهارات إلى الدراسة الأكاديمية داخل القسم، وتعود هذه الفجوة إلى عوائق نفسية مثل القلق والخوف من الخطأ والاعتماد الدائم على الأستاذ، تضاف إليها عوائق سياقية مثل ثقافة الامتحانات التقليدية ونقص الوسائل التعليمية، بناءً على ذلك، لا تقتصر أهمية البحث على قياس جاهزية الطلبة فحسب، بل تمتد لتقديم حلول واستراتيجيات عملية تساعد الأساتذة على تعزيز استقلالية الطلاب وتطوير منظومة التقييم بما يناسب البيئة الجامعية الجزائرية.