Investigating the Impact of Autonomous Learning on Developing the Learners’ Oral Skills

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Abstract

Learner autonomy has become an issue of central interest the field of SLA for various researchers and scholars. The present research seeks to investigate the learners’ conceptions of autonomous learning, and how the latter has an impact on developing various aspects of the learners’ verbal performance.

Through the use of questionnaire surveys as an instrument of data collection, the findings reveal that the 3rd year EFL students at ISLG have shown considerable awareness and highly positive conceptions towards autonomous learning which in its turn has proven very effective in developing the learners’ oral skills.

Keywords: Autonomy, Autonomous learning, oral performance, EFL learner.
Part 1: A Review of the Literature

A review of literature is meant to clarify the notions related to learner autonomy, to highlight a steady move towards student – centered learning and to foreground the main characteristics of autonomous learners. This first part ends by determining the close association of autonomous learning not only with nurturing a sense of self – direction but also with promoting the learners’ self – regulation.

1.1 Defining learner autonomy

The concept of learner autonomy has been constantly viewed as “a problematic term” or “a slippery concept because it is notoriously difficult to define precisely” (Little, 2015). Various attempts have been made to identify adequately the meanings that underpin learner autonomy. The difficulty of arriving at a clear definition for the term stems from its multidimensional aspect (Nunan, 1997; Benson, 2001; Paiva, 2011; Thanasoulas, 2000). In this respect, Little (2015) evokes the ambivalent borderline of learner autonomy when he argues that:

“The rapidly expanding literature has debated, for example, whether learner autonomy should be thought of as capacity or behaviour; whether it is characterized by learner responsibility or learner control; whether it is a psychological phenomenon with political implications or a political right with psychological implications; and whether the development of learner autonomy depends on a complementary teacher autonomy (for a comprehensive survey, see Benson, 2001).”

As a way to unveil this ambivalence, Oxford (2003) accounts for the various perspectives surrounding the term namely the technical, psychological, socio – cultural and political – critical one. Each will be clarified as follows.

- The technical perspective sheds light on the physical situation.
- The psychological perspective emphasizes learner characteristics.
- The socio - cultural perspective highlights mediated learning.
- The political - critical perspective attributes learner autonomy to ideologies, access, and power structures (p. 76 – 80).

Despite the confusions revolving around learner autonomy because of a missing unique and universal theory of autonomy, Murphy (2011) maintains that at least “there is agreement on the educational importance of developing autonomy and that autonomy can take a variety of forms, depending on learning context and learner characteristics.” (p.17).

In the early 1980s, Holec coined the term and associated it to “the ability to take charge of one's own learning, and to take charge of one's own learning is to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning” (1981, p.3). Benson and Voller (1997) build on Holec (1981)’s definition to specify the nature of this ability. They argue that it “is not inborn but must be acquired either by ‘natural’ means or (as most often happens) by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way” (p.2). They further maintain that learner autonomy is applicable to a multitude of usages including:
• a situation in which learners study entirely on their own;
• a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
• an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education;
• the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning;
• the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning (p.2).

In their explanation of learner autonomy, Scharle & Szabo (2000) refer to a famous saying which is “you can bring the horse to water, but you cannot make him drink” (p.4) in order to highlight the close correlation between autonomy and developing the learners’ sense of responsibility. According to them, autonomous learning is achieved unless learners “take an active part in making decisions about their learning” (p.4). That is to say, the rapport teachers establish with their learners needs to foster learner responsibility (Kesten, 1987, p.15).

Therefore, it is through active involvement and engagement that learners’ accountability can be nurtured as learners “take advantage of the linguistic affordances in their environment and act by engaging themselves in second language social practices” (Paiva, 2011, p.63). Concerning the inward classroom interactions between the teacher and the learners, Scharle & Szabo (2000) admit that:

“In language teaching, teachers can provide all the necessary circumstances and input, but learning can only happen if learners are willing to contribute. Their passive presence will not suffice, just as the horse would remain thirsty if he stood still by the river waiting patiently for his thirst to go away. And, in order for learners to be actively involved in the learning process, they first need to realize and accept that success in learning depends as much on the student as on the teacher. That is, they share responsibility for the outcome. In other words, success in learning very much depends on learners having a responsible attitude” (p. 4).

Therefore, autonomous learning "depends on the development and exercise of a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action; autonomous learners assume responsibility for determining the purpose, content, rhythm and method of their learning, monitoring its progress and evaluating its outcomes" (Little, 2000 p. 69).

1.2 A move towards student - centered learning

The necessity to pursue learner autonomy engendered a radical shift from traditional teaching approaches to embrace novel communicative teaching practices. This change has been characterized by a redistribution of power relationships, reorganization of roles assigned to both teachers and learners, rearrangement of classroom activities and restructure of classroom discourse.

The traditional teaching approaches are overwhelmingly dominated by teacher – centeredness in which:

The teacher (a) is the dominant leader who establishes and enforces rules in the classroom; (b) structures learning tasks and establishes the time and method for task completion; (c) states, explains and models the lesson objectives and actively maintains student on-task involvement; (d) responds to students through direct, right/wrong feedback, uses prompts and cues, and, if necessary, provides correct answers; (e) asks primarily direct, recall-recognition
questions and few inferential questions; (f) summarizes frequently during and at the conclusion of a lesson; and (g) signals transitions between lesson points and topic areas (Hancock, Bray and Nason, 2003, p. 366).

The teachers’ image is usually portrayed as the authoritarian sole purveyors of knowledge. They exert their full control over the classroom learning environment as they occupy most of the talking time. The vertical relationship they maintain with their learners do not allow for classroom negotiations, communications or interactions. Consequently, the traditional ways of teaching can only lead to serious negative impacts on student learning and to the creation of defensive learners who view the learning experience as a threat they should be protected against. Among the psychological troubles, learners may feel a kind of frustration, fear, dependence to the teacher and apathy.

But with the advent of communicative language teaching, the teachers’ roles are reduced to give the floor to student – centered learning. As such, learners become at the core of the learning process by assuming more dynamic, productive, and creative roles in the construction of their knowledge. Perceived as persons “of value and worth” (Heywood, McCann, Neville, & Willis, 2005), learners are no longer seen as a blank slate (tabula rasa) or 'container[s] to be filled with the knowledge held by teachers' (Benson & Voller, 1997 p.20) for they cooperatively participate in the construction of their learning process. The greater responsibility they enjoy, the more they “develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning” (Little, 1991, p.4). In such conditions, the EFL teacher is withdrawn from their “expert model” (Lynch, 2000 p. 1) to fulfill the role of “an instructor or supervisor in learning” (Zhuang, 2010 p. 592). They encourage students’ autonomous learning through the use of contextualized practice in which learners manage to:

• “Understand rather than memorize”
• “Retain ideas and facts longer because they are more meaningful”
• “Make connections between subjects and facets of a single subject”
• “Relate ideas to their own lives”
• “Build networks of meaning for effectively dealing with future knowledge (Tomlinson, 2001, p.74).

1.3 Characteristics of learner autonomy

Various scholars have tried to typify the autonomous features that every foreign or second language learner should possess (Benson, 2011, p.77-81-91; Boud, 1988, p. 23; Breen and Mann, 1997, p.134, Scharle & Szabo, 2000, p.3; Littlewood, 1996, p. 429, Omaggio, 1978, cited in Wenden, 1998, p.41-42; Little, 2007, p.17-18; 2009, p.223-224; 1991, p.8). Specifying those features is very crucial in fostering and maintaining the success of the learning process (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002, p. 170). Concerns about finding what constitutes learner characteristics originate from the innateness of the individual’s early sense of autonomy. In this respect, Little (2007) argues that “autonomy is an innate, basic need that is present already from the early years of childhood: It is our nature to be autonomous, to be proactive in exploring and responding to our environment and to persist in following the agendas we set for ourselves ( p.17). Therefore, the autonomous language learner possesses a particular set of discernible attributes that distinguish him from the rest of his classroom peers. Scholars come across the following characteristics:
“the person’s stance towards the world, their desire for what it is they are learning, their sense of self, their metacognitive capacity, their management of change, their independence from educational processes, their strategic engagement with learning, and their capacity to negotiate” (Breen and Mann, 1997, p.134-136).

Other qualities of autonomous learners include the learners’ ability to perform the following:

“Autonomous learners have insights into their learning styles and strategies; take an active approach to the learning task at hand; are willing to take risks, i.e., to communicate in the target language at all costs; are good guessers; attend to form as well as to content, that is, place importance on accuracy as well as appropriacy; develop the target language into a separate reference system and are willing to revise and reject hypotheses and rules that do not apply; and have a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language.” (Omaggio, 1978, cited in Wenden, 1998, p.41-42)

The previously mentioned characteristics when combined with others such taking initiatives or ensuring self-evaluations forge what constitutes ‘good’ language learners (Benson, 2011, p.77). In Scharle and Szabo (2000)’s terms, autonomous learners have also “the freedom and ability to manage one’s own affairs, which entails the right to make decisions as well” (p. 4). Briefly, the characteristics of autonomous learner give an idea about the learners’ classroom performance, determine their ways of thinking and enhance their continuous active pursuit of language learning especially when learners demonstrate self – efficacy, make use of various learning styles and strategies, set their own learning goals and objectives, reflect on their own learning practices in which they have to be fully engaged cooperatively, assess their learning progress and achievements, display an appropriate manipulation of different learning materials, methods, plans and tasks, establish their own learning objectives and goals.

1.4 Autonomous learning and learners’ self direction

The integration of self directed learning as a sign for developed autonomous learning has been under constant investigation. Candy (1991) argues that: “although self-direction has been ... a recurring preoccupation of educators throughout the ages, it seems particularly to have dominated the thinking, and hence to have captured the imagination, of many adult educators in recent years” (p.5). The most frequent definition used for the clarification of this term is the one offered by Knowles (1975) who describes it as “a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes” (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). In the same vein, Brookfield (1995) views self – directed learning as a process through which learners’ critical reflection is enhanced by establishing clear learning goals, employing particular learning methodologies and assessing their own learning progress especially when they are given “situations and opportunities” that permit “a degree of independence” (Sinclair, 1999, p.310). Besides, Holec (1981) stresses the importance of managing the self – directed learning process through establishing the objectives, defining the content and progressions, choosing the methods and techniques to be used, controlling the acquisition procedure and evaluating the previously acquired knowledge. William & Burden (1997) maintains also that the self-directed autonomous learner is the one who demonstrates
an appropriate use of language learning skills and strategies (p. 147). The development of learners’ self–directedness leads to building the personality of learners who become increasingly highly motivated, curious, self-assured, self–reliant and self–disciplined (Taylor, 1995; Lyman, 1997). Therefore, self–directed learning has a positive correlation in boosting students’ academic achievements (Lounsbury, Levy, Park, Gibson, & Smith, 2009), performances (Chou and Chen, 2008), personal characteristics (Lyman, 1997) and learners’ self-regulation (Long, 2000).

1.5 Autonomous learning and learners’ Self regulation

Self–regulation, in Zimmerman (2002)’s terms, is “not a mental ability or an academic performance skill; it is a self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills” (p.7). It includes “an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment” (Pintrich, 2000, p. 453). As such, the self-regulated learners are viewed, in Zimmerman (1998)’s words, as strategic learners for they are equipped with self regulatory skills which hold them capable of maintaining control and direction over their own learning process.

Throughout their complex constructive process of self regulation, learners display an active use of integrated cognitive, metacognitive and motivational strategies (Zimmerman, 1986; Mayer, 2008; Boekaerts, 1997. Pintrich, 1999; Greene & Azevedo, 2007). The explanation of each is best provided by Dignath, Buettner, and Langfeld (2008) who carried out their study with school learners in real classroom settings. They come to the conclusion that:

“Cognitive strategies referred to direct regulation of learned information, such as a math calculation strategy. Metacognitive strategies referred to second order cognitions designed to control, monitor, and evaluate learning and cognitive activities, such as strategy knowledge. Motivational strategies include self - efficacy, attributional orientation, action control methods, and feedback.” (Cited in Zimmerman and Schunk, 2011, p. 59.)

Other scholars added to the previous self regulatory strategies another essential component which makes reference to resource-management strategies. The latter can be defined as flexible approaches urging learners to fulfill their goals and needs (Pintrich, 1999).

Each self regulatory strategy enables learners to perform a variety of sub – skills such as:

✓ The use of metacognitive strategies urge learners to establish self – evaluation (Schunk and Ertmer, 2000; Schmitz and Wiese, 2006), develop their self – monitoring (Schunk and Ertmer, 2000; Kistner et al., 2010), determine goal setting and task value (Zimmerman, 2004) and carry out strategic planning (Zimmerman, 2004; Schunk, 2001).

✓ The motivational strategies encourage learners to enhance their self – efficacy (Schunk, 2001; Schunk and Pajares, 2002) and increase their self-motivation (Wolters, 2003).

✓ The cognitive strategies help learners conduct effective reasoning (Kuhn, 1991), make use of problem-solving strategies (Thevenot & Oakhill, 2006; Montague, M., & Dietz, S. 2009), demonstrate a collaborative strategic reading (Klingner et al., 2004) and
develop rehearsal, elaboration, and organizational strategies (Pintrich, 1989; Pintrich and De Groot, 1990)

Finally, the resource-management strategies enable learners to seek help from other people and from other non-social resources as well (Ryan et al., 2001; Kitsantas, 2002; Schunk, 1987), handle effective time management (Zimmerman, GreenBerg, and Weinstein, 1994) and maintain attention control despite external distractions (Winne, 1995).

It should be noted that the possible integrated use of a variety of the previous strategies leads to a highly – promoted self-regulated learning which guarantees learners’ academic success (Esler & Kohavi, 2003).

Part 2: The Experimental part

2.1 Research questions

• What conceptions do the 3rd year EFL students at the Higher Institute of Languages in Gabes, Tunisia (ISLG) have towards autonomous learning?
• What are the effects of learner autonomy on the students’ oral skills?

2.2 Participants

A total number of 80 undergraduate 3rd year students from the Department of English at the Higher Institute of Languages in Gabes, Tunisia takes part in the present study. The selection of informants is based on a voluntary basis. Their age basically ranges from 21 to 23.

2.3 Data collection instrument

A questionnaire survey is used in an attempt to find answers to the research questions set forth above. It consists mainly of two major parts: the first part seeks to come up with some demographic information about the informants and the second part highlights the real conceptions that are held by a number of learners regarding autonomous learning. The obtained data were analyzed and processed through the use of SPSS.

2.4 Method

The present research is basically descriptive and exploratory as it seeks to unveil learners’ conceptions of autonomous learning and its effects on the development of speaking skills in real and authentic classroom settings.

2.5 Procedure

The students’ performance during the oral presentation sessions have been observed along a whole academic year. Then they were kindly asked to fill in a questionnaire to know more about their own conceptions regarding autonomous learning and its potential impact on their speaking skill development.
Research findings and discussion

The analysis of the first part of the questionnaire reveals some demographic information about the informants. The statistics depict an overall number of 57 females and 23 males who filled in all the questionnaire questions. The majority of informants have spent almost 10 years of studying English as a foreign language.

The analysis of the second part of the questionnaire seeks to unveil the learners’ conceptions of autonomous learning. The first sub – question that needs to be addressed in this part concerns the ways in which learners approach autonomous learning. The findings reveal that learners define the concept of autonomous learning differently as it shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition of autonomous learning</th>
<th>Informants’ number</th>
<th>Informants’ percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assume your responsibility for your learning.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand on the knowledge gained in the classroom.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discard the role of the teachers.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The various definitions given to autonomous learning.

In this research, the majority of informants tightly associate the concept of autonomous learning to learners’ responsibility in developing their own learning. In the same vein, Boud (1988) argues that “the main characteristic of autonomy as an approach to learning is that students take some significant responsibility for their own learning over and above responding to instruction” (p.23). This implies that the prevailing beliefs about what autonomous learning would mean are still the same. Other 42.5% of informants believe that autonomous learning is manifested through the learners’ attempt to expand on the knowledge base gained principally from the classroom. Such a behavior leads learners to be increasingly curious and keen on knowing more about different issues pertaining to their learning. The last weak percentage of informants (7.5%) attributes autonomous learning to a process where the teachers’ roles are cast aside. Such a misconception held by a minority of learners have to be addressed and clarified because the shift from teacher – centered classrooms to learner – centered ones does not entail the downgrading of the instructor’s role but rather the development and proliferation of more independent learners. In this respect, Dickinson (1993) tries to account for the main qualities that make up learners seem independent:

1. They understand what is being taught, i.e. they have sufficient understanding of language learning to understand the purpose of pedagogical choices;
2. They are able to formulate their own learning objectives;
3. They are able to select and make use of appropriate learning strategies;
4. They are able to monitor their use of these strategies;
5. They are able to self – assess, or monitor their own learning (p. 330-331).
A deeper clarification of the teachers’ roles is achieved through the analysis of the second sub – question of the second part. As it is illustrated in the table below, the majority of learners (61.25%) considers teachers as facilitators of their learning. Some informants mention further that the EFL teacher is not only a facilitator but also a guide, a monitor and an actor. While an overall percentage of 38.75% of informants still clings to the traditional roles embraced by teachers such as a lecturer, a knowledge provider and an authoritarian model to be followed in all respects. The presence of a relatively weak percentage of informants who portrays the teacher as such pinpoints to serious pedagogical practices that challenge the main principles advocated by CLT at the tertiary level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers’ role</th>
<th>Informants’ number</th>
<th>Informants’ percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A lecturer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A facilitator</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>61.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An authoritarian model to be followed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Knowledge provider</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: The perceived roles of teachers.

A part from the teachers’ roles, the third sub – question of the second part seeks to investigate the learners’ conceptions regarding the roles they have to assume in their pursuit of foreign language acquisition. The results indicate that 82.5% of informants perceives themselves as active participants while only 17.5% of informants admits that they consider themselves as passive participants. In this research, the majority of informants seem to recognize the dynamic mission they have to endure during their learning process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learners’ role</th>
<th>Informants’ number</th>
<th>Informants’ percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An active participant</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A passive participant.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An indifferent participant.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: The perceived assumed roles by learners.

The roles assumed by learners can further be justified through the third sub – question of the second part where they are asked, for example, to mention the ways they adopt in order to get ready for an oral presentation. The findings can best be summarized in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Getting prepared for oral presentations</th>
<th>Informants’ number</th>
<th>Informants’ percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rely on various resource materials</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>33.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copy and paste what you come cross in the internet</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for your friend’s assistance</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest your time and effort</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in brainstorming, planning, organizing ideas, selecting the relevant information

**Table 4**: The learners’ diverse ways of getting ready for oral presentations.

The responses show the diverse ways opted for when students need to prepare for an oral presentation. The weakest two percentages 7.5% and 21.25% go respectively for the informants who pick up blindly what is found on the net or rely heavily on others’ support. Therefore, their low level of autonomy is signaled through their dependence to the already – made oral themes that are available on the net and their complete attachment to other people. The highest proportion of informants (37.5%) indicates that they do invest much time and effort in brainstorming, planning, organizing their ideas, selecting the relevant information from the irrelevant ones so as to deliver convincing, well – organized and coherent oral presentations. Therefore, we can deduce that autonomous learning engenders the development of the learners’ metacognitive skills. In this respect, Schraw and Dennison (1994) argue that “metacognitively aware learners are more strategic and perform better than unaware learners” (p. 460). The second relatively high proportion of informants (33.75%) indicates that they initially resort to various resource materials for the construction of their oral presentations. As such, autonomous learning helps promote self – study skills by following appropriate study – methodologies.

The fifth sub – question of the second part seeks to investigate the learners’ reactions towards their friends’ feedback upon what they have performed. The results can be summarized as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction to peers’ feedback</th>
<th>Informants’ number</th>
<th>Informants’ percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get angry.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be open to others’ criticism</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>83.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show indifference to the opinion of others.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5**: The learners’ different reactions to their peers’ feedback.

Learners display different reactions to their peers’ feedback. A minority of informants (6.25%) shows complete indifference to what others might say to them. The reasons for doing so can be numerous such as regarding peer feedback as unimportant or insignificant. Other 10% of informants feel irritated when they are subject to criticism. Their furious behaviors can be explained by their intolerant attitudes. Whereas, the majority of informants (83.75%) shows a greater eagerness to listen to others’ criticism. They perceive their peers’ feedback as a constructive tool and as an aid for improvement. Therefore, peer feedback nurtures a sense of self – reflection and assessment that are essential for any autonomous learners.

A part from peer feedback, the informants were also asked to reveal their attitudes concerning autonomous learning. The analysis of the sixth sub – question of the second part yields the following results.
Attitude to autonomous learning | Informants’ number | Informants’ percentage
--- | --- | ---
Positive | 68 | 85%
Negative | 12 | 15%

**Table 6:** The learners’ different attitudes to autonomous learning.

As it is shown in the table above, learners are divided into two categories based on their experiences with autonomous learning. The findings indicate that only 15% of informants hold negative attitudes towards autonomous learning while the majority of informants (85%) maintains very positive attitudes. According to former group of informants, autonomous learning exerts a lot of pressure on learners while the latter alludes to the benefits that can be best discussed and analyzed later.

The seventh sub – question of the second part seeks to reveal what learners might think about the merits of autonomous learning. The results reveal that 13.75% of informants left this question unanswered while the rest estimated about 86.25% of informants clearly mentioned their responses. According to the latter, autonomous learning succeeds in developing the learners’ communication skills (31.25%), social skills (28.75%) and argumentation skills (26.25%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Merits of autonomous learning</th>
<th>Informants’ number</th>
<th>Informants’ percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argumentation skills</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop your social skills</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop your communication strategies</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanswered question</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7:** The multiple advantages of autonomous learning.

For some informants, autonomous learning develops the learners’ communication skills for the following reasons. It helps learners use the target language fluently in order to convey their ideas for different communicative functions and vary their language output depending on the setting and participants’ roles. It also enables learners to maintain adequate body language through maintaining, for example, an appropriate standing posture and a relaxed eye contact with peers while delivering the oral presentation. For other informants, autonomous learning increases social skills especially when learners manage turn –taking, develop team – building skills, and promote cooperative and interactive spirit. Others do believe in the role of autonomous learning in developing the argumentation skills, i.e., the ability to negotiate, discuss, defend and justify the points learners might have raised in their oral presentations.

The final sub - question urges the informants to think about the possible qualities that characterize their verbal performances within the realm of autonomous learning.

Most of the informants’ replies stress the great motivation, enthusiasm, perseverance and devotion that are increasingly perceived in their oral performances thanks to the development of autonomous learning.
Conclusion:

In the present research, the majority of informants hold positive conceptions of autonomous learning. According to them, autonomous learning is linked to learners’ responsibility in assuming active roles in their learning and speaking development. It helps promote not only their metacognitive skills but also their self-study skills, argumentation skills, social skills and communication strategies. Consequently, learners have developed a perceived passion and motivation in the way they delivered their oral performances. As a result, autonomous learning has led to higher developments in the learners’ oral skills.
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Appendix:
Questionnaire survey for the 3rd year university learners
Part 1: General information
Gender: Male.
   Female.
How long have you been studying English? .........................
Part 2:
   1. What does autonomous learning mean to you?
      □ Assume your responsibility for your learning.
      □ Expand on the knowledge gained in the classroom.
      □ Discard the role of the teachers.
      □ Other, please mention your own definition ...................................................

   2. How would you best describe your teachers’ role in oral presentations sessions?
      □ A lecturer.
      □ A facilitator.
      □ An authoritarian model to be followed.
      □ A knowledge provider.
      □ Other, please mention that ..............................................................................

   3. How would you best describe your role in the classroom?
      □ An active participant.
      □ A passive participant.
      □ An indifferent participant.
      □ Other, please mention that ..............................................................................

   4. How do you prepare for your oral presentations?
      □ Rely on various resource materials.
      □ Copy and paste what you come cross in the internet.
      □ Ask for your friend’s assistance.
      □ Other, please mention that ..............................................................................

   5. How do you react to your peers’ feedback?
      □ Get angry.
      □ Be open to others’ criticism.
      □ Show indifference to the opinion of others.
      □ Other, please mention that ..............................................................................

   6. How do you find autonomous learning if ever it is implemented in your classroom?
      □ Negative.
      □ Positive.
      □ Please explain why? ..............................................................................
7. Can you think about the potential advantages of autonomous learning for you as an EFL learner?
☐ Argumentation skills.
☐ Develop your social skills.
☐ Develop your communication strategies.
☐ Other, please mention that…………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………..

8. How would you describe your oral performance within the realm of autonomous learning?
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