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A Study of Saudi EFL Students' Perspectives on the Role of Teachers' Support for Autonomous Online Learning

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Abstract:

This study aimed to explore the impact of teachers' support for learner autonomy with a major concern with online EFL students' engagements. The research design was basically quantitative, drawing on statistical analysis. An online close-ended questionnaire on teachers' support and students' engagement was shared with a group of 99 English language students enrolled at the English Department at the University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia. The results of the study found that students had high positive perceptions of teachers' autonomy support on EFL students' engagement online. The study also found that female students had less dependency on their teachers. The results also showed that Saudi EFL students actively engaged in learning English due to their teachers' support in online teaching. The study emphasized that EFL students' engagement in online learning is an important factor in improving their English language learning. The researchers recommended that EFL teachers should be trained on how to support EFL students to study English online engagingly and autonomously.

Keywords: Autonomous learning; language learning; online learning; student engagement

1. Introduction

It is widely accepted that language acquisition, much like various other aspects of contemporary life, is closely intertwined with digital technology and artificial intelligence. Contemporary theories and methods of learning place a strong emphasis on empowering learners to take charge of their education and cultivate autonomous learning skills (Nunan, 2015). Consequently, it is logical to conclude that when learners actively engage in the learning process, they acquire knowledge through practical application and move away from the traditional model of teacher-centered education toward a more learner-centered approach (Nunan, 2014). This transformation constitutes a key focal point in contemporary educational approaches and curriculum reforms worldwide.

Even though there has been a swift transition to online education in the past five years, teachers continue to be regarded as a fundamental element of the educational journey. They assume crucial and indispensable functions in establishing a productive and captivating learning atmosphere, whether it is in-person or through online platforms (Mohammed & Ali, 2021). Teachers have the capacity to enhance the learning experience using diverse methods like fostering discussions and encouraging active participation, enabling students to exchange their insights (Al-khresheh, 2022; Elyas & Shah, 2018; Lase & Zega, 2021; Meşe & Sevilen, 2021; Quiroz, 2010).

2. Problem Statement

Several researchers advocate for informal, self-directed language learning facilitated by modern technological tools (Ali et al., 2023; Bin-Hady & Al-Tamimi, 2021; Jarvis, 2012; Mohammed & Ali, 2020; Wach, 2012). One potential avenue for enhancing autonomous learning is optimizing artificial intelligence within various apps, which can incorporate elements of self-governance and responsibility into the learning process, while also catering to individual learning preferences and needs (Ali et al., 2023). This approach cultivates autonomy, allowing learners to manage their educational journey efficiently and independently (Dang, 2012; Jarvis, 2012; Trinder, 2022).

Contemporary language learning apps provide learners with the autonomy to pursue their studies independently using resources such as e-books, electronic dictionaries, audio recordings, portable devices like smartphones and iPods, as well as online resources like blogs,

wikis, messaging platforms, web quests, and peer-to-peer sharing. These tools offer language learners access to authentic materials, references, synchronous and asynchronous communication, and a host of other resources (Alrabai, 2017; Islam, 2011; Wach, 2012). Given the ubiquity of these technologies and online learning platforms in daily life, it becomes imperative for modern curricula to incorporate such technologies in teaching university courses.

Learners who are autonomous tend to set goals that are more individualized and have practical relevance in real-life contexts beyond the confines of the classroom. Informal learning plays a significant role in promoting autonomous learning. The wide array of digital technologies available enables students to actively participate in the learning process and enhances their motivation to learn in a manner that differs from the traditional approach centered on textbooks (Ali et al., 2023; Mohammed & Ali, 2021). Even those learners who may be less motivated can harness these technologies outside the conventional classroom setting and engage in independent learning. In theory, this is an impressive development, but it raises the question of whether learners possess a cultural inclination towards independent learning.

The educational landscape in Arab countries, which has traditionally been dominated by teacher-centered approaches, is undergoing a transformation towards learner autonomy. This shift is primarily attributed to the rapid advancements in educational technology and artificial intelligence, which are reshaping the way learning and teaching are perceived. However, the significant utilization of various ICT tools and applications for learning English, some problems prevail including pedagogical policies and teaching methods, stemming from a lack of attention to technology-based outcomes, largely discouraging self-paced English learning (Al-Kadi 2014).

This situation highlights the ongoing changes in the current EFL curriculum, which aimed at making it more learner-centered, with a particular emphasis on promoting learner autonomy as a fundamental principle of modern language education. Given these developments, it becomes crucial to investigate how EFL learners perceive the support provided by their teachers for autonomous online learning, especially in an era where modern technologies have made learning accessible anytime and anywhere. Online learning has been investigated in various EFL contexts and at different concerns (Meşe & Sevilen, 2021; Trinder,

2022). However, there is a need to investigate the impact of online learning on learners at University of Bisha. In other words, how EFL students perceive their teachers' stance towards encouraging students' autonomous learning.

3. Research questions

The current study aims to find out the effect of teachers' autonomy support on English language engagement while studying online. The study tries to specifically answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do EFL teachers at the University of Bisha support students in online learning?

2. Do Saudi EFL male and female students at University of Bisha have different views of their teachers' support?

3. To what extent do EFL students at the University of Bisha engage in online learning?

4. Does EFL teachers' autonomy-support impact online students' engagement in online learning?

4. Literature Review

Learner autonomy has its origins in the theories and approaches to learner-centeredness that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century (Nunan, 2014, 2015). These theories regarded learners as active agents who bring their unique learning characteristics to the educational context, thus shifting the responsibility of learning from teachers into the learners themselves and motivating them throughout the learning process (Ali et al., 2023; Nunan, 2014). Al-Kadi (2014) proposed the idea that learners are no longer perceived as passive recipients waiting to be filled with knowledge by teachers or as passive participants being guided through the process of learning and teaching. Instead, they are viewed as individuals who can take on leadership roles, make decisions, solve problems, and have a clear understanding of why and where they are heading in their learning journey.

Several attempts have been made to define autonomous learning. For example, Trinder (2022) described it as a distinct form of learning that takes place outside the classroom, in contrast to instructed language learning. It is often synonymous with informal language learning online, which Trinder (2022) considered, "a sine-qua-none of successful acquisition" (p. 663). In the literature, terms like 'autonomous learning,' 'self-directed learning,' 'self-

instruction,' 'informal learning,' and 'self-regulated learning' are sometimes used interchangeably. However, these terms are primarily rooted in adult learning and signify a shift in the roles of students and instructors. They underscore the importance of student initiative, self-regulation, and the motivation to learn independently.

In the present study, it would be beneficial to clarify the term 'learner autonomy.' The term is used in accordance with the definitions provided by early researchers such as Jarvis (2012), Little (2003), and Holec (1981), who are considered pioneers in the field of learner autonomy. Jarvis (2012) defined it as a self-directed practice involving the use of English, while Little (2003) characterized it as a dimension of decision-making and independent actions. Similarly, Holec (1981) defined it as 'the ability to take charge of one's learning' (p. 3). According to Dang (2012), this ability is primarily acquired through formal educational practices and is not innate.

While learner autonomy has been a consistent presence in language curricula over the past three decades (Dang, 2012), it remains a topic of debate. Benson (2001) suggested that defining the characteristics of an autonomous learner can vary significantly among researchers, and the term 'learner autonomy' is often mistakenly associated solely with independent, out-of-class learning, where learners have control over all aspects of their learning process. In this context, an autonomous learner is typically perceived as someone who is intrinsically motivated to learn outside the classroom, without relying on teacher support.

However, learner autonomy can also thrive within the structured environment of a classroom and become a pedagogical objective in a language course. In such settings, learners can engage in collaborative learning (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2019), either in pairs or groups, and engage in reflective practices. In essence, learner autonomy extends beyond extracurricular learning and encompasses collaborative learning within the classroom setting. It is also argued that learner autonomy can manifest in varying degrees; it is not solely an individual pursuit but can also be a collaborative one, requiring both the ability and willingness to act independently and cooperatively (Dam, 2003). Interaction, negotiation, and collaboration are essential elements in promoting learner autonomy.

From this broad perspective, it becomes evident that learner autonomy encourages learners to: a) reflect on content and learning processes, b) engage in both conscious and unconscious learning, c) actively interact with the language, and d) utilize a wide range of authentic language materials and resources. Therefore, the selection of teaching materials should be in alignment with their individual needs, learning objectives, strategies, and preferences (Little, 2003; Richards, 2005; Yuvienco & Huang, 2005). In modern curricula, alongside self-assessment and reflective practices in learning, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) stands out as a prominent example of learner autonomy frequently discussed in the literature. ICT can contribute significantly to lifelong learning and enhance awareness and initiative in foreign language acquisition (Yuvienco & Huang, 2005).

The primary aim of this learning mode is to transition learners from a reactive role to a proactive one. Littlewood (1999) elucidated that proactive learner behavior and collaborative learning entail learners formulating their own learning agendas, while reactive learner behavior and cooperative learning are more teacher-directed. According to Littlewood (1999), learner autonomy entails the capability to operate independently with the language and employ it to convey personal meanings in real, unpredictable situations- essentially, autonomy as a communicator. Similarly, Nunan (2014) introduced a model encompassing five levels of autonomy in learner action: awareness, involvement, intervention, creation, and transcendence. These levels can vary from learner to learner and from context to context.

4.1 Learner autonomy in modern curriculum

Over the past three decades, there has been a significant shift towards learner-centeredness in language curricula (Nunan, 2015), which has elevated the role of the learner while diminishing the role of the teacher. This shift has captured the attention of language researchers, leading them to concentrate on communicative teaching methods designed to encourage increased engagement from students (Dang, 2012). Digital technology aligns seamlessly with learner autonomy in modern language curricula. It grants learners the freedom and flexibility to study at their own pace and convenience. Furthermore, digital technology provides second language (L2) learners with valuable insights into the target language and culture, offering opportunities for flexible communication through email, chats, forums, and other platforms in 'authentic' environments where interaction with native speakers and English

as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) learners/teachers becomes possible (Boulton, 2012; Dang, 2012). Eaton (2010) suggested that future iterations of applications could potentially replace traditional textbooks.

A constructionist perspective on language learning can be highly beneficial in courses that aim to cultivate learner autonomy through the use of ICT. This approach encourages students to engage in learning within a social context, facilitating the development of their capacity to generate new knowledge, tackle novel problems, and apply creativity and critical thinking (Richards, 1998). Such an approach aligns with the principles advocated by collaborative epistemologies and underscores the learner's agency in the learning process (Suthers, 2006). Experience holds a central position in constructionist theory, as it posits that "knowledge can and can only be generated from experience" (von Glasersfeld, 2000, p. 4). In essence, contemporary constructionist, and communicative approaches to language learning offer learners with ample opportunities within the learning process to become self-reliant and self-confident in resolving challenges. It is only through such opportunities that they can genuinely relish the excitement and satisfaction of becoming autonomous learners (Suthers, 2006).

4.2 Previous Studies

Numerous studies were conducted to explore the relationship between self-directed learning and academic performance. They demonstrated a positive correlation between self-directed learning and academic performance in various learning contexts, whether they are traditional or virtual (Alrabai, 2021; Dafei, 2007; Guo, 2007; Oraif & Elyas, 2021; Richards, 2005; Wach, 2012). These studies indicated that self-regulated learning, when facilitated by ICT, helps learners recognize the importance of their active participation in the teaching-learning process. It motivates them to assume proactive roles in their learning, departing from the traditional reactive roles. Furthermore, these studies suggested that when designing a curriculum aimed at promoting learner autonomy, the core principle should revolve around student-centeredness.

Some other studies explored how teachers can effectively engage their students in online learning. For instance, Barr and Miller (2013) emphasized the importance of creating a

supportive online environment to reduce learners' stress. They recommended providing active learning activities, fostering cooperative opportunities, and implementing differentiated instruction. Additionally, it is crucial for teachers to familiarize students with course policies and utilize all available online tools such as tests, assignments, projects, discussion forums, and emails for student communication. Furthermore, they suggested equipping online learners with strategies such as goal setting, time management, organization of coursework, avoidance of procrastination, active participation in online activities and discussions, cultivation of effective study habits, and open communication with instructors as needed.

Huang (2018) conducted a study on the roles of teachers in online learning. The study revealed that teachers played varied roles, including managerial, cognitive, and affective roles. The managerial role was predominant, while the affective role was the least prominent. To ensure successful online learning, it is crucial for teachers to design tasks that are engaging, geared towards success, and encourage interaction among students (Koifman, 2020). Additionally, a study by Yao et al. (2020) involving 1024 school students in China delved into the role teachers should assume in online teaching. They highlighted the importance of teachers providing students with knowledge and information, as well as serving as mentors and guides through practical guidance and support.

Teachers and learning environments that can fulfil the three needs defined in self-determination theory (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) are more likely to engage students in e-learning (Chiu, 2021a, 2021b). Similarly, Meşe and Sevilen (2021) investigated the factors influencing EFL learners' motivation in online learning. The study results indicated that many participants held negative views about online learning due to various reasons, such as a lack of interaction with their teachers and peers, as well as inadequate feedback from instructors. Students tend to be more motivated when they receive satisfactory feedback from their teachers (Chen & Jang, 2010; Meşe & Sevilen, 2021; Ushida, 2005). Providing timely feedback to students is essential to facilitate swift improvements in their performance.

Another study conducted by Lase and Zega (2021) explored teachers' engagement with students in online learning. The study revealed that for effective engagement of students in online education, teachers must set clear goals and determine the strategies to achieve them. Additionally, it is essential for teachers to assess whether students have access to the necessary

technology to facilitate their participation in online learning. Furthermore, to engage their students effectively in online learning, teachers should employ a combination of strategies. These strategies may include fostering a sense of community, promoting cooperative learning, motivating students, and utilizing both synchronous and asynchronous learning modes to enhance the overall online learning experience.

Based on the previous findings, it can be argued that learner autonomy can incorporate essential collaborative elements (Little, 2003). Learners have the flexibility to choose varying degrees of independence at different stages of their learning journey and can be encouraged to engage in reflective practices to enhance their learning process (Little, 2003). When designing ESL/EFL curricula and syllabi, it is important to bear in mind that different technologies come with specific affordances and constraints. Therefore, it is essential to consider these potentials to support the development of learner autonomy in various ways including engaging students effectively, and assessing the suitability of specific technologies as learning tools. Additionally, it is worth noting that while the teacher's role remains crucial, it should evolve beyond traditional knowledge dissemination. Teachers should embrace new roles as facilitators of knowledge sharing and construction, guiding learning across diverse modes and contexts (Bin-Hady, 2019).

In summary, the literature review underscores the growing recognition of autonomous learning as an instructional approach. It is supported by teachers' awareness of learners' needs to harness modern technologies and take on the responsibility of independent learning. However, the effectiveness of engaging students in online learning largely hinges on the course instructor. Teachers can actively contribute to creating an engaging learning environment by leveraging discussion forums, group projects, and interactive tools to motivate students and foster an enjoyable learning atmosphere (Dubey et al., 2023). Additionally, providing students with clear instructions on navigating course materials, completing online activities and assignments, and submitting them is essential. Online learning platforms offer teachers the advantage of closely monitoring students' activities and progress while delivering timely feedback to keep them on the right track (Coman et al., 2020). However, teachers must also acknowledge the challenges and difficulties associated with online learning and be prepared to

employ appropriate teaching strategies and practical solutions to address these issues. Recognizing the pivotal role of learners in shaping their educational experiences, the current study delves into EFL learners' perceptions of their teachers' support for autonomous English learning in an online context.

5. Methods

5.1 Research design

The research design of this study primarily relies on quantitative methods, emphasizing statistical analysis as the primary analytical tool. This approach involves collecting data to identify patterns, relationships, and trends within the study's variables. It aims to provide empirical evidence and quantify specific phenomena under investigation, contributing to a robust and data-driven understanding of the research problem. The study was conducted at University of Bisha in the second semester of the academic year 2022/2023.

5.2 Participants

The current study recruited 99 undergraduate students studying English as a foreign language (EFL) at the Department of English, University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia. They were 53 males and 46 females. Their ages ranged from 18 to 23 years. They had good knowledge of using technology. Since the commencement of the COVID-19 pandemic, they have been engaging in online learning, including both full and blended modes. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of participants based on gender and academic level. The researchers had explained to them the main objective of the study. The researchers also asked participants for their consent. Participants were willing to participate in this study.

Table 1. *Number of male and female students by their academic level of study*

		Academic Year of Study				
		1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th Year	Total
Gender	Male	40	5	6	2	53
	Female	7	5	9	25	46
Total		47	10	15	27	99

5.3 Instrument

The current study used an online questionnaire to achieve the study's objectives. The researchers developed the questionnaire based on previous studies (Ali, 2022; Chiu, 2021b; Michou et al., 2023; Reeve & Shin, 2020). The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section consisted of 10 items related to teacher autonomy support, such as "teachers encourage me to participate in online tasks". The second section consisted of 9 items on EFL students' engagement in online learning, such as "I participate in online classrooms more than traditional classrooms". The responses of the items were based on Likert-Scale, ranging from always to never. For the validity of the questionnaire, it was translated into Arabic by the researchers to ensure the comprehensibility of the questionnaire by all respondents. The Cronbach's alpha, which was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire, was 0.88. The questionnaire started with an introduction of the aim of the study. It informed the respondents that the questionnaire was to conduct the research and that their responses would not be circulated to anyone else. The questionnaire then asked the respondents for their consent to include the results of their responses in the research study and guided them to fill in the questionnaire if they were willing to or leave the link if they did not want their responses to be included in the research study.

5.4 Procedures

The process of data collection involved several steps to ensure a smooth and ethical data collection process. First, before initiating any data collection activities, permission was sought from the dean of the College of Arts, University of Bisha. Second, the researchers developed the questionnaire. Given the digital nature of the data collection process, the questionnaire was created using Google Forms. Google Forms is an online survey tool that allows for easy questionnaire design, customization, and data collection. Third, the researchers utilized Blackboard as a platform to reach the participants. Blackboard serves as an efficient communication platform for instructors and students. By sending the questionnaire link via Blackboard, the researchers ensured that the survey reached the intended recipients in a familiar and accessible manner.

5.5. Data analysis

The data were analysed in terms of frequencies, mean, standard deviations and correlations between the teachers' autonomy support and the students' engagement. The significant differences of the responses based on gender were tested using t-test (Kim, 2015). Spearman's Correlation test was used to find the relationship among the study's variables (Xiao et al., 2016). This study measured the correlation between teachers' support and students' engagement. The data were analyzed by using SPSS (Version, 24).

6. Results

In this study, the subjects, who were 99 students, responded to a questionnaire of 19 items that revealed very significant results in answering the research questions that investigated the support of EFL teachers and the engagement the students get in online learning environment. Detailed results for each item are shown in Appendix A.

RQ 1: To what extent do EFL teachers at the University of Bisha support students in online learning?

The answers to this research question are derived from items 1 to 10 in section 1 of the questionnaire. Table 2 illustrates how students responded to these items regarding the level of teacher support in an online learning environment. Both male and female students agreed that teachers supported them in an online learning, with an average mean score of 3.72 and a standard deviation of 0.588, indicating a high perception of support. The mean responses for males (M=3.87, Std=0.06741) and females (M=3.58, Std=0.10104) were quite close, signifying a consensus on the presence and significance of teacher support.

Table 2. *EFL students' perception towards teachers' support*

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Teacher	Male	53	3.8736	0.49074	0.06741
support	Female	46	3.5804	0.68528	0.10104
Total		99	3.727	0.58801	0.084225

RQ2: Do Saudi EFL male and female students at University of Bisha have different views of their teachers' support?

To examine the difference between males and females regarding teacher support, a t-test analysis was conducted. As presented in Table 3, a comparison of the mean responses of both groups revealed that male students scored an average of M=3.8736 with a standard deviation of 0.490, while female students scored an average of M=3.5804 with a standard deviation of 0.685. Notably, male students scored higher than female students. The "T-test for Equality of Means" indicated a significant difference in their responses concerning teacher support, favouring male students (Sig. = 0.015). The majority of male students expressed that teacher support in online learning environments was essential and evident.

Table 3. *T-test analysis for differences between male and female students towards teachers' support*

Gender		Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Teacher support	Male	3.8736	0.49074	2.47	97	0.015
	Female	3.5804	0.68528			

RQ 3: To what extent do EFL students at the University of Bisha engage in online learning?

The answers to this research question were based on the items in section 2, ranging from 11 to 19, the end of the questionnaire, which addressed the level of engagement of learners in online learning situations. As displayed in Table 4, they achieved the mean of 3.761 with a standard deviation of 0.597, indicating a high level of engagement. The engagement levels were similar for males (M=3.69, Std.=0.606) and females (M=3.83, Std.=0.589). A comparison of mean responses from both groups (male and female) was conducted using "Levene's and T-test for Equality of Means," which revealed no significant difference in their responses regarding the extent of engagement they experienced in the online learning environment. This suggests that male and female students shared a consensus on their engagement in online learning environments.

Table 4. *Differences between male and female towards students' engagement*

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Student Engagement	Male	53	3.6897	0.60638	0.08329
	Female	46	3.8333	0.58923	0.08688
Average		99	3.761	0.5978	0.08508

RQ4: Does EFL teachers' autonomy-support impact online students' engagement in online learning?

This question focused on the relationship between teacher support and learners' engagement in online learning situations. Two tests were employed to assess the correlation between teacher support and learners' engagement. The responses to this research question were based on the correlation between sections 1 and 2. Table 5 indicated a significant positive correlation between teacher support and the students' level of engagement (Sig. = 0.41, p = 0.00). This suggests that when there was teacher support, students were more likely to be actively engaged in their learning. The correlation also showed the importance of teacher support in fostering student engagement.

Table 5. *Spearman's correlation test between teachers' support and students' Engagement*

		Student Engagement
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
Teacher	Correlation Coefficient	.410[**]
Support	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

7. Discussion

This study found that students at the University of Bisha have a high perception on their teachers' support to their autonomous learning. These findings align with various studies that have investigated autonomous language learning. For example, studies of technology-based self-regulated learning (Dafei, 2007; Richards, 2005; Guo, 2007; Wach, 2012), online learning studies (Barr & Miller, 2013; Huang, 2018; Koifman, 2020; Yao et al., 2020) have produced similar results.

The study also revealed a significant difference between male and female students regarding their teachers' support. Male students are more dependent on their teachers' support than female students. This finding contrasts with Hung et al. (2010) who reported that gender does not yield a statistically significant difference concerning teacher support.

Furthermore, the study found that EFL students at the University of Bisha have a high level of engagement in the online classroom. This result aligns with many previous studies conducted after the onset of COVID-19 (Ali, 2022; Phuong, 2022), which have indicated that, because of

the shift to online learning, students have adapted to this mode of learning. Finally, the study also found a significant positive relationship between the teachers' support and the students' amount of engagement. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of Meşe and Sevilen (2021) and Lase and Zega (2021), who found that teachers' motivation and support positively influence contributions to autonomous learning.

The current study represents an additional contribution to foreign language research and practice. It highlights the significance of learners' perspectives on how their teachers support them autonomously in online learning. Based on this central premise, the study offers implications for teachers, students, parents, and educational policymakers. All of them can find value in this study to enhance learning methods beyond traditional classroom settings and, in turn, to complement formal language instruction. In sum, the results are generally in support of autonomous language learning. The positive effect of teachers' autonomy support on EFL students' online engagement is apparent, as Saudi EFL students are actively engaged in autonomous learning English, with their teachers providing various forms of support. Given these findings, it is recommended that EFL teachers receive training on how to autonomously support L2 students for more active online English language study, drawing from the theories of informal and autonomous language learning that have been applied in international EFL contexts.

8. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate EFL teachers' autonomy support in engaging students to study the English language online and the impact of that support on their online engagement. The study found that EFL teachers support students to study online actively, and the students showed a high engagement in studying the English language online. The study's findings, therefore, showed a significant correlation between teachers' support and students' engagement. The researcher suggested that there should be an empirical to investigate how EFL teachers' autonomy support affects students' engagement and its impact on students' achievements. Although the studies conform with several previous studies that elicited evidence of informal learning through a survey, future research may explore autonomous learning using other tools,

including case studies, interviews, and content analysis. It is also important to closely investigate the extent of relevance of learners' online presence to their EFL studies.

9. Pedagogical implications

The results of this study have several pedagogical implications for EFL teaching and learning. First, EFL teachers should actively support students in their online language learning endeavours. Teachers can do this by providing clear guidelines, resources, and feedback to encourage autonomous learning. This support can help foster students' confidence and motivation to engage in online language learning activities. Second, teachers should focus on creating engaging online learning environments that captivate students' interest and curiosity. Incorporating interactive and multimedia elements into online lessons can further enhance students' engagement with the English language. Third, EFL instructors should be aware of the significant correlation between their support and students' engagement in online language learning. This highlights the importance of teacher-student interactions, and the role teachers play in facilitating effective online learning experiences. Fourth, EFL teachers should engage in ongoing professional development to stay updated on effective strategies for supporting autonomous online learning. This may include training in online teaching methods, technology integration, and pedagogical approaches that promote autonomy. Finally, it is recognized that different students may require varying levels and types of autonomy support. Teachers should be prepared to tailor their support to meet the specific needs and learning preferences of their students.

10. Suggestions for future research

Based on the findings of this study, some recommendations for future research are presented. Future empirical research can be conducted to investigate how EFL teachers' autonomy support affects students' engagement and its impact on their achievements is crucial. Future research should consider employing a variety of research methods beyond surveys, such as case studies, interviews, and content analysis. These methods can offer a deeper understanding of the types of autonomy support and its impact on online engagement. It is important to explore the relevance of learners' online presence to their EFL studies. Investigating how students' online activities, such as social media use or participation in online language communities, impact their language learning can lead to valuable insights for both teachers and learners.

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المستخلص

دراسة وجهات نظر طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية السعوديين حول دعم معلميهم للتعلم الذاتي عن بُعد

جمال قائد محمد علي

طه أحمد حزام

مؤيد عبد الحليم شمسان

تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على تأثير دعم المعلم لاستقلالية المتعلم اثناء تعلم طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عبر الإنترنت، استخدم الباحثون في هذه الدراسة المنهج الكمي والذي اعتمد على التحليل الإحصائي. حيث تم توزيع الاستبيان المغلق حول دعم المعلمين ومشاركة الطلاب عبر الإنترنت، كانت عينة الدراسة 99 طالبًا وطالبة والذين تم اختيارهم من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة بيشة بالمملكة العربية السعودية. اظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن هناك تأثيرًا إيجابيًا لدعم المعلم لاستقلالية طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عبر الإنترنت. كما أظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب السعوديين الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية كانوا متفاعلين في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية عبر الإنترنت عندما تم تقديم الدعم لهم من قبل معلميهم، وأكدت الدراسة أن مشاركة طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عبر الإنترنت هي عامل مهم في تحسين تعلمهم لها، وقد أوصى الباحثون بتدريب معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على كيفية دعم طلابهم لدراستها عبر الإنترنت بشكل مستقل وجذاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعلم المستقل؛ تعلم اللغة؛ التعلم عن بُعد؛ مشاركة الطلاب

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Appendix A

	Statements	Mean scores	Standard deviation
	Teachers encourage me to participate in online tasks.	3.6465	1.05282
Teachers Autonomy-support	Teacher reply to my inquiries in online discussion forums.	3.6162	1.13125
	Teachers encourage me to ask for help when I face difficulties in online learning.	3.6364	0.97368
	Teachers use different sources like videos, links, Apps in online teaching.	3.8788	0.89526
	Teachers give me freedom to study at my pace.	3.5657	1.17075
	Teachers allow me to use any format to complete the tasks.	3.7374	1.00596
	Teachers give me choices of various online tasks (assignments, activities, etc.).	3.8586	0.89226
	Teachers provide me with feedback with any language online activity.	3.7677	0.99825
	Teachers provide clear instructions with any online activity.	3.8788	0.86038
	Teachers use discussion boards/groups/wikis/e-portfolio, via blackboard or social media ect.	3.7879	0.81156
Students online engagement	I participate in online classrooms more than traditional classrooms.	3.4343	1.23851
	I prepare myself and the tools I need for online classes before the session starts.	3.7980	0.98954
	I feel free to ask and answer questions during online classes.	3.8586	0.91484
	I read the lesson from the textbook or the online teaching material before I start doing any online task.	3.7576	1.01107
	I enjoy my online lessons more than traditional ones.	3.5859	1.04988
	I watch the recorded session again to find answers when I face any difficulty in my online tasks.	3.7778	1.04545
	I express my needs freely when I want any clarification or help from my teacher during online sessions..	3.8788	0.88379
	Students, including myself, help each other during online classes.	3.7071	0.96100
	I do all the required online tasks regularly.	4.0101	0.63076
	Valid N (listwise)	3.746411	0.974579