EFL Students' Perceptions About The Effect Of Blended Learning On Their Learning Autonomy

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Abstract

For the past few years, education has witnessed a lot of core changes due to the pandemic. There were times when traditional face-to-face teaching was impossible to execute. So, the need to find an alternate way of teaching became the subject of discussion. In response to that, blended learning was implemented in higher education. It has been a while now since the adaptation of the new mode of learning and different opinions about its effectiveness have come to the surface. The present study investigates EFL students' attitudes towards the implementation of blended learning and its effect on their learning autonomy, i.e., whether it helped improve their tendency to study independently and become self-reliant (a positive effect) or not. Accordingly, a questionnaire of 35 items, divided into three main sections, was administered to a random sample of 53 second-year students at the Department of English Language-ENS. The findings indicate that the participants expressed more positive attitudes towards implementing blended learning and perhaps even consider it the new norm. The majority have manifested some of the characteristics that can be found in an autonomous learner, such as being reflective, self-aware, motivated, independent, etc. However, their capacity or ability to take charge of the learning process is still in the making. It needs guidance and instruction from the teacher so they can be fully prepared. Since the teacher is the one going to monitor students' autonomy and reinforce it, training them beforehand and giving them first-hand experience of the concept of learning autonomy must be taken into account for the implementation of blended learning to succeed.

Keywords: Attitudes, Blended Learning, EFL, face-to-face teaching/learning, learning autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

General Introduction

The current world witnesses an observable phenomenon of changes due to the application of technology in many different areas. The fact that education is one of the fields been most affected by the revolution of ICT (Information Communication Technology)

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is undeniable because of the integration of new learning methods and approaches. Blended learning is one of them. This latter appeared when researchers find that both traditional face-to-face method and e-learning needed to be integrated in one learning model for the enhancement of the learning outcomes. The appearance of the new method stimulated the concept of learning autonomy to emerge since the process of learning becomes no longer limited to the classroom.

In terms of language learning, particularly, learning English as a foreign language, blended learning has been adopted and applied to encourage EFL students to develop their English proficiency by providing them with the opportunity to practice the English language inside and outside the classroom. Regarding the effect of blended learning on EFL students' learning autonomy, the method intends to improve students' motivation and encourage them to become more active rather than passive learners. In other words, it aims to foster their learning autonomy in order to become responsible for their learning process and get better learning outcomes.

Since students of foreign languages, English in particular, nowadays are most of the time reminded to be more responsible for their learning process inside and outside the classroom; the issue of self-learning is more stressed on than ever. As a consequence, the current study devotes much attention to investigate how EFL students perceive the effect of the blended learning on their learning autonomy.

Research Questions

Since this study aims at investigating the students' perceptions about the effect of using Blended Learning (BL) on EFL their learning autonomy, the main research question to be answered by the end of the study is:

How do EFL students perceive the effect of Blended Learning on their learning autonomy?

Under the main research question, some questions about EFL students' perceptions of the effect of BL on motivating them to become responsible for their learning should be addressed also. Relatively, these are the sub-questions to be answered:

- How does the integration of blended learning impact EFL students' learning autonomy?
- To what extent EFL students' learning process is affected by the blended learning method?

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to:

- Investigate the perceptions of EFL students about the effect of using BL on their learning autonomy.
- Determine how EFL students view blended learning.
- Show what procedures are followed by EFL students when practicing their learning autonomy.

Importance of the Study

The work in hand tackles an interesting topic which would help different groups. Ministry officials would seriously think of modifying and renewing the curriculum, deciding to provide the educational institutions with supporting materials and technological items, and making access to internet (WI-FI) at university compulsory. They also would make courses for teachers to introduce them the two concepts "blended learning and learning autonomy" and then train them how to deal with blended learning and learning autonomy effectively; and how to encourage their students to be autonomous learners is one of the interesting points about the present research. Teachers now would be able to deal with the blended learning method in a way that successfully raises the learning outcomes. In the same hand, trained teachers would determine the suitable teaching approaches and methods that meet their students' needs and interests and foster their motivation to be autonomous learners as well.

In addition, students might be aware of their learning process (learning goals and objectives to be accomplished, learning tools, activities and strategies to be used and involved). More than that, students would decide which learning style they prefer much. They might get inspired to work on being more active learners and more responsible for their leaning in particular, and life in general. Concerning parents, the research would provide them with interesting pieces of information that help them to encourage and push their son or daughter to be responsible for his/her learning process. More than that, it shows them the necessity to give much freedom to their son or daughter when designing and applying his/her learning plans.

Population of the Study

The population of the study is consisted of Second year EFL students in the department of Foreign Languages at ENS Ouargla. The whole population represents 100 students.

Delimitations of the Study: the generalizability of results is restricted to:

- Only 2nd year EFL students at ENS Ouargla.
- Academic year 2022/2023.
- TEFL field (they cannot be used for other fields: literature, civilization, linguistics, etc.)
- Reliability of the instrument is not mentioned in the research design.

Definition of Key Terms

- **Blended Learning** is "the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences. " (Garrison and Kanuka,2004)
- **EFL Students** are those who study and learn English as a Foreign Language.
- **Learner Autonomy** is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning." (Holec, 1981)

Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Blended Learning

 Technology affects almost every aspect of the life in the 21st century including education. E-learning (also known as distance learning or web-based learning) is the product of technological evolution and the widespread availability of personal computers, CDs, the Internet, the web, broadband Internet access, and more (kim, 2007). In comparison to the traditional face-to-face teaching model, what is the best way to equip learners with the skills they need to be most effective? To put it bluntly, neither does. Traditional instructor-led classroom learning requires students to be in the classroom on specific days and times, which is difficult for some students. Sometimes, it lacks classroom equipment, which hinders the instructor's ability to effectively teach specific topics. E-learning, on the other hand, may face issues such as materials that were poorly created or had inconsistencies, and decreased learning efficiency due to the teacher's absence. These are some of the reasons why online learning cannot be implemented solely (ibid). So, Why not integrate the best aspects of both forms of learning rather than choosing one? It is called blended learning. Yoon and Lee (2010) pointed out that BL is "bringing together the positive attributes of online and offline education, including instructional modalities, delivery methods, learning tools, etc. " (p.180)

It first appeared in the late 90s but, without a doubt, a new trend in higher education learning environments. The notion of blended learning has been established as a way to enhance the teaching and learning process by "harmonizing the advantages and disadvantages of on-ground and online learning settings " (Caner, 2012, 24) In accordance with that, Graham (2006) whose definition of BL is highly cited: "Blended learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction " (p.5). Another description was provided by Garrison and Kanuka (2004) who defined blended learning as "the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences. " (p.96) Even though they used different terms to articulate the notion of BL, there is general consensus that its key

components are face-to-face and online instruction or learning. Moreover, Allen and Seaman (2010) claimed that "Course blends online and face-to-face delivery. Substantial proportion of the content is delivered online, typically uses online discussions, and typically has a reduced number of face-to-face meetings. " (p.5) In other words, in addition to the previously derived ingredients of BL, they believed that the percentage of the integrated online content should be remarkable comparing to face-to-face interactions; particularly 30 to 79 percent. This was not the case with Alammary, Sheard, and Carbone (2014), who claimed that there are no guidelines for how much education is delivered by technology versus in person. Caraivan (2011), who clarified the lack of a unified definition to the fact that BL is more than a concept, said: "It is an on-going process that develops with every teacher or trainer who applies it. " (p.2) In other words, the design of BL model is mostly "situational," as it is influenced by the learning situation, including learners' needs, objectives, and materials.

2.1.1 Types of Blended Learning

In the previous pages, the term "blended learning" is defined by a slight difference between one researcher and another. This variation is also encountered when defining its types. Staker and Horn (2012) initially claimed six models of blending that were reduced later on to four. They are:

1- The Face-to-Face Driver Model occurs when classroom instruction is complemented with online instruction.

2- The Rotation Model entails students to rotate (switch) between working online and other classroom-based modalities (small-group or full-class instruction, group projects, individual tutoring, and pencil-and paper assignments).

3- The Flex Model requires students to study mainly online according to an individually customized schedule. Besides, face-to-face interaction is offered by the teacher when necessary.

4- The Online Lab Model is when students take an additional online course on-campus aside from their traditional studies in order to improve their performance.

5- The Self-blend Model happens when students supplement their traditional studies by taking an additional online course off campus.

6- The Enriched Virtual Model is mainly online learning. However, learners sometimes visit a brick-and-mortar (traditional class) setting for face-to-face instruction.

2.1.2 Criticism of Blended Learning

Many changes have occurred in the teaching and learning process due to the adaptation of technology in education. One of the changes is the teacher's role. In a blended learning environment, a teacher has different roles to play. S/He motivates students to be better, s/he guides their learning experience when needed, s/he facilitates the content for their understanding, and many others. According to Elaggoune (2015), "the teacher assumed the role of a coach, a counselor, a delegator, and a facilitator." (p.193) Students, on the other hand, become the focus of the learning process. So, in a student-centered model, learners are expected to be active in terms of interacting with the instructor, analyzing, and criticizing the content, rather than passively absorbing the information. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) justified how learners should act in the following lines:

> "The individual must have the freedom to explore ideas, question and contrast meaning. If learning is to be a process of inquiry, then it must focus on questions not just answers…" (p. 15)

For young children, social interaction is crucial. They need to interact with other people, whether family members, friends, or neighbors, in order to learn and develop different social skills. Preschool children's learning environments should support learning models that encourage social interaction between them and adults (teachers, educators) or more capable peers. In accordance with that, Vygotsky argued in his theory of

social-cognitive constructivism how social factors can affect and facilitate the socio-cognitive development of the individual and that "human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (1978, p. 88). So, when exposing kids to blended learning in the early stages of their development, their immense need for human touch should be taken into consideration. In the case of children, when blending, the learning program must prioritize traditional face-to-face instruction and incorporate fewer ICT-mediated settings. They still need to be in full contact with the social elements, such as parents, teachers, friends, and peers. The more mature the learners are, the better they benefit from the blended learning model. They are at the age where they can decide for themselves what works best for their learning journey as well as think critically.

2.2.1 Learning Autonomy

Although it is originated in the fields of politics and philosophy among debates about free will and freedom, this concept has only recently been known in the field of education particularly in foreign language learning. In his book "Autonomy in Foreign Language", Holec (1979) encouraged the idea of promoting learners' free will by saying: "by developing those abilities which will enable him to act more responsibly in running the affairs of the society in which he lives" (as cited in Little, 2007, 15). Increasing individuals' autonomy helps them become aware of what is happening around them as well as empower them to take action. Jane (1977) argued that adult education should be perceived as a powerful tool. Its goal is to set people free from the ignorance-based constraints holding them back. Also, awareness is achieved through education. People's perception of the life surrounding them becomes clearer and more influential on different levels (personal and social). Producing a man with an increased sense of consciousness and critical thinking towards social issues contributes to the amendment of the society. "From the idea of man product of his society, one moves to the idea of man as producer of his society." (as cited in Lamb&Reinders, 2005, 226)

Holec (1981), the former director of the Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues (CRAPEL), defined the notion of learner autonomy as the "ability to take charge of one's own learning ". Taking charge of the learning process is about taking control and responsibility for their own learning as learners. Learners are in charge of a number of tasks, as setting the learning goals, determining the contents and sequences, deciding on which methods and techniques are best used, watching over the acquisition procedures, and finally assessing the knowledge and skills they have learned (as cited in Hadi, 2017, 44-45).

After knowing that accepting full responsibility for the learning process is what learners should begin with toward their journey of becoming autonomous learners, it's necessary to note that responsibility not only entails planning, monitoring, and evaluating our learning process but also being motivated.(as cited in Little & Dam, 1998, 1)

2.2.2 Autonomy in Language Teaching/Learning Contexts

Little, Ridley, and Ushioda, (2002) in their book "Towards greater learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom", provided an example that illustrates how learning autonomy is implemented and developed in foreign language classrooms. The example was about an English teacher in Denmark named Leni Dam. In order to enhance the quality of learning (the capacity for reflective self-management), Leni Dam, first, encouraged her students to be responsible of their learning process. Then, she asked them to list their learning goals, plan and execute some learning activities and to evaluate their learning every once in a while. This was all done using English (Target language) as a means of communication. Studying the case of Leni Dam's classroom and understanding the concept of learner autonomy, they claimed that the development of students' autonomy in the classroom requires a pedagogical approach that is driven by three principles:

- Learner involvement: Engaging students by allowing them to partake responsibility in the learning process.
- Learner reflection: Encouraging students to become reflective learners entails developing their critical thinking when it comes to planning, monitoring, and assessing their learning experience.
- Target language use: Using the language learners intend to become fluent in as a means of communication (p. 7)

Rather than thinking of these three principles as a hierarchy, Little, Ridley, and Ushioda considered them as three interacting perspectives on the same complex communicative phenomena.

2.2.3 Autonomous Classroom

An autonomous classroom is a teaching and learning environment that fosters both teacher and learner autonomy. It is a space where teachers are free to perform their duty in a self-directed manner with no foreign constraints. Also, learners are enabled to be independent and take charge of their learning, but in a cooperative manner under the teacher's guidance (interdependence). However, in order to establish an autonomous classroom, Dam (2000) revealed a number of conditions that need to be obtained:

- A willingness on the part of the teacher to let go, and on the part of the learners to take hold.
- An awareness of what to do and why and how it should be done, this applies to teachers as well as learners.
- An experience-based insight into the learning process for both teachers and learners.
- An atmosphere of security, acceptance and respect. (P: 22).

A learning centered environment is not only directed and controlled by the teacher but also supports and accepts learners to take part in directing the learning process (change of roles). Both parties are fully aware of what is needed to be done, the reason and the manner it is done. This learning environment entails integrating practical, real-world work experience into the course of study i.e. learn while doing. Moreover, students should feel secured and safe to learn and make mistakes without the pressure of negative criticism. There should be mutual trust and respect between teachers and learners as both of them are making efforts to seek the best outcome of the teaching-learning process.

In the same regard, Nunan (1996) compared between institution-centered (non-autonomous) classrooms and autonomy-centered classes. After going over the key differences between the two approaches, he deduced that the main ingredients for an autonomous learning environment are as follows:

- At the syllabus planning stage: Decisions concerning the selection and sequencing of content are made with much reference to students. They are involved in the modification of both, the content and process.
- In selecting learning experience: Teacher introduces a range of activities by taking students' needs and interests into consideration.
  Reflecting on, assessing and evaluating the learning experience is done, not only by the teacher but also by the learners (p: 21).

2.2.4 Approaches to Foster Learning Autonomy

After discussing both learner autonomy and teacher autonomy, it is crucial to adopt some approaches in order to foster and develop this capacity. Benson (2001) suggested six different approaches: resource-based, learner-based, technology-based, classroom-based, curriculum-based and teacher-based approaches.

- Resource-based approach refers to the independent engagement with learning materials and resources. In this case, learners are in charge of choosing human and nonhuman (internet) resources that appeal to their own learning preferences, interests, and abilities. In other words, actively engage students with multiple resources in both print and non-print forms.
- Technology-based approach emphasizes the inclusion of educational technologies in the teaching and learning such as Moodle, Google Meet, Educational Websites, and CD-ROM, to name a few.
- Learner-based approach focuses on the importance of teaching learners to improve their learning skills and strategies.
- Classroom-based approach empowers learners to plan and evaluate the classroom learning.
- Curriculum-based approach extends the idea where learners are expected to make major decisions concerning the content and procedures of learning with the support of their teachers.
- Teacher-based approach focuses on the teacher's roles in fostering learner autonomy among language learners (as cited in Ismail, Yunus, &Zahidi, 2018, 2178).

Results and Discussion

3.1 Analysis of the Questionnaire

3.1.1 Data Collection

In order to collect data about the perceptions of EFL students on the effect of blended learning on their learning autonomy, a structured questionnaire was adopted from an article entitled "A Comparative Study on Blended Learning and Flipped Learning: EFL Students' Learner Autonomy, Independence, and Attitudes". It is written by Kim Na-Young and Seo Young Yoon in 2021. It is composed of list of different types of questions. For better comprehension of the delivered questions, recognition of key terms, and for less pressure while answering sensitive questions, the questionnaire was collectively administered. It also guarantees high response rate which helps then to investigate and analyze their perceptions as well. Before handling them the questionnaire sheets, they were asked to give answers depending on both their opinions and their experiences. They have been told that their participation is important and their responses are considered as the core of the practical part of the study. Their responses also would not be used for other purposes.

The questionnaire can be described as structured; i.e., It involved different types of questions: "open-ended, close-ended questions. The questionnaire adopted the Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree)" in most of its parts. It aimed at testing the research hypotheses, answering the research questions, and checking whether the objectives of our study get fulfilled. Indeed, it intends to determine how much students are autonomous, what characteristics of learning autonomy they have, to what extent they are independent learners, and what their attitudes to learning English autonomously are. In other words, its results are to be used to investigate their perceptions about the effect of blended learning on EFL students' learning autonomy.

3.1.2 Description of the questionnaire

Well-designed data will take part in getting high quality study. As a result, the questionnaire, which is the instrument used to collect data, was carefully divided into four sections to cover the variables of the topic. Each section deals with certain element: the first is entitled "Personal information", the second deals with "Learner Autonomy", the next is about "Learner Independence", and the last section targets "Learner Attitudes".

Section one: includes questions about the samples' personal information such as: gender, age, do you have a personal computer at home, how can you rate your knowledge and ability to use computers? "Excellent, very good, good, weak", Is Internet connectivity available (WIFI) at home? Do your teachers use e-mails to

send you lectures links on Google Meet? "Never, occasionally, always", Do you think it is important to provide access to the Internet at university? It obvious that there are different types of questions used for the personal information section: open-ended, close-ended, Likert scale questions.

Section two: is about the learner autonomy. It consists of nine questions from which they indicate their ability to decide how to learn. The only type of question used in the second section is "Likert scale: "strongly agree, agree, do not know, disagree, and strongly disagree". In this section our sample ticks the box that indicates how much they agree or disagree with every statement. I can manage my own learning, I can set my own learning goals and objectives, I have specific plans to achieve my learning goals and objectives, I can use learning tools and resources, I can use various learning strategies, teacher presence is needed in autonomous learning, peer interaction is needed in autonomous learning, learner autonomy is important for success in learning, and learner autonomy training is needed.

Section three: targets the learner independence which involves their decisions of what to learn. "Likert scale" is the type of the 11 questions used to know how much they are independent learners. They also asked to tick the appropriate box to answer to the following statements: I know what I need to do in learning English, I use a variety of learning strategies to help me learn better, I often do learning activities that are not assigned by the teacher, I pay closer attention to classes that I am not good at, studying English is important to me regardless of what my teachers or parents think, when choosing materials, I review the sources and make a conscious choice, I know how close I am to reaching my learning goals, I prefer to choose my own learning materials, I know my strengths and weaknesses in learning English, I want to make more learning choices in English classes, and I get nervous if the teacher does not point out important details for me.

Section four: deals with the learner attitudes. In this section, respondents are asked to express how their attitudes to some factors affecting their learning of English are by ticking the appropriate box. Using the "Likert scale" type of question aims at measuring their agreement or disagreement to the following eight statements: I try to maintain a good relationship with peers in my English classes, I hope to make significant improvements in five years, I want to make English speaking friends, I want to visit English speaking countries, I spend a lot of time studying English, I have my own learning strategies for studying English, most of my English learning outside the classroom consists of assignments, and My attitude to learning English changes depending on the teacher.

In those sections, there are many types of question that are selected for different reasons and purposes. Open-ended is used to identify issues more relevant to respondents (age). Close-ended: yes/no measures knowledge or ability. Likert scale "strongly agree, agree, not sure, etc." is the dominant type which aims at determining more precise degree of a response, opinion, or position.

3.2 Population and Sampling

In order to investigate the perceptions of EFL students about the effect of blended learning on their learning autonomy, second-year students of English at ENS of Ouargla were chosen as the population of this study. The population is selected purposefully because it was the largest population of EFL students at ENS Ouargla.

The sample of the study is composed of 53 (46 female and seven male) out of 100 which means that they represent 53% of the population. They ranged in ages from 18 to 23. The participants were selected randomly to respond to different questions depending on their own point of view and experience. Their responses then lead to get the research data which is going to be used to test the proposed hypotheses and answer the research questions.

3.3 Results and Discussions

Having background information about the sample is helpful to get the reason why they respond to the delivered questionnaire in a certain way. For this, we specify a whole section for the personal information: section one. Our sample are all adults, their age is limited between 18 and 23 years old. Being adults makes the answers of the participants more reliable due to the intellectual maturity they start having in this period. Thus, they are mature enough to answer depending on their own points of view and experiences. Regarding their gender, we got a mixed sample with 86.8% female and 13.20% male. According to what they claimed in the item "three" which asked whether they have a personal computer at home (or PC/Smart phone), 90.75% of the students have their own technological piece. That denotes that they have knowledge about how to use those technological items.

The next question proved the previous information, since the responses of the participants to: 'How can you rate your knowledge and ability to use computer?' has shown that they are competent to some extent in using the computer. "Excellent" as well as "very good" scale got chosen by the same number (seven for each), "good" got 36 out of 53, and "weak" got three ticks. It can be deduced that being qualified to use computer is caused by the current technological needs especially in the field of education and learning. In addition, the ability to use their computers efficiently is strongly affected by having Internet connectivity or not. As it is expected, 81.13% of the respondents declared that Internet connectivity is available at home. Being able to access to web gives the user more chances and opportunity to discover how technology works and to get benefit from it; therefore, the user faces less challenges and limitations when developing and improving his English language skills by his own.

Also, 20.76% of the sample picked up the first option "always", and the rest (76.24%) ticked "occasionally" to answer to the question: Do your teachers use e-mails to send you lectures links on Google Meet? The answers to it indicates that they have already been engaged in the blended learning method. Concerning the importance of providing access to the Internet at university, we got 100% for the same option "yes" which is considered as a proof to their real need of it so that they can make much efforts in learning, developing, and mastering different skills of the English language. Also, it raises their interaction with the teachers, so it fosters them to become more active than passive students. From the first section, we can say that students' personal pieces of information are interesting concerning the evidence of selecting the convenient sample for our dissertation.

Learner Autonomy

Scale / Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Do not know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
08	16.98%	49.05%	15.1%	15.1%	3.77%	100%
09	35.84%	45.3%	11.32%	5.66%	1.88%	100%
10	30.1%	52.38%	7.54%	5.76%	3.77%	100%
11	21.15%	57.7%	19.23%	0%	1.92%	100%
12	35.3%	33.33%	19.60%	9.8%	1.97%	100%
13	37.73%	32.1%	26.41%	1.88%	1.88%	100%
14	28.85%	26.82%	26.92%	17.31%	0%	100%

15	55.77%	30.77%	11.54%	0%	1.92%	100%
16	50%	40.39%	9.61%	0%	0%	100%

Table 1. Learner Autonomy

The second section, which comprises nine "Likert scale" questions used to measure to what extent the students agree or disagree with the delivered question, is about learner autonomy. The respondents who gave positive answers to the statement 'I can manage my own learning' represent the majority: 66.03%. While 18.78% disagreed with the latter. It can be said that being able for the students to control their learning means that they know exactly what and how to learn with consideration to their needs and interests. In other words, being psychologically, intellectually, and pedagogically prepared is the key to cover almost all aspects of learning management, sufficiently. As a result, the students make decisions for their academic success without getting confused about their decisions credibility, efficiency and affectivity.

The second question's responses come to ensure the first idea, since positive answers are the dominant to the statement 'I can set my own learning goals and objectives'. Even though learning goals and objectives are used interchangeably by many people, there is still a slight difference: learning objectives are the near target, yet the learning goals target the skill as a whole. It could be gleaned from the table above (Table 1) that 35.84% of the sample strongly agreed and 45.3% agreed which means that their learning journey is well-organized. Furthermore, being strongly sure about their ability to make efficient and effective plans for their learning objectives and goals is caused by the experience they have in setting the objectives to be achieved and goals to be attained at the end of their plans, While one point eighty-nine percent ticked "strongly disagree" to denote that they totally depend on the others to set them the required objectives and goals for their improvement. They are not aware of their needs, interests in the English language unlike the first group.

Going deeply, 30.1% of the sample picked up the scale "strongly agree", and 52.83% ticked the answer "agree" with 'I have specific plans to achieve my learning goals and objectives' in order to express their self-management and responsibility for their own learning plans. It also indicates how much they are experienced in depending on themselves when designing the plans to be followed in the progression of achieving both objectives and goals of their learning. On the contrary, those who answered by "disagree" and "strongly agree" do not know how to plan to achieve their learning objectives and goals and what methods to use and how to use them to apply it. In addition, being unaware of their strengths and weaknesses hinders their abilities to decide what objectives ad goals to set.

As it is shown in Table1, 21.15% of the students strongly agreed on having the ability to use learning tools and materials. Due to the experience in dealing with different types of them, 57.7% of our sample also agreed with it indicating by that they can easily use them in their learning process. On the other hand, students who gave negative answers are not able to use them at all; it refers to the lack of self-confidence and responsibility of their own learning. They usually depend on others to choose for them and teach them how to use those tools and resources efficiently and effectively.

The results of the statement 'I can use various learning strategies' show that 68.63% of the responses are positive, so it can be said that this category of students has significant amount of knowledge and background information about the use of various learning strategies that allow them "…to learn content or accomplish other tasks more effectively and efficiently in schools as well as in non-academic settings" (Schumacker and Deshler, 1992). Students who gave negative answers show that they are unfamiliar with using various learning strategies. They are more likely to depend on their teachers or peers to help them determining which strategies to use in achieving their objectives and goals.

Regarding the question asking about the importance of the teacher presence in autonomous learning, the plurality shows that there is a need of the teacher guidance which helps them to get much better results and outcomes. Usually, teachers know better what weaknesses and strengths their students have in different areas of the English language; autonomous learners find that discussions with the teacher make things clearer. According to Whereas Dam (2011), the teacher promotes the learning autonomy by making "students both willing and capable to make over the responsibility of learning, i.e., planning, carrying out the plans, and evaluating the outcome." (as cited in Kadi, 2018, p28.). Therefore, teachers are considered as a source of motivation by which the autonomous learner gets inspired.

Furthermore, 'peer interaction is needed in autonomous learning' is agreed by the majority who find that interacting with their peers provides them with comfortable environment to perform their skills of English freely. It also offers them the opportunity to discover their identity. Discussions between peers usually includes exchanged experiences that lead them to pay attention to new idea, tip or strategy of what they are in need. According to the collected answers of the statements 'learner autonomy is important for success in learning', one can assume that it is highly required because learner success depends on being responsible for his own learning. As Dafei claims: "The results of the study indicate that the students' English proficiency was significantly and positively related to their learner autonomy '' (ibid) It means that the more autonomy students have, the more they are likely to achieve high language proficiency.

Moving to the last statement's results of the second section, it can be said that almost the entire sample finds learner autonomy training is needed. They said so because when they get trained, their learning autonomy performance gets enhanced. As a result, they become successful responsible for their learning progression; they will be able to set their learning goals and objectives more easily. Being trained means less challenges and more overcome problems. Since, learning English as foreign language requires from the learner to keep working outside the classroom, it is necessary for them to know its features, characteristics. It is important to experience it in order to be active and efficient learners too.

It can be deduced that the sample have many characteristics of the learning autonomy. As a result of being aware of their learning process, their needs and interests, strengths and weaknesses, they can easily plan to achieve their learning goals and objectives. Determining which learning tools, resources, and strategies are the appropriate for a particular goal and objective denotes that our sample is experienced in using the former; thus, the majority of the students are responsible for their own learning. Although being autonomous learners means being responsible for their learning by their own, they believe teacher presence is needed. Accepting others help and instructions for better results is admitted by them. EFL students been engaged in the blended learning method need to practice learning autonomy which has been adopted to develop their abilities, enhance their levels in all skills of the English language. They, most of the participants, believe that being trained enables them to get better results and succeed in their learning.

Learner Independence

Scale / Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Do not know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
17	24.52%	49.05%	16.98%	5.67%	3.78%	100%
18	39.62%	41.50%	11.32%	5.67%	1.89%	100%

19	24.52%	43.4%	13.20%	15.1%	3.78%	100%
20	30.18%	37.73%	11.32%	16.99%	3.78%	100%
21	45.29%	39.62%	5.66%	7.54%	1.89%	100%
22	35.84%	41.50%	15.1%	3.78%	3.78%	100%
23	30.18%	45.28%	18.87%	5.67%	0%	100%
24	35.84%	47.17%	5.67%	11.32%	0%	100%
25	47.17%	35.84%	15.1%	1.89%	0%	100%
26	50%	36.54%	11.54%	0%	1.92%	100%
27	35.84%	26.41%	11.32%	20.76%	5.67%	100%

Table 2. Learner Independence

The present section deals with learner independence. Many people get confused what the distinction between learner independence and learner autonomy is. Autonomous learner can be absolutely autonomous and can be dependent on others for help and support. While, the independent learner does not accept help, resources or care from others. The delivered questions in this section are also "Likert scale" questions.

The results for the question 'I know what I need to do in learning English' reveal that the plurality know what to do in learning English. They are independent for having high sense of consciousness, confidence and responsibility for their learning process. In this context, Dam (2000) claims**:** "… An awareness which hopefully will help them come to an understanding of themselves and thus increase their self-esteem." (Kadi, 2018) Compared to the first group, more than nine percent of the respondents decided to pick up the negative answers because they cannot define or decide what they are supposed to do. It means that they are in need of instructors who guide and control their learning plans, goals and objectives due to the lack of training and motivation.

From the table above (Table 2), the majority of the sample picked up the positive answers which indicate that using various strategies for better learning is a shared goal between them. Their curiosity pushes them to look for the details of every single strategy they intend to use before adopting it. After making sure that the selected strategies are efficient and effective, they start categorizing them according to their objectives and goals so as to gain better outcomes. While, the second group are less likely to be independent learners as they use only what they have been provided by the teacher. As a result, one of the tips to get better results is to use various strategies appropriately.

The statement 'I often do learning activities that are not assigned by the teacher' aims at knowing whether the students practice their skills of English using their way of evaluation besides their teachers'. A significant number of the whole sample which represents 67.92% said that they do select and do different activities that are helpful to master the language skills they work on. They expose that they are independent students who do what looks useful without referring to the teacher because they believe that they truly know what to evaluate and how to get the required result of their assessment. Those learners intend to select specific types of activities that target their weaknesses in order to fill the gaps; activities assigned by the teacher could not fill them. On the other hand, about 21% declared that they do not do learning activities that are not assigned

by the teacher which makes them seem passive students with less confident, motivated and responsible for their own learning.

According to the given responses, to the statements 'I know my strengths and weaknesses in learning English', 'I pay closer attention to classes that I am not at' and 'I know how close I am to reaching my learning goals', it is obvious that the plurality picked up the positive answers. They declare that doing different learning activities helps them to identify their strengths and weaknesses in the English language. More than that, being able to determine what gets developed and what needs much effort raises their motivation to be more active and independent learners. Thus, they would practice more to improve their levels. Dam views that "self-reflection and evaluation make learners aware of their learning level and so they become more motivated to improve it." (Kadi, 2018).

Also, it can be said that being curious and critical students of English pushes them to review the affectivity of the new tools and materials they find. After, they select the suitable learning choices, tools and materials, consciously. Besides, being aware of their needs and interests is a result of having the ability to determine their weaknesses and strengths in English. In order to improve their learning levels, our sample responses expose that the plurality assign different activities that fit their learning goals and objectives.

On the opposite, there is a group of students whose responsibility and self-confidence challenges them, one can deduce that this category of students cannot be provided by facilitators, they need to be controlled and guided by instructors. Regarding the importance of learning English, different responses are got.

84.91 percent of the participants picked up the positive answers to say that they cannot be affected by others' attitudes due to having high sense of confidence and motivation toward learning and studying English. Furthermore, five-point sixty-six percent of the responses were given to the neutral option "do not know". Giving neutral answer to the statement above shows the students' independence can be affected by others' attitudes. They may change their opinion if they get convinced by others' arguments. Concerning negative answers to the same statement, there are about nine-point five percent answers assumed that students change their opinion about the importance of studying English when they find that the social factors go against their interest. It can be deduced that self-confidence is required for the learner independence. In other words, whatever their teachers and parents think, independent learners believe that studying English is important, and improving their skills of the language till mastering them is something highly needed.

Students who said "I do not know" to the statement 'I get nervous when the teacher does not point out important details' are unmotivated and do not care of the delivered knowledge, or they feel that the question is somewhat sensitive. In order to express their curiosity to the English language and high motivation to learn new things, 62.25% responded by "strongly agree" and "agree". They find that unmentioned details are interesting and beneficial to successfully reach their learning goals. While more than 26%, do not get nervous when they do not get what they expect because they can rely on themselves in searching for them and for their explanations.

At the end of this section, one can say that learning independence requires much consciousness, confidence, curiosity, creativity, responsibility and motivation from students of English as a Foreign Language. The answers of the majority of our sample show that they are active learners who depend on themselves in managing their learning. In order to attain the goals of their learning, our sample, who are EFL students, make great efforts to get better results at different classes of the English language. Being successful in reaching their learning goals is due to being aware of their learning, experienced in using different types of learning materials, capable of selecting the appropriate learning strategies which come after identifying their learning weaknesses and strengths, and having great sense of confidence.

Learner Attitudes

Scale Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Do not know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
28	45.29%	37.73%	13.20%	1.89%	1.89%	100%
29	73.58%	22.64%	1.89%	0%	1.89%	100%
30	62.27%	28.30%	7.54%	0%	1.89%	100%
31	79.24%	11.32%	5.66%	0%	3.78%	100%
32	15.1%	45.28%	9.43%	24.52%	5.67%	100%
33	32.7%	44.23%	17.31%	1.92%	3.84%	100%
34	13.20%	41.50%	18.87%	20.76%	5.67%	100%
35	43.39%	18.86%	11.32%	15.09%	11.32%	100%

Table 3. Learner Attitudes

In section four focused on the students' attitudes towards learning English. According to their participation results, maintaining a good relationship with peers in English classes is recommended for most of them because it creates more comfortable atmosphere which encourages them to work better on their learning. On the opposite, only three-point seventy-eight percent strongly disagreed with that indicating by that they can overcome academic difficulties and succeed in improving their performance with no need to return to peers' remarks, exchanged experiences and pieces of advice.

'I hope to make significant improvements in five years' get positive responses by 96.22% of the whole sample. As expected, they have great intention and high sense of responsibility and motivation to reach the advanced levels in the English language skills. While, one point eighty-nine percent strongly disagreed due to the challenges he faces in improving his performance. Giving extreme negative answer denotes that the student is confused about his ability to make significant improvements.

In the question asking how much they want to make English speaking friends, 90.57% said they tried to make friend who were native speakers of English because they want to take the knowledge from its original source and improve their skills of English such us: listening, speaking, and writing. In addition, seven-point fifty-four percent answered by "do not know" because they think that it is not necessary for them to make English speaking friends. It becomes interesting unless they get satisfied with the different learning resources, tools, and materials used to raise their levels.

For the statement 'I want to visit English speaking countries', 79.24% picked up the highest scale, strongly agree. They believe that practicing English in its environment is more efficient and effective than practicing it in foreign environments. It offers them the opportunity to communicate with huge number of native speakers, so their language skills will be promoted in a way or another. While, three-point seventy-eight percent strongly disagreed, so students' interest toward discovering how the English culture differs from the sample's mother tongue culture, Arabic culture, is at low level. Furthermore, they think that learning English

can exist everywhere and they are able to master language skills without going or visiting English speaking countries.

Responses to the statement 'I spend a lot of time studying English' show that they have considerable different attitudes towards the amount of time allotted to spend in learning English. As it is noticed in the table above, 15.1% of the respondents believe that spending a lot of time is highly recommended for better results especially that our sample is involved into the blended learning method in their learning.

45.28 percent find that spending less time than the first group is enough to make significant improvements. On the contrary, 24.52% declared that they disagreed with the statement above to indicate that their passion and ambition toward learning English are not on the high level which requires a lot of time to be spent in studying it. Regarding statement 'I have my own learning strategies for studying English', it is observed that more than 76.93% have their own learning strategies for studying English. To have their own learning strategies means that they are experienced in dealing with challenges they face when depending on themselves to learn English. Moreover, selecting the appropriate strategies for their learning goals and objectives needs trained learners to be done, successfully. Those who gave negative responses to the statement lack autonomy in their learning because they rely completely on the others. Being unconfident, inexperienced and unmotivated are some main reasons that prevent them to decide which strategy to adopt and use.

Depending on the received responses to the statement 'Most of my English learning outside the classroom consists of assignments', it can be said that they support the acquired knowledge by evaluating their comprehension. Their self-assessment happens through assignments and activities that target various elements. In other words, they make assignments so as to check much they get developed. Practicing inside and outside the classroom means they are responsible for their learning and motivated to get better results.

As it is noticed in the table above, about 54% of the sample gives positive response to the fact of getting affected by the teacher. They said that their attitude to learning English changed depending on the teacher. The student's attitude to English becomes positive if he likes the teacher's way of distributing knowledge, explaining lessons, and interacting with him. The previous factors have an impact on their motivation to learning English. Unless the teacher is appealed to the learners, they will find learning English less interesting. On the other hand, 26.41% of the responses chose to say "disagree" and "strongly disagree" to insist on being confident and aware of how much learning English is important for them. Their consciousness and ambition toward learning English are beyond others' effects.

At the end of this section, it can be deduced that the sample have a great interest in learning English. Being motivated to improve their English language skills and responsible for their decisions in studying and learning English provided them with confidence. Self-confidence fosters their ambitions to get better results. They believe that taking knowledge about the English language from the native speakers is required. Practicing and performing in its environment is highly recommended since practicing the language in its environment differs to performing it in a foreign environment. Although a considerable number of our sample attitudes to learning English get affected by the teacher, they still autonomous learners who are responsible for their own learning plans, goals and objectives, motivated to make much efforts, and aware of their learning. As Scharle and Szabo (2000) state: "success in learning very much depends on learners having a responsible attitude." (as cited in Kadi, 2018, p18).

General Conclusion

In the recent years, the implementation of technology in the field of education has increased. It provides the teaching and learning process with new pedagogical models so as to promote its outcomes. Blended learning is one of the most integrated methods in language learning classes, particularly the classes of English as a

foreign language. The method aims at motivating and encouraging the learners to become active and self-reliant language learners who can manage their learning process efficiently outside the classroom.

According to what has been mentioned in the literature review, there are various definitions of the blended learning which appeared as a result of the need to take advantages of both types of learning, namely: the traditional face-to-face and e-learning. Due to the slight difference between its definitions, different types and models of the method emerged. As all pedagogical methods, the latter has advantages and disadvantages. Then, the learning autonomy has been discussed. The learner autonomy means that learner becomes responsible for his learning journey process with bearing in mind that being autonomous learner does not mean neglecting the role of the teacher. In order to have autonomous classroom, teachers as well need to realize both concepts: learner autonomy and teacher autonomy so that they can help their language learning students to continue their learning efficiently outside the classroom.

Regarding the practical part of this study, the research design used is the exploratory, in order to investigate the perceptions of EFL students about the effect of blended learning on their learning autonomy. The questionnaire used to collect data was divided into four sections so that the researchers can tackle different areas of the concept of EFL students' learning autonomy: learner autonomy, learner independence, and learner attitudes.

The obtained results confirmed that EFL students are more likely to be positively affected by the blended learning approach. It pushes and encourages them to be curious, active, responsible, and motivated learners. To be autonomous, it is required from EFL student to have responsible attitude toward learning English and to be aware and motivated for their learning process. Hence, they can make much efforts in managing their learning. Because learning autonomy is important for success in learning, students of English as a foreign language need to be trained on how to be autonomous, precisely, how to rely on themselves when choosing and selecting the appropriate learning strategies, and materials; when assessing and evaluating their learning outside the classroom as well for their language proficiency. Findings also show that being autonomous and responsible learner does not mean being isolated. Even thought, they are confident of themselves, they believe that peer interaction and teacher presence is needed to get a well-managed learning process.

Nevertheless, this study would help ministry officials to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of blended learning on the learners' autonomy and what changes would they make to get better outcomes. In the one hand, curricula designers, inspectors and syllabus designers would use the results of the research as a reference for what to include and what to remove, how to sequence and present the content, and which activities are more useful for different objectives. Regarding students, this study would provide them with new information about how to be autonomous learners due to the implementation of blended learning method in the learning process. The learning autonomy would reflect on various aspects of the students' life. It helps them to check every single item before making judgment. Learning autonomy helps students to make conscious decisions in their life depending on themselves, and this would affect positively their self-confidence and their awareness.

Furthermore, the stakeholders should take into consideration the results of this study to improve the educational conditions. In other words, this study can be considered a resource that may aid professors and curricula designers to decide how and what strategies, content, and approaches to include for the enhancement of the field of education. Also, they need to devote much attention to the necessity of training both students and teachers how to deal with the blended learning method and how to motivate and foster their autonomy. The stakeholders should encourage people to adopt the blended learning as a method of teaching and learning. The learning autonomy would increase; thus, better outcomes are made.

Finally, further research is recommended to focus on the relation that links between learner autonomy, learner independence, and learner attitude, so teachers can evaluate their EFL students' learning autonomy in terms of the integration of blended learning approach in their learning process.

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Appendices

Appendix01: Students Questionnaire

Dear student,

The purpose of this questionnaire is to know about your attitudes towards the use of **blended learning** in EFL classrooms **and** its effect on your **learning autonomy**.
There is no right or wrong answer; we are only interested in your responses for our research purposes.

Some clarifications:

Blended Learning: it is a combination of online learning and traditional face-face teaching.

Learning autonomy: self-learning / taking control and responsibility of my own learning, both *what* and *how* to learn.

EFL: English as a Foreign Language.

Note: Tick (✓) the box indicating your answer

Section One: Personal Information

1. Gender: Female ☐   Male ☐
2. Age:
3. Do you have a personal computer at home (or PC/Smart phone)? Yes ☐ No ☐
4. How can you rate your knowledge and ability to use computers?
    Excellent ☐   Very good ☐   Good ☐   Weak ☐
5. Is Internet connectivity available (WIFI)at home?   Yes ☐   No ☐
6. Do your teachers use e-mails to send you lectures links on Google Meet?
    Never ☐   Occasionally ☐   Always ☐
7. Do you think it's important to provide access to the Internet at university?
    Yes ☐   No ☐

Section Two: Learner Autonomy

- **1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = don't know, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree**

		1	2	3	4	5
8	I can manage my own learning.					
9	I can set my own learning goals and objectives.					
10	I have specific plans to achieve my learning goals and objectives.					
11	I can use learning tools and resources.					
12	I can use various learning strategies.					
13	Teacher presence is needed in autonomous learning.					
14	Peer interaction is needed in autonomous learning.					
15	Learner autonomy is important for success in learning.					
16	Learner autonomy training is needed.					

Section Three: Learner Independence

17	I know what I need to do in learning English.					
18	I use a variety of learning strategies to help me learn better.					
19	I often do learning activities that are not assigned by the teacher					
20	I pay closer attention to classes that I am not good at.					
21	Studying English is important to me regardless of what my teachers or parents think.					
22	When choosing materials, I review the sources and make a conscious choice.					
23	I know how close I am to reaching my learning goals.					
24	I prefer to choose my own learning materials.					
25	I know my strengths and weaknesses in learning English.					
26	I want to make more learning choices in English classes.					
27	I get nervous if the teacher does not point out important details for me.					

Section Four: Learner Attitudes

28	I try to maintain a good relationship with peers in my English classes.					
29	I hope to make significant improvements in 5 years.					
30	I want to make English speaking friends.					
31	I want to visit English speaking countries.					
32	I spend a lot of time studying English.					
33	I have my own learning strategies for studying English.					
34	Most of my English learning outside of the classroom consists of assignments.					
35	My attitude to learning English changes depending on the teacher.					