Investigating the Autonomy Orientations and Perceptions of Saudi EFL Teachers[*]

Abdulaziz Al-Qahtani[1]

English and Translation Department, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Jeddah, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Abstract—This research aims to explore the autonomy orientation of English language teachers in the western province of Saudi Arabia, home to numerous secondary schools. The study, grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), examines the impact of two primary variables: the teachers' genders and their levels of teaching experience. A cohort of 102 Saudi secondary school language teachers participated in the study, with 10 engaging in a qualitative follow-up. Data were collected via a questionnaire and analyzed using statistical techniques such as t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The findings indicated that the autonomy orientation among Saudi language teachers was moderate, with female teachers showing more supportive tendencies towards their students. Moreover, the study uncovered a discrepancy between the teachers' autonomy orientations and their perceptions of the concept, attributing their perceived constraints and roles to the national education system. In light of these findings, the study advocates for pre-service and in-service training programs designed to enable English language teachers to foster an autonomy-supportive environment for their students. Additionally, the study calls for further research to deepen the understanding of English language teachers' autonomy orientations in Saudi Arabia and the interplay between autonomy orientation and teachers' perceptions of autonomy.

Index Terms—autonomy orientation, Self-Determination Theory, in-service training, autonomy-supportive teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

The psychologists Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan are credited with the introduction of a theory of motivation called the Self-Determination Theory (SDT); the same authors developed the theory further in 2000. SDT is a motivational framework that advocates for more autonomy among students, and states that the three fundamental psychological needs that must be fulfilled for optimal human functioning are autonomy, competence, and social connectedness. The theory posits that individuals experience improved mental health and self-motivation when these needs are met, and experience decreased motivation and well-being when they are not (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The theory has been the focus of extensive research and has been applied widely by scholars and academics in various fields, including psychotherapy, sports, healthcare, education, religion, and work (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The theory provides a framework that explains how individuals' attitudes are oriented toward a specific task, and how the promotion of autonomy and autonomous behavior among individuals can significantly affect academic success and learning in the classroom (Purdue University Library resources).

Furthermore, since it was developed as a motivational framework, the theory focuses on the fulfillment of fundamental human needs to motivate humans to perform at their optimal level. According to SDT, these needs are psychological in nature, and include "competence," "autonomy," and "connectivity or relatedness." As the framework in this concept explains how individuals' attitudes are oriented toward particular tasks and that promoting greater self-determination and autonomous behavior among students can improve their academic success, SDT is commonly applied in the field of education (Guay, 2022).

According to Guay (2022), the SDT framework is widely employed in education to study various aspects of student motivation, developments in learning, and improvement (Brenner, 2022). In particular, SDT has been applied to focus on identifying the relationship between two fundamental variables, namely "self-regulation" or "autonomy support" on one hand, and school performance on the other (Jeno & Diseth, 2014). It has also been used to investigate the level of independent English language learning (Hu & Zhang, 2017). In addition, this theory has been applied across the fields of psychology, English for specific purposes (ESP), and online learning, and has been studied extensively by researchers in an attempt to understand students' behavior and motivations. Overall, SDT provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals' attitudes are oriented toward a specific task, and how the promotion of higher levels of self-determination and autonomy can have a significant effect on academic success and learning in the classroom.

The current study aimed to observe autonomy orientations in education by focusing on Saudi secondary schools and on Saudi language teachers' perceptions. Autonomy is considered to be the most important aspect of SDT, and is widely observed in educational settings. The study aimed to understand the students, the teachers, and the classroom environments by analyzing the contributions of previous researchers regarding the development of the concept of autonomy orientation, the primary objectives of their investigations, the specific domains in which the research was conducted, and the results that these investigations yielded. The present research was motivated by the need to understand autonomy orientations in Saudi secondary schools and Saudi language teachers' perceptions because these are considered to be essential for understanding how education can be improved in this context.

Black and Deci (2000) investigated the application of SDT by conducting a study of college-level students of organic chemistry in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of the research was to measure how SDT influenced the students' performances and self-regulation in relation to the teachers' autonomy, as well as if it improved the students' performances. Similarly, Demir et al. (2019) conducted a study to investigate the differences in students' performances and outcomes depending on the level of autonomy exercised by their teachers in the development and teaching of their courses. The authors concluded that greater levels of teacher autonomy in terms of supporting their students did, in fact, lead to improvements in the students' performances. The study by Fedesco et al. (2019) focused on the two components in the aforementioned studies, but added the component of "relatedness". The authors determined that the multidimensional nature of relatedness, as well as its level, enabled students differently. In addition to the traditional components of dependency, this study specifically asked students to report on two different types of connectedness with their teachers, namely the type of connection and the degree of connection. The relatedness items from the adapted Basic Satisfaction Needs at Work were scaled up to extract individual responses from different students. Relatedness with teachers, or instructor relatedness, produced more credible results regarding the students' interest in and enjoyment of the system; conversely, peer relatedness could not significantly predict any differences in the outcomes. Hsu et al. (2019) conducted a study in which the researchers examined the application of SDT in online learning environments. This study was markedly different from previous research. The researchers in the study acknowledged the measurement concerns in the previous research and made adjustments to the SDT model in their study. The study included a total of 300 student participants, and concluded that the fulfillment of students' psychological needs was the best possible motivation for better engagement and outcomes. The fulfillment of psychological needs produced higher levels of perception in students, and made the transfer and attainment of knowledge among online students easier. The findings of this research suggested that SDT could be applied safely and credibly to the systems in online education. Teaching methods that introduce and encourage autonomy in students can be more effective in achieving positive and improved learning outcomes. If teachers adopt methods that encourage students' autonomy in the classroom, students' learning will be improved (Leroy et al., 2007). Accordingly, it is essential to ascertain the autonomy orientations of the instructors as the first step in the process. In Saudi Arabia, mastering the English language is regarded as being extremely important, particularly for students who are enrolled in secondary and higher education programs. The existing literature has demonstrated that students perform better when they are given more autonomy in their learning. Educators should also be urged to adopt a more student-centered, libertarian stance in the classroom. Therefore, the first step is to identify the instructors' autonomy orientations.

Saudi students may experience severe consequences if they do not have good command of the English language; for example, some of them may not complete their education. Researchers have demonstrated that numerous changes, including communicative approaches that involve learners in the language-acquisition process and digital technologies that use awareness and cultural ideas, must be implemented immediately. Saudi students have strongly negative attitudes toward English instruction. Safi (2020) focused on culturally relevant pedagogical practices and on how their incorporation could improve the students' overall performances by surveying teachers' views regarding the importance and inclusion of such practices. The author found that including culturally relevant pedagogical practices in the educational structure was extremely important in order to benefit both students and policymakers. For most students, their cultural backgrounds are an active source of knowledge and inspiration; therefore, the development of methods for preserving their cultural identities while teaching them new concepts is essential.

Hameed's (2020) research investigated Saudi students' opinions about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and found that CLT was well received in language education in Saudi Arabia because the students believed in CLT, particularly with regard to the roles of teachers and students. Teachers and students had diverse attitudes toward CLT regarding teachers' positions, mother tongues, pair work, and class functions. A doctoral study conducted by Almohideb (2019) also focused on teachers' and students' perspectives regarding the importance of the role that CLT should play in teaching English to students. The study found that there were two main challenges for Saudi teachers and students in both teaching and learning another language; the first was related to the teaching and learning environment, such as the teaching style, the examination system, and the classroom setting, which hindered interactive teaching, while the second was related to cultural and societal factors that made it difficult to teach English in an interactive way. In addition, using digital and online tools for language learning is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Al-Samiri (2021) conducted research on language teaching in response to COVID-19. Some of the most significant obstacles noted were the students' lack of motivation, which was later discovered to be linked to other contributing variables, such as technology concerns, ineffective learning environments, and so on. This paper aimed to investigate

the unexpected positive results of the digital transition in the context of Saudi Arabia, such as the advantages of flexibility in terms of place and time, the promotion of specific language skills, and online English instruction. The paper aimed to highlight the importance of addressing these challenges in the Saudi context to improve language learning for students and teachers. The research emphasized the need for a concrete framework to make language a smooth, interactive, and exciting skill to learn and in which to excel. The study was motivated by the need to understand the positive results of the digital transition and its impact on language learning in Saudi Arabia. The current research is essential for accomplishing these aims.

Research Questions

The research aimed to address the following questions, which were formulated based on the study's objectives:
1.   What are the autonomous orientations of Saudi secondary-stage teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL)?
2.   Does the autonomous orientation of Saudi secondary-stage EFL teachers differ in accordance with their years of teaching experience and their genders?
3.   How do Saudi secondary school EFL teachers perceive their autonomous orientations in terms of their teaching practices?

II. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Population and Sample

The study aimed to examine the autonomy orientation of EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia at the secondary level. In total, 102 Saudi instructors of EFL at secondary schools in the western province of Saudi Arabia constituted the sample for this study. The western province was chosen as the location for this study because it has the second-highest number of secondary schools after Riyadh. Secondary schools in Taif, Makkah, and Jeddah, as well as Madinah, were used to compile the proportionately representative random sample. Of these 102 teachers, 10 were interviewed for the qualitative portion of the research.

TABLE 1
GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE

Gender	Male	Female
Numbers	65	37
Total		102

The above table shows that the male respondents were nearly twice as familiar as the female respondents.

TABLE 2
EXPERIENCE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Experience	N	%
Less than 5 years	6	5.8
5 to 10 years	19	18.63
11 to 15 years	27	26.47
16 to 20 years	34	33.33
More than 20 years	16	15.68

The number of years for which the EFL teachers had been teaching is presented in Table 2. Most of the teachers had between five and 20 years of experience. Only 5.8% of the respondents had less than five years of experience, and teachers with 16 to 20 years of experience constituted the largest group at 33.3%.

TABLE 3
RESPONDENTS' QUALIFICATION

Degree	N	%
English Language Teaching (ELT)	102	100

The data presented in Table 3 indicate that all the respondents, or 100%, possessed the necessary degree to teach English as a second language.

In order to triangulate the data and to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' points of view, 10 teachers were selected from three different strata to participate in interviews. The first group consisted of people who had achieved higher-than-average results in the autonomy orientation evaluation, the second group consisted of people who had achieved approximately average results, and the third group consisted of teachers with a greater tendency to control their students.

Research Instrument for the Study

After reviewing the related literature, it was determined that the most appropriate method for this study would be to employ the questionnaire that was developed by Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, and Ryan (1981, p. 642). The questionnaire was adapted to the cultural context of Saudi Arabia, and an expert confirmed its validity. The purpose of this tool was to evaluate whether teachers adopted a traditional or autonomy-supportive approach in their language-teaching classrooms. The questions were first broken down into simpler parts to clarify complex concepts and were then adjusted to suit the Saudi context.

The study used multiple methodologies to collect the data. Before the questionnaire was distributed to the main participants, a pilot study with a sample of teachers from a different intensive language program was conducted. This pilot study aimed to identify any potential issues with the scale items, such as determining whether any of the wording or scenarios were inappropriate for the setting and needed to be deleted. The participants were asked to participate voluntarily in the study by completing an online consent form, and were assured that their information would be kept anonymous and confidential. The questionnaire also included questions about the participants' demographic information, such as their genders, years of experience, and fields of study.

The participants were asked to evaluate the appropriateness of each of the four choices presented for each situation using a 7-point scale. These selections correlated to the following four subscales:

1) highly controlling (H.C.),
2) moderately controlling (M.C.),
3) moderately autonomous (M.A.), and
4) highly autonomous (H.A.).

To ensure that the questions would be realistic representations of situations that the teachers would encounter in the demanding environment of language instruction, two additional scenarios were incorporated into the questionnaire, bringing the number of rating questions to 40. To validate the information contained in the updated questionnaire, we distributed the questionnaire to six experts in ELT for a review and for validation.

The participants' orientation toward independence was represented by their questionnaire scores, ranging from -180, indicating extreme control, to +180, indicating extreme autonomy. The value of zero was regarded as neutral. Each positive score on this scale indicated autonomy-supportive behavior, whereas each negative score indicated controlling behavior. Scores that fell within this range indicated being somewhat supportive of autonomy, while scores that were higher than this range indicated strong support for autonomy. Ratings lower than -90 were seen as indicating being somewhat controlling, while ratings higher than -90 were regarded as indicating being extremely controlling. In the qualitative portion of the study, 10 teachers were asked to analyze and provide their perspectives on the results obtained from the questionnaire. These teachers were selected to represent a range of orientations—three had low orientations, three had medium orientations, and three had high orientations—to obtain a better understanding of teachers' views with regard to supporting the autonomy orientation of their colleagues and themselves.

The participants recorded their feedback about the results of the autonomy orientation score, the autonomy support score, and any possible explanations for the outcomes. In addition, they were asked to provide in-depth responses to a total of six open-ended questions. These questions, which were developed with expert guidance and were based on the research topics, were presented to the teachers as part of the study.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

After evaluating the participants' responses to the autonomy orientation questionnaire, the researchers selected 10 participants to participate in the second phase of the study. The researchers then calculated the percentages for each participant's gender, the number of years of teaching experience, and graduating department.

Subsequently, the suggested formula was applied to determine the total score for a subject's autonomy based on the work of Deci and Ryan (1985). A Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was then conducted to establish whether the autonomy scores of the 102 participants followed a normal distribution. Given the sensitivity of the test to the sample size, it was essential to calculate the skewness coefficient to ensure that a normal distribution was present. Parametric statistical methods were used after the distribution was confirmed to be normal. These statistical methods were used to compare the autonomy orientation scales of the participants to their demographic data. A t-test was employed to examine the relationship between the students' autonomy and gender, and the association between the participants' autonomy scores and the department from which they had graduated. Furthermore, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to investigate the correlation between the level of expertise and the level of autonomy. The qualitative data were then evaluated, and the codes and topics recommended in Creswell's (2012) content analysis method were adopted. This was performed by two independent researchers to improve the dependability of the ratings.

IV. RESULTS

Findings from the Survey of the Autonomy Orientation of EFL Teachers

The results from the 102 respondents are compiled in Table 4, which demonstrates the autonomous orientations of Saudi secondary-stage EFL teachers.

TABLE 4
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE TEACHERS' AUTONOMY ORIENTATIONS

Statistics	Value
Mean	39.6
Standard Deviation	8.9
Kurtosis	+.934
Skewness	+.045

According to the data presented in Table 4, most of the teachers had a positive attitude toward the autonomy orientation research instrument, which suggested that most of the students had autonomy-supportive orientations. The average score of the 102 teachers who took the test was 39.6, which placed them in the "M.A. supportive" category. The highest possible score in this section was 85, which indicated an "H.A. supportive attitude". This was the highest possible score. We can see that the lowest total was -3, which was very close to zero and indicated a neutral attitude; that is, neither autonomy supportive nor authoritarian.

TABLE 5
ONE-SAMPLE T-TEST RESULTS

N	Mean Score	SD	T	df.	Significance (p)
102	39.6	8.9	19.5	101	.000

A one-sample t-test was conducted to check the significance of the difference between the obtained mean score and the mid-point reference score of the scale. The resulting p value was less than 0.05, thus indicating a significant statistical difference.

The second objective of the present study was to determine whether the EFL teachers' orientation varied according to their gender or their years of experience. To accomplish this, an independent sample test was performed after meeting the required assumption of normal distribution. The outcome of the fa K-S test generated a significant result (p=.034<.05), which indicated a non-normal distribution of the scores. However, the obtained skewness coefficient of (-.045) was within the acceptable range of -1 to +1, thus suggesting that there was no violation of the assumption of normality.

TABLE 6
THE DIFFERENCE IN THE AUTONOMY ORIENTATIONS OF THE MALE AND FEMALE TEACHERS

Gender	N	Mean score	SD	T	df.	Significance
Male	65	33.27	9.45	-1.09	100	0.034
Female	37	41.12	9.23			

The independent sample t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the perspectives of the male (mean = 33.27) and female (mean = 41.12) participants. At the 0.05 statistical significance level, the difference in the mean scores was found to be statistically significant (p = .0034). However, the magnitude of the differences in the means (mean contrast = 7.85, 95%) indicated a medium effect (eta squared = 0.45).

An ANOVA was employed to compare the differences in the opinions of the five groups to better understand the attitudes of instructors with varying levels of experience toward support for autonomy. The first group consisted of novice teachers with experience ranging from five years or less to 10 years or more, and the second group consisted of English teachers with experience ranging from five to 10 years. The third group had experience ranging from 11 to 15 years, the fourth group had experience ranging from 16 to 20 years, and the final group had more than 20 years of teaching experience. Levene's test was first used to successfully validate the data's homogeneity; an ANOVA test was performed after ensuring that the data were regular and homogenous.

TABLE 7
AUTONOMY ORIENTATIONS AND YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

Experience	N	Mean	S.D.
Less than 5 years	6	36.34	8.98
5 to 10 years	19	44.78	9.78
11 to 15 years	27	47.04	9.73
16 to 20 years	34	40.52	8.68
More than 20 years	16	29.93	9.73

The study found that teachers with more years of experience had higher scores on the autonomy orientation scale. The teachers with 11–15 years of experience had the highest mean score of 47.04, followed by educators who had worked in the field for 6–10 years, with a mean score of 44.78. This was followed by the instructors who had 16–20 years of experience, with a mean of 40.52, and the teachers who had 0–5 years of experience, with a standard of 36.34. Finally, the teachers with the most years of experience in the classroom had the lowest mean score of 36.34. These findings suggest that teachers with more experience tended to have a greater autonomy orientation. In addition, an ANOVA test was performed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the scores based on the years of teaching experience. The results of this test indicated a substantial difference among the mean scores for the teachers with different years of experience, thus supporting the finding that teachers with more years of experience tended to have a higher autonomy orientation.

TABLE 8
THE RESULTS OF THE AUTONOMY ORIENTATION VARIABILITY ANALYSIS

	Sum of squares	df.	F	Significance
Within group:	3687.56	4	2.11	.068
Between group:	43325.65	97		
Total		101		

Because the difference between p =.068 and .05 is not significant, it is clear from the table that there were no significant differences in the teachers' autonomy orientations based on their years of experience. Hence, we can conclude that experience did not play an essential role in shaping teachers' views concerning autonomy.

Interpretations of the Teachers' Orientations

The teachers who participated in the qualitative research gave their opinions about the group's scores and the overall outcomes, as well as how they interpreted the scores concerning the groups.

The Saudi EFL teachers stated that the moderate support for learners' autonomy was the result of a widespread "teacher-centered mentality" among EFL teachers, and was due to issues such as "curriculum overload and inflexibility". They also believed that female teachers had a more autonomy-supportive attitude because they were "more highly motivated than male teachers" and "more sensitive and responsive to the feelings and viewpoints of their students".

With regard to the insignificant effect of years of experience on the teachers' autonomy orientations, the participants suggested that there was a "prevailing negative conception of learner autonomy among teachers, which creates a collective attitude that shapes teachers' perspective irrespective of years of experience." However, some teachers also suggested that "being more familiar with the latest educational technology" may be why less experienced teachers were more inclined to support learners' autonomy.

When asked to explain their scores, regardless of their type of orientation, all the teachers stated that the "lack of professional development efforts," "fixed curricula," and "the prevailing negative attitude toward autonomy" were the main reasons for their autonomy orientation scores. However, they expressed the need to be more supportive of autonomy because it leads to "better outcomes for EFL learners".

V. DISCUSSION

The survey of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia revealed that they scored near the controlling end of the spectrum for autonomy-supportive teaching, with some scores even being lower than zero. This suggests that, while some of the teachers currently supported student autonomy, they may shift to a more authoritarian teaching style in the future. This could be due to several factors. First, educators may believe that standard materials and evaluations are required to ensure correspondence and coordination in language learning (Reeve & Jang, 2006), which leads to a lack of understanding of autonomy-supportive teaching methods and ways of supporting students' autonomy. Furthermore, the emphasis on standardization in the Saudi Arabian school system may limit teachers' approaches to classroom autonomy. Finally, teachers may believe that students, rather than teachers, have the right to autonomy in the classroom, which can lead to a lack of support for autonomy among teachers. When these factors interact, they can result in a lack of autonomy-supportive teaching practices and limited student autonomy in the classroom.

> According to my observations, Saudi students are unaware of "autonomy". They are guided, or sometimes hampered, by their families or teachers until they attend college, to the point at which they may lose their way or do not know what to do when they are not being led. College is the point at which they can make their own decisions. (T6; score: +39)

It is important to emphasize Maehr's (1976) argument that whether students' psychological needs are addressed, which eventually leads to intrinsic motivation, may be a cultural issue. Maehr came to this conclusion based on a study that was conducted in the United States. Schools, which are components of society, are influenced by both public policy and by the cultural background. If a certain culture exerts more pressure on people to succeed, it generally becomes difficult for educational stakeholders to reinforce a classroom orientation that supports autonomy among their students. According to Peacock (2001), culture is responsible for these perceptions because there is a considerable difference in the pedagogical approaches of teachers from different ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, in a study conducted by Reeve et al. (2004), it was argued that the public attitude toward collectivist or individualist orientations had limited correlations with the controlling or autonomy-oriented attitudes of the teachers. For example, the authors stated that teachers from collectivist cultures reported their tendency to adopt a more controlling attitude toward their students due to the practices in their cultures. In their research, Kozan et al. (2007) concluded that most of the organizations in Saudi Arabia focused more on collectivist and central decision-making through a more active and controlling leadership. All these factors have the potential to lead Saudi Arabian schools to adopt directions that are comparable to those of Saudi Arabian organizations (Kozan et al., 2007). Following this line of reasoning, a teacher may conclude that even students in secondary school, who are expected to behave independently and take greater responsibility for their own learning, are still unable to act independently.

The autonomy orientations of male and female teachers were notably different, as indicated by the significant differences in the scores that the female teachers attained for autonomy support. While few studies have examined

gender in this context, Chudgar and Sankar (2008) and Özkal and Demirkol (2014) found that female teachers generally had a more supportive attitude toward the autonomy of their students than did their male colleagues. This conclusion may be due to the perception that females are more empathic and forgiving than are males (Broidy et al., 2003), while males are often considered to more dominating than women. In addition, Strober and Tyack (1980) suggested that mothers were "better teachers than males" and were more supportive of one another because they were patient, understanding, and nurtured one another. In their comments, the Saudi Arabian educators who were asked about this topic mentioned that they believed that innate and acquired gender inequalities and their power associations could be at the root of this critical finding. An explanation of the difference, namely that it may be the outcome of gender preconceptions imposed by society, can be seen in the following passage:

> On the other hand, the explanations may have origins in archaic gender-based norms that persist in today's culture. Nevertheless, the results make it abundantly clear that men are more dominant; for instance, they are more authoritative. (T1; score: +80)

The group of teachers with the most experience (more than 20 years) had more controlling attitudes, while the younger teachers were less controlling than were the older teachers. This may have been the result of changes in the demographics of the students, as well as an increasing technological divide between older teachers and younger students. More experienced educators may not feel adequately prepared to teach the new generations, which may result in them adopting a more controlling approach. This may occur because the new generations are regarded as being more advanced locals, whereas the older educators are regarded as being more advanced outsiders (McMahon, 2016).

In support of this conclusion, Nakata (2011) argued that increased involvement over extended periods, particularly in an educational context focused on standardized testing, may erode a student's capacity for independent thought and action. However, the sample's differences cannot serve as a basis for making conclusions about the general population because the participants' years of experience invalidated the statistical significance of their autonomy orientation scores. According to the participants, the main reason that the experience variable did not reveal significant differences was because of the difficulty of transitioning in one's employment. The following quotation is from a teacher who exercised a reasonable degree of authority:

> When you begin working for an organization with clearly defined objectives, the effects of graduation and participation begin to lose some relevance. You have the impression that you need to adapt and become more independent to keep the equilibrium and fulfill the requirements of the institutional goals. (T2; score: -3)

There was no discernible difference between the graduation directions and the independence directions that the EFL teachers expressed. This insignificance may have been caused by a lack of teacher training regarding the issue of student autonomy and the particular nature of the teachers' educational experience as having been students before beginning to work. Surprisingly, it was found that non-ELT graduates had significantly higher ratings on the autonomy orientation scale than did ELT graduates. Their personal and professional efforts, such as engaging in a training program about CELTA, were found to be more significant than was their former education:

> One possible explanation is that I learned more about how to give students more time for independent activities during CELTA. Another reason is that, given their ages, I believe they should choose how rather than what they learn because they are learners. (T1; score: 80)

An analysis of the teachers' opinions revealed that their reasons for orientation toward autonomy were largely similar. They could choose a better and more enjoyable method of learning.

Subsequently, it is conceivable that the educators' perspectives were not formed by their independent directions. For example, language teachers with varying scores appeared to agree on the orientation-related results, with females demonstrating greater independence and stability than males. In addition, instructors with normal, low, and high independence directions stated that their reasons for their independence directions were unaffected by long periods of involvement and graduation division, as this was largely due to their adaptation to the work environment and their personality traits.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, despite having many of the same ideas in common, teachers' interpretations of the system they used resulted in a wide range of scores; teachers with average controlling scores could be more inclined toward fostering autonomy and independence among students while working on their own improvement by engaging with different writing materials. Conversely, teachers with higher-than-average controlling scores could easily ascribe this to the syllabus forcing them to behave in certain ways. Although the former example is more likely, the first step in encouraging teachers to act with more autonomy should be to confirm the instructors' beliefs and the motivations underlying these beliefs. When this occurs, teachers can serve as models for their students, and can encourage them to become more self-directed in their educational pursuits.

According to this study, most of the language teachers were found to have orientations that were supportive of autonomy. No instructor was either completely independent or entirely authoritarian in the classroom. Despite this, the range for control had scores relatively near to the mean. The sole factor that changed the teachers' attitudes was gender; the researchers discovered that female educators were more supportive. There was little difference among the experiences of the instructors and those of the graduating department and their autonomous orientations. When

explaining their reasoning, the instructors mainly blamed the school system in Saudi Arabia for the lack of autonomy support contributing to their autonomy orientation scores. In addition, their perspectives revealed that they lacked explicit definitions of autonomy-supportive teaching and techniques for providing such teaching for their students. However, the teachers' responses indicated that their autonomous attitudes and their perspectives were incompatible. How instructors interpreted their surrounding environment had a substantial bearing on the choices and judgments that they made, but this did not appear to be connected to the stance that they adopted regarding autonomy. This may be the missing piece when developing an environment that fosters more autonomy. The teachers' negative opinions about their roles and the opportunities available to them were partly influenced by their sense that they had a limited amount of control.

VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The main limitation of this review is that the findings cannot be generalized to all other language schools or language educators since an in-depth investigation of Saudi educators is required. Furthermore, this study might be considered a single-case study because it was only conducted in one region of Saudi Arabia.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study will have significant repercussions, not only for language teachers but also for administrative personnel. Education initiatives for current and prospective employees may also benefit from the findings. First, it should be abundantly clear to teachers that fostering a sense of autonomy in students leads to improved academic performance (Reeve & Jang, 2006). Therefore, educators should be encouraged to be more aware of the possibilities available to them regarding their autonomy. Furthermore, they need to be made aware that it is not exclusively the students' responsibility to exercise autonomy, as teachers are obliged to cultivate and sustain an autonomy-promoting environment in their classrooms. The majority of those who took part in the study stated that, if they were to do it again, they would participate in more in-depth training on topics such as what autonomy-supportive teaching is, how it can be encouraged, and what obligations are shared between teachers and students. It is possible that the most effective strategy for training teachers would be to demonstrate real-world examples of behaviors that are supportive of student autonomy, and to explain how the instructors' words and choices impact on their pupils. Perhaps all that is needed is for instructors to be encouraged to view events from a variety of perspectives. According to the feedback that the instructors provided verbally, educators in charge of children's development should have a heightened awareness of the likelihood that this will have a substantial impact on their students' development. Administrators can be in a position to make decisions to improve the overall learning environment in their institutions if they are aware of the autonomy orientations of their teaching staff. For example, in a class with more than one teacher, each group of students could have a diverse, yet complementary assortment of instructors allocated to them.

That is, instead of having two teachers controlling one class, it is preferable to have one teacher who encourages students' autonomy and another who maintains order. This setup will result in a more equitable learning environment and will provide students with more opportunities to become autonomous language learners. The findings of this study could potentially be helpful in the establishment of programs for pre-service and in-service training for teachers. These programs allow instructors to make choices and to internalize the reasons for events that are outside their control. Instead of demanding a more flexible curriculum, teachers could realize their power and roles to make their teaching more adaptable and supportive by providing students with opportunities to become autonomous language learners. Lastly, if pre-service teachers are given the opportunity to experience autonomy support for themselves, they may be more likely to support the autonomy of their students once they begin teaching because pre-service teachers learn best by doing. This makes it possible for future generations to inherit greater degrees of autonomy and support in comparison to previous generations.

It is possible that the study's conclusions, which focused on language teachers in Saudi Arabia, do not apply to language teachers in other countries. Generalizability would require a sample that is more representative of the total population. Teachers' impressions of the possible variables that could affect their autonomy and suggestions for addressing the issues may be ideal beginning steps in encouraging them to act more freely because their perceptions are based on their own experiences. In addition, the perspectives of instructors, their levels of autonomy, the potential variables that affect their independence, and the solutions that correspond to these problems could be the subject of future research. Because providing autonomy support is a concept that can be acquired, researching the autonomy orientations of teachers who work with young students and planning training sessions for them may be extremely helpful. Finally, evaluating the post-training impacts of awareness-raising training on autonomy support is possible, as the success of these training programs is largely dependent on the instructors implementing what they have learned in their daily teaching practice. According to a study by Daif-Allah and Aljumah (2020), implementing training programs must be a consistent routine to ensure their success. It is important to note that professional development is an ongoing process, and that teachers should engage in on-going training to sustain the implementation of the training in their teaching.

In general, it is essential to bear in mind that the success of a training program depends on the instructors. Because of this, EFL teachers who are employed in schools teaching foreign languages must participate in training programs concerning motivational orientations.

REFERENCES

[1]   Alharbi, A. (2019). The impact of Saudi Arabian teachers' beliefs on their use of 11 or 12 in the classroom in the context of communicative language teaching: A literature review. *Arab World English Journal*, *10*(4), 344–355. https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no4.25

[2]   Almohideb, N. (2019). *Investigating Saudi Arabian teachers' and students' perspectives on teaching English by using the CLT approach* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow]. University of Glasgow Theses Service. https://theses.gla.ac.uk/81760/

[3]   Al-Samiri, R. A. (2021). *English language teaching in Saudi Arabia in response to the Covid-19 pandemic: Challenges and positive outcomes* [SSRN Scholarly Paper]. Retrieved February 29, 2022, from https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3851682

[4]   Black, A. E., & Deci, E. L. (2000). The effects of instructors' autonomy support and students' autonomous motivation on learning organic chemistry: A self-determination theory perspective. *Science Education*, *84*(6), 740–756. https://doi.org/10.1002/1098237X(200011)84:6<740:AID-SCE4>3.0.CO;2-3

[5]   Brenner, C. A. (2022). Self-regulated learning, self-determination theory and teacher candidates' development of competency-based teaching practices. *Smart Learning Environments*, *9*(1), 3. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-021-00184-5

[6]   Broidy, L., Cauffman, E., Espelage, D. L., Mazerolle, P., & Piquero, A. (2003). Sex differences in empathy and its relation to juvenile offending. *Violence and Victims*, *18*(5), 503–516. https://doi.org/10.1891/vivi.2003.18.5.503

[7]   Chudgar, A., & Sankar, V. (2008). The relationship between teacher gender and student achievement: Evidence from five Indian states. *Compare*, *38*(5), 627–642. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920802351465

[8]   Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson.

[9]   Daif-Allah, Ayman. & Aljumah, Fahad. (2020). Differences in motivation to learning English among Saudi university students. *English Language Teaching*, *13*(2), 63. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v13n2p63

[10]   Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behaviour.* New York: Plenum.

[11]   Deci, E. L., Schwartz, A. J., Sheinman, L., & Ryan, R. M. (1981). An instrument to assess adults' orientations toward control versus autonomy with children: Reflections on intrinsic motivation and perceived competence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *73*, 642–650. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.73.5.642

[12]   Demir, M., Burton, S., & Dunbur. (2019). Professor-student rapport & perceived autonomy support as predictors of course and student outcomes. *Teaching of Psychology*, *46*(1), 22–33.

[13]   Fedesco, H. N., Bonem, E. M., Wang, C., & Henares, R. (2019). Connections in the classroom: Separating the effects of instructor and peer relatedness in the basic needs satisfaction scale. *Motivation and Emotion*, *43*(5), 758–770. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-019-09765-x

[14]   Guay, F. (2022). Applying self-determination theory to education: Regulations types, psychological needs, and autonomy supporting behaviors. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, *37*(1), 75–92. https://doi.org/10.1177/08295735211055355

[15]   Hsu, H.-C. K., Wang, C. V., & Levesque-Bristol, C. (2019). Reexamining the impact of self-determination theory on learning outcomes in the online learning environment. *Education and Information Technologies*, *24*(3), 2159–2174. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-019-09863-w

[16]   Hu, P., & Zhang, J. (2017). A pathway to learner autonomy: A self-determination theory perspective. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, *18*(1), 147–157. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-016-9468-z

[17]   Hameed, P. F. M. (2020). Saudi EFL students' beliefs on communicative language teaching. *TESOL International Journal*, *15*(3), 6–19.

[18]   Jeno, L. M., & Diseth, A. (2014). A self-determination theory perspective on autonomy support, autonomous self-regulations, and perceived school performance. *Reflecting Education*, *9*(1), 1–20.

[19]   Kozan, M. K., Ergin, C., & Varoglu, D. (2007). Third party intervention strategies of managers in subordinates' conflicts in Turkey. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, *18*(2), 128–147. https://doi.org/10.1108/10444060710759345

[20]   Leroy, N., Bressoux, P., Sarrazin, P., & Trouilloud, D. (2007). Impact of teachers' implicit theories and perceived pressures on the establishment of an autonomy supportive climate. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, *22*(4), 529–545. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03173470

[21]   Maehr, M. L. (1976). Continuing motivation: An analysis of a seldom considered educational outcome. *Review of Educational Research*, *46*(3), 443–462. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543046003443

[22]   McMahon, M. J. (2016). The adoption of a virtual learning environment among "digital immigrant" engineering lecturers: A case study. *Irish Journal of Academic Practice*, *5*(1), Article 3. https://doi.org/10.21427/D78B04

[23]   Nakata, Y. (2011). Teachers' readiness for promoting learner autonomy: A study of Japanese EFL high school teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *27*(5), 900–910. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.03.001

[24]   Özkal, N., & Demirkol, A. Y. (2014). Opinions of teachers on the necessity and execution of learners' autonomy support. *Education Sciences*, *9*(3), 293–310. https://doi.org/10.12739/NWSA.2014.9.3.1C0619

[25]   Peacock, M. (2001). Pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs about second language learning: A longitudinal study. *System*, *29*(2), 177–195. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(01)00010-0

[26]   Reeve, J., & Jang, H. (2006). What teachers say and do to support students' autonomy during a learning activity. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *98*(1), 209–214. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.98.1.209

[27]   Reeve, J., Jang, H., Carrell, D., Jeon, S., & Barch, J. (2004). Enhancing students' engagement by increasing teachers' autonomy support. *Motivation and Emotion*, *28*(2), 147–169. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1023/B:MOEM.0000032312.95499.6f

[28] Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *The American Psychologist*, *55*(1), 68–78. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68

[29] Safi, M. (2020). English as a second language teachers' perspectives of culturally relevant pedagogy for Saudi university students. *Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies*. Retrieved May 15, 2022, from https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/9807

[30] Strober, M. H., & Tyack, D. (1980). Why do women teach and men manage? A report on research on schools. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *5*(3), 494–503. https://doi.org/10.1086/493734

Abdulaziz Al-Qahtani is an assistant professor of English at the University of Jeddah. He received his BA degree in English from Umm Al-Qura University in 1994 and MA degree from Taif University in 2009. In 2016, he received his PhD in applied linguistics from Newcastle University, UK. At the start of his career, he taught English at Saudi secondary schools for 9 years, and then he was promoted as an English language supervisor at Taif's General Directorate of Education for 8 years. He has also worked as a teacher assistant in MA level modules such as Introduction to TESOL and Thinking Skills at Newcastle University between 2012 and 2016. From 2017 to 2019, he headed the Department of Private Language Institutes in Taif. Since 2020, he has been the chairman of English and Translation Department at the University of Jeddah. He has published several articles which addressed issues in foreign language teaching/ learning; EFL reading comprehension and critical/ creative reading; critical discourse analysis; and creative thinking.