

Investigating the Effects of Humanistic Elements of the Classroom Environments on Learners' EFL Learning Development in Shahrekord

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Abstract

With the emergence of learner-centered approaches to teaching, the importance of learner autonomy becomes more and more evident. In addition, there are many of elements in English teaching/learning environments that may affect the EFL language learner's autonomous learning. Thus, this study was conducted, aiming to find out the extent to which students think the autonomy of the learner is affected by the elements of both teacher's teaching and learner's learning in the teaching of English to the high-school-aged students. The data of the study were collected by questionnaires, after which the data were analyzed quantitatively. The results showed that high school students experienced an environment of English teaching/learning in the language centers, in which they have gained rather frequently their autonomous learning. Also the findings revealed that open discussion, classroom partnership and reflection of teaching/learning methods ensure that the development of the learner's autonomy is supported in teaching/learning process sufficiently.

Keywords: Teacher's Teaching, Learner's Learning, Humanistic Elements, EFL Learning Development

1. Introduction

Given the wide acceptance of learner-centered methods and approaches to teaching foreign languages, more weight is currently put on the role of the learner in the learning process. No more are learners viewed as passive recipients of information, but as active interpreters and processors of knowledge, which they seek based on their own interests and needs. This interest in the learner's role in the learning process has given rise to the concept of learner autonomy, which means the learner's ability to control and take responsibility of his or her own learning (Ikonen, 2013).

Most educators and thinkers agree that autonomy should be taken as a desirable educational aim in order for students to master the new language. In this respect, many conceptions have been proposed and many educators have tried to explain learner autonomy.

Also, according to Greene and Azevedo (2007) classroom teaching can produce significant effect on the creation of autonomous learning atmosphere and the improvement of learners' autonomous learning ability, this is while sufficient attention and researches have not been aroused. Most of the previous relevant research focused on learners' autonomous learning itself, and few of them discussed the effect of classroom environments on it. So it seems necessary to make an exploration into how and at what degree "teachers' teaching" and "learners' learning" affect the autonomous EFL learning of the Iranian high school learners from the perspective of environment factors.

Since language learning has become an essential component in people's lives, educational research has emphasized the need for students to take responsibility for their own learning. It goes without saying that this shift of responsibility from teachers to learners is the result of changes in the curriculum towards a more learner-centered learning. Thus, in order to contribute to the development of learner-centered education in

language classrooms, it is vital that students be involved in taking control of their own learning (Nematipour, 2012).

Although learner autonomy has caught the attention of many scholars and practitioners in the past few decades, interestingly it has not been studied much. It seems to be a concept the importance of which is widely recognized, but which no one seems to be able to grasp. As learning and language learning, in specific, is a complex phenomenon, so seems to be learner autonomy. It is probably due to this complex and multidimensional nature of learner autonomy that it has not been studied that widely, at least not to the extent the increased interest in the concept would suggest.

Nevertheless, this study took the challenge. In particular, this study focused on learners' perceptions of the promotion of learner autonomy in the context of English teaching in upper secondary schools in Iran. The aim of the present study is to examine the extent to which learner autonomy is perceived to be affected by humanistic elements of EFL classroom environments in English teaching in a number of language schools of Iran.

Classroom environment factors are generally composed of the three factors which affect the classroom teaching, and are respectively independent but closely associated with each other. They include the material elements, which consist of subject course and learning tasks, the social elements which are made up of the relationship between the teachers and the learners and their interactivity, and also the cultural elements that consist of educational concept, social norms and expectations (Li & Yin, 2010).

It is believed that classroom environments generally includes physical environments and humanistic environments. The latter refers to the social psychological environments in the classroom and is created by both teachers and learners (Sun, 2010). Thus, in view of the coverage of the classroom environments, the author of this research mainly aims to investigate the social-psychological elements of the classroom environments since the response and feeling of the classroom participators towards the classroom environments

usually produce significant effect on individual and collective behaviors (Fraser, 1998), and to find out how the teachers' teaching and learners' learning affect the autonomous EFL learning of the Iranian learners. This study is significant because it applies one of the famous approaches on the current concept of autonomous learning- classroom-based approach.

In order to find out how the teachers' teaching and learners' learning affect the autonomous EFL learning of the Iranian learners' of non-English majors at Language schools, this study aims to answer the following two main questions: **(a)** in the students' opinion, to what extent is learner autonomy affected by the teacher's teaching component of Humanistic elements involved in English classroom in high schools?, **(b)** In the students' opinion, to what extent is learner autonomy affected by the learner's learning component of Humanistic elements in English classroom in high schools?. Also, two sub main questions raised here are as follows: (1) in the students' opinion, are some aspects of learner autonomy affected more than others?, and (2) do such variables as gender and age, of the learners have an effect on or a connection to the answers?

Therefore, based on the research questions, our research hypotheses are formulated as follows:

- a. Specific element(s) of teachers' teaching does effect on the autonomous learning of the EFL learners.
- b. Specific element(s) of learners' learning does effect on the autonomous learning of the EFL learners.
- c. There is a significant correlation between age/gender of the EFL learners toward reaching to the autonomous learning.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

The present study was conducted in Shahrekord, Iran, in the academic year 2017-18 among high school students studying English at two language learning centers. The statistical population of the study consisted of 31 high school students (15 girls and 16 boys) attending a preliminary or lower intermediate level English course. The participants in this research were preliminary or lower intermediate level learners from Language schools in Shahrekord, Chaharmahal-va-Bakhtiari province, Iran, who was availablely sampled at the same level. Preliminary or lower intermediate level learners are selected as participants for two reasons. Firstly because learners in their initial years of study might have lacked in experience on English learning in language school. And the second reason derives from neuropsychological research on executive functioning, which means the self-regulatory functions related to cognitive processes such as learning, develop late (Reynolds 2008: 879). Research findings such as these imply that the older the learners, the more accurately they can reflect on their learning, which is exactly why preliminary or lower intermediate level learners are selected as participants. Questionnaires are distributed among the learners in the classroom and returned on the spot. This research was performed in Navid, Rahe Noo and Shahre Zaban institutes.

2.2 Instrument

The measurement instrument used in this research is based on Xu et al.'s (2004) "Questionnaire on Undergraduates' Autonomous EFL Learning" which consists of 31 items, covering five aspects of learners' autonomous EFL learning, namely clear requirements, plan making, strategy usage, self-monitoring and self-evaluation. Likert scale with five point scoring was used for items from "not clear" (one point) to very much clear (five points) or from "bad" (one point) to "very good" (five points). As for the measurement of the specific elements for teachers' teaching and learners' learning, it

is based on Sun's (2010) "Evaluation Scale for College English Classroom Environments" and designed and revised according to the current classic measurement scales for classroom environments and the Iranian specific characteristics, including nine dimensions such as teachers' support, learners' cooperation, learners' responsibilities and 31 items in all. The questionnaire also uses Likert scale with five point scoring, from "never" (one point) to "always" (five points).

In this research, the data gathering tool was a questionnaire, developed in six sections based on Likert scale 5 (see appendix 1). The design of the questionnaire was done by applying the views of the supervisor. And also exploratory factor analysis was used to ensure the validity of the questionnaire. Upon the results from this analysis, the data gathering tool was valid sufficiently (see table 4-18). Also, in order to measure the reliability of the questionnaire, 31 questionnaires were distributed first, and after the calculation of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and their acceptability, the questionnaire distribution was done.

After carrying out an analysis of reliability for the main components of the questionnaire and deleting some items to achieve the desired alpha coefficient, the value of alpha for the components, including impact of opportunities (0.811 for question 1, 0.731 for question 2), objectives and needs (0.649 for question 1, 0.834 for question 2), support (0.692 for question 1, 0.770 for question 2), metacognitive acts (0.750 for question 1, 0.849 for question 2), atmosphere (0.681 for question 1, 0.725 for question 2), and motivation (0.747 for question 1, 0.674 for question 2) was obtained, showing an internal correlation between the items of the questionnaire; and thus the questionnaire's reliability was confirmed (see table 4-16 in the next chapter).

3.3 Procedures

The compilation of the data required for research is one of its essential steps and is the beginning of a process by which the researchers collect the field and the library findings, compile them in an inductive manner through classification, and then

analyzes them. After that, the researcher evaluates his/her developed hypotheses and eventually issues a statement and answers to the research question by relying on them. In other words, by relying upon the data gathered, the researcher will discover the reality as it is. Therefore, the reliability of the information is very important, because invalid information prevents the discovery of the truth and the research problem remains unknown, or presents a deviant or incorrect image. As a result, In order to maintain the credibility of the collected data, the researcher must pay particular attention to at least two principles of accuracy and correctness.

One of the most common methods for gathering field information is the questionnaire method that makes it possible to collect data in a large scale. In descriptive research as well as in studies with a large geographic scope or with large population and samples, the questionnaire method is usually used. The questionnaire method needs predictions, planning and the provision of human resources that the researcher must be sure of. In the questionnaire methods, several elements are involved that through their coordinated function the researcher can collect the information he needs. These elements are: data gathering tool (questionnaire), planning and implementation of the questionnaire, respondents and factors for the implementation of the questionnaire.

After collecting, extracting and classifying data through above mentioned methods and instruments, their Statistical analysis were administrated as follows:

Firstly, we used the explorative factor analysis to analyze the factor structure of the questionnaires so as to validate its construction validity, and at the same time calculated the Cronbach's Alpha of each factor in the questionnaires. According to the questions to be answered in this research, we applied mean analysis. In order to answer the first and the second questions, we took teachers' teaching and learners' learning as independent variables and learners' autonomous EFL learning results as dependent variables to examine the effect of teachers' teaching and learners' learning on learners' autonomous EFL learning via mean analysis. To answer the third question, we took

teachers' teaching and learners' learning as independent variables in the same Pearson correlation analysis and autonomous EFL learning as dependent variable to find out the effect of interaction between teaching and learning on autonomous learning. In addition, this research employed SPSS 25 as statistical analysis instrument and all the significant levels for inductive statistics are considered at $P < .05$.

Before the explorative factor analysis of the questionnaires, we validated the normal distribution of each item in the two questionnaires. Results should indicate that the questionnaires are accorded with the requirements of single variable normal distribution. Next, for the Effect of Teachers' Teaching on Learners' Autonomous EFL Learning, we took learners' autonomous learning (taken from all the items that were added together in "Questionnaire on Secondary school's Autonomous EFL Learning") as dependent variables, and the four essential elements for teachers' teaching (fair teaching, teachers' guidance, creative teaching and teachers' support) as independent variables, controlled the virtual variables such as the subject and learners' sex and made multiple regression analysis. After that, for the Effect of Learners' Learning on the Autonomous Learning, we took the five elements for learners' learning such as learners cooperation, partnership, classroom participation, task orientation and learning responsibilities as independent variables, controlled the two virtual variables of learners' sex and subject and made a multiple regression analysis of the autonomous EFL learning for learners of non-English majors. Finally, for the Interaction between Teachers' Teaching and Learners' Learning on Autonomous EFL Learning, based on the results from previous steps, we analyzed how and at what degree the interaction between teachers' teaching and learners' learning affects the autonomous EFL learning for learners of non-English majors. Hence, we took the five elements of learners' learning and the four elements of teachers' learning as independent variables control the two virtual variables of sex and subject and make a regression analysis of the autonomous EFL learning for learners of non-English majors.

In this study, descriptive tables have been also used to examine and analyze the data and beside them explanatory tables have also been used. To prove the hypothesis of the

dissipation (existence of a significant relationship between dependent and independent variables), the Chi-square test was used which would determine the accuracy/inaccuracy of the research hypotheses. The statistical data related to Chi-square were analyzed after entering the data in the SPSS software.

3. Results

In this study, we tried to use a descriptive method to obtain the frequency, percentage, mean, median, and 90th percentile; where in total included in frequency distribution tables, tables for mean difference by the questionnaire's items, age and gender, correlation by theme tables, and factor analysis table. In addition, in order to measure the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated for each theme and by the two questions (i.e. the perceived frequency of a statement and the satisfaction with the perceived frequency of a statement) (see Table1).

Table1 Frequency Distribution of the Participants based on the Age (N=31, median 17)

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
14	2	6.5	6.5	6.5
15	7	22.6	22.6	29.0
16	6	19.4	19.4	48.4
17	7	22.6	22.6	71.0
18	7	22.6	22.6	93.5
19	2	6.5	6.5	100.0
Total	31	100.0	100.0	

According to Table 2, in total, 31 subjects were present in this study with a mean of 17 years. And, the frequency distribution regarding the age of the subjects was respectively as follows: The highest frequency belonged to the ages of 15, 17 and 18 each with a frequency of 22.6 representing 29% of the subjects. After these ages, the age of 16 had the highest frequency (N=6), representing 19.4% of the subjects. Also, there were two 19-years-old subjects, representing 6.5% of the subjects, as well as two 14-years-old subjects, representing 6.5% of the subjects.

In order to measure the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated for each theme. The results are summarized in the Table 3.

Table 3. Reliability of the Questionnaire Items based on the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients of the Questions by Theme.

Theme	Perceived frequency
Choice	.811
Goals and needs	.753
Support	.863
Metacognition	.770
Emotional climate	.750
Motivation	.747
Cooperation	.711
Responsibility	.752
Partnership	.762

As we know, the closer the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is to 1, the more reliable an instrument is. In addition, an instrument can be considered reliable only if the value exceeds 0.700. Based on the alpha values in table 3, all of the themes received in the questions a value well above 0.700; the coefficient was in some cases above 0.800 value. Therefore, the results can be considered completely reliable.

To describe the connections between questionnaire items, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. In particular, correlation coefficients were calculated between the mean values of themes concerning the question how often a statement was true. When correlation coefficients were calculated, the linear connection between the two items was interpreted in the following way:

<0.300 = non-existent

>0.300 = *weak*

>0.500 = *moderate*

>0.700 = *fairly strong*

>0.900 = very strong.

In order to find out the possible differences between the answers of different groups, variance analysis was done on the data. In specific, the mean values of the themes and answers by gender and age were looked at in this respect. The results of variance analyses were treated as follows:

>0.05 = statistically insignificant

<0.01 = statistically significant

At last, the results of these calculations were grouped by the research questions of the study. In the following sections, the results of the study will be reported.

3.1. Results for the Perceived Impacts of Learner Autonomy

3.1.1. Teacher's Teaching Scale Themes

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of statements that were grouped according to the themes mentioned earlier. The results concerning the theme *Choice* (Table 4) are reported first.

Table 4. How often a Statement was True- *Choice*

Statement	Response alternatives (n)					N	Mean value
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %		
My English teacher...							
1. Allows me to choose working methods that suit me best.	2 (6.5)	0 (0.0)	5 (16.1)	12 (38.7)	12 (38.7)	31	4.03
2. Allows me to take part in the planning of schedules.	1 (30.2)	6 (19.4)	5 (16.1)	9 (29.0)	9 (29.0)	31	3.63
3. Allows me to set personal goals and to work according to them.	1 (3.2)	2 (6.5)	7 (22.6)	11 (35.5)	10 (32.3)	31	3.87

Response alternatives: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always

As seen in table 4, almost all of the statements concerning the theme *Choice* were evaluated more often positively than negatively: the majority of the statements (statement 1, 2 and 3) were thought to be true either *often* or *always* by a clear majority of the participants. In conclusion, it seems that the participants' English teacher made use of most of the strategies related to the theme *Choice* either *often* or *always*. The second theme in the questionnaire was Goals and needs, and the concerning it will be reported next (see Table 5).

Table 5. How often a Statement was True - *Goals and Needs*

Statement	Response alternatives (n)					N	Mean value
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %		
My English teacher...							
1. Helps me in setting My personal goals.	2 (6.5)	1 (3.2)	8 (25.8)	13 (41.9)	7 (22.6)	31	3.71
2. Supports me in setting and achieving personal goals.	1 (3.2)	9 (29.0)	13 (41.9)	8 (25.8)	0 (0.0)	31	2.90
3. Makes sure that I understand other-determined goals (e.g. Curricular goals).	1 (3.2)	10 (32.3)	8 (25.8)	8 (25.8)	4 (12.9)	31	3.13
4. Allows me to approach tasks in my personal way.	1 (3.2)	1 (3.2)	7 (22.6)	8 (25.8)	14 (45.2)	31	4.06
5. Allows me to work according to my personal goals even if they do not match my English Teacher's goals.	1 (3.2)	1 (3.2)	7 (22.6)	10 (32.7)	12 (38.7)	31	4.00

Response alternatives: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always

According to table 5, the statements related to the theme *Goals and needs* received rather mixed results: while only two statements (4 and 5) were thought to be true either *often* or *always* by the majority of the participants, in the rest of the statements the participants were not as unanimous. Nevertheless, the statements were evaluated more often positively than negatively, as can be seen in the mean values of the statements. In conclusion, it seems that the participants' English teacher made somewhat frequent use of most of the strategies related to the theme *Goals and needs*. The results concerning the statements related to the third theme of the questionnaire, Support, will be reported next (see Table 6).

Table 6. How often a Statement was True – *Support*

Statement My English teacher...	Response alternatives (n)					N	Mean value
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %		
1. Encourages me to ask for help and advice.	4 (12.9)	4 (12.9)	8 (25.8)	11 (35.5)	4 (12.9)	31	3.23
2. Allows me to work with a partner/in groups.	3 (9.7)	7 (22.6)	7 (22.6)	8 (25.8)	6 (19.4)	31	3.23
3. Offers me Materials (e.g. dictionaries, sites).	Referenc (e.g. Intern 3 (9.7)	7 (22.6)	6 (19.4)	11 (35.5)	4 (12.9)	31	3.19

Response alternatives: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always

As seen in table 4-6, the statements concerning the theme *Support* were quite often evaluated clearly negatively, which is reaffirmed with a mean value of either close to or above *rarely* of statements 1, 2, and 3. In addition, two statements (1 and 3) were evaluated positively by nearly one third of the participants, and statement 2 was evaluated negatively more often than positively. Thus it seems that the participants' English teacher made frequent use of most of the strategies related to the theme *Support*. The fourth theme of the questionnaire was Metacognition, and the results concerning it will be reported next (Table 7).

Table 7. How often a Statement was True – *Metacognition*

Statement My English teacher...	Response alternatives (n)					N	Mean value
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %		
1. Helps me in finding out Which learning styles suit me best.	1 (3.2)	3 (9.7)	10 (32.3)	9 (29.0)	8 (25.8)	31	3.65
2. Allows me to try out different working methods.	1 (3.2)	3 (9.7)	10 (32.3)	8 (25.8)	9 (29.0)	31	3.68
3. Pays attention to the process of learning	0	1	9	7	14		4.10

(instead of the outcome) in evaluation.	(0.0)	(3.2)	(29.0)	(22.6)	(45.2)	31	
4. Makes me notice my mistakes and helps me in correcting them.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (19.4)	5 (16.1)	20 (64.5)	31	4.45
5. Helps me in discovering my strengths and weaknesses.	0 (0.0)	3 (9.7)	2 (6.5)	8 (25.8)	18 (58.1)	31	4.32
6. Allows me to bring out my strengths e.g. By letting me help other students.	2 (6.5)	1 (3.2)	5 (16.1)	8 (25.8)	13 (41.9)	29	4.00

Response alternatives: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always

As seen in table 7, the statements related to the theme *Metacognition* were most frequently evaluated as being true *always*. In addition, they were more often evaluated positively (i.e. as being true either *sometimes*, *often* or *always*) than negatively. Thus, in the participants' opinion, their English teacher made use of the strategies related to the theme *Metacognition* mostly *always*. The results concerning the statements related to the fifth theme of the questionnaire, *Emotional climate*, will be reported next (see Table 8).

Table 8. How often a Statement was True - *Emotional climate*

Statement	Response alternatives (n)					N	Mean value
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %		
1. I feel that I can be open towards my English teacher.	0 (0.0)	6 (19.4)	6 (19.4)	7 (22.6)	12 (38.7)	31	3.81
2. My English teacher responds to feedback in teaching.	0 (0.0)	3 (9.7)	2 (6.5)	5 (16.1)	20 (64.5)	31	4.40
3. My English teacher encourages me to take part in decision-making.	0 (0.0)	1 (3.2)	1 (3.2)	5 (16.1)	24 (77.4)	31	4.68
4. My English teacher encourages me to ask questions.	0 (0.0)	3 (9.7)	1 (3.2)	6 (19.4)	19 (61.3)	29	4.41

Response alternatives: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always

As seen in the table 8, most of the statements were evaluated positively by the majority of the participants. In other words, in the participants' opinion, their English teacher made frequent use of a clear majority of the strategies related to the theme Emotional climate. The last theme of the teacher's teaching factor in the questionnaire was *Motivation*, and the results concerning it will be reported next (Table9).

Table 9. How often a Statement was True – Motivation

Statement	Response alternatives (n)					N	Mean value
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %		
My English teacher							
1. Helps me in finding out what motivates me in learning English.	1 (3.2)	8 (25.8)	4 (12.9)	4 (12.9)	14 (45.2)	31	3.71
2. Motivates me.	1 (3.2)	8 (25.8)	4 (12.9)	4 (12.9)	14 (45.2)	31	3.29

Response alternatives: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always

According to table 9, as most of the statements received rather mixed responses, the participants were not as unanimous in the theme *Motivation* as they were in the other themes. However, as can be seen from the mean values of the statements, all the statements had a mean value of either above or close to *rarely*. Thus it could be concluded that in the participants' opinion their English teacher used strategies related to *Motivation* mostly *rarely*.

3.1.2 Learner's Learning Scale Themes

The next three themes included in the questionnaire are related to the learner's learning factor. First, the *learner's cooperation*, and the results concerning it will be reported (Table 10):

Table 10. How often a Statement was True - *Learner's cooperation*

Statement	Response alternatives (n)					N	Mean value
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %		
1. I help my classmates to experience success in doing their assignments.	2 (6.5)	2 (6.5)	12 (38.7)	8 (25.8)	7 (22.6)	31	3.52
2. I do not challenge the slow learner and the advanced learner within the same class	1 (3.2)	6 (19.4)	10 (32.3)	9 (29.0)	5 (16.1)	31	3.35
3. I often feel that attending group activities and working with other members has increased my learning experience.	2 (6.5)	5 (16.1)	8 (25.8)	7 (22.6)	9 (29.0)	31	3.52

Response alternatives: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always

Based on the results from table 10, as can be seen from the mean values of the statements, all the statements had a mean value of either above or close to *sometimes*. Thus it could be concluded that in the participants' opinion they used strategies related to *classroom cooperation* mostly *sometimes*. The results concerning the statements related to the fifth theme of the questionnaire, *Task orientation and learning responsibility*, will be reported next (see Table 11).

Table 11. How often a Statement was True - *Task Orientation and Learning Responsibility*

Statement	Response alternatives (n)					N	Mean value
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %		
1. I use to evaluate my progress besides using tests	2 (6.5)	5 (16.1)	8 (25.8)	8 (25.8)	8 (25.8)	31	3.48
2. I usually do additional homework to learn more.	0 (0.0)	5 (16.1)	10 (32.3)	9 (29.0)	7 (22.6)	31	3.48

Response alternatives: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always

As observed in table 11, as can be seen from the mean values of the statements, all the statements had a mean value of either above or close to *sometimes*. Thus it could be concluded that in the participants' opinion they used strategies related to *Task orientation and learning responsibility* mostly *sometimes*. The results concerning the statements related to the last theme of the questionnaire, *Classroom Partnership*, will be reported next (see Table 12).

Table 12. How often a Statement was True - *Classroom Partnership*

Statement	Response alternatives (n)					N	Mean value
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %		
1. I often volunteer for the class activities	5 (16.1)	4 (12.9)	6 (19.4)	9 (29.0)	7 (22.6)	31	3.29
2. I feel that more engagement in classroom activities has increased my ability to speak in the classroom.	1 (3.2)	2 (6.5)	7 (22.6)	11 (35.5)	10 (32.3)	31	3.87
3. My participation in class activities has increased my level of readiness.	1 (3.2)	6 (19.4)	5 (16.1)	9 (29.0)	9 (29.0)	30	3.63

Response alternatives: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always

In accordance with the results from table 12, although most of the statements received rather mixed responses, they were evaluated positively by the majority of the participants. In other words, in the participants' opinion, as English learners, they made frequent use of a clear majority of the strategies related to the *classroom Partnership* theme.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Extent to Which Learner Autonomy is affected by Teacher's Teaching Elements

The first research question was concerned with the extent to which learner autonomy is in students' opinion affected by teacher's teaching strategies used in English teaching in upper secondary schools in Shahrekord, Iran. It was found that the participants thought that learner autonomy was generally affected fairly frequently by teacher's teaching elements, and that their English teacher made frequent use of most of the strategies related to the improvement of learner autonomy.

Although the results of this study indicated that in the students' opinion learner autonomy was in general affected in English teaching in upper secondary schools in Iran, they also revealed that some aspects of learner autonomy were affected less than others, and that some strategies were used less frequently than other strategies. According to the participants' answers, while the theme *Choice* was affected as a whole most frequently, the theme *Motivation* was perceived as being affected as a whole less often than *sometimes*. In the light of the previous studies, this uneven impact on the learner autonomy is not uncommon; as Camilleri (1999: 30-31), for example, found out, teachers tend to view some areas in teaching and learning to be better suited for the implementation of learner autonomy than others. This seems to be reflected in the results of the present study too.

Regarding the extent to which learner autonomy was perceived as being affected either positively or negatively, the effects of the participants' background variables, such as gender and age were studied. The comparison by gender showed that in most cases, the female participants have had a more positive attitude toward the perceived effects of learning autonomy on their teacher's use of appropriate teaching strategies; except in the theme *Goals and Needs*, in which in statements 3, 4 and 5 more male participants than

female ones had stated that their teacher was either nearly above *sometimes* or *often* use of the strategies related to Goals and Needs theme. Also, the same was true for the statements 1 and 2 of the *metacognition* theme. Furthermore, there were also mean differences in the male participants' answers, in which they had evaluated positively their teacher's frequent use of the teaching strategies related to the theme *Emotional Climate*.

In general, results of the comparisons by gender and age revealed that while the participants' gender had an effect only on some individual statements, the participants' age had an effect on a much wider scale. As it was concluded that the oldest participants (e.g. over 18-year-olds) were more critical than the younger participants in all the cases where differences were found, it seems that they perceived learner autonomy as being affected less often compared to the younger participants' perceptions. According to Barkley (2004) in Ikonen (2013) this difference between the age groups' answers could be related to *executive functioning*, which refers to the neuropsychological basis of the self-regulatory functions of cognitive processes such as learning. It has been proven by research (e.g. Reynolds, 2008) that this skill develops late; consequently, it could be that the oldest participants' self-regulatory and metacognitive skills were more mature, which would have resulted in different perceptions of teaching practices.

5.2. The Extent to Which Learner Autonomy is affected by Learner's Learning Elements

Regarding the second research question concerned with the extent to which learner autonomy is in students' opinion affected by learner's learning strategies in English learning in upper secondary schools in Shahrekord, it was found that the participants thought that their learning autonomy was generally affected fairly frequently by learner's learning elements, and that they made frequent use of most of the strategies related to the improvement of learner autonomy.

Although the results of this study in this regard revealed an increase in the learner use of the learner autonomy strategies in English learning in upper secondary schools in Shahrekord, they also revealed that some aspects of learner autonomy were affected less than others, and that some strategies were used less frequently than other strategies. According to the participants' answers, while the theme *Classroom Partnership* was affected as a whole most frequently, the themes *Learning Cooperation* and *Learning Responsibility* were perceived as being affected as a whole less often than *Often (mostly sometimes)*. Again, in accordance with Camilleri' view (1999), this uneven impact on the learner autonomy is not uncommon; and seems to be a reflection of teachers' tendency to view some areas in teaching and learning to be better suited for the implementation of learner autonomy than others, which manifested in the results of the present study.

Regarding the extent to which learner autonomy was perceived as being affected either positively or negatively by the learner's frequent use of learning strategies, the effects of the participants' background variables, such as gender and age were also studied. Results of these comparisons revealed same results as that in previous section. As in most cases, it turned out that they had positively evaluated their use of learning strategies with the exception of statement 2 in the *Learning Cooperation* theme, in which male participants are positively evaluated their use of learning strategies.

Regarding age, the results were the opposite of the results in the previous section.

As in most cases, a decreasing trend was observed in the mean differences of the answers by the over 18 year old participants compared with those of the lower ages. With an exception (Task Orientation and Learning Responsibility, Statement), a less frequent use of the strategies related to learner's learning was found, this means that like below 15 year old participants, those of over 18 year old have used less frequently of the learner learning strategies.

As it was concluded that both the oldest and the youngest participants (e.g. the participants over 18 and 14 year-olds) were more critical than the 15-17 years old

participants in all the cases where differences were found, it seems that they perceived learner autonomy as being affected less often compared to the 15-17 years old participants' perceptions. For the youngest participants (14 years old), according to Barkley (2004) in Ikonen (2013) this difference between the age groups' answers could be related to executive functioning, which refers to the neuropsychological basis of the self-regulatory functions of cognitive processes such as learning. It has been proven by research (e.g. Reynolds, 2008) that this skill develops late; consequently, it could be that the oldest participants' self-regulatory and metacognitive skills were more mature, which would have resulted in different perceptions of teaching practices. But, in the case of over 18-years old participants, such a decreasing difference might be due to the inadequate support, motivation or emotional climate provided by the teacher in the classroom.

6. Conclusion

As mentioned before, this study aimed to investigate the humanistic (social-psychological) elements of the classroom environments and find out how the teachers' teaching and learners' learning affect the autonomous EFL learning of the Iranian learners. Based on the results of this study, the answer to the research questions is that in the students' opinion, the learner autonomy was positively affected (affected fairly often) by both teacher's teaching and learner's learning elements in English teaching in upper secondary schools in Shahrekord. However, as some aspects of learner autonomy were in the students' opinion affected more often than others, reflection on and open discussion of both teaching and learning practices could reveal whether some aspects of teaching/learning could be upgraded.

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