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## **EFL Learner Autonomy and Identity through Group Work**

**(The Case of EFL Master One Students at Amar Telidji University, Laghouat )**

*Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirement of Master Degree in  
English*

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation and that due reference or acknowledgment is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.

**Date:** June 19, 2016.

**Signature:** BOUALAM Kaouthar .

## Dedication

This modest dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my grandmother **Aicha** ,to my parents who sparked my interest to wonder , ponder and then learn and to my brother and sisters especially **Chaima**.

## *Acknowledgements*

*Exalted in the above all, we would like to thank Allah who helped us to fulfill this work.*

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## Abstract

The study described in this paper stemmed from the desire to examine the assertion that foreign language learners are more successful when they are allowed to actively participate in their own learning process. This dissertation explores learner autonomy and identity through group work in English as a foreign language from the theoretical lens of constructivism and how may group work enhance learner autonomy and therefore, develop learner identity. Along this study, chapter one presents an overview about learner autonomy and identity While, the second chapter sheds light on learner autonomy through group work inside class and through facebook group out class setting and the effect of group work on learners' identity construction .To achieve the settled objectives, Chapter three is concerned with data collection and analysis in which research questionnaire as a research instrument has been administrated to EFL master one students at Laghouat University to investigate learners' perceptions of autonomy .In addition to an online observation that aims at looking closely to the extent to which master students are involved in autonomous learning in facebook group . Results have revealed that group work helps master one students to rely on themselves and develop their autonomous learning.

**Key words** : Learner autonmy , learner identity , group work , EFL , facebook group , master one students .

## **List of abbreviations**

**EFL** : English as a foreign language .

**ZPD** : Zone of Proximal Development.

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## General Introduction

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Twenty first century requires learners to be adaptive and confident of themselves in order to have access to education, capacity to learn, collaboration in knowledge. In terms of higher postgraduate education, independency in learning has been a topic of interest to many students since they have the capacity to manage their own learning and be active participants. In recent times, a new concept has been brought to the process of education in order to meet the demands of globalization. Researchers have created a concept known as “Autonomy” which enriches the domain of adults learning and encourages students to become more active in the learning process. It also leads to better achievement inside and outside formal settings. Besides autonomy, this study is concerned with learner identity discussion which has been in spotlight of many scholars and its relation to autonomous learning since the interaction between autonomy and identity becomes of the most influential elements that affect learner attitudes where autonomous learners act by engaging themselves in foreign language and use effective learning strategies outside and inside classroom practices .Therefore, the present study aims to investigate autonomous learning through group work inside and outside classroom .

Benson (2001), in his study addresses learner autonomy will be advanced by each exchanging responsibility from the teacher to the learner. This transfer might incorporate setting objectives, selecting strategies and by assessing progress .By this regard, the awareness of these ways assumes in advancing autonomy, without which transfer cannot occur and learners become passive, therefore, autonomy cannot be effectively raised as she believes that to encourage learner autonomy implies such factors learner’s motivation, needs, attitudes, learning styles and strategies have an essential part in autonomous learning .

Additionally , for Henry Holec (1981) Learner autonomy is a shift from a teacher - centered learning where she believes that attitude is a direct perception of learner’s one’s own learning that constructs learners’ identity .Taylor (2013) traces that attitude is a factor influencing autonomy towards learning in which the learner is ready to take and is responsible for his own learning through group work. While Henry Holec (1981) believes that learner autonomy must be the objective of all learning . According to Taylor, the attitude of expressing in foreign languages can be conveyed as tool in exploring identity both inside and outside classrooms that urge students to create and express their own particular identities through the language they are learning and make them more autonomous .Also, identities initially acknowledged as a stable entity of a learner, which controls his or her activities. Thus, identity changes through negotiation and focuses more signs of change over the

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environment where learning that lead to learner identity development. In this sense , in a classroom where learner autonomy is no real conversation does occur, learners might be unable to express their identities .

Literature also points , there is a link between Autonomy and identity Murray, Garold, Xuesong and Lamb (2011) argument that granting autonomy to learners where teachers afford an autonomous atmosphere that (re)construct their identities .The argument goes, if it is the learners themselves who share their ideas in the activity of learning and interact in the class and take responsibility for their knowledge ,Then they ought to be autonomous Furthermore , they believe that the more learners are motivated , the more autonomous they are While their study support Taylor (2013) observation that learners' identity may be a point of origin for the development of autonomy and one of its outcomes, they also suggest that identity construction can also be a point of origin for autonomy and drawing attention to the motivation of learners that build a strong autonomous learning even apart from classroom practices to lifelong learning . These two studies, indicate that the role of identity in language learning and its relationship to autonomous learning , and motivation as a factor which comes out at first as an impact on outside practices to provide and help learners for better autonomy . As the aforementioned studies show autonomy and identity as important part in language learning. However, there are few studies which have paid consideration of the direct connection between them.

The learning process holds wide range of issues. The way adults learn has been one of the major themes that encourages researchers to investigate more; they have discovered that adults learn in different ways and this truth uncovered many problems. .The present study takes into account the autonomous learning process which aims to induct EFL learners into ways of thinking, behaving and expressing themselves through working in groups inside and via facebook group outside class. Since most students nowadays consider the development of their English as a personal struggle that demands a high level of autonomy. Furthermore, the study main objective is to explore autonomous learning through group work and learners identities. “The teacher opens the door and you have to enter by yourself”, this proverb describes the principles underlying the current research. The context of the study is in Algerian higher education where the traditional teacher-led approach is not now common. Teaching and learning English especially in postgraduate level is limited to “entering by yourself”; that is, the main task of the learner to become autonomous in their learning.

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In the course of this reflection the main question is to what extent autonomous learning changes learner's attitudes and how it affects their identities .A chain of questions follows to clarify to what extent autonomous learning through group work in EFL context at the university makes them responsible for their own learning .

- In what ways can group work enhance learner autonomy in an EFL classroom?
- In what ways can Facebook group enhance learner autonomy outside classroom?
- To what extent learner autonomy through group work constructs learners' identity?

Without pretending to bring decisive answers to all these questions .One suggests the following hypotheses :

- Autonomy can be fostered if learners work in groups in and out class setting.
- Furthermore, identity construction may result from group discussions .

What fuels the present study on learner autonomy was a natural interest extending from my experience of being first year master student in which a remarkable shift towards learner centeredness where master one students assume by a desire to contribute towards filling the gap of autonomy between the theory and practice .This research can be considered as a first step in the design a course for EFL students that help to promote autonomous learning skills.

The objective of the current study was to explore EFL learners' perceptions about learner autonomy and the effect of group work on learner's identity. In particular the current research explore classroom practice through group work strategy and out classroom through the use social media such as facebook group for enhancing autonomy and therefore construct learning identity and to better build an autonomous learning atmosphere and construct their learning identities, This study discusses the essence of autonomy and learners' identity in EFL context and as it can be considered as a source of information in investigating the reality of learner autonomy inside and outside class .In addition; this contributes to the realization of autonomous EFL learning for postgraduate students

This study examines the major EFL autonomous learning through group work and its effect on learners' identity. Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) is the theoretical lens through which the issues on learner autonomy are examined and reported in this dissertation. This theory was used because of the interactive nature of learner autonomy within a specific

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social setting .This work is a descriptive research that focuses on the qualitative method which is undertaken through a case study selecting 30 students from the division of English department at Laghouat university from 190 Master One students.By using questionnaire for students as a research tool that will be useful in gathering and analysing dataand as well through an online observation to check their autonomy outside class through facebook group .

For answering the questions of the study, this dissertation has been divided into three chapters .Chapter One provides a concept definition of autonomy in language learning and learners' identity and then followed by a link between autonomy and identity in EFL learning .Chapter two highlights the autonomous learning strategies project work inside classroom and facebook group for enhancing autonomy outside class and both for constructing learners' identity .Chapter three describes how the study was carried and the methods used and presents the results of data from questionnaire administrated to master one students to test their autonomous learning through group work inside class and an online observation outside class through facebook social networking to observe master one students practice of autonomy .

### 1.1. Introduction

Being able to recognize ones' own learning needs, make decisions without others' help have always been a desired goal for all human beings. Many researchers have improved the possibility to promote this ability. The field that stands as an evidence for the existence of such skill is known as Learner autonomy. Since this area of research is vast, a whole chapter is devoted to discuss the core concepts and notions underlying learner autonomy including its origins, and different definitions. Furthermore, this chapter deals with constructivist theories and contextualizes autonomy within Foreign Language learning. It also sheds light on learners' identity as a key element that develops successful autonomous learner.

### 1.2. Origins of Learner Autonomy

In ancient Greece, from where the term autonomy originates *Learner autonomy* is regarded as one's individual virtue though it was not something everyone could gain (Gremmo and Riley 1995). Several influential figures in history therefore have expressed favor towards a learner-centered educational philosophy in which control of the learning process is given to the learner. Such as, John Amos Comenius (1592-1670) who claims "*let the main object of our didactic be .... to seek and find a method of instruction by which our teachers teach less, but learners may learn more*" (Keatinge 1896: 156)

The birth of a new philosophy of learning is essentially related to social, political and cultural changes. Henri Holec (1981) views that advanced nations witnessed a socio-cultural change in the late 1960s and early 1970s which helps at promoting learner autonomy. Although these countries had gained material flourishing, there was sympathy toward the overall well-being of individuals because of abuse and segregation. Movements created by myriad minority groups formed a culture of protests among students and intellectuals in order to establish the rights and autonomy of individuals in society. In this sense, a new interest in freedom of thought and expression for the individual shaped the area of education.

### 1.3. Versions of Autonomy

In terms of etymology , the word autonomy has Greek roots *autonomos*, which may be split into *auto* "self" and *nomos* "law", which connotes the literal translation "self-law" or "self-rule". Autonomy was in ancient Greece a political term portraying a state that

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had full independence from other states. The term has since come into use in other areas and differs according to each context in which it appears. Within the field of medicine, for instance, autonomy is most often concerned to patient rights. In the field of philosophy, however, autonomy refers to individual's capacity in making decisions. Politically speaking, autonomy refers to the relationships between political groups and also bears other connotations referring to self-governance of nations and of independence. One reason for such different perspectives reflects how definitions of the term learner autonomy encompass in different domains and have been subject of disagreement since its introduction to the educational agenda ( as cited in Holec 1981 :56 )

### **1.4. Constructivism and Learner Autonomy**

Within the context of social change, developments of learning theories have also contributed to the rise of autonomy in education. Behaviorist philosophy of education which had been dominant since the end of World War II view learners as mechanic creatures, passive recipients of knowledge (Gremmo and Riley 1995). Learning a foreign language was therefore primarily seen as a matter of habit formation and memorization which relied heavily upon the instructor as the presenter of knowledge. Thus, Behaviorist influence has lost ground with a growing interest among educators towards learner-centeredness which has opened up opportunities for learners to take responsibility of their learning.

The notion of learner-centeredness is closely identified with constructivist theories, which are essential to the development of learner autonomy. Constructivism was fronted by such influential psychologists as George Kelly and Jean Piaget and based on their assumptions that views each individual vary greatly in the construction of knowledge according to his/her interpretations and prior experiences. Therefore, in the context of education, constructivist theory takes into consideration that students experience learning by actively pursuing, processing and acquiring knowledge without being outlined by the teacher (Kelly 1955). This process gives more importance to the learner in which they construct their own conceptualizations and find solutions to problems in the process of learning rather than given knowledge or taught by others.

While, the early constructivist ideas of Piaget and Kelly play a fundamental part in the promotion of autonomy in education, both of them emphasize heavily on autonomy and

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neglect the social dimensions of the learner. Though, Benson (2001) pays much attention to learning as a social process and views learners' interaction as a crucial feature for autonomy because any autonomous individual makes decisions more or less with respect to social norms and traditions and knowledge through sharing ideas with peers, which has led many educators to stress that autonomy is more about interdependence than independence (Little 2004). In other words, learners are dependent from others' support if they are capable of developing their learning abilities.

Unlike Piaget, who stresses on learners' cognitive development sequences but ignores the influence of social environment, Vygotsky (1978) the forefather of social constructivism theory claims that the starting point for learning is provided thanks to learners' existing mental readiness with the help of others through social interaction, they can achieve a high level of competence. He emphasizes on the significance of social interaction based on the concept of "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) which differentiates between the actual level of the autonomous learner and the potential level of the learner if the interaction takes place. As Vygotsky puts it, "*what [ a learner ] is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow.*" (Little 2004: 22). Thus, by sharing the cognitive process with other individuals helps to promote the ability to learn as well as to collaborate with others.

Social constructivism therefore has had a major impact on learner autonomy, as evidenced by new definitions of learner autonomy that stress on social interaction and as well as has also contributed to assert the importance of the teacher's role as a facilitator of learning, one who rather than directs lectures to learners, he guides and supports them through their own processes of knowledge construction (Komorowska 2012).

### **1.5 . Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning**

Learner autonomy has become a "*buzz-word*" (Little 1991: 2) in foreign language teaching. "*The literature on autonomy published since 2000 exceeds the literature published over the previous 25 years.*" (Benson 2006 :21). It seems appropriate to assume that learner autonomy becomes a researched aspect of foreign language education and great amount of literature attempts to define the concept and explore the applicability of learner autonomy in various contexts over recent decades.

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Yet, learning languages is closely associated with learner autonomy. Vygotsky's theories have expressed that higher cognitive processes has been created as a consequence of different types of social interaction, and not as a programmed result of individual efforts. In this vein, language is a means of creating meaning; not only conveying meaning from one person to another. Language is therefore the device that makes interaction possible. In the words of Vygotsky himself: "*thought is not merely expressed in words, it comes into existence through them.*" (Vygotsky 1986: 218) .Thus, the acquisition of a foreign language develops learner's independent thinking which is essential in autonomous learning and can be seen as well as a supportive context for learner autonomy advancement.

Autonomy discussion was born from Council of Europe and language learning realities in 1979, Henry Holec ( 1981) was the first who mentioned learner autonomy in the field of foreign language acquisition. A major motivation for developing autonomy is due to globalization and immigration and the growing need for competent speakers of foreign languages in Europe. Holec aims to promote lifelong learning for adult language learners. Holec's writing in 1981, ten years after the founding of CRAPEL defined autonomy as is "*the ability to take charge of one's own learning*" ( Holec 1981: 3).He also determined his definition by stressing that autonomy is an ability, not behaviour in which he describes that autonomy is: "*determining the objectives ;defining the contents and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used; monitoring the procedure of acquisition; properly speaking (rhythm, time, place);evaluating what has been acquired* "( Ibid)

Learner autonomy is primarily a matter of *attitude* towards taking responsibility for one's own learning; it separates from learning with the absence of the instructor. Rather, it refers to the *ability* to learn how to, and it does not refer to the ability of self-directed learning without teachers .Accordingly, with the help of the teacher, the learner makes a move gradually from being dependent to being independent, from being non-autonomous to being autonomous .These imply a close link between Learner autonomy and language learning proficiency. Accordingly, the ability one's assume to be responsible for one's own learning identifies with the capacity to be involved partially or totally in decisions on one's objectives, and to plan, implement, and assess one's learning. Attitude towards responsibility for learning regarding learners acknowledgement of their needs, of their responsibility to conduct their own learning.

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Another notable contribution by Trebbi et. al. (1990), who stated that learner autonomy is a “*readiness to take charge of one's own learning*”, (as cited in Little, 1991; p.7). They emphasize on motivation and learner’s personal responsibility as key factors which enhances learner autonomy, and it is “*a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action*” (Little 1991:4). This definition describes the cognitive processes of learning and of demonstrates the psychological aspect of learner autonomy in which the autonomous learner is psychologically capable of using these skills. While maintaining the essence of Holec's definition which examines the skills of the autonomous learner and explores the technical aspect of autonomy. However, both view of learner autonomy as a mental quality of the learner that must be trained and developed. Along this, the modern ideas of learner-centeredness come into being where a noticeable shift from the instructor to the learner is considered.

It is apparent for Thanasoulas (2000) that the relationship between learner autonomy and philosophies of learning such as constructivism put more emphasis on student activity, than on teachers teaching. That is, he argues that the student's own experience and study are where learning starts. In other words, when learners’ initial role is to act actively, take responsibility of constructing knowledge, teachers’ role is to guide learners, and support their choices through the process of learning. Within this line of thought , foreign learning is concerned with issues of power and ideology and is seen as a process of interaction with social context, which can bring about social change. What is more linguistic forms that convey social meanings, thus, language is power, and vice versa. Certainly, learner autonomy assumes a more social and political concept within critical theory. As learners become aware of the social context in which their learning is embedded, they gradually become independent

### **1.6 The role of the teacher**

One of the basic principles regarding learning autonomously is the capacity of sharing responsibility between the learners . Autonomy “*requires teachers who are willing to let go and learners who are willing to take hold*” (kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 144). Based on this view, teacher's autonomy is also required. The concept of teacher's autonomy was first suggested by Allright (1990) and developed by Little (1995). It refers to the teacher's capacity of taking responsibility over one's decisions and practices inside the classroom and even outside . Aoki argues that comparing to learner's autonomy which involves

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independency and responsibility for one's own learning, teachers' autonomy emphasizes on independency and responsibility for one's own teaching (Benson, 2006).

Teachers play an important role for the promotion of learner autonomy since they are in charge for implementing and creating a learning environment to develop learner autonomy. Nonetheless, Little (1995) calls attention that to advance autonomy in the teaching context instructors need to teach learners how to learn. Thus, teachers develop learner's awareness of their learning strategies and their effective use in the learning process. Furthermore, instructors train learners progressively to be more dynamic, reflective and critical thinkers and encourage them to set up their learning objectives based on feedback and self assessment and use learning strategies both in and out classroom setting.

Ehrman describes teacher's role as *"If the classroom is a stage in a theater, and students are actors, what is teacher? The teacher is many people in theater: director, prompter, coach, scriptwriter, audience, and above all, another actor"* ( Dickinson 1987, p.5, cited in Jones 2003). To support learner autonomy, teachers consider learners as their partners in accomplishing shared objectives. They motivate learners by empowering commitment and self-confidence. As partners, instructors help learners overcome obstacles. They are constantly prepared to enter a dialogue with learners.

For the promotion of learner autonomy in foreign language classes, teachers help learners set objectives, plan work, select materials, assess themselves, and acquire the skills and knowledge required. Teachers additionally change students' perceptions about the traditional role of the teacher and learner in the classroom. As a part of this awareness-raising process, teachers clarify objectives and reasons for particular activities. Teachers train learners to help them recognize learning styles, appropriate learning strategies and, more importantly, the utility of learner autonomy and necessity for autonomous learning. Besides, teachers let learners commit mistakes, and to select learning materials so that learners may have more impact on their own learning process. Teachers respect learners' ways of handling tasks.

### **1.7. Characteristics of Autonomous Learners**

St. Louis (2005) lists the following characteristics of autonomous learners:

- Willing and have the ability to control or supervise learning
- Recognizing their own learning styles and strategies
- Motivated to learn

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- Good predictors
- Appropriately select the materials, methods and tasks
- exercising choice and purpose in organizing and carrying out the chosen task
- selecting the criteria for evaluation
- taking an active approach to the task
- paying attention to both form and content
- Ready to take risks .

According to Dickinson (1993) autonomous learners share these characteristics

First of all, autonomous learners can realize what is going on and what is taught in their classes, in other words the autonomous language learner differentiates relationship between the new information and any other structure of language

Secondly, Dickinson adds, autonomous learners can put their own learning objectives and make efforts outside class setting to improve their language skills by using the target language as part of their own learning objectives.

Thirdly, as (Ibid) mentions that autonomous learners choose their appropriate learning strategies while acquiring knowledge rather than trying to get information and comprehend it immediately.

The fourth category of characteristics is that autonomous learners can monitor their learning strategies and change in them in an effective way .For example, an autonomous learner is the one who has not understood some points and tries to find out more effective study ways. With these four basic characteristics, autonomous take control of their own learning an engage actively in the learning process.

### 1.8. Identity and Learner Autonomy

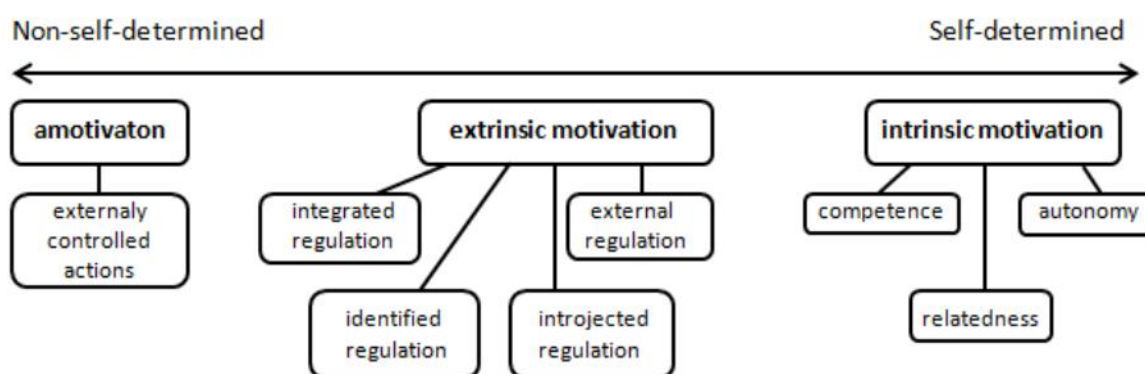
Motivation is considered as an important advantage for the enhancement of learner autonomy and it is linked to the notion of learner identity.

#### 1.8.1 Motivation and Learner Autonomy

Motivation from a qualitative point of view is regarded as “*an interaction between intrinsic (innate) and extrinsic (environmental) factors*” (van Lier 1996: 99). Since ‘*intrinsically motivated activity is inherent in the nature of life*’ (van Lier 1996: 99).In this vein, learners of all ages are curious creatures that want to fulfill a certain learning-urge. Next to that, however, there are some society requirements imposed upon them , which can be seen as being extrinsic demands that do not always fulfill individual’s needs. By

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following van Lier's (1996: 99) stream of thought that '*in the best of worlds, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations act in concert, or at least in peaceful coexistence*' Next to these terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, Deci and Ryan (1990) consider that an overload controlled actions do not adhere with learner's intrinsic motivation but only leads to a motivation. All these notions are presented as following:



**Figure 1** Motivation/self-determination continuum.

This continuum representation from external to internal motivation demonstrates that both aspects do not oppose one another "*must work in concert to stimulate learning*" (van Lier 1996: 113). Hence, "*externally controlled actions can only be beneficial if they gradually fall in step with intrinsically motivated actions, so that other-regulation can become self-regulation*" (van Lier 1996: 113). Thus, It is teachers' duty to stimulate their students' intrinsic motivation and attract them in order to get interested learners full of curiosity.

### 1.8.2. Learners Identity and Autonomy

Learner motivation then may be viewed as an organic process that comes into being through the interaction between intrinsic (i.e. self-regulated) and extrinsic (i.e. other-regulated) factors. Hence, as Ushioda (2011: 12) points out, a "*person-in-context relational view*" of motivation is identified. In her argument, she pleads for that an individual person thinks and feels, with an identity, a personality, a unique background, with determined objectives and intentions; a focus on the interaction between this self-reflective agent, and his/her social relations, activities, experiences define him/her (Ushioda 2011: 12-13).

From this point of view, in order to enhance autonomy which is seen crucial to create 'fully rounded' persons who are capable to '*express their own identities through the*

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*language they are learning – that is, to be and to become themselves*’, so that, as Little (2004: 106) puts it, “*what they learn becomes part of what they are*” (Ushioda 2011: 13-14). According to Deci and Ryan’s (1990) autonomous learners will develop a sense of self-concept, one can notice the link between motivation and learner identity: on the one hand, learner identity determines one’s innate needs and therefore intrinsic motivation leads to a motivational environment which empowers the further construction of one’s learner identity.

In this sense, an eminent project has been carried out by Legenhausen (1999) in which he has analyzed the conversations held by Danish students, he claims that the classroom has a major impact on the topics of target language discussions and on the degree to which those who learn the language are involved instead of solely behaving as those who practice language. (Legenhausen 1999, qtd. in Ushioda 2011: 15).

Following the same stream of thought, Richards (2006) argues that there is a need to focus on aspects of identity as these are dynamically constructed in the developing discourse to understand whether and how “real discussions” may occasionally permeate teacher-student classroom talk (Ushioda 2011: 16). Starting from Zimmerman’s (1998) proposal for different categories of identities, Richards (2006: 15) makes a distinction between the following aspects:

The ***discourse identity*** it is related to the way in which learners engage themselves to particular discourse roles (i.e. listener, questioner, interviewer ...).

The ***situated identity*** concerns the way in which learners situate themselves and live up to contextually accepted identities.

The ***transportable identity*** that it refers to identity that is visible, that is to say, assignable or claimable and it demands a higher level of personal involvement.

The last aspect of identity is the most important one as it establishes a comfortable motivational classroom environment and it allows students to connect learning contents with their own transportable identities. This notion of transportable identity confirms that both worlds in and outside the classroom have to be related to each other.

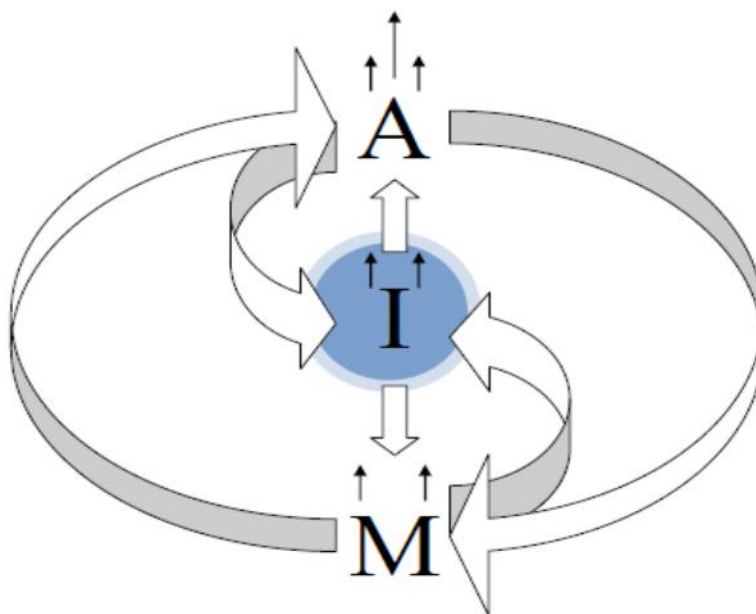
However, working towards a motivational classroom environment that provides room for all learner identities is a demanding and continuous task. Once again, the teacher has a privileged status in this process as the transportable identity extends beyond the

## Chapter One: An overview of Learner Autonomy and Identity

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physical boundaries of the classroom and beyond teacher-student roles and relationships (Ushioda 2011: 17).

In this context, students will be highly motivated to express themselves if they are left autonomous to expose the identity-aspects of their own knowledge. As can be derived from this figure, this rounds out the vation autonomy –identity – motivation circle.



**Figure 2 :** The A.I.M.-model: the link between autonomy, identity, and motivation (Seberechts 2013).

### 1.9. Conclusion

In educational environments, and more specifically in foreign language classrooms, the concept autonomy has gained a lot of attention. Foreign language learners are generally considered to be more successful when they are allowed to actively participate in their own learning process. Moreover, autonomous learning is closely linked to the notions of motivation and identity that can be related to the development of the successful autonomous language learner. Yet, there still exists a great gap between theory and practice.

## Chapter Two:Autonomy and Learner Identity Through Group work

### 2.1 Introduction

As postgraduate students mode of learning requires students who are able to identify their needs and recognize their learning capacities both in and out classroom without being spoon fed from teachers. Learners tend to follow their own way in class with the instructor's help. In addition, they attempt to take responsibility to grasp knowledge by themselves outside class. This chapter attempts to explore group work as an enhancing-autonomy strategy in and out class learning and its impact on learners' identity.

### 2.2 Autonomy inside Classroom

Many scholars define a learning centered environment as an environment where the learners are capable to practice consciously and take an initiate role in their own learning as Leni Dam (2000) claim that learners are aware of many engaged in the learning process by being expected to be involved actively in their own learning process. Some of the prerequisites for setting up such an environment are:

- A willingness from the teacher to let the students control their learning , and on the part of the learners to take an active role in their own learning.
- An understanding of what and how learning process should be done, and what applies for both the instructor and the learner .
- An environement full of security, trust atmosphere and respect as well

As Nunan (1996) presents a picture of what a autonomous classroom and non-autonomous classroom resemble

Autonomous classrooms	Non-autonomous classrooms
<p>- Decisions are made with much reference to students. – Teacher introduces range of activities by taking students 'needs and interests into consideration.</p> <p>- Students are allowed to reflect on, assess and evaluate their learning process.</p>	<p>- Teachers make all decisions about content and classroom norms.</p> <p>- Students are exposed to the activities they are expected to perform.</p> <p>- The assessment and evaluation part are structured in a traditional manner in a way that tests and exams are carried out.</p>

**Table 1. Autonomous classroom versus non-autonomous classroom**

## **Chapter Two:Autonomy and Learner Identity Through Group work**

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### **2.3 Group Work and Learner Autonomy:**

One of the things that characterize the autonomous classroom is a strong emphasis on group work as a means to develop learner autonomy. Researchers believe that learner autonomy within a classroom-based approach can be encouraged through cooperative learning within classroom contexts. The fact is that learners become less dependent on the teacher by learning to collaborate with their peers. Group activities play a large part in this because learners acquire a lot of learning strategies when collaborating with, and receiving support from their peers and not just the teacher (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001). That is, learners can be in charge of their learning with their peers or teachers. This approach focuses on the role of teachers that should to negotiate responsibility with their learners in setting their objectives, the learning process and determining assessment (Nguyen, 2010).

For instance, Miller and Ng (1996) concentrated on peer assessment as one way to develop learner autonomy through involving students in their own learning. The aim behind this study was “*to turn passive recipients into active participants in a language program*” (p. 134). The advantages of peer assessment are that students can get a fairer assessment from peers than with traditional assessment; peer assessment can also enhance students' understanding and their attitudes towards it; and as the consequence of participating in peer assessment tasks students may turn out to be more self regulated. Studies demonstrate that peer assessment leads to positive results regarding learner autonomy advancement. It is found that “*under certain circumstances, language students are able to make a realistic assessment of each other's language ability*” Richard Pemberton et al 1996 :142).

### **2.4 Teacher's role**

The teacher plays a vital role throughout group work. They are those who encourage, support and accept student autonomy. Autonomous students take responsibility for their own learning by framing questions, going about answering, analyzing, interacting, and elaborating the answers. The way constructivist teachers frame assessment methods also determines the degree of learning autonomously. In which authentic classroom instruction can incorporate authentic assessment. Meanwhile, assessment is used to determine what students know after presentation of content. By encouraging students to discuss what they have learned and how to apply it. As stated earlier, learner autonomy recognizes the reflective involvement of learners in the learning process. Therefore, authentic assessment can help to promote learner autonomy. The way instructors convey information and the way learners get it has been continuously an issue

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among researchers. What learners take in class can vary from what has been taught by instructors. Learners don't generally react to what instructors say or perform in class, rather; they just react to what is suitable for them.

In learner autonomous classrooms both teachers and learners use the target language as one of the basic tools with which the collaborative learning process is framed. (Little, Dam, 1998). The target language is used not just for the sake of communication, but also as a channel for learning, and a way for reflection. Also, to control learning process the teacher negotiates with the content. At the same time, learners are requested to discuss it. The learner also shares with his/her points of view and collaborate together (Camilleri, 1999).

Teachers should be placed in the role of facilitator whose task is to develop and maintain active out-class atmosphere. Teachers are the ones who decide, direct, explain and connect old with the new. Communication between the teacher and students and their peers must not be lost. That is why it is important to use technology and Internet outside classroom and make sure that alienation does not take place. Wisely controlled teaching should only profit by the use of computer technology but as well from social networks which are able to motivate students. For this reason, Facebook groups is used as a helping means for autonomous learning, and the variety of social networks should be used to bring out the best that students can give.

EFL teachers often doubt the possibility the activities outside class. Little (2009) set three issues : (1) a lack of an adequate English environment, (2) inability to carry knowledge by themselves, and (3) the unavailability of setting curriculum design, or exams. This shift of responsibility toward learners and new learning environment adaption out class setting require changes in teachers' perspectives. For this reason, the teacher is not free of responsibility while students are engaged in autonomous learning after class. Instead, the teacher needs to provide students with help in acquiring the necessary materials and approaches to accomplish learning objectives and to achieve autonomy in long life learning that aims not only to produce autonomous, responsible learners inside and outside class environment; rather, it creates more critical thinkers, educated and open minded individuals who can cope with different situations in life. Autonomy then in life learning is regarded as a tool for one's total freedom.

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### **2.5 Autonomy outside Classroom**

The Internet can provide language learners with any sources audio , and video and written materials to supplement lessons. Teachers can locate a wide collection of materials for learners to think about in class or after class for autonomous learning and to empower learner self-sufficiency. Recently, social networking sites has opened new horizons for language learners to collaborate in real ways that were beforehand hard to accomplish. Progresses in technology imply learners of a language can easily interact with their peers in important practice that cultivates learning identity. That is, strategies that make use of Web 2.0 can essentially raise students' capability to produce meaningful output and fortify their enthusiasm for language learning. Kaufman (2004) believes that constructivism, based on the cognitive developmental theory of Piaget and in the social constructivism of Vygotsky, enhances the use of technological devices such as computer, video and technologies and interactive virtual environments. Parallel to this, Solé and Mardomingo (2004) emphasize on the need to implement constructivism for the development of independent learners .

### **2.6 . Facebook and Learner Autonomy**

Many educators have investigated the educational applications of recent technology and the possibilities to redesign the instructional techniques to improve learning. Without a doubt, this objective has been accomplished through social networking usage. This interactive means is powerful in helping students to explain and communicate pieces of information with their peers. Undoubtly, the emergence of new media added new dimensions to EFL learners. For instance, Dang and Robertson (2010) investigated the relationship and also the effect of computer technology on learner autonomy, they viewed learner autonomy from socio cultural view which deals with the connections between learners and their surroundings. This study demonstrated a solid interaction between them In another case, Ankan and Bakla (2011) concentrated on the use of social networking to foster learner autonomy.

One of the new virtual settings and the most successful social networking site is Facebook. This web site has thousand millions of users and it is easier for students to create an online group where learners get more confident in their English writing skills Facebook , as well is an excellent way to build a good autonomous learning in which learners communicate and share their thoughts and considerations that would be hard to duplicate in a classroom setting. A huge number of students enjoy learning with social networking and attempt to study outside classroom. Especially, via Facebook which

## **Chapter Two:Autonomy and Learner Identity Through Group work**

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permits learners through new advances to produce meaningful output and contribute in learning English. Whatever learners compose on their facebook group can be read by others. Also, learners are motivated to use facebook groups since they offer a free and easy writing environment to develop their abilities, for example, being able to make decision on one's own, be less teacher dependent, and be involved in critical reflection. Thus, this approach is to encourage learner autonomy outside classroom ( as cited in Cotterall 2008 : 58

One of the fundamental purposes behind the popularity of social networking is the procedure of creating online relationships (Thorne, 2010). It is not just an approach to chat with friends, for example, Facebook group is a form of expression, collaboration, and community building. An increasing number of instructors and learners are making use of these tools to communicate outside the classroom. Maybe it is the emphasis on using the target language as a source for building interpersonal connections that separates it from conventional ways to deal with language learning/teaching method and give a chance for better achievement. In other words collaborative group work calls for different communication skills. The use of the target language and more learner-learner interaction and communication due to group work and general discussion, opens up a whole new world for better communicative skills. Hence, effective ways to enhance language learning incorporate students' use of r with its social impact on learners.

Many studies show that computer based social networking can enhance learning as compared to conventional lectures study materials that do not use social media. Social networks permit learners to investigate, consider, search, question, reply and receive feedback. Gradually, social media brings authentic, similar to, real world impressions. All language learners are different in terms of their requirement, enthusiasm, strength and weakness, motivation, style etc. Therefore, facebook group is used as a self-study resource that may be valuable in accommodating these learner differences. Learners can learn in their particular way and concentrate on the subject they are interested or weak in, and can take as much time as they like, and repeat the same module number of times they prefer. Hence, during the use of multimedia the learner can decide how to study, when to study. Thus, any successful learner is the one who is responsible for his or her own learning. Social networks makes the learning autonomous with its materials since the main importance is given to the student as an individual in which he/she takes in consideration his/her personal needs.

## **Chapter Two:Autonomy and Learner Identity Through Group work**

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Working in peer groups via Facebook outside classroom cover all group learning activities .This includes study collaboration and also encompasses other university-related tasks like clubs and facebook groups. It is mostly been assigned group projects. As the importance of group-work skills in professional life is becoming increasingly recognized There are different kinds of group work such as, Studying together during term time, Consulting teachers, Consulting peers and revising together before examination, as well as discussing certain topics etc. Students are making their own decisions as to which learning activities they tackle and how to manage and perform them. In the field adult education Harlow (2007) states that in-class differ from their on-line students counterparts in that they are more responsible for their learning and more autonomous than inside class , accordingly, with the use of only web-based resources and individualized self-directed learning, enhance each other. Semilar to Hurd (2000) supports the idea of students' willingness of being accustomed to self-direction in other aspects of life and this plays a vital role in nurturing autonomous learners out class setting .

### **2.8 Constructivism and Group work**

Group work is an important part of the learner autonomous classroom. By shifting the focus from teaching to learning and diminishing the learners' dependence on the teacher the groundwork is laid for peer assistance. The relationship between learner autonomy and dependence means that at any particular time learners will be able to perform some tasks by themselves but need help with others. Individual differences will ensure that learners develop at different rates and with different emphases. This means that almost from the beginning, learners will be able to support one another in task performance. This is why group work plays a key role in any pedagogy derived from Vygotskian principles. In Vygotsky's definition of the zone of proximal development he relied on adults or more capable peers to take on a pedagogical role. In the principles of learner autonomy relating to group work ,this role is assumed first by one learner and then another in a complex structure of interdependence (Little, 2000).

From a constructivist point of view, learning implies constructing, creating, and developing knowledge. In other words, "*autonomy is characteristic of knowledge construction*". It is also the goal of an empowerment process, which is characterized as "*the process of how to gain and increase autonomy and control in one's own life*". It is, therefore, possible through a constructivist lens to interpret practices to promote language learner autonomy.A constructivist pedagogy underlines the role of questioning, learners

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discussing ideas in learning communities, the significance of think pair share. *“The students achieve ownership of their learning. The teacher no longer knows all the answers, meaning that communication in the FL classroom becomes authentic and the language becomes the means, as well as the goal”* (Lacey, 2007, p. 5). Students therefore construct their own knowledge by taking an active part in the learning process, instructors give a hand help and support by allowing students to think together, investigate and share their ideas through working in groups. In other words, constructivism highlights learners at the focal point of the learning process; the constructivist classroom is learner-centered. Likewise, Language autonomy considers learners the central role in the management of their language study. It requires an active involvement of learners in their learning process through group work.

### **2.9 Autonomy and Learners’ Identity through group work**

Increasing students’ motivation may be regarded as an important advantage of the implementation of autonomy-enhancing strategies and group work. However, since motivation may not merely be seen as a consequence of autonomy, the concept of motivation is linked to the notion of learner identity.

#### **2.9.1 Motivation as a predictor for identity**

Motivation appears to have a solid relationship with learner identity in foreign language learning. In which motivation is one of the key elements in shaping identity. As indicated by Dornyei and Skehan (2005) that motivation is in charge of individual decisions and to what extent he/she will be willing in practicing and the amounts of the efforts he/she will spend. Spratt, Humphreys, and Chan (2002) expressed that motivation drives learners towards autonomy. Learners’ behaviors in the classroom mirror their learning styles, attitude, strengths, and weaknesses furthermore autonomy.

Some students show disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Disruptive behaviors may be characterized as behaviors which impact the learner's own particular learning negatively and prevent social cooperation in the classroom .One of the causes of these behaviors is that when some students say "I cannot..." and they do not take part in the lesson or listen to the explanation of their teachers. More, they never volunteer to reply questions (Santrock, 2004). Therefore, taking into account the causes of these practices may help teachers to lead their students towards autonomous learning. It is worthy to note that teacher’s

## **Chapter Two:Autonomy and Learner Identity Through Group work**

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appropriate evaluation of this reflection may help learners to enhance their learning skills. Stipek (2002) views that learner autonomy should include and determine that the learner studies autonomously , likes challenging learning tasks and participates in non-obligatory learning tasks as well as tries to improve his/her learning skills no matter how better he/she is than the others. Also , he/she does not ask for direct answers for questions. He/she asks for help to support his/her autonomy.

Dickinson (1995) claimed that motivation could be improved if learners assumed responsible for their learning. Ushioda states “*because we want to motivate our students and shape their identities*” (2011 :230). Motivation is therefore associated with learner identity. For instance, Dörnyei (1994) claimed that teachers have a facilitating role, and play an important part in the decision of their own learning materials and as well encourage learners to set objectives for themselves. As a proof for learner’s motivation in the classroom, it merits saying a noteworthy study which was accounted for by Slimani (An Algerian instructor of English). Slimani's (1992) study explored what a gathering of 13 Algerian EFL learners guaranteed to have learned inside class. Concentrating on 'uptake', or what they learned by the end of a lesson, Slimani asked students what they had realized after each of the six lessons that she recorded. She found that learners will probably claim to have learned things independently than things given by the instructor . She likewise found that they will probably have learned things from their peers than those from her .

### **2.9.2 Learner identity through group work**

Learner’s identity becomes a key characteristic for autonomy .It refers to how we relate to the social world .The investigation of learner identity endeavors to see how and why learners shape their social identities and develop them over time .Learners are able to express themselves differently in various contexts because they can develop any number of social identities and can create also collective as well as individual social identities. Brophy (2009) distinguishes between ascribed and attained identities. Ascribed identities are those constrained upon learners by social condition or genetics (e.g. sex, race, ethnicity, financial status and so forth.).On the other hand, attained identities are those echoing individual interests and are achieved through individualization and choice (e.g. as a guitarist, an artist, lawyer and so forth.)

## **Chapter Two:Autonomy and Learner Identity Through Group work**

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The identity of the language learner is hypothesized as multiple, clashing and evolving. The conditions under which learners acquire a foreign language are affected by social connections and qualities, and language identities are developed and negotiated through interactions. According to Taylor, “*expressing yourself in a foreign language can...be an excellent tool for identity exploration*”. In classrooms where authentic communication does not take place and learner autonomy is not encouraged, learners are unable to speak for themselves and express their identities. “*language classrooms that seek to promote autonomous learning...encourage students to develop and express their own identities through the language they are learning - that is, to be and become themselves*” (Garold Murray, Xuesong Gao, Terry Lamb 2011 :13).

Freire (2005) recommends that authentic discussions through group work frees learners and leads to equality among peers and teachers. In this regard, real classroom conversations mean that both the teacher and the students are learning and, consequently, the students and the teacher are teaching. Thus, classroom dialogues between teachers and students permit learners moving from being simply uninvolved passive listeners to co-constructors of the learning process and critical thinkers .According to him dialogue cannot take place if the teacher is in control. Therefore, authentic communication can merely occur in classroom environments that encourage autonomy.

In parallel with authentic classroom conversations, Zimmerman termed "transportable identity". Transportable identity is related to physical or social-based features (e.g. sex, race, ethnicity, religion) .This concept is brought up into play when teachers urge learners to speak as themselves. Richards (2006) claims that some teachers are unwilling to invoke transportable identities because to them, this kind of communication may bring chaos if the way of control gets to be obscured. In his study, the teacher demonstrated an enthusiasm for the students' personal interests regarding their learning which they seemed to react positively. Murray recommends that giving learners the opportunity to choose their learning materials leads to identity construction and autonomy.

Identities are not formed in a vacuum and working in a group can significantly affect how learners see themselves .In this regard, Vygotsky (1978) sees that peer cooperation is an essential part of the learning process and supports collective learning in small groups. He claims that working successfully in groups by critical thinking and solving issues with

## **Chapter Two:Autonomy and Learner Identity Through Group work**

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peers, develops learners' abilities to become autonomous learners. Then, one can assume that there is strong connection between learner autonomy and identity, as Spratt et al. call attention to, increase learners' motivation is critical in making them willing to assume responsible of their own learning and by this reconstruct their learning identity. Thus, the teacher's aims at demonstrating the importance of learning autonomously beyond language classroom and relating it to their own life.

Encountering longitudinal learning develops learner autonomy and constructs their identities. Benson et al. (2003) report that English language learners who experienced both English as a foreign language and English as a native language contexts., the study demonstrates how learner's identity is constructed and reconstructed along with learner's autonomy development. In this regard, based on the case study of Kojima's language learning experiences as pointed out by Murray and Kojima (2007), Kojima changed her identity of a poor score maker to that of a fluent language user, moreover, to a multilingual language user. It is observed that Kojima strong desire to connect with target language resources such as native speakers encourages developing her individual learner identity, which impacts on the learner autonomy improvement.

### **2.10. Conclusion**

To conclude, the chapter study explores the relationship between learner autonomy on the one hand and EFL learner's identity in and out class setting where autonomous learners act by engaging themselves in foreign language in classroom through group work strategy and out classroom through the use social media such as facebook groups to better build an autonomous learning atmosphere and construct their learning identities.

## **Chapter Three : Data Collection and Analysis**

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### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter is concerned with the collection of data and analysis. It attempts to gather data that enable us to investigate learners' perceptions of autonomy through group work and its link to learners' identity. The data collection has been carried out in a descriptive method. This chapter is also devoted to the presentation and the analysis of the data obtained from Master One students' questionnaire and from an online observation. Which, in turn, help to confirm or disconfirm the study hypotheses that autonomous learning can be fostered if master one students work in groups. Moreover, results confirm the second hypothesis which demonstrates that constructing learner identity for first year master students mainly fulfilled through group discussions.

### **3.2 Choice of the Method**

The method used in this research is the descriptive method. This choice is based on the major different points and views that are discussed and are best illustrated by that kind of method. Opinions which have been tackled in this research can display that autonomy process passes through; definition, origins and the positive impact of this new concept on the learning process in university and especially in master studies. Moreover, this method provides a great help in proving the effective role of group work in enhancing learner autonomy and developing their autonomous skills and also to prove that autonomy enhancement should be considered as a central goal for learners to be achieved in order to improve their learner's identity .

### **3.3 Sample of the Study**

To follow this study, we have worked with a limited sample of students due to the huge proportion of Master One students. Taking into consideration the whole population of students which represent a number of 190 students; thirty (30) students have been selected randomly to be our sample without reference to their names.. They required to fill in respective the questionnaire that would serve as tool for data collection.

Choosing Master One students to work with was a conscious and deliberate decision due mainly the following :

- They have already a well background and a considerable experience in university in terms of independency and autonomy in learning.
- They are much aware of their autonomy in learning English and are matured enough to take charge of their own learning.
- They are in a postgraduate mode of learning so they have more effort to give.

## Chapter Three : Data Collection and Analysis

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- Most importantly, Master One students are not like license students who are not familiar with taking most of the responsibility for learning improvement and learning progress and who do not give much importance to take the initiative role in learning.

### 3.4 Data Gathering Tools

The main purpose of data gathering tools is based on the central aims of our research. The study aims at describing, identifying and understanding how autonomy affects positively learners' identity and it aims at showing the positive impact of group work in and out class setting in enhancing learners' capacities and improving their autonomy . On that base, we have used a questionnaire administrated to master one students, given learners to imply their attitudes towards autonomy and in addition to an online observation in order to see if they are empowering their autonomy through facebook group outside class.

### 3.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

#### 3.5.1 Questionnaires

Amongst the most well-known methods in gathering data in foreign language research is to use questionnaires , since the essence of any scientific research is the attempt made to find out replies to questions in an efficient way. In this line of thought, questionnaires have gained considerable attention in social sciences. Therefore, Brown (2001:6) defines the questionnaire as: *“Any written instrument that presents respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers”*.

#### 3.5.2 Questionnaires' Layout

Two types of questions were used in the students' questionnaire: Closed and mixed question:

##### 3.5.2.1 Closed Questions

The respondent is provided with ready-made response options to choose from, generally by surrounding or ticking one of the options or by putting a tick in the appropriate box. According to Wilson and McLean, (1994:21) the respondent answers one of the proposed possibilities without commenting or adding a remark.

- E.g. / **How do you prefer to study outside classroom?** (See appendix)

**3.5.2.2 Mixed Questions:** ask the respondent to choose one of the proposed possibilities, and then justify his answer.

## Chapter Three : Data Collection and Analysis

E.g /Do you consider Facebook group an effective means for improving your capacities out class learning? (see appendix)

Similarly, with any research tool, there are advantages and disadvantages regarding its application. Questionnaires cannot be the perfect research instruments, they have some serious limitations, and some of these have led several researchers to claim that questionnaire data are not really reliable or valid. There are therefore advantages and disadvantages underlying questionnaire application as put by Dörnyei (2003:9) in the following table :

Advantages	Disadvantages
Collect a huge amount of information in less time. Not time consuming.	It is very easy to produce unreliable and invalid data by means of ill-constructed questionnaires.
Data collection can be fast and relatively straightforward.	Simplicity and superficiality of answers by participants.
Cost-effectiveness.	Unreliable and unmotivated respondents.
They can be successfully used with a variety of people in a variety of situations targeting a variety of topics.	Respondent literacy problems (especially in social research)

**Table 2.** Advantages and Disadvantages of Questionnaires

### 3.6 .Analysis of Student's Questionnaire

Before asking any questions concerning learner autonomy, three questions in order to identify students age, gender and level in English .The results showed that students' ages range between 21 and 28 years. Their gender distribution and number are shown in the following table:

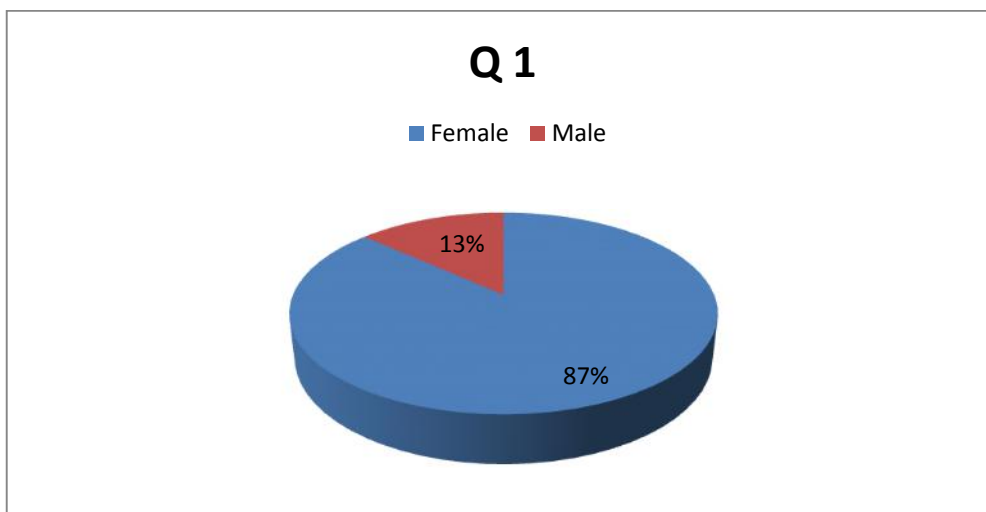
#### Item One: Students' Gender.

Gender	Female	Male
Participants	26	4
Percentage	87	13

**Table 3: Students' Gender**

## Chapter Three : Data Collection and Analysis

It was noticed that the number of female students is superior to male students. This difference in the number of students in terms of gender is represented in the following Figure



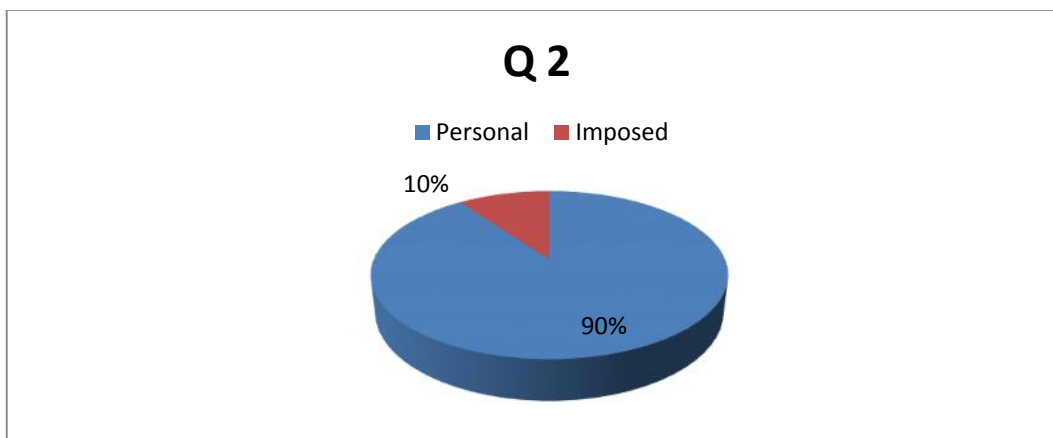
**Figure 2: Student's Gender**

From the chart above, a big difference between the number of males (13%) and females (87%) . This indicates the actual situation of Algerian universities that girls have tendency to choose the literary stream (mainly languages) as opposite to boys who rather choose the scientific stream with more technical branches.

### Item Two: Students' Choice to Study English.

Choice	Personal	Imposed
Participants	27	3
Percentage	90	10

**Table 4: Students' Choice to Study English**



**Figure 3: Students' Choice to Study English**

## Chapter Three : Data Collection and Analysis

The results above show that 90% of the whole sample has chosen deliberately and personally to study English at university because they like to learn this language. However, 10% confessed to have been imposed to that branch and that they have not chosen it themselves.

### Item Three: Students' Level in English

Level	Good	Average	Bad
Participants	9	19	2

Table 5: Students' Level in English

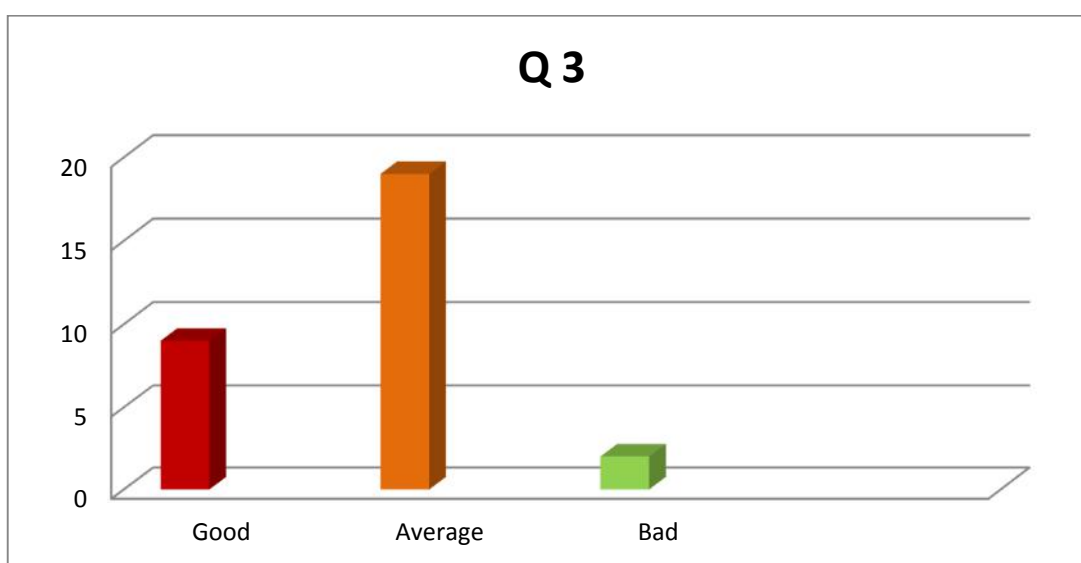


Figure 4: Student's Level in English

Through this question we come to know the level of Master One students English proficiency. The table above show that more than half of the students 19 have claimed that they have an average level in English language and 9 evaluated their level to be 'good', and only 2 revealed that they have a 'bad' level in English.

### Item Four :

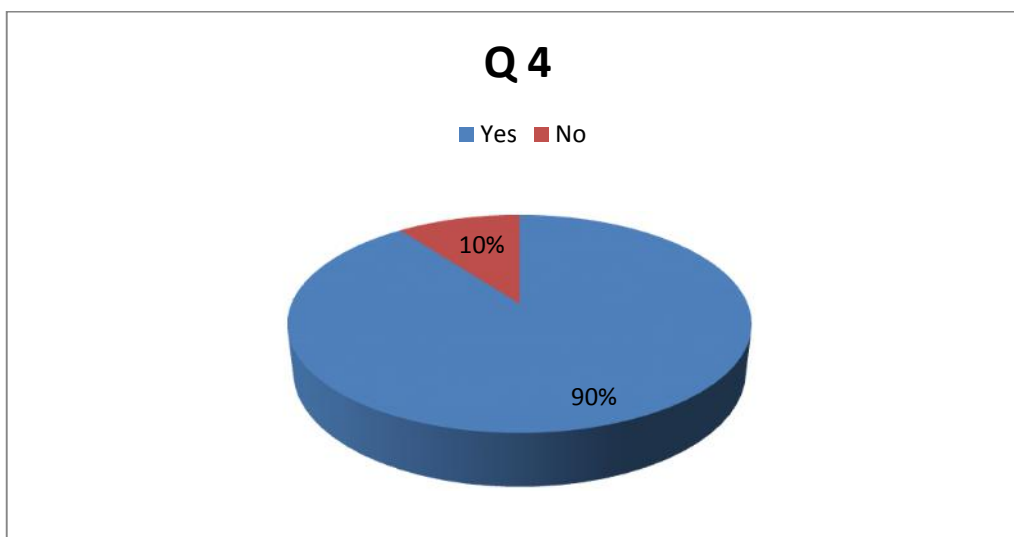
**Question 5: Do you describe yourself as an autonomous learner?**

Response	Yes	No
Participants	28	2
Percentage	90	10

Table 6: Students' Perception of themselves as Autonomous Learners

## Chapter Three : Data Collection and Analysis

It is shown that most students have explored their beliefs they had about their autonomous learning all students expressed that they are autonomous and show a positive attitude towards learner autonomy except two students . The aim behind asking this question was to unveil students' perceptions of their ability to learn English independently and if they can rely on themselves or not. In fact, the results revealed that only two learners perceived themselves as unable to take an independent action for their learning process.



**Figure 5: Students' Perception of themselves as Autonomous Learners**

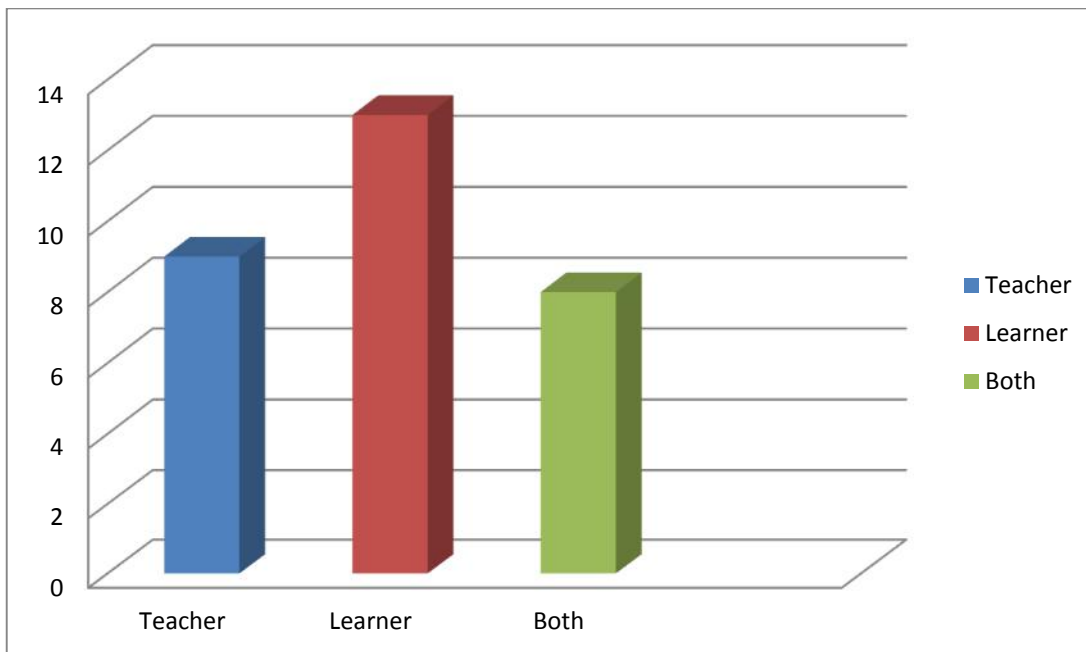
The results above show that 90 % of our sample are autonomous in learning which means that they do not rely completely on their teacher inside class which means they are independent enough from the their instructor and they search for information by themselves outside the classroom. 10%, however, do not consider themselves autonomous learners and do not try to enrich their autonomy.

**Item Five: Q 6 :Who is taking more responsibility in the teaching / learning process?**

Option	Teacher	Learner	Both
Participants	9	13	8

**Table 7: Students' Opinion about who is More Responsible for Learning.**

The results show that 13 students from the overall number 30 think that they are the ones responsible for for supervising and controlling their own learning and 8 students believe that learning process is a shared responsibility between teachers and students and that both sides must collaborate together to achieve good results and 9 students think that it is only teacher's responsibility .



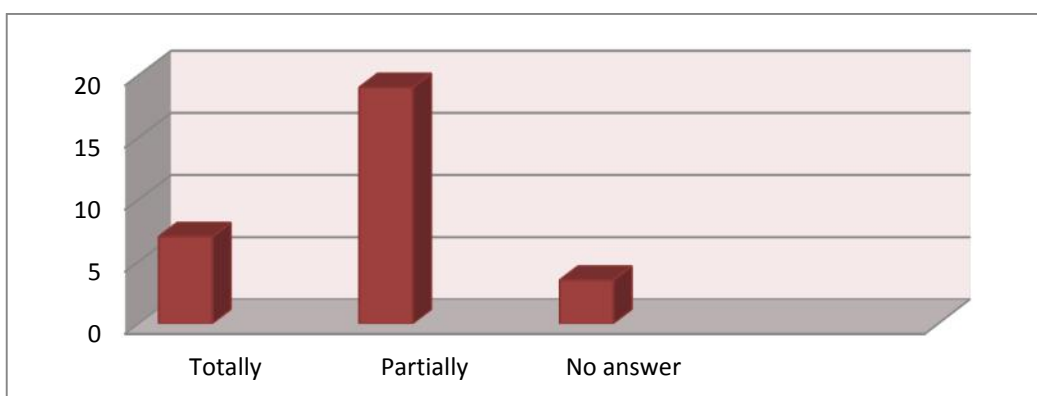
**Figure 6 : Students' Opinion about who is more Responsible for Learning.**

The results show most students believe that they take responsibility for learning whereas some believe that the value of responsibility in the learning process is reserved for the teacher who manages and controls and guides the students and further delivers information While the remaining students share the opinion that responsibility for learning is rather shared between the teacher and the learner .

**Item six: Q 7: To what extent do you rely on your teacher in your learning?**

Response	Totally	Partially	No answer
Participants	7	19	4

**Table 8 :Students' Dependence on their Teacher.**



**Figure 7: Students' Dependence on their Teacher**

## Chapter Three : Data Collection and Analysis

The results above show that the majority of students more than half of the students do not depend on just their teacher but more on themselves or maybe their mates. This proves that they rely on themselves in their process of learning and they are autonomous.

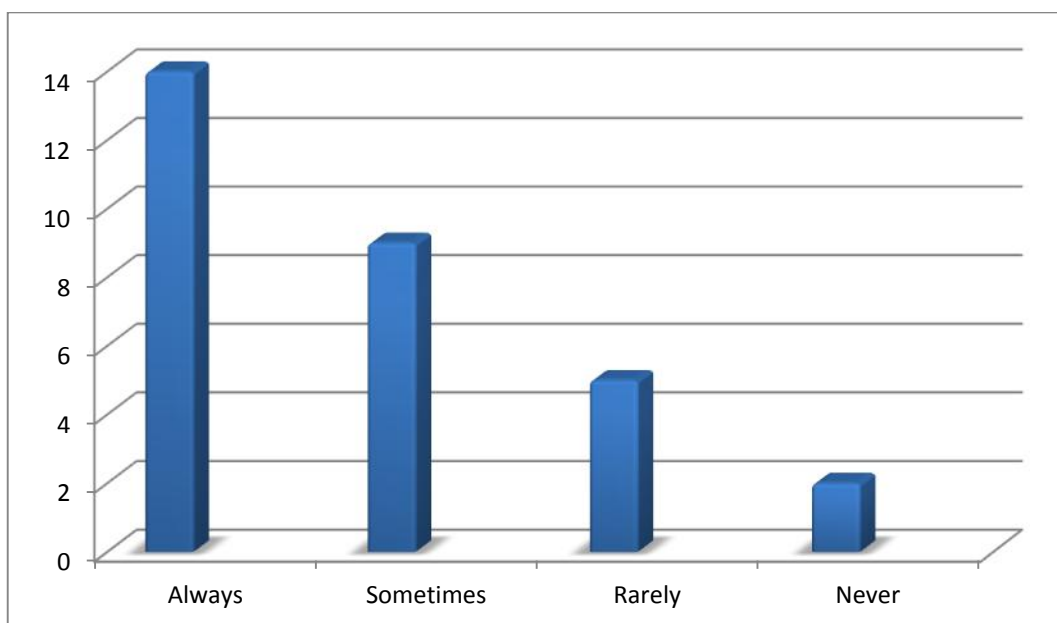
7 students however, confessed to depend totally on the teacher who is the one who delivers information, explains, assesses, and corrects.

### Item Seven

**Q:7 Since the beginning of the academic year, how often have you taken charge of your learning inside classroom**

Response	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Participants	14	9	5	2

**Table 9 : Students perception of taking charge of their learning inside class**



**Figure 8: Students perception of taking charge of their learning inside class**

The results above show that the majority of students are always responsible of their learning inside class , in other words it is not only the teacher who control the learning process but students engage in many activities and participate in and are active . However , 9 students take charge of their learning from time to time not all the time are autonomous and 5 students reveal that it is rare where they take charge of their learning .

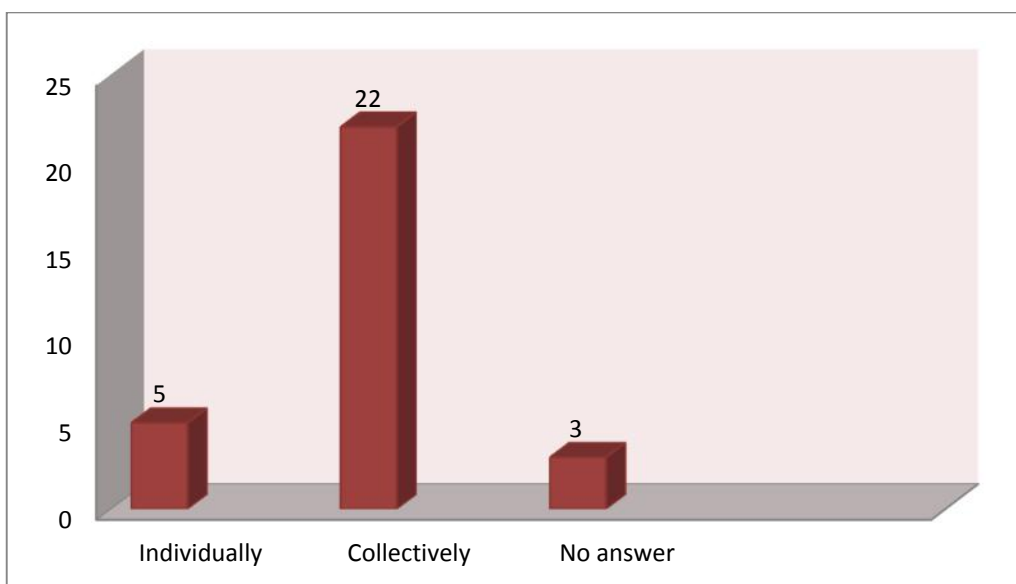
## Chapter Three : Data Collection and Analysis

Item Eight :

Q 13/ How do you prefer to study outside classroom?

Response	Individually	Collectively	No answer
Participants	5	22	3

**Table 10 :Students perception of their preferable way to study outside class**



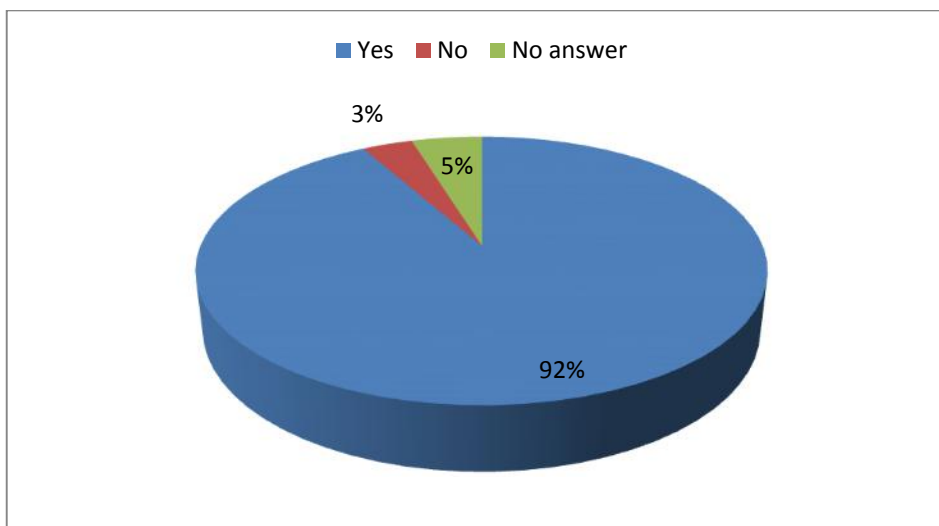
**Figure 9: Students perception of their preferable way to study outside class.**

It is obvious from the results that the majority like to work collectively 22 Students like to work in groups with other students when for example doing assignments and projects in order to share their ideas together and benefit from each other while 5 students from the overall number 30 prefer to work individually and they do not like to attach with other students.

**Item Nine: Q 14 Do you consider Facebook group an effective means for improving your capacities out class learning?**

Response	Yes	No	No answer
Participants	27	1	2
Percentage	92	3	5

**Table 11 :Students perception of Facebook Group as a means for improving their capacities outside class**



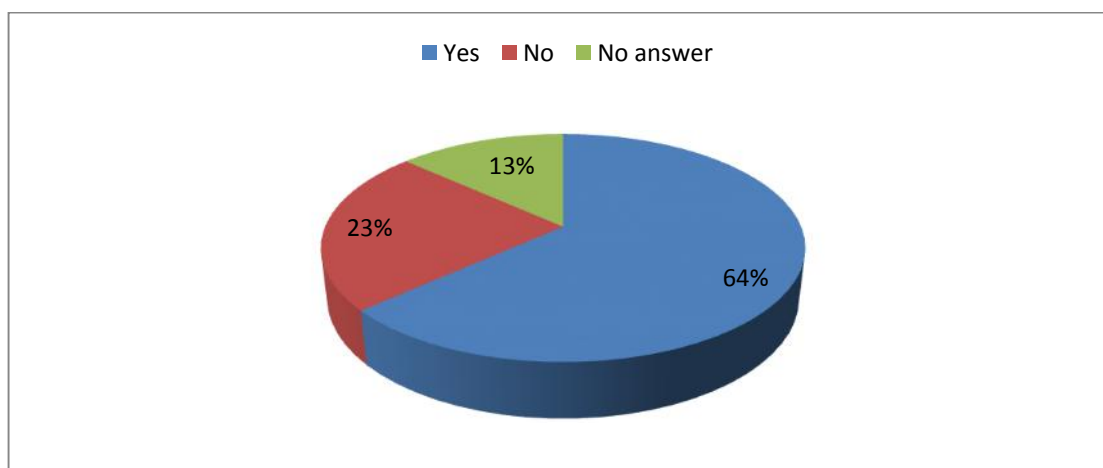
**Figure 10 :Students perception of Facebook Groups as a means for improving their capacities outside class**

The results above show that 92% of the whole sample has answered that studying in facebook groups will improve their learning capacities in which they share their ideas together and this creates critical thinking and builds a positive sense of autonomy While 3% confessed that facebook groups is not a means for improving their learning capacities outside class may be because they are dealing with other multimedia .

**Item Ten: Q 15: Have you ever corrected your peers?**

Response	Yes	No	No answer
Participants	19	7	4
Percentage	64	23	13

**Table 12: Students' correction of their peers**



**Figure 11: Students' assessment of their peers**

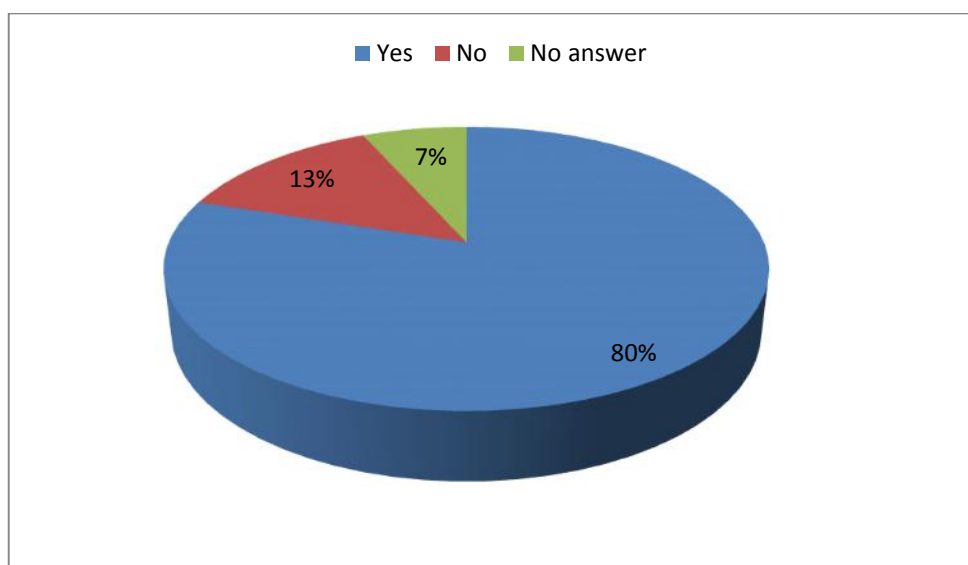
## Chapter Three : Data Collection and Analysis

The results above show that 64% of the students assess their peers when they commit mistakes and this show that Master One students have a high level of autonomy because they control their learning and they use peer assessment strategy and correct themselves and this latter builds a strong autonomous feeling whereas 23% of the students are not assessing and correcting their peers may be because they think it is only teacher's duty.

### Item eleven :Students' perception of their English proficiency and its relation to autonomous learning .

Response	Yes	No	No answer
Participants	24	4	2
Percentage	80	13	7

**Table 12 Students' perception of their English proficiency and its relation to autonomous learning**



**Figure 11 Students' perception of their English proficiency and its relation to autonomous learning**

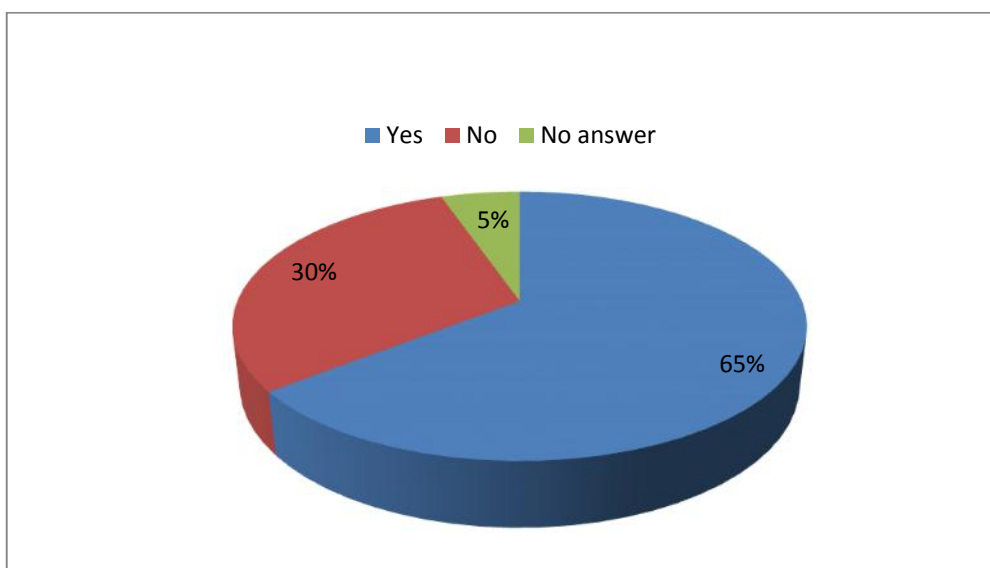
The results reveal learners opinion concerning the association of learners' autonomous learning to their English language proficiency in which 80% of answered that their level of language proficiency is tightly related to their autonomous learning. Therefore, it indicates that learners are conscious about the importance of this language learning strategy and its effects on English proficiency while interacting in the target language which is English and improving their communicative skills

## Chapter Three : Data Collection and Analysis

**Item Twelve :Students perception of self directing their learning by the end of the academic year**

Response	Yes	No	No answer
Participants	17	8	5
Percentage	80	13	7

**Table 13 Students perception of self directing their learning by the end of the academic year**



**Figure 12 Students perception of self directing their learning by the end of the academic year**

From the results above it is crystal clear that Master One students want to carry on their autonomous learning journey even by the end of the academic year in which they control their learning even outside class may be together with their pairs or alone .Through autonomous learning students can build their a sense of lifelong learning whereas 30 % of the students will not continue their autonomous learning may be they have other things to do.

### 3.7 Online Observation

In this section, we emphasized the Group application available on Facebook and highlighted the role of the interaction in English outside the classroom in specific contexts. What is more, facebook builds relationships, and rises learner's awareness through observation and experience. Facebook is undoubtedly a tool that can enhance the sense of

## Chapter Three : Data Collection and Analysis

belonging and construct the learner identity in which Master one students group consist of 239 members that share , debate and work together .



Picture 1 : Master One students facebook group



Picture 2: Master One students discussion

Facebook group is used primarily as a place to exchange thoughts and perspectives on various thematic topics during the academic year. This picture presents a visual picture of the discussion board used on Facebook .

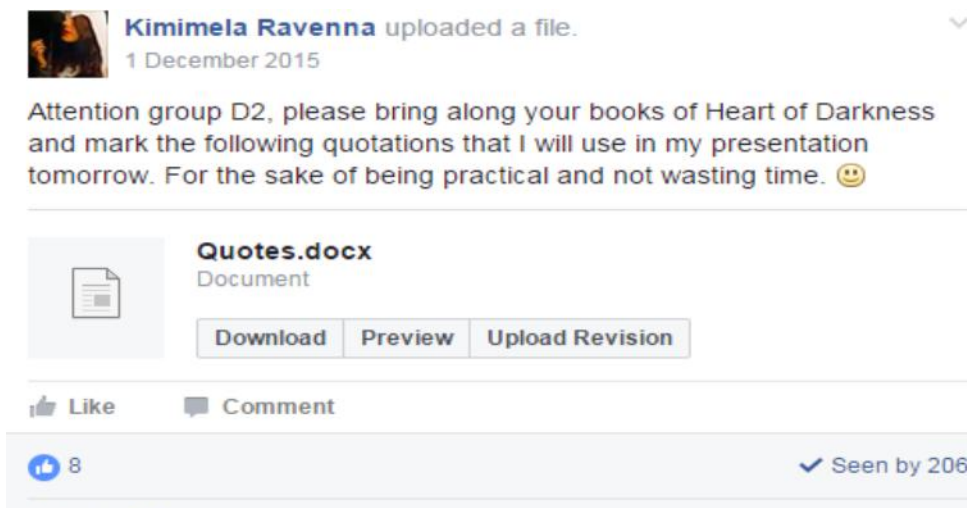
## Chapter Three : Data Collection and Analysis



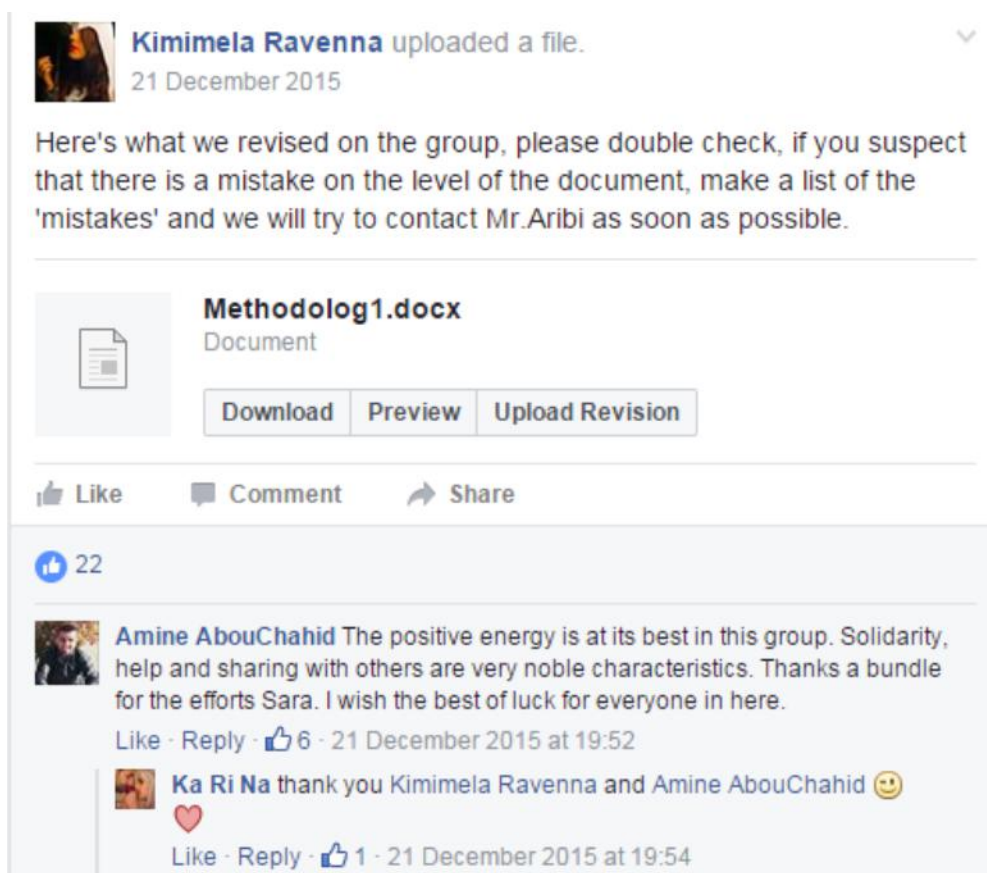
**Picture 3** : Master One students discussion

In this picture some members in the Group are sharing views, ideas, and topics. The number of discussion forums and participants varies greatly.

Master One Students are aware of the autonomous learning potential and the flexibility of time and place that Facebook offer and add to their e-routine and learning experience .



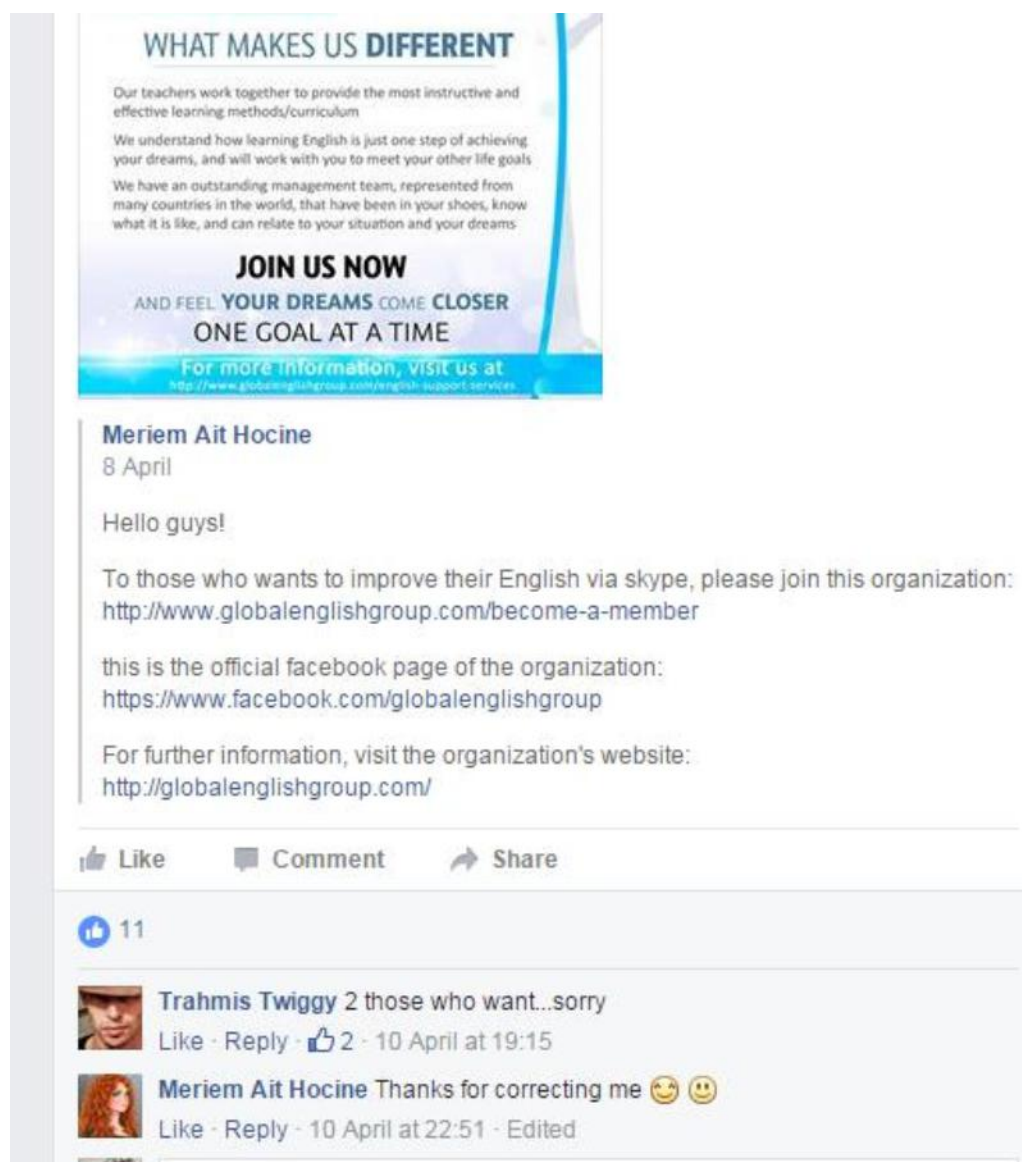
As it is shown above, students can post some topic on classroom group page and ask teams about their thoughts about the topic. This can encourage out of class learning. Teams can discuss the topic over Facebook before the topic is actually discussed in the class.



**Picture 4 and 5** : Master one students peer revision

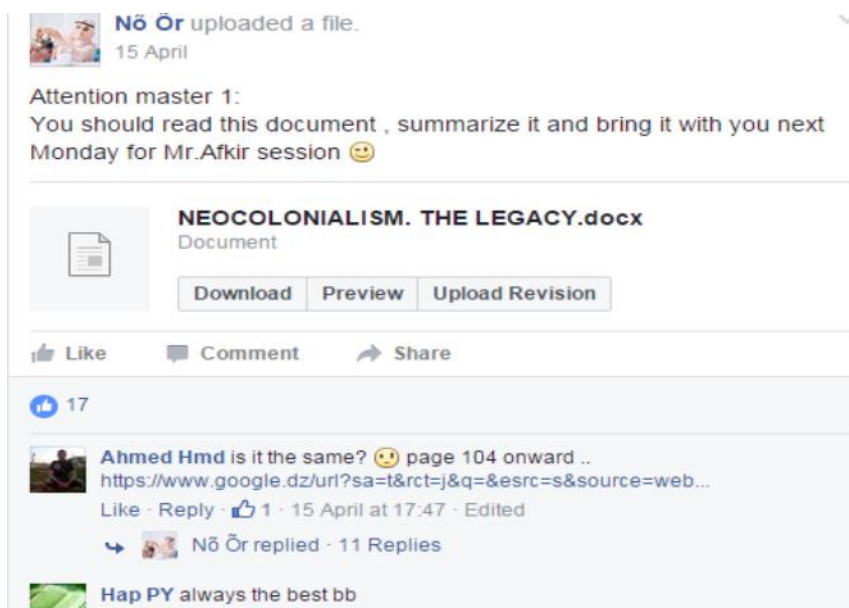
Based upon the observation of the picture above, we can say that facebook becomes a focal point for creative language learning. We also notice that the process of learning is significantly different according to this new environment where students are competent in reading, writing, understanding and debating in the target language, especially in topics related to their study. Furthermore, a remarkable break of the routine concerning the function of language is witnessed i.e. language here is localized within a community.

Working in peer groups outside classroom covers all group learning activities .This includes study collaboration. As the importance of group-work skills in professional life is becoming increasingly recognized .There are different kinds of group work such as, Studying together during term time, Consulting teachers, Consulting peers and revising together before examination, as well as discussing certain topics etc.



**Picture 6 :** Master One students peer correction

Several students indicated that they felt they could benefit from corrective feedback on their posts. One student noted that the teacher should "correct grammar and spelling! So that they can learn from their mistakes. Peer cooperation proved to be an essential part of the learning process and supports collective learning in small groups. Working successfully in groups by critical thinking and solving issues with peers, develops learners' abilities to become autonomous learners through peer correction. Thus, one can assume that there is strong connection between learner autonomy and social identity and peer groups.



**Picture 7** : peer work and the role of the teacher

Consulting teachers and revising together before examination, as well as discussing certain topics by sharing documents etc. Students are making their own decisions as to which learning activities they tackle and how to manage and perform them and as well the teacher is the one who accepts learners' initiatives role and supports and guides through sharing pieces of information and extra work and provides as well a good outside classroom.

### 3.8 . Conclusion

After analyzing Master students' questionnaires and collecting their views concerning their autonomous learning and as well their perspectives towards working in groups .Moreover, these views of master one students at Ammar Telidji University. In fact, the great majority of students consider themselves autonomous in learning English due to many factors. Most of them see the learning process as a learner's responsibility. Moreover, from their responses it's obvious that they work in groups both inside and outside classroom. While a small proportion of students tends to work individually. Facebook helps also in develop their autonomy skill by using facebook group and this constructs their social learning identity.

Students are aware of the autonomous learning potential and the flexibility of time and place that Facebook offer and add to their e-routine and learning experience.

## **Chapter Three : Data Collection and Analysis**

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Facebook is a great tool to enhance students communication and give constructive feedback for everybody to learn from it.

Facebook helps to use the target language as a source for building interpersonal connections that separates it from conventional ways to deal with language learning/teaching method and give a chance for better achievement. In other words, one of the important benefits of team based learning is that it helps students with developing skills. Also, it allows students to interact with each other on a daily basis and enables students to complete tasks within teams. Students then can communicate with each other as well as communicate with the teacher and other students in class via Facebook. This can encourage learners to work hard without going through embarrassment in front of the class as it plays an eminent role in their identity construction.

## General Conclusion

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It is necessary to enhance learner autonomy in foreign language learning, because the knowledge provided at universities is insufficient. Learners need to continue studies if they want to adapt to such a changeable world of information in which English is a vehicle for international communication. For this reason, Master students need to pay much more attention to the development of learner autonomy, so as to help them to foster a life –long learning. This study has dealt with autonomous learning in higher education more precisely in master one degree and its relation to the construction of learners' identity through group work.

Therefore, the present study aims at investigating the extent to which EFL Master One students' autonomous learning constructs their learning identity through group work. For answering the questions of the study, this dissertation has been divided into three chapters. Chapter one traces an overview of learner autonomy and identity and two is about the second variable of this study that demonstrates the enhancement of learner autonomy through group work and it constructs learner identity. While, the third chapter is devoted to the collection of data and its analysis.

To examine those variables and prove their close relationship, a descriptive research is conducted through the use of questionnaire as a valuable data gathering tool which has been submitted to EFL master one student .The analysis besides to what has been identified in the literature review provided worthy answers to the research questions. The findings of the questionnaire confirm the hypothesis that autonomous learning can be fostered if master one students work in groups. Moreover, results confirm the second hypothesis which demonstrates that promoting learner autonomy for first year master students mainly fulfilled through group discussions. The outcome of the questionnaire analysis has shown that most EFL master one students work in groups inside class and out class setting via the social networking Facebook and these strengthen their sense of independence and that the majority of master one students are autonomous learners due to many factors:

- The opportunities to take the initiative role in learning.
- The presence of group work strategy inside the classroom and as well as in out class setting via facebook that encourages students to be autonomous.
- The presence of some psychological factors such as motivation.

## General Conclusion

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- The postgraduate mode of learning insists on helping learners to become autonomous.

The ultimate aims in this study are to increase students' awareness about the effective role of autonomous learning as well as incorporating their use of group works both inside and outside class. Research questions are successfully answered in the present study. The analysis of the gathered data revealed that master one students from the division of English department are aware of the significance of group works and the sense that collaboration is on the whole oriented towards effective means for enhancing autonomy in and out class settings and for better construction of learner's identity.

Besides, the limitation of data was also attributed to the research method and the sample population being chosen; research questionnaire and an online observation are criticized by the fact that generalizations are not easily concluded especially when the sample population is approximately small. In fact, a sample of 30 students and to and as well active autonomous students from an online observation does not guarantee any attempt to generalize the findings. Nonetheless, the results obtained gave insights that a noticeable shift from the teacher to learner centeredness in which students take an active role inside and outside EFL classroom and unveiled that group work helps to both enhance autonomy and construct learner identity. The findings that come across, through research questionnaire and an online observation revealed some of the major reforms of the Algerian educational system.

In fact, this research would spark another nationwide debate on how to make our educational system to more efficient to graduate active, creative and productive critical thinkers and full autonomous learners.

# Appendices

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## Appendix I : Students' Questionnaire

Dear student,

The following questionnaire seeks to gather your perceptions for taking responsibility concerning your learning in and out class setting i.e, becoming autonomous learners through group work and how it can shape learners' identity in high education and more precisely M 1 degree.

Therefore, you are kindly requested to give your opinion on the following questions by putting a tick (√) in the appropriate box and comment when necessary. Please answer honestly. This is not an exam. The information you give will NOT be used to calculate your grades.

Miss **Kawthar Boualam**

---

### Section One: Background Information

1/ Age

2/ Gender                      **Female**                       **Male**

3/ Is studying English your personal choice?

**Yes**

**No**

4/ How would you evaluate your level in English?

**Good**                       **Average**                       **Bad**

---

### Section Two : Learner autonomy and Group work

5/ Do you describe yourself as an autonomous learner?

**Yes**                       **No**

**Why?**.....  
.....  
.....

## Appendices

---

6/ Who is taking more responsibility in the teaching / learning process?

**Learner**       **Teacher**       **Both**

7/ To what extent do you rely on your teacher in your learning?

**Totally**       **Partially**

8/ Since the beginning of the academic year, how often have you taken charge of your learning inside classroom ?

**Always**       **Rarely**       **Sometimes**       **Never**

9/ What kind of activities do you prefer to do in class?

**Group discussions**       **Others**

**Oral Presentations**

**Why?**.....  
.....

10/ Since the beginning of this year, have you read something out of your syllabus course design outside class?

**Yes**       **No**

11/ How do you prefer to study outside classroom?

**Individually**       **Collectively**

12/ Do you consider Facebook group an effective means for improving your capacities out class learning?

**Yes**       **No**

## Appendices

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How?.....  
.....

13/ Have you ever corrected your peers?

Yes

No

When ?.....

14/ Do you think your English proficiency is related to learning autonomously?

Yes

No

15/Will you continue to self-direct your learning by the end of the academic year?

Yes

No

Why ?.....

*Thank you for your collaboration*

## Appendix I I Online Observation

### Master One students' Facebook Group (pictures )

**The Department of English 2015-2016 (Master - LMD)**  
Closed group

Joined | Share | Notifications

Discussion | Members | Events | Photos | Files

Write Post | Add Photo/Video | Create poll | More

Write something...

RECENT ACTIVITY

**Mohamed Mechattah**  
2 hrs  
African Literature Exam (2015-2016)  
2nd semester

**ADD MEMBERS**  
+ Enter name or email address...

**MEMBERS** 239 members (1 new)  
Message · Invite by Email

**DESCRIPTION**  
Revision - Lessons - Presentations -  
Dissertations - Explanations  
University of Ammar Telidji - Laghouat \_  
Algeria

**Kimimela Ravenna**  
2 January

Now, we shall proceed to discussing Arrow of God in the same way we did in the classroom.  
First Question:  
Why was Arrow of God written in the form of a novel and not a poem ?

Like · Comment · Share

12

View 1 more comment

**Kendall Jenner** novel can be at the reach of everyone and not restricted for the intellectuals!  
Like · Reply · 3 · 2 January at 22:03 · Edited  
Ahmed Hmd replied · 2 Replies

**Bob Nina** To answer back the western stereotypes just in the same way Heart of Darkness was written  
Like · Reply · 1 · 2 January at 22:03  
Kimimela Ravenna replied · 1 Reply

**Amine AbouChahid** I think the main reason is that the novel attracts more readers and it would enable the writer to express a lot of ideas easily.  
Like · Reply · 2 · 2 January at 22:04

**Kendall Jenner** the themes are very limited in poems however in prose the writer has a vast space to express whatever theme he wants!  
Like · Reply · 4 · 2 January at 22:05

**Takwa Rose** Exactly  
Like · Reply · 1 · 2 January at 22:07



**Ibtissam Touhami** Adi Depends on your audience and context of the discourse coz all three are elements if discourse analysis.... A well educated crowd would focus on content ...a less educated one would be brain washed by your body language and tone  
Like · Reply · 8 · 19 March at 22:09 · Edited

**Nadir Bentireche** I prefer to go silent ,,silence is the greater deal  
Like · Reply · 2 · 19 March at 22:45

**Mebrouk Lebrague** replied · 4 Replies

**Hicham Benelmouaz** I believ the importance must be given to the whole three factors as respectively stated above.choosin an appropriate vocab is an important aspect of any performance.Dont dress up ur vocab,if u use abscur one in an attempt to impress the audience,it wi... See more  
Like · Reply · 3 · 20 March at 00:59

**Wafa Rgb** they are all important but the order for me is 1 the tone 2 body language 3 content cz you may have an interesting content but with a bad tone it won t be attractive and u ll feel bored from the beginning. + once you get the opportunity to speak this means that you certaily have a good content  
Like · Reply · 1 · 20 March at 10:46

Write a comment...

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**ONE GOAL AT A TIME**

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**Meriem Ait Hocine**

8 April

Hello guys!

To those who wants to improve their English via skype, please join this organization:  
<http://www.globalenglishgroup.com/become-a-member>

this is the official facebook page of the organization:  
<https://www.facebook.com/globalenglishgroup>

For further information, visit the organization's website:  
<http://globalenglishgroup.com/>

Like Comment Share

11

**Trahmis Twiggy** 2 those who want...sorry  
Like · Reply · 2 · 10 April at 19:15

**Meriem Ait Hocine** Thanks for correcting me 😊 😊  
Like · Reply · 10 April at 22:51 · Edited



**Kimimela Ravenna** uploaded a file.  
1 December 2015

Attention group D2, please bring along your books of Heart of Darkness and mark the following quotations that I will use in my presentation tomorrow. For the sake of being practical and not wasting time. 😊



**Quotes.docx**  
Document

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Seen by 206



**Kimimela Ravenna** uploaded a file.  
21 December 2015

Here's what we revised on the group, please double check, if you suspect that there is a mistake on the level of the document, make a list of the 'mistakes' and we will try to contact Mr.Aribi as soon as possible.



**Methodolog1.docx**  
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**Amine AbouChahid** The positive energy is at its best in this group. Solidarity, help and sharing with others are very noble characteristics. Thanks a bundle for the efforts Sara. I wish the best of luck for everyone in here.

Like · Reply · 6 · 21 December 2015 at 19:52



**Ka Ri Na** thank you Kimimela Ravenna and Amine AbouChahid 😊



Like · Reply · 1 · 21 December 2015 at 19:54



**Kimimela Ravenna** uploaded a file.

21 December 2015

Here's what we revised on the group, please double check, if you suspect that there is a mistake on the level of the document, make a list of the 'mistakes' and we will try to contact Mr.Aribi as soon as possible.



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**Amine AbouChahid** The positive energy is at its best in this group. Solidarity, help and sharing with others are very noble characteristics. Thanks a bundle for the efforts Sara. I wish the best of luck for everyone in here.

Like · Reply · 6 · 21 December 2015 at 19:52



**Ka Ri Na** thank you Kimimela Ravenna and Amine AbouChahid 😊



Like · Reply · 1 · 21 December 2015 at 19:54



**Nõ Or** uploaded a file.

15 April

Attention master 1:

You should read this document , summarize it and bring it with you next Monday for Mr.Afkir session 😊



**NEOCOLONIALISM. THE LEGACY.docx**

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**Ahmed Hmd** is it the same? 😊 page 104 onward ..  
<https://www.google.dz/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web...>

Like · Reply · 1 · 15 April at 17:47 · Edited



Nõ Or replied · 11 Replies



**Hap PY** always the best bb

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## ملخص

نبعت هذه الدراسة من الرغبة في تأكيد الجزم بان متعلمي اللغة الاجنبية اكثر نجاحا عندما يسمح لهم بالمشاركة والانخراط بفعالية في عملية التعلم. ان هذه الدراسة -التي هي من خلال عدسات النظرية البنائية تهدف الى استكشاف مدى ارتباط ذاتية التعليم بهوية المتعلم من خلال العمل الجماعي، وكيفية ان هذا الاخير يعزز الاستقلالية و بالتالي يساهم في تطوير هوية المتعلم

يعرض الفصل الاول من هذه الدراسة لمحة شاملة حول التعلم المستقل والهوية في حين يسلط الفصل الثاني الضوء على التعلم المستقل من خلال العمل الجماعي داخل الصف ومن خلال مجموعة الفيسبوك خارجه كما يدرس مدى تاثير العمل الجماعي في بناء هوية المتعلمين بصفة عامة ومن الاستبيان. لتحقيق الاهداف السابق ذكرها اهتم الفصل الثالث بجمع البيانات وتحليلها من خلال دراسة الذي وجه لطلبة السنة اولى ماستر -تخصص لغة انجليزية بجامعة عمار ثليجي بالاغواط- الذي يعد اداة تجريبية من خلالها تم تحري تصورات المتعلمين حول التعلم المستقل،بالاضافة الى جمع عدد كبير من الملاحظات على الانترنت بهدف النظر عن كثب الى مدى مشاركة الطلبة بمجموعتهم بالفيسبوك. وفي الاخير ، كشفت هذه الدراسة ان التعلم المستقل يساعد الطلاب على الاعتماد على انفسهم و تطوير تعلمهم المستقل.

**الكلمات المفاتيح:** التعلم المستقل،الهوية،العمل الجماعي،مجموعة الفيسبوك،اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية، طلبة اولى ماستر