



Learner Autonomy and Language Achievement: A Case Study of Secondary Level ESL learners in Pakistan

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Abstract: The current study explores the relationship between language learning autonomy and language achievement among the SSC level learners enrolled in the private sector and public sector schools in Gujrat. Additionally, the study explores how male and female respondents at sector and public sector SSC level schools differ in their perceived levels of language learning autonomy, language learning strategies, and dependence on the teachers and peers. To achieve these research objectives, the researcher applied a concurrent mixed-methods approach involving the quantitative and qualitative means of data collection and analysis. A survey-questionnaire with 22 Likert scale question items and a semi-structured interview guide was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data was collected from 230 respondents at two private and two public sector schools. For the semi-structured interviews, eight (8) randomly selected students from one public, and one private-sector school. The ESL learners were asked about their perceptions about learner autonomy. SPSS software was used for the quantitative analysis of the collected data, and the content analysis helped the researcher identify themes relevant to answering the research objectives. The data shows that more competent learners are more autonomous and less dependent on the teachers and peers. Moreover, t-tests and interview data confirm that there exists a gender difference in the levels of learner autonomy among the respondents. It was also found that the ESL learners of the private sector schools were more autonomous and competent in English language. It is expected that syllabus designers and classroom instructors will use the current study to improve the levels of autonomy among learners.

Keywords: Learner Autonomy, Language Achievement, Gender Differences, Secondary Level, ESL Learners

I. INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy is not a new concept in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). It emerged as an area of inquiry in pedagogical studies in the 1970s. It was defined adequately by Holec (1981) as "an ability to take charge of one's learning" (as cited in Nunan, 1997, p. 193). This definition explains learner autonomy in terms of a learner's ability to take control of the process of learning. This conceptualization of learner autonomy yielded several studies exploring the learner's ability to make decisions during the process of learning.

Nonetheless, decision-making abilities are not the only criterion for being an autonomous learner. Later, scholars like Nunan (1997), have argued that it is not right to consider an autonomous learner is only autonomous in making decisions; instead, an autonomous learner is also involved in "active, independent management of learning" (Rivers & Golonka, 2009, p. 225). This dynamic concept of an autonomous learner is elaborated by Bneson (2001) more comprehensively. He explains that a learner's autonomy has three interrelated dimensions as learning management, learning content, and cognitive process (Benson, 2013, p. 47).

From a pedagogical perspective, it is imperative for a teacher to support a learner and develop his/her autonomy in managing his learning. Empirical studies have shown that teachers' role in developing learners' autonomy cannot be undermined (see Longworth, 2003; Voller, 1997). Teachers being the facilitator of the learning process, can introduce those learning materials to promote learner autonomy. Furthermore, a teacher can also introduce certain classroom activities that could lessen the learners' anxiety and promote

the confidence of the learners. So, a teacher is a mentor and a facilitator who can boost the autonomy of the learner in the process of learning.

Our understanding of the role of the learner's autonomy in a language in language successful learning achievement has proven the way for the developing learner-centred syllabuses and teaching practices methodologies. It is a proven fact that teachers and learners both have an important and vital role in promoting learner autonomy in English language. Both factors are proportional to each other, and none should be ignored. It can be expected that the current study will provide a baseline for future studies in the field of learner autonomy. Furthermore, it is envisaged that the study would provide a guide-line to the syllabus designers and language teachers for the development of teaching materials that could promote autonomous learning.

Over the years, in ELT, the traditional teaching language methods have been critiqued for being too much teacher-centred (Chohan, Saleem& Abbas, 2018). One of the major calls for the change in pedagogical practices emphasizes the need for learners' autonomy in learner-centred classrooms (Jacobs& Farrell, 2003). Nonetheless, this shift in teaching approach is impossible until our teachers are equipped with modern-day teaching practices and are competent enough to introduce such a teaching material that could promote autonomous learning culture among the language learners.

There is no doubt that learner autonomy has emerged as the most cherish-able goal of modern-day teaching. It is acknowledged that language learning is a life-long process, and if a learner is equipped with autonomous strategies for language learning, he/she will make better progress than non-autonomous learners. Substantiating the relationship between learner autonomy and language achievement, Little (1991) has also highlighted that the more autonomous learners are the most competent.

The current study focuses on the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between language learning autonomy and language achievement or success among the ESL learners at secondary level schools in Pakistan?

RQ2: How do the target ESL learners at secondary level schools in Pakistan differ in their level of autonomy in language learning?

RQ3: Is there any gender differentiation in the levels of learner autonomy among the secondary level ESL learners in Pakistan?

RQ4: How do the ESL learners of public sector schools differ from the private sector schools in their levels of learner autonomy, at secondary level schools in Pakistan.

II. METHODS AND PROCEDURE

The current study falls into the domain of social science. Different research approaches are opted by scholars in social science to achieve their research objectives. The researcher's beliefs determine these research approaches about the nature of the research and his/her adherence to any paradigm of research. The current study applies a post-positivist research paradigm for the current study. This paradigm responds to the criticism put against the positivist research paradigm, which is considered more appropriate for the research in the domain of natural sciences (Clark & Creswell, 2008). In social sciences, a researcher cannot remain an objective observer of the phenomenon, as scientists in the fields of natural sciences. The subject matter of the study in social sciences are humans, their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. The complexity human nature does not allow us to take a positivist stance. In our case, a learner's autonomy is a complex phenomenon that requires both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data. Any positivist approach to understand learner autonomy will not be able to grasp the complexity of the concept. In this regard, a post-positivist paradigm that alusing a mixed-methods approach can be regarded as the most appropriate research paradigm. Considering this, the current study will use the post-positivist paradigm for the current study.

The mixed-methods approach is used to triangulate the quantitative and qualitative data. Nonetheless, this triangulation can be done in different combinations of qualitative and quantitative approaches. For the current study, I will use a convergent parallel research design. According to Creswell & Pablo-Clark (2011), this research design is a mixed research design that requires a concurrent application of the qualitative and quantitative approaches for data collection and analysis. So, the data collected from the respondents through a survey questionnaire and the data collected in the form of interviews, both types of data overlapped in time.

The current study uses a concurrent mixed methods approach to explore learner's autonomy and its role in language achievement at SSC level schools in Gujrat. The quantitative data was collected with a survey questionnaire that measured learner's autonomy on 22 Likert-scale question items. The survey questionnaire measured learner's autonomy on the four scales as a) Self-perceived beliefs about learner autonomy, b) strategies used for learner autonomy, c) dependence on teachers, and d) dependence on peers. The last two scales were loaded negatively on the SPSS for the analysis as they measured the lack of learner's autonomy. This survey questionnaire was administered to 230 SSC level students enrolled at 2 public and 2 private sector schools in Gujrat.

The qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews from 8 respondents randomly selected from the 1 public sector and 1 private sector school. An interview guide was developed for these interviews to study the learners' autonomous learning behavior and strategies.

Context of the Study

The current study was conducted on the respondents from the public and private schools situated in Gujrat city, Pakistan. According to the Census (2017), the total population of Gujrat district is 2756110. Kharian, Sara e Alamgir, and Gujrat city are the three tehsils of district Gujrat. The data of the study were based on the two private and two public sector schools offering SSC level qualification in Gujrat city. Most of the respondents were the native of the Gujrat city and aged 14 to 17. For the quantitative data, the researcher administered the survey questionnaire on the selected students from the following four (4) schools:

1. Govt. Girls High School, GhareebPura, Gujrat, Pakistan.
2. Govt Municipal Boys High School, Muslim Abad, Gujrat, Pakistan.
3. Kids Galaxy School, Rehman Shaheed Road, Gujrat, Pakistan.
4. Pakistan International Public School, Ali Pura Road, Gujrat, Pakistan.

For the interview data, the researcher visited two schools and interviewed students regarding their perceptions about language autonomy and its role in language achievement. The schools where the interview data was collected are:

1. Govt. Girls High School, GhareebPura, Gujrat, Pakistan.
2. Kids Galaxy School, Rehman Shaheed Road, Gujrat, Pakistan.

Sampling Design and Size

The current study involved quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures, and hence two different samples were selected to administer survey questionnaire and conduct interviews. For the quantitative data collection through a survey questionnaire, data were collected from the SSC level learners enrolled at the secondary education level. From each of the four schools, two classes of 9th and 10th grades were purposively selected and the students were asked to volunteer for the study. Responding to our call, 230 students took part in the survey questionnaire. The following table shows the distribution of the sample size in the selected schools.

Names of the Schools	Sample Size
Govt. Girls High School, GhareebPura, Gujrat.	73
Govt Municipal Boys High School, Muslim Abad, Gujrat.	58

Kids Galaxy School, Rehman Shaheed Road, Gujrat.	46
Pakistan International Public School, Ali Pura Road, Gujrat.	53

Table 1: Distribution of ESL learners in the selected schools

For the qualitative data collection through interview sessions, eight (8) students were selected from the following schools

Names of the Schools	Sample Size
Govt. Girls High School, GhareebPura, Gujrat	4
Kids Galaxy School, Rehman Shaheed Road, Gujrat.	4

Table 2: Sample size for the semi-structured interviews

Data Collection Tools

For the quantitative data collection, a survey questionnaire was used to know about the respondent's level of autonomy and the role of their autonomous learning in English language learning. Furthermore, for the qualitative data collection, an interview guide was used as a data collection tool.

a) Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire used for the study has two parts A and B. Part A of the questionnaire had 4 learner autonomy scales on 22 Likert-scale question items (see Appendix A). The questionnaire used for this study was partially adapted from Jhaish (2010) and Bagherzadeh, et al. (2014). From these sources, the researcher borrowed 10 question items either in whole or in modified form. The rest of the 12 question-items were new.

S. No	Scales for Learner Autonomy	Question Items
1.	Self-perception about Learner Autonomy	1 to 7
2.	Strategies Used for Learner Autonomy	7 to 13
3.	Learner Dependence on Teacher (Reverse)	14 to 18
4.	Learner Dependence on Peers (Reverse)	19 to 22

Table 3: Scales for the Learner Autonomy Questionnaire

The first scale measured learners' self-perception about their autonomous learning and asked questions like "I learn better by reading than listening". The second scale explored the strategies they generally use to learn autonomously. Questions asked under this scale were like "I learn more when I make something for a class project." The next two scales were the measure of learner's dependence on teacher and other peers. So, the question items of these two scales were negatively loaded for the analysis. The third scale inquired how much the learner was dependent upon the teacher for learning and asked questions like "I find I cannot learn without the help of my teacher". The last scale explored the learner's dependence on his/her peers by asking questions like "I learn more when I study with the group".

Part B of the survey questionnaire aimed at collecting data on the demographic features of the study sample. The questions asked in this section were related to age, gender, locality, mother tongue, language proficiency, etc.

b) Interview Guide

This interview guide was used to ask about the learner's beliefs about learner autonomy. The respondents were also asked about their most commonly used strategies for language learning. Moreover, they opined about the role of learner autonomy in language achievement scores. The following interview guide was used for semi-structured interviews with the respondents.

1. How would you describe yourself, an autonomous or a dependent learner?
2. Do you believe that learner autonomy is important for learning?
3. Do you think you get ample opportunity in the class to be an autonomous learner?
4. What is your opinion about the role of learner autonomy in language learning?
5. How dependent are you on your teacher for language learning?
6. Do you learn by group activities and collaborative tasks? How much are they useful?
7. What strategies do you adopt to learn the language on your own?
8. Do you learn more when you independently study some topic?
9. How much time do you give to the learning tasks not assigned by your teacher?
10. Do you seek help from your parent and siblings for the assigned home tasks?

It is important to state here that these questions functioned only as an interview guide. The researcher modified these questions during the interview process based on the respondents' responses. A mobile phone recorder was used to collect the interview data.

Research Variables

The independent variable used for the current study was learner autonomy. In the survey questionnaire this variable was measured for its four dimensions as reflected in the four scales of the questionnaire, as discussed earlier. The dependent variable was learner achievement, a criterion variable measured by collecting the learners' data about their reported or perceived competence in English language and their marks obtained in the previous examination. This information was collected through the survey questionnaire. The qualitative interviews also targeted to study the association between the learner's autonomous behavior and their language achievement.

Data Collection

The data was collected in the two stages, i.e., quantitative data collection and qualitative data collection.

Quantitative Data Collection: Survey Questionnaire

In this data collection stage, the researcher visited the following four SSC level schools situated in Gujrat City.

1. Govt. Girls High School, GhareebPura, Gujrat.
2. Govt Municipal Boys High School, Muslim Abad, Gujrat.
3. Kids Galaxy School, Rehman Shaheed Road, Gujrat.
4. Pakistan International Public School, Ali Pura Road, Gujrat.

The first two schools given above are the public sector schools, and the last two schools are the private sector schools. Verbal consent was granted by the heads/principals of these schools to collect data on the survey questionnaire. At these schools, different classes and sections of SSC level were visited by the researcher and the data was collected with the help of the class teachers. The respondents were not forced to take part in the survey, and they voluntarily filled-in the questionnaires.

Qualitative Data Collection: Semi-structured Interviews

At the second stage of data collection, only the following two schools were visited:

1. Govt. Girls High School, GhareebPura, Gujrat
2. Kids Galaxy School, Rehman Shaheed Road, Gujrat.

The researcher randomly collected eight (8) students from these schools with four (4) students from each school. There were four girls and four boys in this sample, all taking SSC level classes at their schools. The data were collected during break-time with the help of the mobile phone recorder.

Limitation of the Study

One of the primary limitations of the study was that the data was collected only from Gujrat, and the findings of the study cannot be generalized for all the SSC level students in Pakistan. Nonetheless, this limitation was an outcome of the limited scope of the research. The second limitation of the study is that the learner's autonomy was self-reported data provided by the learners. Self-reports are not the most reliable form of data as the learners may under-report or over-report their beliefs and strategies for autonomous learning. This limitation could have been minimized by getting data through certain qualitative data collection techniques like classroom observation by the researcher and the learners' diary notes. Nonetheless, many scholars consider self-reported survey questionnaires reliable means of data collection if it shows high-reliability value statistically. The questionnaire used for this study was a reliable instrument (see the following section Data Analysis), and it can be assumed that the findings based on the questionnaire were authentic and reliable.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

As discussed earlier, the current study aimed at exploring the relationship between language autonomy and language achievement among the graduate students of SSC level in Gujrat. The study also aimed at exploring how the gender of the learners is related to the degree of learner's autonomy in language learning. Furthermore, another objective of the study was to unearth the role of school affiliation, i.e., private or public schools promoting the learner's autonomy. Finally, the study's primary objective was to analyze the role of learner's autonomy in the learners' language achievement. To achieve these research objectives, quantitative and qualitative data were collected with the help of a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. This section is divided into two strands of analysis, i.e., quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software, and the research questions were answered by applying correlations and t-tests. The qualitative analysis discusses the significant themes of learner autonomy found in the collected data.

Quantitative data analysis

As the survey questionnaire was adapted and modified before the administration, it was imperative to study the questionnaire's reliability, first before applying other statistical procedures to the data. Therefore, a pilot study was conducted. In the following section, the findings of the reliability of the questionnaire are presented.

Piloting Survey Questionnaire

As most of the questionnaire items used in the survey questionnaire were either modified or new, the researcher deemed it appropriate to run the reliability test for all four scales of the questionnaire. For this purpose, in the first stage of data collection, the data from 53 students were collected from PIPS, Rahman Shaheed Road, Gujrat. This data was loaded in SPSS, and Cronbach alpha values for the four scales were calculated.

Scales for Learner Autonomy	Question Items	Cronbach Alpha without deletion	Question Items to be removed	Cronbach Alpha improved
Self-perception about Learner Autonomy	1 to 7	0.621	4	0.686
Strategies Used for Learner Autonomy	7 to 13	0.725	None	0.725

Learner Dependence on Teacher (Reverse)	14 to 18	0.589	16	0.614
Learner Dependence on Peers (Reverse)	19 to 22	0.749	19	0.767

Table 4: Reliability: Piloting of Survey Questionnaire

The above-given table4 shows that, for the three scales, if a question item is removed, then we get an improved reliability score for the scales. However, the difference in the removal of the identified question items made is too small to be considered. Therefore, the researcher retained all the question items for the final questionnaire as well. For the second scale, Strategies Used for Learner Autonomy, the reliability alpha score decreases with removing any of the question items used in this scale. The questionnaire's highest reliability alpha score is for the scale of Learner Dependence of Peers, and the lowest is for the scale Learner Dependence on Teacher. The reliability alpha scores are above 0.6 for all the scales, which is considered a good value in social sciences (see Pallant, 2007)

Statistical Analysis

This section highlights the statistical tests performed on the data collected through a survey questionnaire. There were three major types of statistical tests that were applied to the data. The correlation test was run on the collected data to explore the associations between the demographic variables and the four learner autonomy scales: Learner Dependence (LD) on Teachers, Learner Dependence (LD) on Peers, Self-Perception about Learner Autonomy (LA), and Strategies Used for Learner Autonomy (LA). Later, to answer our second and third research question, two independent samples t-tests were applied to explore whether the gender (male/female) or the affiliation with the school (private/public) determines differentiation in the mean score differences the learner autonomy.

Correlations tests

The following table (5) gives the correlation values for the different demographic scales and the four dimensions of learner autonomy.

Correlations

School	1																		
Medium_Instruction	.696**	1																	
Gender	.243**	.486**	1																
Mother_Tongue	.383**	.182**	.278*	1															
Age	.014	.038	-.089	.136*	1														
Locality	-.046	.183**	.156*	.153*	.033	1													
Lang_Competence	.503**	.232**	.679*	.249*	.059	.104	1												
Marks_Obtained	.473**	.468**	.146*	.290*	-.168*	.105	.794*	1											
LD_Teachers	.486**	.041	-.078	.042	-.009	.021	.225*	.094	1										
LD_Peers	-.536*	.056	-.117	.023	-.074	.072	.137	.270*		1									
	.164*	.007	.749*	.249*	.013	.000	.725*	.015	.228*	-.011	1								

	Female	96	1.6979	.61763	.06304
LD_Peers	Male	135	2.4593	1.2799 4	.11016
	Female	96	2.1771	1.0462 4	.10678
LA_Perceptions	Male	135	2.2889	1.2208 8	.10508
	Female	96	2.3438	1.0743 7	.10965
LA_Strategies	Male	135	2.1704	1.1752 5	.10115
	Female	96	2.1979	1.1931 4	.12177

Table 6: Group Statistics

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	
Lang_Competence	EV A	.656	.419	-.363	229	.717	-.034	.0948	-.221	.158	
	EV NA			-.369	214.1	.713	-.034	.0935	-.21	.149	
Marks_Obtained	EV A	11.7	.001	2.238	229	.026	3.736	1.670	.446	7.73	
	EV NA			2.146	217.7	.033	3.736	1.741	.299	7.19	
LD_Teachers	EV A	14.6	.000	1.180	229	.239	.1391	.117	-.093	.371	
	EV NA			1.278	223.2	.203	.1391	.108	-.075	.353	
LD_Peers	EV A	7.33	.007	2.778	229	.047	.2821	.158	-.030	.594	
	EV NA			2.839	224.5	.056	.2821	.153	-.021	.584	
LA_Perceptions	EV A	1.96	.012	.354	229	.024	-.0548	.155	-.360	.250	
	EV NA			.361	218.7	.028	-.0548	.151	-.354	.24	
LA_Strategies	EV A	.036	.851	-.174	229	.862	-.0275	.1579	-.338	.283	
	EV NA			-.174	202.5	.862	-.0275	.158	-.339	.284	

Table 7: Independent Samples Test

The independent samples t-test shows a significant difference among males and females for the mean scores for the Marks Obtained ($t(229) = 2.778, p=.047$), as females are less likely to depend on their peers for language learning. Moreover, the data also shows that for Self-Perceived Learner Autonomy, females respondents' mean score is more than male respondents with $t(229) = .345$, and $p = 0.24$.

Independent Sample t-test: Private/Public Schools and Learner Autonomy

The group statistics for the t-test (see below table, 8& 9) show that, for the public and private sector schools, there is a notable mean score difference for the respondents' reported language competence and their dependence on teachers and peers. The government school learners report to be less competent than the private school respondents, and they were found more dependent on their teachers and other peers for their learning than the respondents of the private sector schools.

Independent samples t-test for this table shows that the mean score difference between the public and private sector schools for the perceived language competence was significantly different with the values of $t(229) = -3.99$ with $p=0.001$. Similarly, the mean score difference between the Marks Obtained was also significantly different as the private schools students reported to have achieved more marks than the public sector learners ($t(229) = -2.89$, $p.004$). Moreover, the significant difference was also found for the language dependence of the public and private sector students on their teachers. Independent sample t-test shows that the public sector schools' learners were more dependent on their teachers for language learning than private-sector learners. The values for this mean score difference were found to be $t(229) = 2.79$ at $p=.006$.

	School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Lang_Competence	Govt School	120	2.2333	.57589	.05257
	Private School	111	2.5946	.79061	.07504
Marks_Obtained	Govt School	120	76.7917	13.09686	1.19557
	Private School	111	81.5315	11.64148	1.10496
LD_Teachers	Govt School	120	1.9333	.91425	.08346
	Private School	111	1.6126	.82209	.07803
LA_Peers	Govt School	120	2.4500	1.16569	.10641
	Private School	111	2.2252	1.21868	.11567
LA_Perceptions	Govt School	120	2.2333	1.00196	.09147
	Private School	111	2.3964	1.30926	.12427
LA_Strategies	Govt School	120	2.2417	1.03709	.09467
	Private School	111	2.1171	1.31936	.12523

Table 8: Group Statistics

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	
Lang_Competence	EA A	28.51	.000	-3.99	229	.000	-.366	.090	-.534	-.182
	EA NA			-3.94	199.51	.000	-.366	.091	-.543	-.180

Marks_Obtained	EA A	1.996	.159	-2.89	229	.004	-4.73	1.635	-7.966	-1.51
	EA NA			-2.91	228.6	.004	-4.73	1.627	-7.94	-1.532
LD_Teachers	EA A	2.296	.131	2.79	229	.006	.320	.114	.0946	.546
	EA NA			2.80	228.82	.005	.320	.114	.0950	.545
LA_Peers	EA A	1.117	.292	1.43	229	.153	.224	.156	-.0848	.533
	EA NA			1.43	225.07	.154	.224	.157	-.0844	.534
LA_Perceptions	EA A	14.80	.000	-1.06	229	.287	-.163	.152	-.4640	.137
	EA NA			-1.05	205.7	.292	-.163	.154	-.468	.141
LA_Strategies	EA A	4.96	.027	.801	229	.424	.124	.155	-.183	.431
	EA NA			.793	208.6	.428	.124	.156	-.183	.434

Table 9: Group Statistics

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews was based on the content analysis of the interviews' transcribed data. Following essential themes emerged from the data collected from 8 respondents equally selected from public and private sector schools.

a. Schools and Dependence on Teacher and Peers

The interview data revealed that public sector ESL learners were more dependent upon their teachers and peers for language learning. On the other hand, the respondents from the private sector school claimed that, for language learning, they were less dependent on others. In interview data, many factors explored for this difference ranged from the school environment, teaching practices, parents support, and tuition culture. For instance, a public sector school's respondent said, "After school time, we stay at school, and our teacher helps us do the home-tasks and assists us for the class-tests" (Respondent 3). This reflects that students were encouraged to take tuitions at public sector schools even after the school timings, which made the public sector students more dependent upon their teachers.

Similarly, the learners at public sector schools also reported taking help from the other class fellows or peers if they struggle in learning. A respondent claimed, "I get help from my friends when I don't know the meaning of any word. They are helpful" (Respondent 7). This suggests that the students at the public sector are more dependent and less autonomous in learning language than the learners of private sector schools.

b. Self-Perceived Language Competence and Learner Autonomy

The qualitative data based on the content analysis shows that the autonomous learners reported having a higher level of Self-Perceived Language Competence. This suggests that the perception about English competence was partially dependent upon their autonomy as a learner. A learner mixed the concept of language competence and learner autonomy in these words, "I think I am competent enough to learn on my own" (Respondent 1). Furthermore, learners also reported to believe that autonomous learning is quite helpful for developing their language skills. In this regard, Respondent 4 opined, "I do my home-tasks without any help from anyone. I feel I learn better when I study alone". This suggests a relationship between the learner's self-perceptions about their language competence and their autonomy in language learning.

c. Gender and Learner Autonomy

T-tests show that female respondents were more autonomous and less dependent on others for language learning. There was also a reporting pattern in the qualitative data that suggests that females considered themselves more autonomous than males. One respondent expressed that she was more careful about doing her home-tasks than her brother studying in the same school. It was also found that all 4 boys were attending extra coaching or tuition classes after the school timings, but only two of the four girls took such classes. This

was due to the discriminated attitude of the parents towards the education of their girls. In Pakistan's patriarchal and poor society, the girls' education is not considered as necessary as that of boys. In such circumstances, it is understandable that female students are generally left to manage their educational challenges with any assistance from a tutor after school. The positive side of this fact is that it makes female learners more autonomous in language learning, and they end up getting good grades and achieve higher scores in education.

IV. CONCLUSION

The current study has shown that private and public sector schools differ in the levels of their language learning autonomy. The private sector schools' ESL learners consider themselves more competent in the English language and report to have secured more marks in their last English subject examination. This is understandable as the selected schools use bilingual teaching methods, and comparatively, the teaching of the English language is focused more than the public sector schools. Later, the Independent samples t-test also showed that the mean score difference of Perceived Language Competence and Marks Obtained was significantly different for private and public sector schools where the private sector schools' students considered themselves more competent. At the same time, in the correlation tests and independent samples test, it was found that the learners of the public sector schools are dependent on the teachers for their learning. These finding answer the study's primary question that the students who report to be more competent and report to have obtained higher marks are less dependent upon their teachers. So, there exists a relationship between learner autonomy and language achievement measured in the form of perceived competence and obtained marks in English. The second most significant finding of the study is that there exists gender differentiation in the use of language learning autonomy. The correlation tests showed that the gender of the respondents correlated with the Perceived Competence and Marks Obtained by the learners, but it had negative values for its correlation with the scales of teacher and peer dependence. This reflected that females are more autonomous learners and had better competence in the English language as measured in their self-reported competence or the marks obtained. This pattern was later also confirmed by independent samples t-test findings.

The current study has certain pedagogical implications for the teachers, syllabus designers, and institutional management. The study shows that if a learner is more autonomous, he/she will develop a better competence in the target language. To promote learner autonomy in our traditional classrooms, we need to change our teaching materials, methods, and practices. We need to change our teacher-centred classes in favor of student-centre classes. A student-centred class put the learner at the center stage of learning. If a learner is allowed to learn autonomously, he/she will develop some language learning strategies which will support the process of his/her leaning. Furthermore, we also need to discourage the culture of coaching and tuition classes that promote the learners' dependence on the teachers. These so-called coaching classes are the cram-industries that do not let the learners become autonomous and critical learner.

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