

## Students' and teachers' perceptions about the promotion of learning autonomy

### Percepciones de alumnos y maestros acerca de la promoción del aprendizaje autónomo

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#### Abstract:

The main purpose of this study is to know, through the perceptions of students and teachers, if learning autonomy is promoted at the BA in Veterinary Medicine, and if so, to what extent it is. To collect data for this qualitative study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and students. The findings in this study showed that autonomy is promoted to a certain extent; essentially regarding the use of teaching materials and the implementation of some activities. Students seemed to acknowledge the importance of becoming autonomous but just some of them implemented actions to develop it.

#### Keywords:

*autonomy, learning, perceptions, analysis, findings*

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#### Resumen:

El objetivo principal de este estudio es conocer, a través de las percepciones de alumnos y docentes, si en la 'Licenciatura en Medicina Veterinaria y Zootecnia' impartida en la UAESH, el aprendizaje autónomo es promovido, y de ser así, hasta qué punto lo es. Para la recolección de datos de este estudio cualitativo, se aplicó la entrevista a docentes y alumnos. Los hallazgos en este estudio mostraron que la autonomía sí es promovida hasta cierto punto principalmente en el uso de los materiales y la implementación de algunas actividades. Al parecer los estudiantes reconocieron la importancia de volverse autónomos, pero solo algunos de ellos implementaron acciones para desarrollar la autonomía.

#### Palabras Clave:

*autonomía, aprendizaje, percepciones, análisis, hallazgos*

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## Introduction

Learning autonomy has become popular as teachers and students try to implement autonomous behaviors within the educational context they are part of. As Berka (2000) states, the term 'autonomy' was first mentioned centuries ago in Ancient Greece where autonomy used to be an important part of students' learning process. Currently, there are relevant studies that have claimed that learner autonomy is considered an important factor in developing

independent learners. Those studies will be discussed in the following section.

The present research focuses on what students and English teachers of Veterinary Medicine think about the promotion of learning autonomy, both inside and outside the classroom. Thus, this study aims to reveal new findings about learning autonomy and whether it can help students to improve their learning process.

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This research study is divided into five sections. The first one introduces the topic under discussion. The second one focuses on the previous research studies which have been conducted about learning autonomy. The methodology used in this study is discussed in section three. Section four reports the results. Finally, section five mentions the general conclusions that were drawn from this study.

## Literature review

Students and teachers can be considered two of the most important actors in any educational process. Traditionally teachers were in charge of providing students with the knowledge, and learners were the ones expected to acquire a reasonable understanding of this information. However, this conception has changed, and both students and teachers have adopted active roles. They may make use of autonomy as a resource to improve their learning and performance respectively. Nevertheless, sometimes the role of autonomy among students and teachers might be poorly understood.

Therefore, this research project aims to analyze the perceptions of Veterinary Medicine students and their teachers about autonomy, and to what extent it is promoted in this BA program. The findings of this study will provide a new view of autonomy which might represent a positive change in the way of teaching and learning in this B.A.

### Learner autonomy

In the literature, autonomy has been defined in several different ways by various experts. It refers to the ability to take charge of one's learning (Holec as cited in Duong, 2014). Drawing on that definition, I can say that learner autonomy is an ability that students can acquire thanks to the freedom given by the teacher about the student's learning process.

Nunan (as cited in Duong, 2014) set a framework in 1997, proposing five levels for encouraging learner autonomy concerning the use of learning materials. Furthermore, he included in his framework several characteristics that encompass the skills and behaviors of an autonomous learner as shown below,

The first level involves the attempt to make learners aware of the goals, strategies, and content of materials. The second level is to get learners involved in making choices from a variety of goals, content, and strategies. The third level is to encourage learners to adapt and modify the

goals and the content of the learning program. The next level is to let learners set their goals, develop their content, and create learning tasks. The last level is for fully autonomous learners as they can make connections between the content of classroom learning and the world. (p.15)

The previous framework considers not only the characteristics of the student as an autonomous learner but also what is expected from them during the learning process. Similarly, Little (as cited in Sert, 2006) states that "the practice of learner autonomy requires insight, a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection, and a readiness to be proactive in self-management and interaction with others" (p. 127). Such requirements to consider a student autonomous are more related to attitudes and intrinsic processes coupled with social relations, not only the individual.

In this light, Dam, Eriksson, Little, Miliander, and Trebbi (as cited in Al Asamari, 2013) mentioned that there are two more frequently used definitions of learner autonomy;

"...a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a social, responsible person" (p. 102).

"... an attitude towards learning in which the learner is prepared to take, or does take, responsibility for his learning" (Dickinson, 1994, p. 167).

The definitions of student autonomy are diverse, but the point of convergence between them arises when it comes to a process that is performed individually and where both the teacher and the student are an active part of the learning process, one granting opportunities and the other making decisions about such processes. Then, what the teacher thinks about their autonomy promotion in the classroom could be different from what happens within the school context. Therefore, it is important to discuss teachers' perceptions about autonomy as well.

### Learner autonomy: teacher's perceptions

Several studies have been conducted on teachers' perceptions regarding learner autonomy. Camilleri (1999) conducted a study and collected data from 328 teachers from six European scholar contexts. According to the teachers, students should be involved in decisions about a range of learning activities, such as establishing the objectives of a course or selecting course content.

In a study conducted by Tham My Duong in Thailand (2004), a relationship between autonomy and independence is proposed to clarify what autonomy is

especially for teachers and students who are unaware of what it means. The author brought together several teachers to investigate their promotion of autonomy and their teaching practices in the Thai context. During this investigation, the teachers were asked about autonomy; the instrument items were categorized into four categories: decision-making ability, learner independence, physiology of learning, and levels of learner autonomy. Focusing exclusively on the student's independence section, 80% of the teachers think that autonomy is promoted through independence using self-learning centers; however, most of them (80%) disagreed that autonomous learners were entirely independent of the teacher. This means that independent practices do not necessarily promote autonomy (p.12). He also found that motivation plays a central role in the promotion of autonomy since 90% of the teachers agreed that motivated students are more likely to develop autonomy.

In the study "Practices and Prospects of Learner Autonomy: Teachers' Perceptions" conducted by Abdulrahman Al Asmar (2013), the relationship that teachers found between independence and the promotion of autonomy is discussed, together with external factors that contribute to such development. The majority of the teachers believed that they promoted learner autonomy in their teaching by using a range of pedagogical strategies from advocacy and awareness-raising to independent out-of-class language learning activities.

Thus, autonomy is conceived by teachers as an ability/attitude that could improve the learning process of students (in this case, second language learners within BA) and can be promoted through different strategies, from pedagogical to psychological.

#### Strategies to promote autonomy

In the context of learning autonomy, certain strategies can be employed to promote autonomous behavior among learners. Those strategies will depend on each student's needs and on their perceptions of what autonomy means to them at the moment of making a decision (Stafanou, 2004).

A study about learners' perceptions of strategies to achieve autonomy was conducted by Amir Saeed in the year 2021. It took place at the University of Dhofar. Most of the interviewed students shared that, for them, studying extra material from reliable sources has helped them to boost their confidence and also increased their knowledge. Some other students said that peer teaching has been a very effective way to build confidence as well, due to the lack of pressure of having a teacher saying what to do all the time. Finally, another learner interviewed testified that

different tasks both inside and outside the classroom without strict guidelines foster their autonomy and the results have been satisfactory. The author reported that the whole group agreed with that claim. Besides, they mentioned that autonomy is an amazing tool that helps to be a better student. Those results showed common perceptions among those students from the University of Dhofar.

Drawing on these results, it is important that teachers help students to build their confidence by allowing them to use the strategies they find useful according to their characteristics; in this way, they might find out what they can do without being under pressure. However, if students do not have a clear perception of what autonomy is, nor of the benefits that developing an autonomous behavior might represent to their learning process, then they may not have the same results as the students who are aware of the advantages of being autonomous. Therefore, the following research question emerges: From teachers' and students' perceptions, to what extent is learning autonomy promoted by English teachers in the B.A. in Veterinary Medicine?

### Methodology

This section provides a detailed explanation of the process used to investigate to what extent autonomy is promoted in the B.A. in Veterinary Medicine. The initial part of this chapter is a brief analysis of the method, participants, as well as the process of data collection, and the instrument utilized to carry out the study.

Worldview, approach, and design.

This research adopts a constructivist worldview, a common philosophy used in qualitative research. It states that all knowledge is constructed from human experience, and that experience is the key to forming the basis upon which learners construct their reality, therefore it is perceived to be subjective (Feder, 2022). Thus, my decision is based on the grounds that I am interested in the perceptions of students and teachers about the promotion of autonomy among the B.A in Veterinary Medicine.

Moreover, this research is inductive because I seek to obtain results from the collected data and, consequently, this study provides results based on the analysis of the findings as it is a case study design. All of this will be made on the basis of a qualitative approach to guide this research.

According to Creswell (2004), “qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human matter” (p. 32). The present research procedure involves different steps starting from the creation of research questions, obtaining data through an instrument, data collection, and its respective analysis ending with an interpretation of the data obtained.

### Participants

The participants for this study were three Veterinary Medicine students from 1st semester, (2 female and 1 male whose ages range from 17 to 19 years old) as well as two female teachers who have been teaching in the same program for at least 5 years. The students and teachers were chosen in terms of their availability and willingness to participate in the research. It is important to mention too that the sample was purposeful to the aim of this research.

It was decided to work with 1st-semester students because they are starting their educational process in the UAEH, and the findings of the research could help them to develop autonomous behavior which may be helpful to them through the B.A. Consent was granted from both students and teachers to participate in the study.

### Instrument

As stated before, I decided to adopt a qualitative approach because of the type of research I was doing, which consists of collecting qualitative information, analyzing it, and finally, obtaining results. Therefore, the instrument consisted of a semi-structured interview composed of 20 open-ended questions for students (Appendix 1) and 15 open-ended questions for teachers (Appendix 2) designed to obtain as much information as possible to later analyze the data collected more deeply. The interviews conducted with students were done in Spanish, and the ones conducted with teachers were in English.

It is important to mention that some questions that are part of the instrument were adapted from a thesis (Segura Acosta, 2009) which developed a similar topic; learning autonomy.

### Data Analysis

After conducting and recording the interviews I transcribed them. Once I had the transcripts, I read the information several times to get familiarized with the interviewees' answers. During the reading of the data, I started to identify relevant concepts previously analyzed in the literature review, always keeping in mind the research question

already set. Then, I employed a color-code strategy to identify similarities among the transcripts, this consisted of highlighting the extracts in which the data show salient themes that expressed similar ideas. I followed the same process with all the transcripts which were a total of 5 (3 students' interview transcripts and 2 teachers' interview transcripts.).

### Findings

Teachers and students show different behaviors which indicate how autonomous they are in the school context and they are discussed below.

#### Teachers' role

All of the participants agreed that the activities that their English teachers implement in class are suitable to develop a sense of autonomy in their learning process. Student 1 and Student 2, for example, mentioned that they have perceived that the activities they do in the classroom promote autonomy because the teacher gives students the foundations of the language, acting as a guide by allowing them to work in their way, as stated below,

As a guide. And yes, she allows me and my classmates to be autonomous in her classes because in many aspects she allows us to work in our way, she does not ask us to follow a certain process, or for example, she does not say; you have to work like this and that's it, no... she allows us to work in the way we desire to do so (Student 1).

In classes, she does not repress us, but on the contrary, she tells me; it is very good what you are doing, and you can also do this and this... She explains to me what I do not understand, and the topics which are not comprehensible, the teacher reinforces them a little more (Student 2)

These statements show a common belief shared by these students as they suggested that their teacher is a guide, and the strategies and techniques the teacher employed helped them to develop autonomous behavior at school. It seemed that this teacher also gives students choices on how to improve certain aspects of the task they are working on, which also contributed to developing students' autonomy. That is, the teacher does not show a rigid attitude since she is promoting autonomy while being aware of her student's performance.

#### Teacher's perceptions of learning autonomy

#### Autonomous behaviors

One of the most important actors in any educational process is the teacher. They can promote autonomy through the activities they administer during the English lessons, as well as the fact they are aware of students' autonomous behavior. The two interviewed teachers agreed to a certain extent that their students are autonomous. They have perceived this because of their students' performances, their behavior, and their performance at school as follows:

They give different answers to the same questions/exercises, study or practice with different materials, expand their answers, and not only say yes or no, they try to apply what they have learned to new situations (Teacher 1).

To a certain point, it seems to me that the students who are in a more advanced semester have a higher degree of autonomy. They are more responsible for their learning and also are more aware of the knowledge they need to acquire. The behaviors that show that my students are autonomous are for example that they do research apart from what is seen in class, they prepare the topics in advance, they know how to use the tools and the apps and they try to apply them in some other contexts what it is seen in the English class (Teacher 2).

These statements suggest that teachers are aware of the autonomous behaviors of their students. Besides, it was noticed that as the students advance more in their educational program, they also present a higher degree of autonomy which is something that might refer to level two of autonomy where according to Nunan (1997), learners at this level are involved in making choices from a variety of goals, content, and strategies.

#### Degrees of autonomy

Both teachers have perceived that there are different degrees of autonomy shown by the students in their classes; some of them have a low level, while others are more autonomous. As they said below,

My students do not present a high level of autonomy. As I said before, they are used to being passive and accepting what the teacher teaches. They don't usually give opinions about their learning, even if I ask them (Teacher 1).

I have all kinds of students, the ones who are concerned about learning, who do all their activities, ask their doubts, and participate in class. Some others are not interested in learning,

they copy the activities they have to submit, and therefore, they obtain low grades. In those situations, I can see the degree of autonomy of each student (Teacher 2).

These extracts demonstrate that there are different situations in which students show their degree of autonomy. When students do not try to obtain further knowledge apart from what is seen in class they are considered by the teacher as passive students, and therefore their autonomy degree is low, while when they are concerned about their learning process, they do certain activities which demonstrate that they are at a high degree of autonomy.

#### Promotion of autonomy at school

One teacher interviewed considers that they try to promote learning autonomy by implementing different collaborative tasks in which students help each other, and she has perceived that these tasks create a nice environment in the classroom as shown below,

I try to do it (promote autonomy), I like to work with different class dynamics, collaborative and individual work, and students also learn from their peers who have a more advanced level. The groups are very heterogeneous and that working that way, students feel more comfortable (Teacher 1).

This comment suggests that the teacher seeks to promote autonomy in her classes by implementing different strategies she has perceived as useful according to their students.

On the other hand, there was a convergence point when the teachers were asked whether they considered the promotion of autonomy in the classroom important. As they stated below,

Yes, it is very important to promote autonomy in the students. As I mentioned before, the degree of autonomy that students have gets reflected as they advance on the B.A., and they become better students in terms of learning. (Teacher 1).

Yes, I do. Because students should take control of their learning individually or in collaboration with others (Teacher 2).

Based on the previous comments, it is evident that teachers consider it important to promote autonomy within the classrooms so that students become more independent either on their own or with the help of their

peers, and this is noticed as they advance to a further level.

### Obstacles

On the other hand, one teacher interviewed considers that they promote autonomy in the classroom even though there are certain obstacles like the syllabus they must cover. Similarly, the second teacher mentioned that, since there is a syllabus, they have to follow, sometimes it is complicated to promote autonomy as shown below,

Certain obstacles impede me from always promoting autonomy in the classroom. I have had different ideas to work with activities that promote that autonomous culture among students, but sometimes the program and the way that it is organized do not allow me to do it because I have to cover many topics in a short period (Teacher 1).

Yes, I do to some extent (promoting autonomy). Since we have to accomplish a program and its contents and goals per semester, it is difficult to promote learning autonomy (Teacher 2).

Based on those comments, I can suggest that perhaps an impediment to promoting autonomy in the classroom could be how the syllabus is organized. The teachers do have the desire to create activities that allow students to be autonomous but they need to have that flexibility from the contents of the program.

### Student's perceptions of learning autonomy

The perceptions of teachers about autonomy have been already discussed, now it is turn to describe what students have perceived in terms of autonomy at school. Some important findings arose from the interviews carried out with three different students from the B.A in Veterinary Medicine.

### Autonomous student concept

As mentioned in the section above, autonomy can be defined as "... an attitude towards learning in which the learner is prepared to take, or does take, responsibility for his own learning" (Dickinson, 1994, p. 167). Therefore, the participants were aware of what it means to be an autonomous student, and both of them agreed on their understanding of the term, as follows,

Autonomous students are the ones who collect information by themselves. They look for their own study strategies and research different

resources. They try to solve their own problems in every situation (Student 2).

Someone that does not require the order to investigate information about the topics, they have the initiative to do it. If they have doubts do not wait until the class to ask their doubts to the teacher, they use different resources, or perhaps they ask different teachers to solve their doubts. (Student 3).

As we can notice, they have a notion about what autonomy means; this is good because by having that information in mind, they can see the usefulness of being autonomous students. Furthermore, one student mentioned that being an autonomous student not only helps him at school but also outside the classroom which to him is something good. As he mentioned below,

Being an autonomous student helps you a lot to be mature in all aspects of life. Talking about school, I feel that it helps you to deal with certain difficult situations, for example when you are struggling with a topic or something like that. So being autonomous is a good result everywhere (Student 1).

To him, being an autonomous student allows people to overcome certain problems that may arise at school and in different situations in their lives because it helps them to be better people. Students' perceptions of autonomy are diverse, Saeed (2021) remarks that learner autonomy is considered as one of the most important factors contributing to lifelong learning for language learners. This is primarily because learners are more likely to feel motivated and engaged when they are given the freedom to take charge of their own learning.

### Promotion of autonomy at school

As stated in section 2, in a study conducted by Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, and Turner, (2004) in addition to classroom activities, teachers should provide personal and instructional support meant to facilitate the developing sense of students' autonomy. Therefore, when I asked about the promotion of autonomy, an interviewee commented that their English teacher gives them the freedom to do the activities inside the classroom as they considered to be appropriate for their learning process, as stated below,

It is not that she let us do whatever we want, no. She gives us our freedom to do things our way, but as long as we are following the rules, both of

the school, and of the work we are doing at the time (Student 1).

That previous quote shows that the teacher is aware of what students are doing, they have certain controlled freedom. The same student mentions that the teacher allows students to share their comments and ideas in the classroom, by doing so she is taking into account student's ideas which have been cultivated not only from what is taught in class but also, outside of it by the student's own study process. He mentioned the following,

The teacher allows me to share my knowledge during the class. I have had some ideas and she takes them into account. From my perspective, I consider that I am an autonomous student, not completely but to some extent yes, I am. For example, outside of the classroom, I try to study what I learned in class, I have some books that I have bought and I read them, and I try to learn because, talking about the English subject, there are certain peculiar concepts difficult to learn and, in this way, I understand them better. After obtaining more information about those concepts I have the desire to participate in the class and share what I learned. Not all students do that (Student 1).

The previous comment shows that some students are developing autonomous behavior and this is not being restricted by the teacher's attitudes, but their efforts are being recognized by taking students' comments into account. Now, when I asked them about the activities they do outside the classroom, student 2 said that their teacher encouraged them to work and provided them with different resources to study whenever they have the opportunity to do so as stated below,

Outside the classroom most of the time she encourages us and tells us, 'The work is on the platform, check it out, watch videos.' She gives us a lot of didactic material of the basics in the simplest possible way so that we can see it and work on it. She gives us a lot of video links, and since it is on the platform, we can watch it at any time without any problems (Student 2).

As can be seen, the teacher takes advantage of different resources to promote autonomy at school. For example, by using the platform she can provide students with some sites she considers that are useful for her students, then they decide when to check them out.

Moreover, student number 3 said that the teacher allows them to share their ideas about the class without any

restriction and if those ideas are relevant, she recognizes students' efforts. The following comments show it,

She always allows us to participate, we do not have to ask her. If I remember something I can share it with the class. She never represses us, but on the contrary, she tells me; 'what you are doing is very good, and besides, you can work on it like this and like that...' (student 3).

Based on what students said, we can notice that the English teacher gives students the confidence that learners need to share their ideas. That attitude from the teacher is motivating and therefore students encourage themselves to participate in the class.

Student's perceptions of their classmates' autonomy

Moreover, I asked about what students have perceived from their classmates in terms of autonomy. There were no discrepancies between the information they shared as they suggested that a minority of students do certain actions towards the development of autonomous behavior at school. They mentioned the following,

I have seen them but in a low percentage, at the end of the day, I think that some remain traditional. The aspect that we always work with (sic) the same topics does not motivate them. I have had the experience that I have been in other B.A. programs and I feel that it is the same (Student 1).

Some do and some do not, some are focused, others only stay with what they get here at school and that's it. Others are already doing other extra activities to master the subject, so there is a lot to say about that, and also that outside they are sometimes practicing, studying, reading, etc. (Student 2).

Yes, there are, but there are a few of us who seek to do things differently, look for other sources, and have the need to learn because it is a necessity to know how to use the language, that is. Some people just stick to the idea of, well, I already went to school, they already explained it to me, and that's it, I do not need anything else (Student 3).

As we can see, the majority of students who are part of this research are not developing autonomy at school; they prefer to receive only what is taught in class, and they do not go beyond that. Just a few of them try to research for more information in addition to what is given by the teacher. They mentioned that they do so because they

consider that knowing how to use the English language is a necessity.

#### Teacher's attitude

To identify if there were discrepancies between what was mentioned by the teachers interviewed, I asked students if they had noticed any attitude from their English teachers which may be an obstacle for them to develop autonomy at school. They shared the following comments,

Not in the English class. I think that if at some point, I had a problem I could talk about it with the teacher, I feel that positive attitude on her part because she is a person who motivates us. There is confidence in which you can tell her, talk to her, and I feel that she is open to certain possibilities, I do not find a negative attitude, but yes, I do feel that she could help us in that aspect of being more autonomous students and she gives us confidence (Student 1).

In many aspects she allows us to work in the way that we understand. She is always supporting us and gives us the freedom to do the work in our own way and at our own pace, obviously with the established times. She always supports us when we have doubts or when we are wrong in some work, she corrects us and teaches us how it is, and when we practice it, we learn better (Student 2).

She never limits you, as if to say; "oh no, but we are not talking about that", no, no, I mean by practicing you learn more, that applies when I add more information than what she asks for. So yes, yes, she allows me to be more autonomous. I mean, she doesn't limit you, she even tells you "Well, if you know it, put it" (Student 3).

Students' and teachers' perceptions are similar as students agreed that there are no impediments occasioned by their English teachers, but on the contrary, they encourage them to be autonomous. Remarkably, the teachers give students the confidence to talk about some problems that may arise regarding their learning process. Moreover, both teachers are said to be always supporting students when they have doubts about the class. That shows that they are aware of the different problems that students may have, and they are ready to help them.

#### Autonomy outside the classroom

Finally, I asked students if their English teacher encouraged them to work outside the classroom and

therefore, develop autonomous behavior. I obtained similarities in students' perceptions,

Yes, she works with the platform and there she leaves us a lot of didactic material. She encourages us to review it and that is motivating for us because it is not mandatory, it is more like a support. Besides, she tells us to look for our own sources, and if what we find on our own is more useful than what she shares with us, so much better (Student 2).

Sometimes I study and search on my own, and then I come and apply it in class. She motivates me to look outside the classroom, to keep on practicing, to keep on looking, and to keep on applying it. And also, what motivates me sometimes is to have her recognition, or to be able to have a good conversation and that I understand and that she understands me, that is also motivating. A satisfaction (Student 3).

The previous comments show how the teacher promotes autonomy outside of the classroom, the place where students can work without a strict schedule, and where they develop autonomy as students. I can see that the teacher is doing something to promote autonomous behaviors among their students, and the students have perceived that the results of being autonomous are motivating to them which is something satisfactory. These findings were somewhat similar to the study conducted by Saeed (2021) where a large number of participants agreed that teachers were consciously making efforts to foster autonomy in them by assigning them different tasks both inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, in the same study, some students testify that they feel confident when the teacher provides them with extra practice material and guidance, and how these resources help them to understand the tasks as well as to do different tasks independently. Hence, these outside activities show how they build confidence and contribute to students' autonomy.

The findings in this study showed that there exists a point of convergence regarding the perceptions of teachers and students about whether learner autonomy is actually promoted in the B.A of Veterinary Medicine. It was evident that English teachers are promoting the development of autonomous behavior among their students by implementing certain activities and giving suggestions to students such as working outside the classroom, providing extra resources, and encouraging them to look for their learning materials which result to be useful for them. However, it seems that teachers mainly promote autonomy regarding the use of the teaching materials, and



the use of certain activities; and it seems there is no room for the identification of needs, setting learning goals, or the use of self-assessment, just to mention some. Furthermore, these findings revealed that despite these teacher's efforts to implement autonomy in their lessons, students are not fully autonomous probably because of some of the previous ideas mentioned above.

### Conclusion

In this study, both teachers and students from Veterinary Medicine have shown that to some extent learner autonomy is promoted in their English classes regarding the use of materials and some activities they implement. Students mentioned having a notion of what being an autonomous learner means. However, they are aware that not all students within their English group are showing autonomous behaviors related to their learning process; they are accustomed to the traditional way of learning where students do not attempt to seek their resources to achieve a bigger level of knowledge or to set their own learning goals. These students seem to be rather passive in their learning process because of the lack of involvement in class both outside and inside the classroom.

On the other hand, certain students consider themselves to be autonomous learners; since they are concerned about what they are learning. Some ways in which they do so is by looking for extra resources, both those provided by the teacher and those that they find by themselves. These resources are useful tools when they are struggling with a certain part of the language.

Moreover, students shared that when they show their teachers what they have learned as a result of being autonomous students, they recognize their efforts to keep learning. It is important that teachers make the learning process easier and motivate learners to play to the best of their potential, as well as to assist learners to acquire knowledge and skills and motivate learners to learn actively and autonomously (Guan, & Li, 2014). Therefore, teachers' support is an important component of the process of establishing a student's sense of awareness and responsibility in learning.

In this study, it was found that students perceived that there was no attitude from their English teachers which may impede them from developing autonomy. They acknowledge that their teachers show support by giving flexibility and encouraging them to work by themselves at their pace, but without being permissive. According to what students perceive, to some extent, learner autonomy is promoted in the B. A. in Veterinary Medicine, but there are still many areas of opportunity in this matter because the majority of students are not involved in the process of

developing autonomous behavior at school. In addition, teachers of the B.A. claim that they are willing to promote autonomy in the classroom. They consider this important because when students are autonomous, they take control of their learning process, something helpful through the B.A. Unfortunately, the teachers interviewed mentioned an obstacle that does not allow them to promote autonomy as they would like. They mentioned that how it is organized is not the most appropriate because the time destined to cover all the topics is not enough to allow students to do all they may need to do. Moreover, students have also noticed that the content of the syllabus is sometimes repetitive and that is something that they believe can be an obstacle to developing autonomous behavior.

I expect this research to be helpful for future generations who become interested in the promotion of learning autonomy in a determined school context. Moreover, I recommend to researchers who are interested in the topic, to try to identify different useful ways to promote learning autonomy at the university level.

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**Nota\***

Appendix 1. Students' interview guide

1. What do you understand by hearing the word autonomy?
2. Do you think that the concept of 'autonomy' can be related to the school context?
3. What is learner autonomy to you?
4. Do you consider yourself an autonomous student? Why?
5. Can you tell me some benefits of being an autonomous learner at school?
6. Do you think that autonomy contributes to your English learning process? Why?
7. Have you perceived that your classmates are autonomous students? Why do you say that?
8. What is your teacher's role in the lessons?
9. Have you perceived that your English teacher allows you and your classmates to be autonomous in their lessons? How?
10. Have you noticed any attitudes from your teachers which can be an impediment for you to develop autonomy at school?
11. Have you noticed any attitudes from your teachers which help you to be autonomous at school?
12. In which way do you think that learner autonomy can improve your performance at school?
13. What do you usually do when you struggle with a topic in your English class?

14. Does your English teacher promote autonomy in the classroom? How?
15. Do you think that your teacher should decide what happens in the lesson?
16. Does your teacher help you to find your individual needs?
17. Does your teacher encourage you to work by yourself inside the classroom? What about outside the classroom?
18. Does your teacher give you the opportunity to share ideas and knowledge in class? Can you please give an example?
19. Are you responsible for your own learning?
20. Do you need the teacher's guidance to learn?
21. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 2. Teacher's interview guide

1. How long have you been working at the Autonomous University of Hidalgo State?
2. How long have you been working at Veterinary Medicine?
3. What is your role in the lessons?
4. What role do your students play in your class?
5. What is your opinion about learning autonomy?
6. Do you consider that it is important to stay in total control of the lesson?
7. Do you think that success in your class depends on your control of the lesson?
8. Do you think that you should decide what happens in the lesson?
9. Do you consider that you promote learner autonomy within the classroom? How do you promote it?
10. Do you think that your students are autonomous? Why?

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11. Which behaviors from your students can demonstrate that they are autonomous?
12. Do you help each student to find his or her individual needs?
13. Do you think that it is important to promote learner autonomy in the classroom? Why?
14. To what extent are your students autonomous in your class?
15. What do you think is the way to encourage your students to learn independently?