

Decision Making in Autonomous Language Education

Understanding Decision-Making in Autonomous Language Education

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Research Report submitted

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master in English Language Teaching –Autonomous Learning Environments

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Chía, Colombia

June 2020





### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank primarily La Universidad de La Sabana for giving me the opportunity to continue my professional development and each of the teachers and colleagues who were part of this process. Also, I would like to thank my friends and family who gave me the strength to complete this research project, including my mother, to whom I will be eternally grateful for my education. Finally, I want to deeply thank each of the students who made this project possible, since they inspired and motivated me to implement each of the steps described in the following pages.



**Abstract**

Autonomy has been an important concept associated with language learning. Previous research has highlighted the importance of fostering autonomy outside the classroom and the influence of technology for autonomous language learning environments. However, little attention has been given to the development of autonomy as a decision-making ability and its impact on the language learning process. Therefore, the target study explored different decision-making strategies with a target group of students to determine which learning practices emerged when they work on their writing English assignments. By using mixed-method, action research, and data analysis, this research project concluded the degree in which a learner can make decisions regarding his/her language learning. The data collected demonstrated the interaction of decision-making strategies and writing tasks produced successful autonomous learning practices. Through the classroom implementation students recognized that factors such as time, feedback, and metacognitive strategies helped them work autonomously. For example, they became less dependent on the educator and more confident in performing language activities. To facilitate their learning, they were asked to apply skills they had acquired in different life experiences. This helped students become aware of their process and factors that were out of their control. These outcomes indicate that training students in decision-making improves students' learning and introduces new methods for teaching language learners in Colombia.

*Key words:* autonomy, self-directed learning, language learning, decision-making, technology

## Resumen

La autonomía se ha posicionado recientemente como un concepto importante asociado con el aprendizaje de idiomas. Investigaciones anteriores han resaltado la importancia de fomentar la autonomía fuera del aula y la influencia de la tecnología en entornos autónomos de aprendizaje de lenguas. Sin embargo, se ha prestado poca atención al desarrollo de la autonomía como la capacidad de toma de decisiones y su impacto en este proceso de aprendizaje. Por lo tanto, el estudio de investigación exploró diferentes estrategias de toma de decisiones con un grupo focal de estudiantes para demostrar qué prácticas de aprendizaje surgen cuando trabajaban en sus actividades de escritura en inglés. Mediante el uso de un método mixto, investigación acción y análisis de datos, fue posible detectar el grado en que un alumno puede decidir en su aprendizaje del inglés. Los datos recopilados demostraron que la interacción de las estrategias de toma de decisiones y las tareas de escritura produjeron prácticas de aprendizaje autónomo exitosas. En la implementación en el aula, los estudiantes reconocieron que factores como el tiempo, la retroalimentación y las estrategias metacognitivas los ayudaron a trabajar de manera autónoma. Por ejemplo, se volvieron menos dependientes del educador y lograron ser más seguros al realizar las actividades. Para facilitar su aprendizaje, se les pidió que aplicaran las habilidades que habían adquirido en diferentes experiencias de su vida. Esta actividad ayudó a los estudiantes a tomar conciencia de sus procesos y factores que estaban fuera de su control. Estos resultados indican que capacitar a los estudiantes en la toma de decisiones mejora el aprendizaje de los estudiantes e introduce nuevos métodos para la enseñanza de idiomas en Colombia.

*Palabras claves:* autonomía, aprendizaje auto-dirigido, aprendizaje de idiomas, toma de decisiones, tecnología.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction to the Study**

The concept of autonomy was introduced in philosophy as a deliberative process guided by the moral reasoning of an individual (Kekes, 2011). This definition suggests that all individuals can make decisions themselves based on their morality; this originated with the Kantian idea of judgment (Haskins, 1989). Since then, several philosophers have presented autonomy as a process within the self, and therefore, it is possible to associate it with self-governing, self-determination, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. Autonomy has impacted other fields as an important topic of discussion (Carver & Scheier, 2000; Fallon Jr., 1994).

In psychology, for instance, autonomy has been framed in numerous ways. On the one hand, it has been related to a personal focus. In this case, autonomy is seen as an individual construct. Airasian and Walsh (1997) conclude that learners develop their own knowledge from their personal perceptions and beliefs. That explains why there are different assumptions about autonomy in individuals. On the other hand, this concept has also been defined in terms of the ideologies and constructs created and shared inside a culture (Holliday, 2003). Moreover, some psychologists have related autonomy to the concept of self-regulation, where it is seen as an individual process gradually done in the interaction within a society (Dongyu, et al., 2013; Lantolf & Poehner, 2012; Stoltz et al., 2010).

Piaget (1932) has also defined autonomy as the ability to self-govern, which is also called moral autonomy. He argued that autonomy should be understood as the opposite of heteronomy, in which individuals act because of the interaction and motivation of external factors (Kamii, 1984). To clarify, Piaget highlighted that heteronomy is one stage of the process of autonomy.

In education, autonomy was presented firstly by Holec as “an ability to take charge of one's own learning” (Benson, 2007a, p. 22). This perspective was understood as students’ capacity to make decisions about their own learning process. Other authors have also contributed to the definition of this concept by acknowledging that autonomy is an ongoing process that has different levels (Benson, 2013; Candy & Phillip, 1992; Little, 1991; Nunan, 1997). This conclusion supports Piaget’s idea (1932) that heteronomy is the starting point of this process. Moreover, autonomy has also been defined in terms of the person’s role in the educative process (Olorunsola, 2018; Yigit & Yildirim, 2018). For example, it has been associated to the perceptions and opportunities that learners and educators have in the classroom, which suggests that autonomy can be understood differently according to the role of a teacher or a student.

Altogether, as different fields have worked with conceptions of autonomy the definitions have changed. Consequently, the current study highlights three main factors fundamental to developing autonomy. First, it is a concept that is culturally created, and therefore it can change among places and people. This means that different groups and contexts might have different perceptions of what they consider as autonomous. Second, it is internal and ongoing, which implies that it is personal process and can be improved in stages. Third, this process is related to the capacity to make decisions (Benson, 2013; Candy & Phillip, 1992; Holec, 1981a; Holliday, 2003; Nunan, 1997).

In English language teaching, technology has allowed the development of autonomous learning environments. Different studies have addressed technology as a fundamental aspect for the future of language learning (Farivar & Rahimi, 2015; Thu Ba, 2018; Yao, 2016). Therefore, technological tools have been very important in education to not only improve language learning but also to facilitate learners’ autonomy. Although technology promotes autonomy of language

learning, the tools focus on organization of materials and procedures rather than the personal development necessary for students' successful learning (Everhard, 2018). Some authors suggest that more studies are needed to achieve better "access to self" or "self-access" (Everhard, 2012, 2018; Tassinari & Ciekanski, 2013). This focus encourages developing internal sources for students to succeed in language learning. They may do this with carefully selected external sources that facilitate developing and training decision-making, which is a personal process necessary for language learning in different contexts (Everhard, 2018).

## **1.2 Rationale for the Study**

### ***1.2.1 Rationale for the Problem of the Study***

With globalization, learning English has become a priority for people's education. English has been recognized as a necessary language to expand communication and compete in different fields related to economics, technology, science, academia, and other disciplines that foster multiculturalism (Mufwene, 2010). This is why, different institutions have included English teaching within their curricula and this has created different challenges for the educational community. On the one hand, students must achieve a level of English that allows them to be proficient in the language to compete in a globalized world. Furthermore, institutions and educators are asked to implement different strategies to ensure that these levels are reached. On the other hand, the dynamics of language learning have not been established in many contexts because of various factors associated with context. These challenges include the large number of students, low exposure to the language, and motivational issues, among others.

Autonomous learning has emerged as a response to these educational challenges. Environmental positioning is applied to achieve multicultural abilities and different strategies

have begun to be explored to contribute to the understanding of what autonomy is and how it can be developed in education. For example, considering technology as an opportunity to include individuals in e-learning (Bojare, 2016). Alternative pedagogical models have flourished in recent decades; however, the understanding of these implementations has not been explored sufficiently in learning English and in different contexts.

Consequently, The Colombian Ministry of Education states that learning a second language in Colombia is necessary because of the demands generated by globalization. Thus, students are expected to access information and communicate in an additional language (Macías, 2010). In 2006, new policies and goals related to a bilingual education were proposed to change the landscape of the educational system at that time. In those policies, several strategies were suggested to achieve a better goal in regard to language education and the implementation of materials, pedagogical models, and teacher training. Additionally, some general proposals for the creation of autonomous environments and the use of technology were also created to contribute to the achievement of bilingualism in Colombia (Secretaría de Educación, 2004). Despite the efforts made by the Colombian Ministry of Education, only a privileged group of the Colombian population is able to graduate from school with a B1 level (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006). This suggests the need for better strategies for bilingual education in Colombia.

The Colombian Ministry of Education recognizes that foreign languages are necessary for students in Article 23 of Colombian Educational Law (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 1994). It acknowledges some general standards for the institutions on the official national web page (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006). However, those standards are focused on language objectives. They only take into account communicative abilities and content topics

without fully reflecting on the context. This is a problem because time constraints limit classroom practices to grammar.

Additionally, most learners do not feel the need or motivation to communicate in another language all of the time. Therefore, they learn grammatical structures but not fluency through consistent practice. It is also important to acknowledge that just like in other countries, teachers in Colombia do not always have the tools to help their learners improved their language levels. The lack of teacher resources suggests that better strategies should be implemented to support language learning. To address this concern some autonomous environments and the use of information and communications technology (ICT) have emerged (Rueda Ortiz & Franco Avellaneda, 2018).

### ***1.2.1.1 Needs Analysis and Problem Statement***

The present study was implemented in a school located in Chía, Colombia, where there is an educational model that focuses on the development of autonomy. This pedagogical model is known as Fontan Relational Education (FRE) and is used as a benchmark of the learning process in which established stages are implemented. The model is described in more detail in later chapters.

The purpose of the pedagogical model is to empower students in their learning process so that they learn different themes and skills by interacting with information (Twani & Fontan, 2014). In this educational institution, students work with an online platform that provides different instructions for the student to follow to acquire knowledge. These instructions contain activities that students carry out with the educators who guide them through learning processes, propose activities, and evaluate their development. However, students can choose their work times, their goals in the development of their study plan, and the execution of session activities,



among others. Both educators and students use the information found online to learn. However, many of these students face this learning model, but they do not have strategies that allow them to progress using that model and to interact appropriately with the information. For example, in English classes, students develop the corresponding activities, but they do not manage to improve their level. This is demonstrated in that the students make the same mistakes in their productions and despite the fact that the educator points out their mistakes, they seem to keep making errors. Also, they find it difficult to focus on specific goals, carry out the activities at the proposed times, and even internalize the information they found to develop the tasks. All of this reveals that students still need to develop autonomous learning skills. However, exploring these strategies could benefit language development. Therefore, training in this ability should be a priority for these learners.

#### ***1.2.1.2 Justification of the Problem's significance***

For this study it is evident that students face a world in which learning English is considered important to compete professionally in a multicultural society (Mufwene, 2010; Smith, 2015). Therefore, students must work on improving their skills in order to meet the goals established in educational policies (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006). However, it is also recognized that the contextual conditions of the students have hindered the achievement of this goal. Thus, new proposals for learning have emerged to respond to this need. One of these alternatives is found in the development of autonomous environments that allow the student to become empowered in their educational process. However, students still lack skills that allow them to take control of their learning process, and therefore, many of these methods fail. For this reason, it is necessary to explore the development of skills related to autonomy in the classroom, so that students can carry out this process. This proposal emerged in order to clarify that the

challenges of the world are related to continuous personal development and it is necessary that students develop a self-learning process (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014).

### ***1.2.2 Rationale for the Strategy Selected to Address the Problem of the Study***

In recent studies of language learning, the word autonomy has received a great deal of attention. Various fields such as philosophy, psychology, and education have defined autonomy in discipline-specific ways, but all of them agreed that it has a relationship with the decision-making ability (Airasian & Walsh, 1997; Benson, 2007a; Dongyu et al., 2013; Kamii, 1984; Kekes, 2011). With globalization, language learning and technological support have become important because they allow people to be connected and to have access to information (Schmenk, 2005). The world's rapid change has generated different needs for the educational contexts, in which various problems have emerged as well (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). For instance, some countries like Colombia have highlighted the importance of learning foreign languages such as English. (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006).

However, teachers do not always have opportunities to achieve the goals inside the classroom (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019). Therefore, learners' autonomy is a desirable goal that contributes to bilingual language-learning. Additionally, technology in autonomous learning environments seems to be an important factor in the development of learners' autonomy (Farivar & Rahimi, 2015). Nevertheless, teachers have little experience in how to foster autonomy because learners consider it different ways depending on context. Therefore, research has to be done to understand the main ideas related to autonomy, and how they impact the educational context. Taking into account the aforementioned ideas, it is evident that training students in decision making could bridge the gap and tackle the problem that educators and students face

within autonomous learning environments. Therefore, this study considered the implementation of autonomous some autonomous strategies while working on English activities.

### **1.3 Research Question and Objective**

The objective of this study was to demonstrate the importance of the development of autonomy in the learning process and to establish its relationship with language learning. For this, the following research question guided the objective of the project: How learning practices are shaped when students explore decision-making strategies in their English writing productions.

### **1.4 Conclusion**

Learning English has become very important to the world due to the competitive challenges that are generated by globalization (Mufwene, 2010). However, different contextual factors have made it difficult for this to be done properly in countries like Colombia (García, 2015; Mora, Chiquito, & Zapata, 2019). For this reason, pedagogical proposals have emerged in order to facilitate autonomous learning environments in different fields. However, students do not succeed in them because they do not have the skills to empower themselves in their academic process. This is why, this study focused on highlighting the practices that arise when students explore strategies in decision making while working on their activities in English in an autonomous learning environment. Therefore, the next chapter will develop some ideas to understand the theoretical foundation for the implementation of this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Autonomy has been widely considered in the field of education. Different educative approaches and institutions have paid attention to its development and a controversial debate has developed regarding the different agents that participate in this process. Autonomy, for instance, has an important role in schools at all levels. In this context, it is perceived as the freedom that institutions have to create curricula and plans for the learners while also having the self-management to operate (Steinberg & Cox, 2017). Teaching has also been associated with autonomy, but for teachers the concept is more related to the way they teach and the opportunity to decide what to do with their students during the class (Manzano Vázquez, 2018). From the learners' perspective, the concept of autonomy seems to have a divergent meaning, where it is more related to the responsibility in their learning process (Yigit & Yildirim, 2018). To conclude, the concept of autonomy seems to have different connotations depending on the perspective, but it is a valuable skill for language learning.

Taking into account the previous evidence, the following section aims to understand the concept of autonomy in different fields. First, it explains the general overview of the word autonomy in philosophy and psychology. Second, it states how autonomy has been defined in academic education and language learning. Third, this literature review concludes with the description of different studies related to the language learning context and how the decision-making ability is explored as a strategy to develop autonomous learning.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.2.1 *Autonomy*

The word autonomy has been a concept addressed for many years in different contexts such as economy, education, and psychology. Understanding its complete meaning has never been easy because the term has such different interpretations. For instance, in philosophy autonomy has been largely associated with deliberation guided by both, reason and moral (Kekes, 2011). The Kantian idea of “judgment” comes from the idea that the dichotomy of choices are expressed by an agent who could deliberate autonomously in his decisions brought (Haskins, 1989). However, autonomy has not only been related to this concept, but it has also been linked to self-consciousness: “the purported metaphysical foundation of people's capacity and also their right to make and act on their own decision” (Fallon Jr. 1994, p. 878). This idea of making personal choices expresses how autonomy is related to the self, which would explain why autonomy is defined in terms of self-governing, self-determination, or even self-regulation (Carver & Scheier 2000). Consequently, autonomy can be understood as the self-capacity to make decisions which is an ideal for students who are supposed to be the owners of their learning process.

The abovementioned definitions have acknowledged the importance of autonomy in the individual's development. Those ideas of autonomy state how this term is not only necessary, but it is also a personal construct. Airasian and Walsh (1997) showcase how learners make their own knowledge from their personal perceptions and beliefs. This is why there are several discrepancies in how autonomy is perceived among people. Autonomy is also a construct created and associated with the ideologies within a culture (Holliday, 2003). Therefore, the notions of autonomy and its domains can vary by individuals. Some theories from the psychological point

of view have linked autonomy to the concept of self-regulation, where it is seen as an individual process gradually achieved with the interaction of a society (Dongyu et al., 2013; Lantolf & Poehner, 2012; Stoltz et al., 2015). This definition supports the complexity of the construction of the concept without taking into account the individual and the social context.

### ***2.2.2 Autonomy in Education***

In education the concept of autonomy has also been a hot topic discussed in different studies (Benson, 2007a; Candy & Phillip, 1992; Holec, 1981b; Little, 1991; Nunan, 1997). It was introduced in terms of Learner's autonomy by Holec in 1981 where he explained learner's autonomy as "an ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Benson, 2007a, p. 22). Since then, more authors have also supported the concept suggested by Holec (1981b). Little (1995) and Nunan (1997), for example, are both in agreement with the definition provided by Holec (1981b). They also discuss the importance of decision-making abilities in the learning process and the development of a sense of responsibility, which are related to Kantian philosophy. Candy (1992) developed the concept of ability in autonomy and brought two different ideas to it. First, he presented the importance of developing self-direction as a key concept in autonomy in the learning process, and second, Candy (1992) stated how autonomy is an ever-lasting process in the learner's life.

In parallel, Little (1991) suggested autonomy is "not a single, easily describable behavior" or a "steady state" (p.7). This directed his study to understanding autonomy as a set of stages or levels that can be developed in the learning process (Benson, 2007a). This idea has also been upheld in more recent studies where autonomy is considered a "process oriented in nature" and "individual practice" (Doğan, 2015, p. 167). Likewise, Kohonen (2012),

acknowledges autonomy in individual identities and declares that autonomy is also related to active learning.

Rivers and Golonka (2009) defined the concept of self-management in learning as “the active, independent management of learning...where the learner sets or attempts to control the goals, curriculum, pedagogical method, or content of the learning program” (p.255). With this definition, the aspects in which the learners can make decisions started to become clear for the researchers and scholars of autonomous learning. Those ideas about autonomy are key to understanding why this concept is essential to learning and why it should be fostered in school, but there are too few cases in which there is evidence of how learners are actually encouraged to make decisions in their educational contexts (Han, 2017).

Autonomy in education has not only been discussed from the learners’ point of view, it has also been addressed as an important role in the educator’s work. According to Hermendaoglu, Balçıkanlı, and Cephe (2018) there are different dimensions to teacher’s autonomy where psychological and institutional factors affect the degree in which a teacher can be autonomous. This independence is also related to the learners’ autonomy because the perceptions of a teacher can affect the way it is fostered in students (Aoki, 2002; Han, 2017). Additionally, those psychological and institutional teacher factors model the learners’ ability to become autonomous (Hermendaoglu Baz et al., 2018). Different studies have shown that both learners’ and teachers’ autonomy are related to teaching and learning practices, and for that reason, to define learners’ autonomy, it is essential to consider the teachers’ conditions (Cotterall & Crabbe, 2008; Hermendaoglu Baz et al., 2018; Usma & Frodden, 2003). Therefore, it is important to take into account that autonomy has also some restrictions depending on the social

environment. Thus, to deepen the concept of learner's autonomy, teachers should be allowed to make their decisions instead of following imposed instructions (Hong & Youngs, 2016).

Finally, many ideas have been addressed until now in the light of understanding how autonomy works in education. However, it is important to understand that there are some key concepts that this theoretical framework highlights. Firstly, learner's autonomy is a decision-making ability in the own learning process. Secondly, it is an individual process that can be developed through someone's life and it is influenced by the social environment, and lastly, it is a process that involves learners' capacity and success.

### ***2.2.3 Autonomy in Language Learning***

The term autonomy in language learning is popular in language teaching. With the increase of technology, many methods encourage autonomous learning to assist with language learning in the classroom (Farivar & Rahimi, 2015). However, what is autonomy in language learning? This concept has a clear definition in Benson (2007) where he joins the main points addressed by Holec (1981b) and Little (1991) stating:

Autonomy in language learning depends on the development and exercise of a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action (Little 1991, p. 4, as cited in Benson, 2007).

The definition of autonomy continues with the idea that autonomous learners assume responsibility for determining the purpose, content, rhythm and method of their learning, monitoring its progress and evaluating its outcomes. (Holec, 1981, p.23, as cited in Benson, 2007).

This combination of the capacity of making decisions and the control of the objectives, contents, and methods in language learning seems to be compatible with the challenge addressed



in Farivar and Rahimi (2015), in which technology is seen as a tool that allows a learner to develop this particular ability. Additionally, technology has provided opportunities to globalize language learning. It aids students in obtaining more efficient sources to have contact with other languages and also to learn from them on their own (Schmenk, 2005).

Although, technology appears to be important in the changing landscape of autonomy in language learning, it facilitates organization of materials and procedures more than developing inner processes that students need for successful learning (Everhard, 2018). Some authors suggest that more studies are needed to achieve better control and understanding of skills to have self-access (Everhard, 2012, 2018; Tassinari & Ciekanski, 2013). Therefore, one of the most important factors for autonomous language learning is developing internal sources for working with the external sources provided in the classroom. (Everhard, 2018). Some important movements developed in the self-access carried out strategies where learners could take ownership of the process with portfolios, journals, and strategy instructions (Anderson, 2016). However, they also needed the support of the teacher to develop and to guide the learner through the process. Until now, autonomous language learning has mostly been self-initiated and continued by the intervention of a mediator such as a tutor or a teacher (Benson, 2013). Thus, the challenges of language learning continue to be the development of strategies that allow the learner to become self-sufficient. Technology is a tool that can foster self-sufficiency, but there are some skills that learners need to develop to scaffold their own learning processes; however, learners do not always have enough experience in becoming autonomous (Yigit & Yildirim, 2018). The lack of abilities in this area demonstrates why teachers need to support autonomous language learning in the classroom (Olorunsola, 2018; Tran & Duong, 2018).

In addition to teachers promoting self-sufficiency in the classroom, there are other factors to consider. A variety of studies suggest that there is a need for teachers to foster and encourage language learning in contexts outside the classroom (Leptokaridou, Vlachopoulos, & Papaioannou, 2016; Manzano Vázquez, 2018; Nakata, 2011; Ou, 2017). According to Ou (2017), it is impossible for language educators to help the students gain a high level of English proficiency and work on their individual needs because of the constraints provided by the institutions. For example, resources and time in the classroom are not enough to achieve competence in foreign language (Oblillos Dela Rosa, 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to create new environments and tools that allow the learner to work outside the classroom. Furthermore, there should be a focus on learner-centered approach where they can take control of their process and become active in different social contexts and with different participants (Collibee et al., 2016; Leptokaridou et al., 2016; Tran & Duong, 2018). In conclusion, the fosterage of autonomy in language learning consists of developing learners' decision-making ability through encouragement by a triad of elements, including but not restricting to, teachers, social interactions, and technological tools.

## **2.3 State of the Art**

### ***2.3.1 Importance of the Teacher in the Learner's Autonomy***

From the teachers' perspective, learners' autonomy is a desirable educational goal. Different studies demonstrate that teachers are encouraged to support their students in making more decisions in their learning process (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Nguyen & Walkinshaw, 2018; Phan & Hamid, 2017). However, most of the time teachers do not have the tools to assist their students, or they feel attached to a curriculum that does not allow them to foster the necessary skills (Nguyen & Walkinshaw, 2018; Wichayathian & Reinders, 2018). Until now,

autonomous language learning has mostly been self-initiated and continued by the intervention of a mediator that in most cases is a tutor or a teacher (Benson, 2013). However, the challenges of language learning continue to be the development of strategies that allow the learner to become self-sufficient.

Some studies suggest that if teachers were less dependent on a curriculum and could decide what to teach their learners, students could be provided with more opportunities to be autonomous (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Phan & Hamid, 2017; Smith et al., 2017). Teachers recognize the importance of autonomy to create better metacognitive skills and self-evaluating abilities to improve learning. However, teachers are not motivated to do those changes for all the problems and obstacles that they find while implementing new strategies in the classroom. Consequently, more studies are needed to understand how the interaction of the teacher can foster students' autonomy, and how this contributes to developing higher language level.

### ***2.3.2 The Landscape of Autonomy in the Field of Technology***

In recent years, there has been a need to develop the practice of incorporating autonomy into language teaching, and technology has been one of those key elements to do so. Language learning has become a priority because of the demands created by a connected world where the need for getting information and communicating overseas have changed the landscape of education (Schmenk, 2005). As mentioned, teachers feel compelled to provide students with tasks in the classroom to achieve the goals set by their institutions. Moreover, teachers are supposed to consider individual needs in large groups, implement inclusive methodologies and train students to face open access to information (Aoki, 2002; Hong & Youngs, 2016; Nakata, 2011; Oblillos Dela Rosa, 2016). Therefore, they need new strategies and methods to employ in the classroom to help their students gain fluency for working in a globalized environment.

Technology has provided students access to working autonomously to communicate about what they encounter outside of the classroom. Different studies have attempted to understand how autonomy can be developed through the use of technology, and most of them have shown this tool has a positive impact on language learning (Farivar & Rahimi, 2015; Thu Ba, 2018; Yao, 2016). However, these studies provide different reasons why learners struggle with autonomy.

In his study, Hoang Thu Ba (2018) acknowledges that creating motivation and the ineffective use of the Internet as challenges to the development of autonomy with technology. He suggests that students need reasons to improve their work to be motivated to learn. Additionally, he also recognizes that students need the support of their teachers to advance their skills of autonomous language learning. Similarly, Shuping Yao (2016) also shows how the lack of strategies, habits, and discipline can affect the autonomy of the students even if they are encouraged to use technology. Consequently, Farivar and Rahimi (2015) have demonstrated how the use of computer assisted language learning (CALL), which is also understood as a technological tool, can facilitate students' learning by providing control of the materials they use to be more independent learners.

In recent years, new educational approaches such as blended-learning and flipped-classroom have been used to incorporate technology into the classroom (Lee & Martin, 2020; Sujannah, Cahyono, & Astuti, 2020). On the one hand, with blended learning practices teachers use online media and face-to-face lessons as tools to teach learners. On the other hand, in a flipped-classroom students incorporate supplementary materials from outside the classroom in class. Those approaches have allowed teachers to effectively include technological tools in the class as resources to improve students' performance and involve them more in their academic process. In fact, these practices have shown a positive impact on the development of better

learning dynamics inside and outside the classroom, which in turn encourages students to work on their language skills on their own (Albadry, 2015; Forsythe, 2013; Lee & Martin, 2020).

However, a large part of the students still has difficulties managing their learning processes and becoming self-sufficient because the educator continues to have the greatest responsibility in the classroom, which means that even by using better resources, students do not develop skills that allow them to take more control of their learning (Olelewe, Orji, Osinem, & Rose-Keziah, 2019).

Although those studies (Farivar & Rahimi, 2015; Lee & Martin, 2020; Sujannah et al., 2020; Thu Ba, 2018; Yao, 2016) demonstrate an overall optimistic perspective of technology as a way to improve autonomous language learning, little focus has been given to the results of students' performance in language abilities. Additionally, all those studies were qualitative and concentrated in the perceptions and experiences of how to be more autonomous while learning a language, rather than demonstrating if autonomous behaviors can increase opportunities for improving language learning practices. Therefore, there is still room for research to determine if becoming autonomous by using technology will effectively impact language learning.

### ***2.3.3 Self-Access in Autonomous Learning***

Numerous studies in the field of language learning have determined that self-access is critical for developing students' autonomy (Anderson, 2016; Everhard, 2012; Ramli, Muljono, & Afendi, 2018; Wichayathian & Reinders, 2018). These studies concluded different factors that affect students' disposition to become autonomous. For example, Ramli, Muljono, and Afendi (2018) argue that the attitudes, abilities, and personality are necessary concerns to consider when developing self-directed learning readiness. Additionally, Anderson (2016) acknowledges that learners can take ownership of their process with strategies like portfolios, journals, and strategy instructions, but they also need the support of the teacher to guide and assess them through the

process. All these studies suggest that there are different aspects to the development of autonomy and most of them are related to the inner process of the person. From the definitions of autonomy already presented, it is clear that the decision-making ability is one of those important characteristics of the individual's capacity for autonomy (Westley, 1988). However, there is space to research the impact of this ability on improving language learning and promoting educational practices beyond the classroom.

In addition to technology, empowering students must be considered for developing student self-sufficiency. Many studies have mentioned the importance of motivation as a key aspect in the process of autonomy (Afshar et al., 2014; Cave et al., 2017; Leptokaridou et al., 2016; Maulana, Helms-Lorenz et al., 2016; Sanadgol, 2015; Spratt et al., 2002). Motivation is one of the internal factors that affect self-efficacy because learners lack strategies to effectively achieve this goal (Cave et al., 2017). Learners need an additional boost to continue working when results are not tangible, and rewards are not clearly in view. Developing extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are fundamental for increasing autonomous behaviors (Leptokaridou et al., 2016). Research has shown several cases in which learners that are not motivated have difficulty achieving academic gains in any field (Sanadgol, 2015). Therefore, if students want to succeed in language learning, teachers need to cultivate learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

Overall, there is a wide range of factors related to students' readiness to become autonomous. Everhard (2018) argues that there is still a gap in understanding all the factors that might interfere with the inner process that a person faces when becoming autonomous, and that this tool is needed to measure if a person is ready to develop in this way. Many studies have used qualitative research to understand what hinders autonomy, but more research is needed to

understand how this ability can be improved, especially by working on the decision-making ability (Maulana et al., 2016; Ramli et al., 2018; Spratt et al., 2002).

#### ***2.3.4 The Decision-Making Ability in the Classroom***

The previous sections outline several challenges related to language education and autonomy in various contexts. Additionally, different perspectives regarding the future of technology, its impact on autonomous learning, and self-access were presented. However, data-based decision-making (DBDM) must also be considered in relation to autonomous learning. In different studies, the decision-making ability has been highlighted as one of the main factors that can contribute to the development of the learners' autonomy (Alshareef, 2016; Nel, 2018; Stefanou et al., 2004). Those studies focused on understanding the role of the decision-making ability on students within their educational contexts. Nevertheless, they just took into account the general process to make decisions by following a simple structure: identification, validation, and implementation of the supportive ideas and little attention was given to the reflection of the results (Thille & Zimmaro, 2017).

The DBDM, however, is a method implemented by different researchers in which data is collected to improve the range of making decisions (Cramer, Little, & McHatton, 2014). Some studies validate the importance of the decision-making ability, not only for learners but also for all the agents that belong to the educational context (Crone et al., 2016; Faber, Glas, & Visscher, 2017; Reed, 2015). This method has been implemented to analyze different factors that involve decision-making abilities in several fields. For instance, some schools have used DBDM to evaluate socio-scientific issues of the modern world to develop students' citizenship skills (Fang, Hsu, & Lin, 2019). DMBD has also been used to improve reading skills by providing more options to evaluate reading comprehension (Nel, 2018). All those implementations have proved

effective for improving decision making for academic purposes. Additionally, DBDM has also improved and affected other skills that come within the self like cooperation, patience, and respect to make those decisions (Prenger & Schildkamp, 2018; Reed, 2015). Therefore, this current research project proposes that applying DBDM could be effective means for uncovering the beliefs and practices surrounding the concept of autonomy as a decision-making ability in a group of students in Colombia.

### ***2.3.5 Justification of Research Question/Objectives***

There are several studies that support the idea that developing autonomy in the classroom benefits educators and students in contexts such as Colombia where the consolidation of multicultural skills are necessary to face the challenges produced by globalization (Mora et al., 2019; Mufwene, 2010). It has also been shown that using technology has facilitated autonomous environments that allow the student to take control of their learning process (Farivar & Rahimi, 2015; Thu Ba, 2018; Yao, 2016). However, Everhard (2012) suggests that students still lack the autonomous and self-access abilities for taking control over their learning practices. This is why training students in the development of decision-making, which is considered as part of the autonomy process, could benefit their language learning. Thus, the research question of this research project: Which learning practices emerged when students explore decision-making strategies in their English writing assignments? This investigation is relevant to understanding the impact of decision-making and represents a gap in knowledge that must be addressed.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In this section, different ideas were shown with the purpose of conveying concepts of autonomy and its significance in the classroom. First, autonomy was defined from the philosophical point of view, where it is understood as the self-capacity to deliberate and make



decisions (Fallon Jr., 1994). However, this notion can vary because each individual builds this concept based on the social environment in which they belong (Holliday, 2003). Additionally, this literature review highlighted learner's autonomy as frequently discussed concept in educational matters. The idea involves the decision-making ability as a personal learning process, that is ongoing and dependent on social environments (Benson, 2013; Candy, Phillip, 1992; Dongyu et al., 2013; Little, 1991).

Moreover, autonomy in language learning has been associated with two main aspects: technology and self-access. Both are necessary to develop self-sufficiency beyond the language classroom (Everhard, 2018). Different authors have addressed the importance of autonomy as one of the most important skills needed in today's society and one of the challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Leptokaridou et al., 2016; Olorunsola, 2018). For this reason, it is essential to study autonomy and to produce research that contributes to the development of students' autonomy.

Consequently, this section also focused on understanding general ideas about autonomy from different perspectives. It has defined how autonomy was perceived in fields like philosophy where it was shown the relationship within the self and the individual opportunities to decide using the moral reasoning (Carver & Scheier, 2000; Fallon Jr., 1994; Kekes, 2011). In addition, autonomy has also been analyzed from the psychological perspective to understand that this is also a construct created in a community (Holliday, 2003).

From the educational viewpoint, autonomy has been introduced as an ability to make decisions in the learning process (Benson, 2007a; Candy, Phillip, 1992; Holec, 1981b; Little, 1991; D. Nunan, 1997). It has also been shown that it is an ongoing process in learners' lives and develops in relation with other agents such as teachers. However, there are still some remaining questions in regard to how to foster learner's autonomy, and if this improvement in

autonomy has an impact on language learning. Therefore, several ideas related to language learning were also discussed to provide an overview of how autonomy could impact in this field.

First of all, it examined the relationship between the teacher and the learner concluding that the educator has an important role in learners' development of autonomy (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Nguyen & Walkinshaw, 2018). Secondly, it analyzed the general framework of technology in the development of language learning and autonomy. It concludes that there are various ideas about the implementation of technological support that seem to have a positive effect on language learning (Farivar & Rahimi, 2015). Thirdly, it discusses the importance of self-access in the development of strategies to become autonomous (Everhard, 2018). Finally, this section addressed the problems and how data-based decision-making (DBDM) could be a strategy to attack all those issues in language learning (Thille & Zimmaro, 2017).

## **Chapter 3: Research Design**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, different elements related to this research study were presented to contextualize the design, selection, and implementation of the different data collection instruments of this project. Therefore, this section explains the type of study chosen to justify the decisions made to understand how the learning practices of a target group of learners are shaped when exploring different decision-making strategies while completing written assignments in English as a foreign language. The implementation of the instruments was carried out during a period of two months.

### **3.2 Context**

This research was carried out in a non-traditional school in Chía, Colombia, where English is taught as a foreign language. The school has a total of 237 students registered in 2019 who belong to a high socio-economic status. This institution uses an alternative pedagogical method called Fontán Relational Education (FRE) that emphasizes developing learner's autonomy to empower the students in their learning process. Therefore, each learner studies with a personalized plan that boosts their abilities in different subjects (Twani & Fontan, 2014). Additionally, the students do not attend traditional classes. Instead, they study on a virtual platform in which they complete the activities provided by the teachers. The main role of the educator is to analyze students' abilities in those specific subjects. When students enter the school, they take a diagnosis test in order to provide information about their current abilities and knowledge in different domains. After that, the teacher creates a study plan with the topics and activities that students complete during the course of their grade so that the learners can evolve in their academic process. This institution has a different time calendar because the students start

and finish their school program at any time of the year. Thus, the attendance of all the students is intermittent and the range of students that participate in activities varies.

### ***3.2.1 Type of Study***

The framework that underpins this project is action research because this approach involves reflecting on the practices performed while students work on written tasks (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017; Nyanjom, 2018). Therefore, a mixed-method approach was used to determine the students' beliefs and practices surrounding autonomy during and after the implementation of decision-making strategies. These strategies were used to develop their assignments which range from reflective papers and portfolios, to short essays prepared as follow-up work. In this study, different types of data were collected to identify the learning practices that emerge when learners explore different decision making-strategies for their writing assignments. The research study follows an exploratory phase of strategies of decision-making, then an explanatory, and finally a reflective phase of the results obtained (Shekhar, Prince, Finelli, Demonbrun, & Waters, 2019). Firstly, qualitative and quantitative data was collected to analyze students' performance in written tasks, and then qualitative data was collected to understand beliefs and perceptions about different aspects regarding autonomy, the learning process, and decision-making (Creswell, 2009).

### ***3.2.2 Participants***

The selection of participants was purposeful and different elements were considered when choosing the group of students who were part of the implementation (Patton, 2014). Firstly, because of the conditions of the school not all the students were available for the implementation. Therefore, the participants for this study were chosen based on the criteria of

time to make sure that the students were enrolled in the institution during the period when the implementation was carried out. Secondly, because of all the amount of data to be collected, only a small group of 5 students was selected for the decision-making training. Additionally, all the students had to have the abilities to write in the foreign language to participate in the academic writing implementation without major problems.

Among the characteristics of the group of students; it can be highlighted that all of them had a B1- B2 English level according to the Common European Framework of References for language (CEFR). Their ages ranged from 12 to 18 years old. All of the participants needed more academic language practice and received a total of 5 hours a week of English lessons.

### ***3.2.3 Researcher's Role***

Taking into account the different decisions made regarding the data collection for this research study, the role of the researcher had different facets depending on the moment of the implementation of the instruments (Gaillet & Guglielmo, 2014). On the one side, there was the role of the teacher-researcher in order to implement different decision-making strategies, as well as monitoring their use during the lessons. Additionally, the role of the teacher-researcher in this project also involved designing the lessons, evaluating the student's archives, interviewing the students, adjusting pedagogical implementation, and monitoring the progress. On the other side, there was the analyst role in which the main objective was examining the data collected from the implementation, the students' reflections, and students' artifacts (Gaillet & Guglielmo, 2014).

### ***3.2.4 Ethical Considerations***

During the implementation of the target research study, several elements were considered in order to protect the participants' well-being. The responsibility of the researcher was to avoid

any type of ethical damage to guarantee the reliability of the study. The aspects that were taken into account and ensured were consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. For that reason, there were two types of permissions requested to demonstrate the reliability of the authorizations (Donelan, Walker, & Salek, 2016). Firstly, the institutional permission was handled by the academic coordinator, who notified the principals and administrative staff about the project that would take place in the school. Secondly, the participants also signed a consent by their parents to agree with their involvement in the study.

In both permission letters, the participants, the school and the students, authorized the use of their information regarding the aspects of the study. However, it was promised that their identities would be confidential. Thus, pseudonyms were used to protect their anonymity. Additionally, every instrument used in the implementation guaranteed that students would not experience any physical or psychological harm.

### **3.3 Data collection instruments**

A set of instruments were used to collect the data needed to determine the decision-making ability of a group of students who were exploring different strategies while working on writing tasks. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, checklists, and students' artifacts.

#### ***3.3.1 Descriptions and Justifications***

##### ***3.3.1.1 Questionnaires***

A questionnaire is a research instruments that collects data from a large group. They are useful to gather both quantitative and qualitative information depending on the type of questions included. They are useful to understand personal perspectives in a complex and an intimate level,

due to the fact that it could allow the taker to reflect on the answers and provide an honest response (Gaillet & Guglielmo, 2014).

For the sake of the research, several questionnaires were used to understand the participants' ideas about autonomy and self-regulation. Some questionnaires from different studies were applied. Those questionnaires were adapted to the needs of the context, as well as to the specific needs of the project. On the one side, the questionnaires from the University of Berlin gathered information about learning aspects, such as style, discourse, and learners' autonomy. On the other hand, the questionnaire provided by Brown, Miller, and Lawendowski (1999) gathered information about the self-regulatory behavior in autonomous environments.

### **3.3.1.2 Focus Groups**

Focus groups are instruments that allow the researcher to gather data from selected people who debate a specific topic in planned discussions (Kader, 2018). This instrument collects data that can be shared among the participants and it is intended to optimize an implementation by avoiding the overuse of other instruments like questionnaires. For this project, the focus group helped to gather information about the perceptions that the students had about language learning and autonomy. This instrument was chosen because most of the participants share different beliefs, and therefore they could share ideas related to those topics.

### **3.3.1.3 Checklists**

A checklist serves not only to guide the process of different activities, but also to provide self-assessment about the performance of the assignments (Mihaly et al., 2018). In the target study, checklists were used to keep track of the different elements that students took into account when doing writing tasks (Nimehchisalem, 2014). All the items of the list were created by the

students considering the different moments of the writing process. Therefore, those checklists included a before-writing phase, a while-writing phase, and an after-writing phase (Dunst, Raab, Emblar, & Roberts, 2018). In each of those moments, the learners set their own criteria based on the training that they received and based on the feedback given after finishing their writing tasks. Therefore, more elements could be included in the checklist for each of the phases, which demonstrated the decision-making process that a student develops while working on language.

#### **3.3.1.4 *Semi-structured Interviews***

Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to understand personal opinions and gather information about a subject matter (Alshareef, 2016). During this project the semi-structured interviews were used to collect data about the perceptions that the students had regarding their autonomy when the implementation of the strategies was completed. Doing so it was possible to see if the perceptions about autonomy collected with other instruments changed or continued to be the same. The questions of the interview were carefully created to avoid any type of bias. Thus, those questions were checked and revised by a couple of colleagues and more experienced researchers.

#### **3.3.1.5 *Student Artifacts***

Artifacts are instruments that show the process of developing a product. Therefore, the students' artifacts were used to analyze their language progress (Friedman, 2007). They collected quantitative data for this project. Students produced different assignments, so only the writing tasks were considered for this research study. Those provided data on autonomous learning after working with some decision-making strategies. All of the writing activities were uploaded to their portfolios and were evaluated based on the criteria presented to the British Council and the



conventions created for the tasks (Thonney, 2011). Additionally, the project was designed so that learners evaluated their own writings with the checklists that they created before submitting it to the educator.

### **3.4 Validation and Piloting**

In order to implement the questionnaires, the focus group activities, the interviews, the checklists and the artifacts criteria, they were validated by a group of colleagues, including the research adviser and course instructor. They revised the questions presented in each of the instruments with the aim of ensuring that the language as well as the questions were accurate and appropriate for the learners (Donelan et al., 2016). Moreover, all the instruments were previously tested with a group of students with similar characteristics to rectify that the language used was accessible and to verify if the aim of the questions was suitable for the real participants. With those two actions, it was possible to demonstrate that the instruments were ready to be implemented and that the purpose of each was achievable. Additionally, other aspects that were not part of the instruments per se but were indirectly necessary during the implementation could be evaluated. For instance, instruction-giving, time management, and the format were some other elements that could be analyzed before the real implementation of the project.

Finally, to guarantee the trustworthiness of the data, different types of instruments were chosen to understand the relationship between the decision-making ability and the writing ability while exploring different strategies with a group of learners.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter presented an overview of different considerations when designing the instruments for the research study based on the action research methodology. This includes the qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches suggested by the literature (Cohen et al.,

2017; J. W. Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2014). Moreover, the chapter defends the validity of those instruments and the process of planning the type of data collected through different instruments. The purpose of the data collecting instruments was to understand how learning practices of a target group of students are shaped when they explore decision-making strategies for their English writing assignments.

## **Chapter 4: Pedagogical Intervention and Implementation**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, different ideas regarding the data collection instruments of the study were addressed. This was included to justify the decisions behind each one completed by the students during the execution of this project. Therefore, this section explains the way those instruments were designed, planned, and applied in the context of the project to validate the actions of the implementation phase. For that reason, this chapter aims to describe the pedagogical approach used during the implementation, including the visions of language, learning, classroom, and curriculum.

### **4.2 Visions of Language, Learning, and Curriculum**

#### ***4.2.1 Vision of Language***

A vision is an individual or collective understanding of something that is shared or transmitted to others through actions (Quijada, 2017). Within a classroom, the ideas that the teacher has about language frame the way students develop assignments. Therefore, for this particular research project it is the teacher's vision what underpins the way language is perceived through the activities that students do in the sessions. Considering the context for investigation of this project and the activities done with this target group of students, whose English level is already fluent, but lacks academic awareness, there are three visions of language that support the activities proposed during the implementation.

First, language is seen from a functional perspective. That means that language is understood as a performative activity that involves communication. The functional uses that learners give to language and the social interaction inside a classroom are what allows language to emerge. Thus, students approach the language by doing activities that let them interact with

their classmates and with the information. These actions develop a communicative context where accurate language usage can be improved but meaning is what prevails (Tudor, 2001).

Second, language is also understood as a self-expression tool that allows learners to exhibit what they wish beyond the transactional function. That means that language is unique to each individual and helps them show what they feel (Tudor, 2001). For example, in this school, learners are encouraged to interact with the information and relate it to their personal lives to make it meaningful.

Third, language can also be seen as a linguistic system. Taking into consideration that these learners lack academic language awareness, they also develop activities where they must recognize how patterns work. Therefore, they need to understand the systemic rules that language has to be able to improve their performance (Tudor, 2001). Overall, language is seen as a functional and communicative tool that also allows self-expression, but also must be understood systematically to improve academic performance.

#### ***4.2.2 Vision of Learning***

Considering the context of this research project, students do the activities in the language sessions with two main purposes. Firstly, students need to develop abilities that can only be mastered by practicing the language. Secondly, they need to reflect and conduct research on different topics that involve language and its use. These two goals of language learning can be explained into two visions of learning. On the one hand, when students do activities to practice the language, learning is seen as experiential, which means that to learn something you need to do it. Just like the way a person learns how to swim by going into the swimming pool, a language needs to be practiced to help learners develop communicative competencies: speaking, listening, writing, and reading (Tudor, 2001). On the other hand, there is a vision of analytical

learning when students need to reflect and investigate information to learn a language. That means that learners are not empty vessels; instead, they are equipped with a set of abilities and knowledge that allows them to process the information and create connections with new concepts or abilities (Gudnason, 2017). These two visions of learning help explain the way students interacted with the information during this implementation.

#### ***4.2.3 Vision of the Classroom***

Another important aspect to consider in this pedagogical implementation is the vision of classroom. There are different perceptions about the concept that a classroom entails, mostly because it is a place where students and teachers interact and the decisions in terms of interaction and pedagogy are influenced by the ideas of the different agents around it. For instance, the school where the participants study follows a pedagogical approach, and therefore that idea impacts the interaction of teachers and learners. For this vision, the classroom is seen as a place for autonomy where learners are empowered to make decisions about their learning process (Tudor, 2001). From a psychological point of view, students perform a more active and participatory role in the learning process. They can “assume responsibility for determining the purpose, content, rhythm, and method of their learning, monitoring its progress and evaluating its outcomes” (Holec, 1981, p.23, as cited in Benson, 2007a). Additionally, the classroom is also seen in terms of scenarios where there is a possibility of interacting with self-access materials which transcends the idea of a traditional classroom where information and learning are no longer given by a teacher in a physical space (Wichayathian & Reinders, 2018).

#### ***4.2.4 Vision of Curriculum***

The vision of curriculum of this research project coincides with the ideas proposed by Nunan (1989, p. 9): “statement of intent of a language program as set out in syllabus outlines, sets of objectives, and various planning documents.” This means that a curriculum involves the development of a content program where topics and activities are planned, in this case following one of the models provided by the CLIL approach. The curriculum model of the implementation is connected to the interdisciplinary module approach, which purports that learners study the language by also doing activities of different topics that are not necessarily language-driven (Coyle, D., Hood, P., & Marsh, 2010). However, those activities are needed to complement language teaching where students develop abilities for authentic language use. Additionally, learners benefit from the interaction with language and other disciplines by putting their language knowledge in context. This also generates a more holistic language education combining the four principles of the CLIL approach (Mede & Çinar, 2019):

**Content.** Students work on interdisciplinary modules with topics of other subjects which can be chosen by their interest. They can learn content by working and reporting in another language.

**Cognition.** Students apply their learning skills in another language according to their levels, which allows them to create more connections during their learning process and fosters more learning opportunities.

**Communication.** Students develop authentic tasks that allow them to communicate and self-express in a foreign language. Besides, they benefit from the feedback given not only in language matters, but also in the content-subject matters.

**Culture.** Students relate content topics to their contexts, which generates awareness of other cultures and current issues or challenges. They also learn from others by interacting with information from different sources.

### 4.3 Instructional Design

The instructional design of the implementation of this research project was carried out using a pedagogical model of learning that is used by the school. This model is known as Fontan Relational Education (FRE) which was created in 1957 by the psychologists Ventura Fontan and Emilia García (Twani & Fontan, 2014). In this pedagogical model, the aim is to process the information by relating it to personal life experiences. To do this there are several stages students go through to learn new content or develop an ability. First, students work on a stage called *Starting and Ending Points*. In this stage, students link their pre-existing knowledge to the content topic that they are learning. They can also generate a hypothesis of what they will learn through guiding questions provided by the educator. In this stage, students set goals and plan how they are going to work to develop the activities proposed. The second stage is called *Research* and it is the moment in which the students investigate the information in different sources. In this stage, they must demonstrate the way they process this information in their final products. *Skill Development* is the third stage of the model, and it is the moment in which students are required to apply what they know to what they have been studying. Thus, they complete different assignments that allow them to internalize the content topic. To do so, educators can customize the activities to meet learners' preferences and interests. They can provide specific learning opportunities to process the content they are working with. Finally, the last stage is called *Relating*. This occurs when students reflect on the new knowledge or ability, they developed by relating it to their personal lives. They also apply what they have learned

about the content provided to them with their own experiences. They can then evaluate their own learning process. (Twani & Fontan, 2014).

*Starting and Ending Points, Research, Skill Development, and Relating* are all developed when completing the content units that the students have scheduled in their learning plans for each subject. Therefore, the instructional design for this implementation takes into account how the information they learn is aligned with the actions of each stage. Finally, it is important to take into account that all those activities were presented to the students in their online platform where they can review the instructions on each activity at any time and in any place.

#### **4.3.1 Lesson Planning**

The planning for the pedagogical implementation of the research project was done considering two different aspects of the learners' context. On the one side, the students needed to continue their studies in language learning by developing the content units proposed in their learning plans. Therefore, the activities that they developed were all planned bearing in mind the set of topics that all the students had to learn. Additionally, each of those units considered the written submissions in which language training could be demonstrated. This learning product or artifact of the student was necessary to evaluate the level of progress made in their language development. Additionally, all the content units followed the process outlined in the FRE model used by the institution.

On the other side, the students needed to be trained in the use of decision-making strategies. Therefore, within each of the content topic units the learners were asked to complete different tasks where they could reflect on the decisions they made during the implementation of the project. All of the tasks that the students developed in regard to the training of decision-making were aligned with the aims of the FRE model stages. For that reason, each of the content



units provided activities related to decision-making strategies in the stages of the model, but not all of them contain specific training in decision-making.

### 4.3.2 Implementation

The pedagogical implementation of this project was done over a ten-week period where students developed three content units of their learning plans to complete a total of 40 hours of study. This period included the diagnosis, training, and data collection phase. Each of the units was designed with activities related to content, language, and decision-making training and were aligned with the FRE model stages. In addition to directed training, all the students had the opportunity to study at their own pace. Therefore, all the activities could be finished in times besides the ones provided by the school. Nonetheless, the time considered for the development of each activity corresponded to the time available in each session. Table 1 illustrates graphically the action plan with the different moments in which various elements of the research project were executed. Likewise, it describes the activities performed during the time each of the content units were completed.

**Table 1**

*Action Plan of the Pedagogical Implementation*

Week Number	Stage of the project	Hours	Activities to be developed
1	Diagnosis phase	5h	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creation of the portfolio</li> <li>- Analysis of the last writing assignment</li> </ul>
2	Content Unit 1	15 h	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus group activity (Instrument)</li> <li>- Questionnaires 1, 2, 3 (Instrument)</li> </ul>
3	Content Unit 1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of the Unit activities</li> <li>- Development of the Unit activities</li> </ul>
4	Content Unit 1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of the Unit activities</li> <li>- Checklist training</li> <li>- Artifact collection (Instrument)</li> </ul>

5	Content Unit 2	15h	- Data-base Decision-Making strategy implementation
6	Content Unit 2		- Covey Matrix training
7	Content Unit 2		- Development of the Unit activities
			- Questionnaires 4 and 5 (Instrument)
			- Development of the Unit activities
			- Artifact collection (Instrument)
			- Data-base Decision-Making strategy implementation
			- Checklist implementation (created by students) (instrument)
			- Development of the Unit activities
8	Content Unit 3	15h	- Covey Matrix training
9	Content Unit 3		- Checklist training
10	Content Unit 3		- Development of the Unit activities
			- Development of the Unit activities
			- Artifact collection (instrument)
			- Data-base Decision-Making strategy implementation
			- Checklist implementation (created by students) (instrument)
			- Individual Interviews (Instrument)
			- Development of the Unit activities

The pedagogical implementation combined the development of different activities related to content units, data collection, and decision-making strategies. First of all, the data collection instruments were planned in the implementation to determine when to collect the data. Additionally, some activities, such as the portfolio creation, were scheduled to provide support for the students. This included instructions for the activities that were included in this academic portfolio. They uploaded their completed written tasks for each unit there for storage management purposes. The strategies of decision-making were established to train the students in the decisions they make in regarding to time management, activities to understand information, and evaluating tools for their assignments while they study the language. To

accomplish this, they worked on three main strategies: Data-based decision making, Covey Matrix, and checklists.

Data-based Decision-making is a strategy that has been implemented in education to allow the teacher to reflect on the data sources provided by the students (Crone et al., 2016; Prenger & Schildkamp, 2018). That means that teachers adapt their practices based on the information gathered from the students' performance. This can be also applicable to the students where they analyze their performance based on the data collected from their products. This strategy implies that the educator has to help the students by making them aware of their learning process to analyze the decisions made during the development of the content unit.

The second strategy implemented in this Research project was the Covey Matrix, which is a time management tool that helps with the prioritization of activities (Quintana, n.d.). In the context in which the target group of students studied, there was the possibility of working on the activities in different moments apart from the ones provided by the school. Therefore, the learners developed the activities at their own pace, and they could decide the time when they wanted to complete their assignments. For that reason, this strategy was useful for this group because time management had been proven important for the academic performance of different groups of learners (Mei, 2016).

Finally, the last strategy for decision-making training was the implementation of Checklists. This tool is a self-regulatory strategy that provides students and teachers with different elements to direct, monitor, and regulate steps to meet writing goals (Hales & Pronovost, 2006; Jagaiah et al., 2019). Thus, the implementation of a checklist starts with an exploratory phase where students use them to evaluate their work. Then, they create their

checklists based on the elements that they consider important to their assignments. Lastly, they evaluate their performance by taking into account each of the guidelines of the checklist.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter explained the different visions regarding language, learning, classroom, and curriculum as well as the implementation procedures required for the research project. First, it defined language as a functional and communicative tool that allows self-expression, but that needs to be understood systematically to reach academic levels. Secondly, it recognized learning from two different approaches known as functional learning and analytical learning. Those ways of understanding language are embedded in the activities that the students developed in their learning plans. This is where they learned language by using and analyzing it. Thirdly, this section described the reasons why the classroom was perceived as a school of autonomy where learners were empowered in their learning process. It also explained the curriculum model adopted by the school using CLIL where students could develop activities from different disciplines while learning languages. Lastly, this section also demonstrated the setting up of the implementation by clarifying the pedagogical model that the school followed known as FRE and included a detailed description of the activities developed regarding decision-making strategies in the stages of the model *Starting and Ending Points*, *Research*, *Skill Development*, and *Relating*.

## **Chapter 5: Results and Data Analysis**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The analysis of the data gathered during the implementation of the research study allowed analysis of how learning practices are shaped when students explore decision-making strategies for their English writing productions. This chapter illustrates the numerous steps and processes executed in regard to the data management and data analysis resulting from the qualitative and quantitative data gathered in previous stages of the project. Moreover, in this research study, a mixed method was applied to understand different answers of the participants. Their performances in the development of the implementation stage were considered to review their language learning progress. Thus, this chapter compiles the findings that emerged from the interpretation of qualitative and quantitative data in order to answer the research question and meet the goal of this study.

### **5.2 Data Management Procedures**

The design used to collect and analyze the data found during the implementation is called a Concurrent Mixed Method (Creswell, 2009). In this approach, the qualitative and quantitative information was obtained using instruments to gather both type of data simultaneously. Thus, the results and outcomes of the data collection phase originated from the integration and execution of those two mixed methods (Creswell et al., 2007). This was employed to triangulate the information and to clarify the analysis for the research problem.

The evidence gathered in the questionnaires and the artifacts of the students represent the quantitative information of the project, whereas the qualitative information emerged the checklists, focus groups, and individual interviews. Moreover, from the moment that the implementation started on October 7, 2019, different procedures were performed to store the

information collected through the instruments so that the researcher could organize the data. As the instruments were applied, different folders were created to categorize the information of each participant. All those folders were labeled with pseudonyms for each student such as L1, L2, and L3... to protect their anonymity from the beginning. The questionnaires and interviews from the focus group were saved in online and offline files to safeguard the information gathered. The students' artifacts and checklists were also placed into those files which were also classified by pseudonyms and dates. Additionally, each student created an online portfolio where the artifacts could be seen. Finally, all the interviews of the participants were transcribed and kept in the aforementioned files to allow efficient access of the data. Later on, all the information of the participants was compiled in a Microsoft Excel matrix facilitate analysis and retrieval of the information.

### ***5.2.1 Validation***

To guarantee the validity of the information obtained in the analysis phase, the researcher engaged triangulation, interpretation, and comparison of the findings from the qualitative and quantitative data (Cohen, et al., 2017). Additionally, the data was analyzed to find emerging patterns, and the information obtained by the instruments was compared to show if there was a consistency in the findings. Using the Grounded theory method, the researcher extracted some codes from the information, and these were compared and analyzed many times to verify their relevance. Finally, the emerging codes were reviewed by other colleagues and more experienced researchers to corroborate the veracity of the conclusions.

### ***5.2.2 Data Analysis Methodology***

The data analysis approach used for this research project includes mixed methods to evaluate the information collected during the action research implementation. On the one hand, the first analysis was done using the grounded theory method which aims to create theories through the collection of qualitative data from different sources (Charmaz, 2006). This method was used because it provided a structure for the researcher to work with the information coming from the project participants, which in turn helped determine a theory based on their results and responses. Likewise, the method was used to refine the amount of data coming from the qualitative instruments because each provides significant amount of information from the participants (Moore, 2018). Thus, grounded theory contributed to the management of the qualitative data emerging from the focus group, some checklists, and the individual interviews. This method supported the triangulation of information, the identification of emerging codes from instrument findings, and the creation of categories to answer the research question using the qualitative information. On the other hand, the quantitative data resulting from artifacts of the students and the questionnaires were statistically analyzed using descriptive statistics that aligned with the categories used for the qualitative data.

During the analysis of the qualitative information using the grounded theory method, three stages were carried to define the categories from the raw data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the first stage called open coding, the information was analyzed to identify patterns that allowed the identification of recurring codes related to the research question. These codes were revised in a second stage known as axial coding to refine the previous coding into categories and subcategories. Finally, in the last stage, known as selecting coding, the main categories and

subcategories were chosen, and an umbrella core category was identified. This provided support and explanations about the emerging categories and subcategories formed in the previous stages.

Once the categories of the qualitative data were identified, the information was compared once more with the results of the analysis of the quantitative information. Basic descriptive statistics were employed to support the previous data relationships identified among the data sets. Finally, each of the findings were supported with excerpts, tables, and charts to ensure validity, breadth, and depth of the data analysis.

### **5.3 Categories**

Considering the three stages of the process of coding qualitative information introduced by Corbin and Strauss (2008), three main categories and six subcategories emerged to see how learning practices are shaped when students explore decision-making strategies for their English written productions.

#### ***5.3.1 Overall Category Mapping***

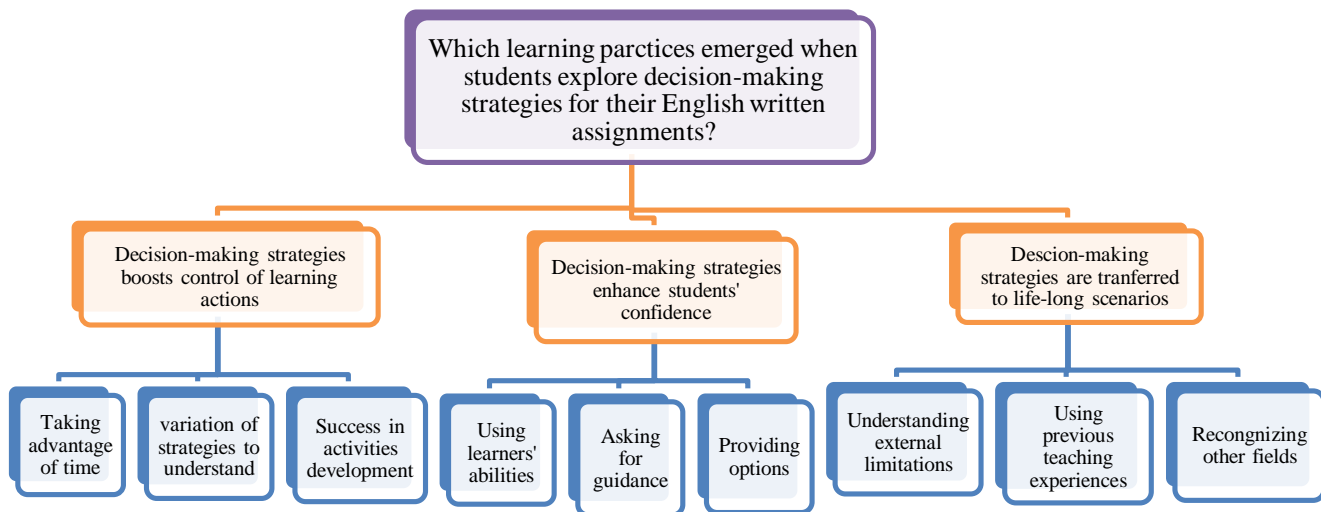
During the first part of the data analysis, in the open coding stage, different codes were defined according to the information collected from the instruments as illustrated in Table 2. Those codes were analyzed and grouped using the color technique to identify their recurrence, and thus reduce the number of concepts that emerged from the information.



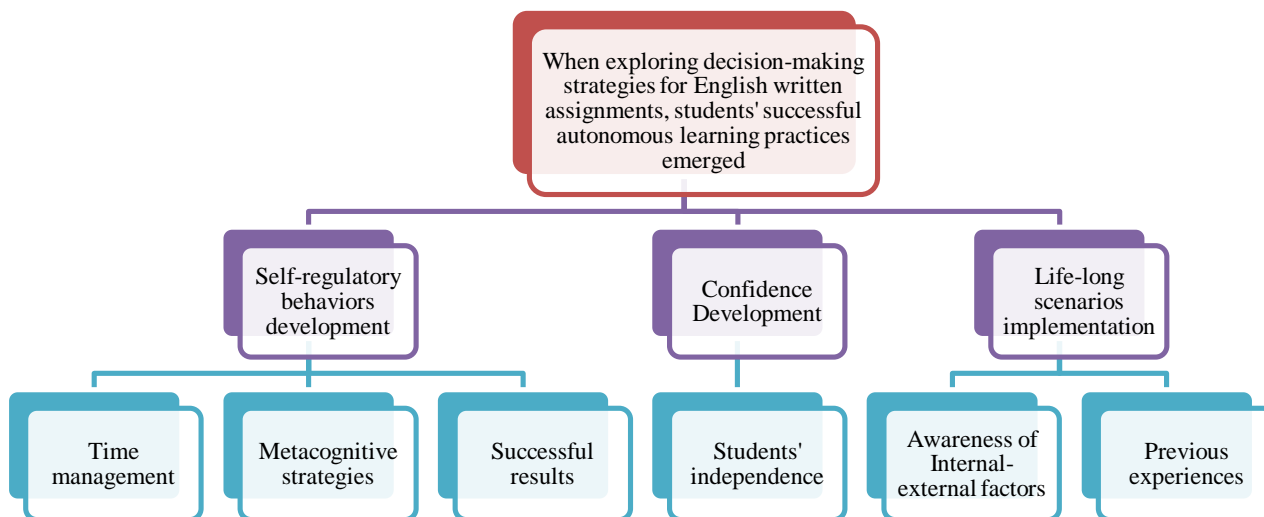
**Table 2***Open Coding Stage*

Research question	Initial emerging codes
Which learning practices emerge when students explore decision-making strategies for their English written assignments?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulating the behaviour</li> <li>• Controlling time</li> <li>• Independence from the teacher</li> <li>• Changing instructions</li> <li>• Completing activities</li> <li>• Asking for guidance</li> <li>• Providing options</li> <li>• Using abilities</li> <li>• Showing good results</li> <li>• Using previous experiences</li> <li>• Considering external factors</li> <li>• New scenarios opportunities</li> </ul>

Once the list of emerging codes showed saturation, the second stage of the process began. The codes were analyzed to find relationships and patterns between them. Thus, the first categories and subcategories that accounted for the research question were identified as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1***Initial Categories and Subcategories*

Finally, in the axial coding stage, the categories and subcategories were analyzed to see the relationships. Their connections were reviewed to identify the main category and its validity as presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2***Final Categories and Subcategories***5.3.2 Discussion of Categories****5.3.2.1 Self-regulatory behaviors**

When students explored decision-making strategies for their English writing assignments, they showed a major improvement in their self-regulatory behaviors to complete the activities proposed. On the one hand, students were more aware of the time that they needed to develop the activities and considered it as an essential item for their evaluation. On the other hand, the students could choose different strategies to reflect on their language usage. They could then decide to change some approaches to the activities to enhance metacognition and show their improvement. Moreover, they improved their performance in writing in each of the different assignments during the implementation. There were three main subcategories that support this finding.

### ***5.3.2.1.1 Time Management***

When students work in autonomous environments like this school in Chia in which there is flexibility in submission times for assignments, there is a tendency to understand time differently. Generally, traditional academic settings neglect the impact of time in the performance and development of the tasks, mainly because there is only one due date set for all students. However, when teachers give students the opportunity to make decisions about when to complete assignments, students must acknowledge their responsibility to complete their work. For instance, the completing assignments on a regular schedule shows their dedication to their learning. However, not all the students are fully aware of this matter and do not consider it essential for their learning process. Students may not have training in time management, or they do not factor that in as part of their academic performance. Furthermore, the implementation showed that the students' understanding of time were twofold. On the one hand, time is an indicator that shows if students are on a path of an efficacious academic performance. For example, Excerpt 1 and 2 show the way students consider time limits when they self-evaluated their activities before submitting them to the educator. The findings show that being on time is important to them and that is an essential element in their performance. Additionally, when creating the group checklist provided in Table 3, the students recognized timed submissions as an important element of their evaluation. This supports the idea that most students are aware of the significance of time in their academic performance.

**Table 3***Group Checklist*

<p>My assignment is well-organized and contains a cover and a proper layout (Yes/ No)</p> <p>All the tasks are fully completed (Yes/ No)</p> <p>My answers provide examples (Yes/ No)</p> <p>My language is appropriate and accurate (Correct use of spelling and language) (Yes/ No)</p> <p>My assignment includes connectors and vocabulary according to my level (Yes/ No)</p> <p>My Assignment includes references of the resources I used (Yes /No)</p> <p>My assignment was delivered on time (Yes/ No)</p> <p>My assignment includes a clear conclusion of what I did (Yes/ No)</p> <p>My assignment shows dedication and preparation (Yes/ No)</p>
--

**Excerpt 1**

Checklist: If you were the instructor, would you approve your work? Why?
Yes, because I am taking into account quality, time and the English level that I am on and I am sure that this document meets all those requirements.

**Excerpt 2**

Checklist: If you were the instructor, would you approve your work? Why?
I think this was a good job, but I can improve the timing by working faster.

On the other hand, students relate time to autonomous behaviors. Time investment allows the students to organize their work effectively to complete it and helps them consider their levels of dedication to academic excellence. Excerpt 3, for instance, illustrates how the awareness of time reflects more than just an indicator of deadlines. It also shows that time investment is a factor that influences performance and has an impact on the quality of the final product.

Moreover, students agreed that including dedication and preparation are important part of their evaluation, as show in Table 3. Related to this finding, other studies have also acknowledged the influence of time within strategies of self-regulated learning (MacArthur & Philippakos, 2013; Seker, 2015). They also recognize that the fusion of time and dedication favor the development of decision-making. In addition, the fact that students consider time an indicator of academic accomplishment suggests that they should be trained in the time management skills in the classroom. This would help them become more aware of time and develop strategies to work efficiently.

### **Excerpt 3**

Final interview: Do you consider yourself as an autonomous learner?
Yes, I always organize my work hours to be disciplined and to be able to deliver all my works on time and with good quality.

#### ***5.3.2.1.2 Metacognitive Strategies***

The data analysis showed that students considered English learning an important aspect of their academic future. Excerpts 4 and 5 demonstrate why some students feel motivated to learn languages. Although all the students agreed that they can perform well in various activities, they recognized they had different difficulties in language learning.

### **Excerpt 4**

Focus group: Do you feel motivated to learn English? Why?
---

I feel motivated because I think it is pretty important because in the future it will be useful for you and your life.

**Excerpt 5**

Focus group: Do you feel motivated to learn English? Why?

I feel motivated to communicate with strangers in the internet and reading and acquiring knowledge

During the implementation of the project, students had the opportunity to make decisions on some elements that they wanted to be evaluated in their writing production. Some students were aware of the importance of correct language usage for their performance, as illustrated in Excerpts 6 and 7. Therefore, when discussing the elements that should be included in the group checklist, all of the students agreed to include correct use of language. However, students had different challenges with language use, and therefore, they developed strategies to meet their individual needs. Learners demonstrated their development of metacognitive strategies when they reflected on the effectiveness of the activities proposed to improve their language skills. Thus, they were allowed to make decisions about the activities, which supported their learning before they submitted their final assignments.

**Excerpt 6**

Checklist: If you were the instructor, would you approve your work? Why?

<p>Yes, my work was good, and I think it was good 'cause I worked days for it trying to have the best grammar, writing for the story</p>
--

**Excerpt 7**

<p>Checklist: If you were the instructor would you approve your work? Why?</p>
--

<p>Yes, I think it's well done and has appropriate grammar.</p>
---

Data showed that students made decisions on strategies to improve their language learning abilities. For example, it provided information that they made decisions related to the effectiveness of content and activities, or it assured that they did learn about the topic to complete the writing tasks. Excerpts 8 and 9 are examples of the decisions that students made to facilitate their learning process. They indicate that students are able to recognize their abilities, and to understand how they can achieve learning goals by doing some activities that are more engaging to them. Such comprehension of their process is associated with metacognition, which is one axis of self-regulated learning (Winne & Perry, 2000).

**Excerpt 8**

<p>Interview: Do you make decisions in your learning process?</p>
---

<p>Yes, I try to be as autonomous as possible with that like texting the analyst and asking him if I can do this instead of this or that instead of that.</p>
---

**Excerpt 9**

<p>Interview: Do you make decisions in your learning process?</p>
---

<p>I do make decisions on my learning process because I try to make the work efficiently, I try to choose activities like if I want to do a mind map or if I want to do an infographic.</p>
---



Learners could also reflect on the effectiveness of those decisions based on the knowledge that they gained from completing the assignment. Excerpts 10 and 11 illustrate some of the reflections that students had when evaluating the decisions that they made. The results indicate that decision-making training had an impact on the development of metacognition. Different studies have related this training to self-regulation (Locke & Latham, 2006; Peeters et al., 2014; Saks & Leijen, 2014). The findings support that fostering decision-making skills in the language learning classroom is relevant.

#### **Excerpt 10**

Interview: How can you evaluate if those decisions are the most appropriate?
I do evaluate by experiencing if I am not learning or not doing the work as I should do it, you know, if I am not doing it in an optimum way, I know then my decisions are not the right ones and I try to change them, making other decisions and doing all over again.

#### **Excerpt 11**

Interview: How can you evaluate if those decisions are the most appropriate?
I evaluate my decisions based on how well I am learning and if I can do the activities without having too many corrections.

#### ***5.3.2.1.3 Successful Results***

Findings showed the impact of decision-making strategies on the students' performance in their writing productions. Overall, the suitability of the decision-making strategies can be reflected on learning practices only if they are effective. Therefore, the data demonstrated that decision-making strategies had a significant impact on the results and development of their actions in different ways. On the one hand, the results were important for evaluation because

they could be used to determine success (Winne & Perry, 2000). Excerpts 12, 13, and 14 demonstrate that the students found results relevant and that this is related to their success in decision-making and developing autonomy.

**Excerpt 12**

Interview: How can you evaluate if those decisions are the most appropriate?
Because of the results, I think the most important thing is the result. Like you have to know when it is efficiently or when it is not the decision that you just made or made a long time ago, because if you have the ability to make decisions also you have the ability to evaluate those decisions. Like If I choose to go through this road and I fall, then I will not go again to that road. Like if you are able to make that decision, Therefore, you are able to evaluate because the result tells you if your decision was good or not good.

**Excerpt 13**

Interview: How can you evaluate if those decisions are the most appropriate?
Ok, I make my decisions based on the results that I get from others, but I make some decisions like in my work or with my time like I say to myself: Ok, I am not gonna play videogames. I am not gonna do things in that time, so can deliver my work on time and see what happens.

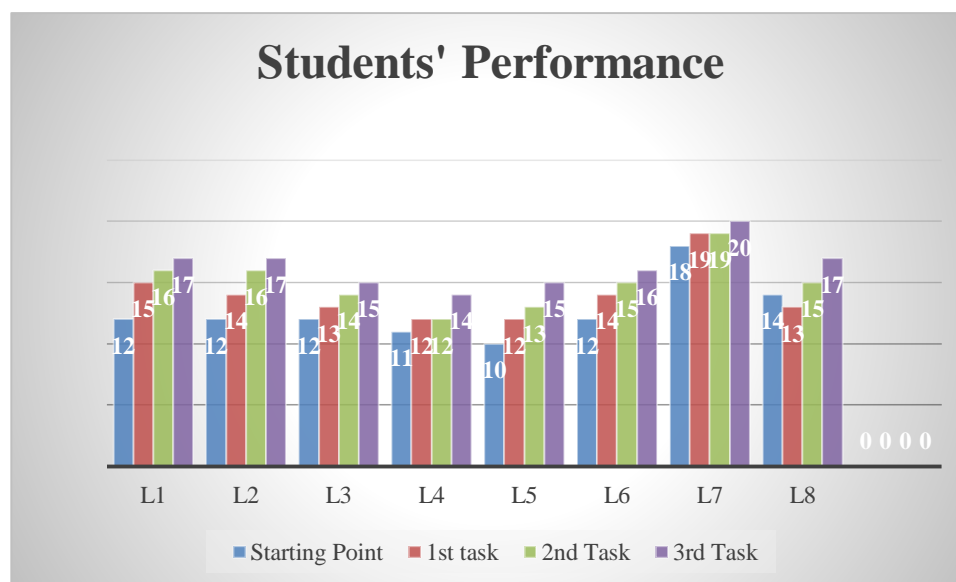
**Excerpt 14**

Interview: How can you evaluate if those decisions are the most appropriate?
I evaluate my decisions based on how well I am learning and if I can do the activities without having too many corrections or the scores that I get.

On the other hand, when exploring decision-making strategies, the students were also more aware of the elements that they had to consider in their writing to have good results. Thus, there is a direct relationship between making good decisions and having successful results. Table 4 shows the progress students made during the implementation of the project. These indicate improvement in their writing activities.

**Table 4**

*Students' Performance*



### 5.3.2.2 *Confidence Development*

The results of the investigation revealed that decision-making strategies have a fundamental impact on the development of confidence. When students have the confidence to act without the need of having an external agent to guide them, they demonstrate that they have the independence to carry out the activities and processes established in the curriculum. Confidence can be seen as a factor that builds autonomous behaviors because learners are able to succeed in

the development of activities without supervision. Additionally, it provides students with readiness to take control of different aspects of their learning process. Confidence has been a concept that has been largely addressed in the development of self-regulation and self-efficacy, specifically because it can provide learners with a perception of their own competence to carry out tasks. That is why it is fundamental for the development of autonomy (Locke et al., 1984; MacArthur & Philippakos, 2013; Mok, 2013; Pajares, 1996).

#### ***5.3.2.2.1 Students' Independence***

The results revealed that decision-making strategies impact independence in learning practices. Students identify independence as a key factor for developing autonomy because they are able to control aspects of their learning process. Excerpts 15 and 16 for instance, show how students associate autonomy and independence and the relationship that students have developed around it.

#### **Excerpt 15**

Interview: What do you think is to be autonomous?
I think that being autonomous is being able to answer (act) for yourself and not depend on anyone for your life.

#### **Excerpt 16**

Interview: What do you think is to be autonomous?
Well, the autonomy is doing things, is doing your job on your works by conscience not because, they have to remind you that you have to work, you do it because you have to. That's your job and if you do it then you can rest then.

The findings of the project analysis also demonstrated that students are able to establish different connections related to dependency towards the educator. This result confirms that even in autonomous learning environments students tend to trust some parts of their learning process to an external figure to guide them in the activities. Although, they do not see this reliance as a factor that affects their autonomy, as illustrated in Excerpts 17 and 18. Therefore, students need to be trained to reduce teacher-dependency behaviors. It has been shown that through scaffolding and self-regulatory development training, students can gradually achieve this objective (Edwards et al., 2019; Hermendaoglu Baz et al., 2018; Lee & Martin, 2020; Leptokaridou et al., 2016; Nakata, 2011; Tran & Duong, 2018).

#### **Excerpt 17**

Interview: Do you consider yourself autonomous?
I do not consider myself a 100% autonomous. I still need the teacher to help me with some activities, but I try to do the things by myself first.

#### **Excerpt 18**

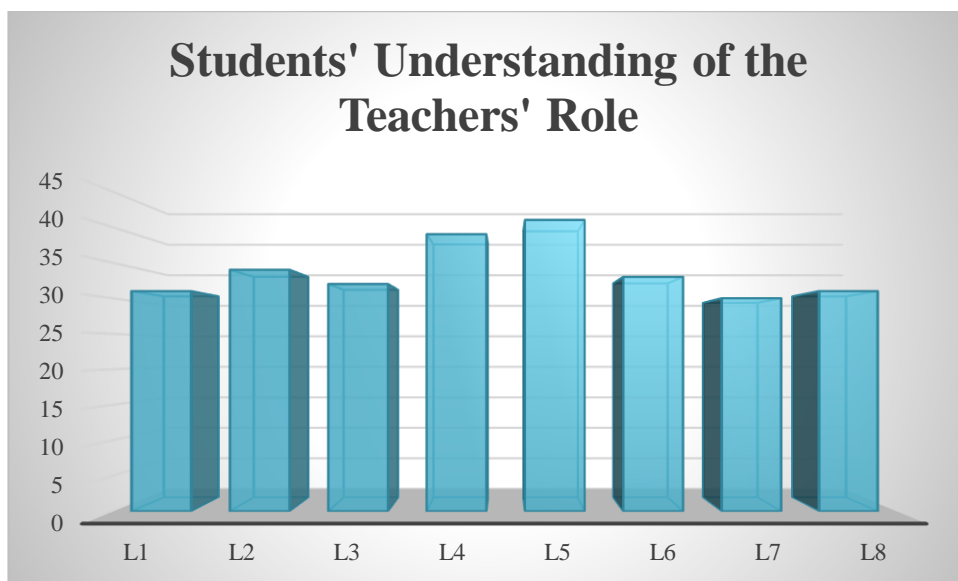
Interview: Do you consider yourself autonomous?
Well, I think that I am autonomous, I work when I have to, I talk with my analyst every time I need him and if I have problems or I can't work, I tell him I reorganize my planning to do my goals, even if I have problems and I always send my works. Then, yes I think that I am autonomous because I can do the things that I have to.

Table 5 demonstrates students' awareness of the role of the teacher in their learning process. It shows that students also recognize that the educator should not provide them everything. Additionally, by training students in decision-making strategies, they can generate

better dynamics that allow them to take control of their learning without the need of having constant supervision from the educator.

**Table 5**

*Students' Understanding of the Teachers' Role*



Excerpts 19 and 20 show that students can generate dynamics that favor their learning process and allow them to be less dependent on the teacher. On the one hand, independence helped them manage better capacities to understand their own learning process, and therefore, students can set options to work on their writing assignments or even use other abilities to achieve progress. On the other hand, their independence made students recognize the most suitable moments in which the intervention of the educator was necessary. Excerpts 21 and 22, for example, demonstrate the readiness that students have to take control of the process and advise the teacher to make adjustments in the activities to facilitate their learning. This reveals that students do not always need the teacher to tell them what to do in order to learn, and that

they have an overall sense of competence to be able to complete the activities. Some other studies have addressed how independence behavior contributes to the development of confidence and why it is important for the development of autonomy in self-regulated environments (Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Schunk, 1990; Tavallali & Marzban, 2015).

**Excerpt 19**

Interview: Do you make decisions in your learning process?
I also make decisions in my learning process like any other person. For example, if for some reason a topic hasn't been opened yet to work on. Then, I simply work on something else until the topic is ready.

**Excerpt 20**

Interview: Do you consider yourself autonomous?
I consider myself very autonomous since I start studying without being told. And teachers do not have to tell me what to do since everything is very clear in the platform that I use to study.

**Excerpt 21**

Interview: Do you make decisions in your learning process?
I do, I usually ask my teachers if they can help me with some exercises or if they can adapt them to me so we can work with my interests or my capacities, my talents. So I try to make my learning process the most comfortable for me and for my teachers.

**Excerpt 22**

Interview: Do you make decisions in your learning process?
--

Sometimes, ask my teachers to change the activities and give ideas about what to do.

### **5.3.2.3 *Lifelong Scenarios Implementation***

The data gathered from the implementation also revealed that by working on decision-making strategies in writing activities, students could transfer their skills to different academic environments. On the one hand, it was evident that the students recognized that there were limitations that they had to understand in a self-learning process. They also recognized that decision-making and autonomy are processes that develop throughout life and can be applied to different contexts. On the other hand, the students understood that it is also vitally important to understand that some autonomous behaviors and capacities used to make decisions were the results of previous teachings.

#### **5.3.2.3.1 *Awareness of Internal and External Factors***

Data revealed that students recognized that there were aspects related to the learning process of which they did not have absolute control. There were internal and external factors that affected their performance in the activities and caused them to be unable to complete their goals. On the one hand, the results revealed that students considered some biological factors such as maturity and psychological preparation to face challenges. They recognized that these impeded them from taking control of their learning process. For instance, Excerpts 23, 24 and 25 demonstrate that they became aware of these challenges during the implementation. Additionally, motivation was a factor students found difficult to manage as seen in Excerpt 26. Here the student enjoyed learning but was not motivated to do certain technical tasks. Studies have revealed how motivation, maturity, psychological readiness, and emotional stability play an important role in the academic performance of the students. Thus, allowing the student to



develop their decision-making ability can significantly help the students in other areas of their lives (Cave et al., 2017; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Schunk, 1995).

**Excerpt 23**

Interview: Do you consider yourself autonomous?
I do consider myself autonomous though I do believe I do not have the enough maturity to behave well in some circumstances so that takes some of my autonomy away.

**Excerpt 24**

Interview: Do you consider yourself autonomous?
I do not consider myself autonomous, my autonomy is very basic. All my life I've been used to people telling me to do things and when to do them, so it is really difficult to me to be autonomous. I do not feel psychologically prepared to do everything by myself.

**Excerpt 25**

Interview: Do you consider yourself autonomous?
well, I think that I am autonomous, I work when I have to, I talk with my analyst every time I need him and if I have problems or I can't work because I feel ill or tired I tell him I reorganize my planning to do my goals even if I have emotional problems and I always send my works.

**Excerpt 26**

Focus group: Do you feel motivated to learn English? why?
---

I feel motivated to learn English because I think it is pretty important because in the future it will be useful for you and your life. But, I do not enjoy working some topics because they are too technical.

#### 5.3.2.3.2 *Previous Experiences*

Data shows that students use previous knowledge to enrich their learning process, and that contributes to their decision-making ability. On the one hand, some students make decisions in language learning based on the teachings from scenarios they have been given. This demonstrates that decision-making is a holistic process based on the successful accumulation of knowledge and skills from different fields, as demonstrated in Excerpt 27. On the other hand, students referred to the teachings of other people to evaluate their decisions because they trust the worthiness of the decision made by them, as illustrated in Excerpts 28 and 29. Studies have shown that people share what they have found successful for their learning to help others who are having difficulties, and this process can vary by cultures (Mok, 2013; Peeters et al., 2014).

#### **Excerpt 27**

Interview: How can you evaluate if those decisions are the most appropriate?

I am not sure. It is kind of common sense I think. I have been taught to be logical.

#### **Excerpt 28**

Interview: How can you evaluate if those decisions are the most appropriate?

I think that since the other people whom I live, teach me how to do things well because otherwise I would be a disorganized person and would not know anything. So, without that person I would not be autonomous because I would not know how to organize myself. I think I made the decisions based on what I have learned about important people in my life.

**Excerpt 29**

Focus group: What are your experiences regarding English learning? what is difficult and what is easy?

I think the difficult part of learning English is at the beginning because you need to memorize all the words and the information to use it all the time. For me it wasn't that difficult because my sister taught me English since I was 3 years old when I entered the school it wasn't so difficult to understand the conjugations and all the stuff. My sister helped me to do activities and decide when I had to put more attention.

In conclusion, students recognize that decision-making is a process that is learned, and that it is a social construction that has cultural implications. This means that different people can contribute to the development of this skill and for that reason, it must be nurtured in academic and non-academic settings to reach learners' full potential. Likewise, it is a process that is applicable in different scenarios. For this study it is important to note that training students in decision-making allows them to recognize they can use previous learning experience throughout their lives. (Seker, 2015).

### **5.3.3 Core Category**

The final core category emerged from the analysis of the codes from the qualitative and quantitative information gathered during the implementation of the project. The purpose of the research study was to analyze which learning practices emerge when students explore decision-making strategies for English written productions. Data showed that successful autonomous learning practices developed and they have an impact on the results of learners' achievement. When students explored decision-making strategies during the implementation, a set of aspects related to the learning process appeared in their answers. For instance, applying decision-making strategies in the classroom generated self-regulatory development, increased confidence, and strategies to apply to real-life scenarios. The evidence of self-sufficiency was demonstrated by their performance in the subcategories of time management, metacognitive strategies, successful results, students' independence, awareness of internal and external factors, and application of previous experiences. These subcategories were influential to the students' success because throughout the research implementation they demonstrated a level of awareness of them and the process of autonomy. Overall, the core category emerged as a response to the main inquiry of this study. It was found that students could experience personal growth because of their success in working autonomously and in their language assignments.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the research inquiry was addressed through the analysis of the data obtained during the implementation. The data showed that a variety of factors affected students' autonomous learning practices while they were introduced to decision-making strategies in their writing tasks. Evidence shows that students took control of their learning based on the data related to time, results, and strategies. They developed confidence in completing their own work

without depending on the teacher. Moreover, students were able to employ skills that they had acquired from their life experiences when learning, which made the process more holistic for them. The students recognized factors that they do not have control over all of the learning challenges they face. Thus, this demonstrates the need for them to train in decision-making strategies to be able to address different issues in their learning process as they arise.

The chapter described how the data was collected, managed, validated, and analyzed. It concluded by with an explanation of the final categories that emerged from the qualitative and quantitative data gathered during the research implementation. In the next chapter, more aspects related to the emerging categories, their relevance, and the comparison to previous studies will be discussed.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the conclusions from the results obtained in previous sections of the project will be addressed. Findings showed that internal practices of the students developed while they explored with decision-making strategies to complete writing activities. This was demonstrated by the emerging categories of the study: self-regulatory development, confidence building, and life-long scenarios application of strategies. These were supported by the subcategories time management, metacognitive strategies, successful results, students' independence, awareness of internal and external factors, and applying previous experiences. Therefore, the project's findings support decision-making strategies as an effective resource for students. The results could influence other fields as they are consistent with other studies on similar scales. This chapter will conclude with a look at the limitations of the study and propose opportunities for future research.

### **6.2 Comparison of Results to Previous Research**

This research project explored decision-making strategies used for English written activities and the finding could benefit different fields related to educational practices and foreign languages teaching. On the one hand, different studies in Colombia have focused on the developing strategies to support different language learning skills (Anillo-Babilonia, 2016; Barragán-Torres, 2013; Correa-Morales, 2013; Grimaldos-Urrea, 2020; Muñoz-Melo & Guayacán-Velasco, 2019; Pérez-González, 2019; Rojas-Suancha, 2019; Tibaduiza-Contreras, 2018). Of specific importance to this study, other research has been done using different methods to develop and implement better strategies in the classroom to support the writing processes (Bueno-Hernandez, 2016; Cardona-Gallego & Novoa-Torres, 2013; Grimaldos-Urrea, 2020;

Lugo-Vásquez, 2010; Prieto-Serrato, 2019). However, none of them has specifically focused on the use of decision-making strategies to foster autonomy in the language class, so this study provides an opportunity for these methods to be implemented in other contexts.

On the other hand, regarding decision-making and autonomy, different studies related to self-directed learning and self-regulation have also been carried out in the Colombian context (Correa-Morales, 2013; Rodríguez-Garzón, 2013; Zea-Alvarado, 2009). Although, these do not address decision-making per se, they highlight the importance of certain concepts related to autonomy that allow the students to empower themselves in their academic performance. This project is relevant in the context of developing autonomy because it demonstrates practices that support it. For example, the relationship between autonomy and independence of the learner has been mentioned in previous studies which recognized that students understand the importance of responsibilities outside of the control of the teacher (Cotterall, 1995; Saks & Leijen, 2014; Tavallali & Marzban, 2015).

Additionally, one of the categories of the project showed the importance of confidence in developing successful English learning practices. Confidence has been discussed and mentioned in other studies and clear relationships have been drawn between the difficulty of the task and the ability to perform it. This suggests that it is an important factor for fostering autonomous learning (Cotterall, 1995; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Negretti, 2015; Schunk, 1990). Finally, the study also revealed the impact of metacognition in the process of autonomy, validating once more that the understanding of one's own abilities is essential in the process of autonomy (Murray, 2014; Pajares, 1996; Peeters et al., 2014; Saks & Leijen, 2014; Schraw & Moshman, 1995).

### 6.3 Significance of the Results

The results of the research project revealed various ideas about the influence that decision-making training has on language learning. The implementation of decision-making strategies shows a significant effect on the student's internal process. This means that students are able to recognize their role within their educational process and can manage the dynamics that allow them to evolve in their learning (Locke & Latham, 2006; Murray, 2014). Likewise, the project demonstrated that the students have the reflective capacity to analyze the results of their decisions in order to improve them. Thus, a process of recognition and self-access is relevant and important and more responsibility should be given to the student in the classroom (Kitsantas et al., 2004). Additionally, it is evident with the implementation of the project that students can improve time management, apply better metacognition processes, and recognize various factors that may affect their academic performance.

The study also demonstrated the importance of improving school dynamics. The use of autonomy-building techniques can bring different benefits to the classroom, but the inclusion of such techniques have not yet been sufficiently explored. One challenge teachers face in developing students' autonomy is the limited time they have to adapt their current practices to meet new needs (Chan, 2000). With the development of this project, it is clear that by training students to make better decisions and reflect on their approach to their written assignments, they become less dependent on the teacher. Finally, this study provides the opportunity to redefine the role of educators, who contribute to students' learning beyond the discipline that they teach, by preparing students for the challenges they face in 21<sup>st</sup> century globalized communication.



#### **6.4 Pedagogical Challenges and Recommendations**

Regarding the pedagogical challenges that this research project evidenced, the inclusion of decision-making at different levels was, perhaps, one of the most important for future research. On the one hand, it is important to recognize that, to improve decision-making practices in the classroom, the educator must know how to introduce strategies to help students develop this skill (Mok, 2013; Peeters et al., 2014). Therefore, it is important for the educator to be able to make decisions in the implementation of the students' curriculum and to assume an active role in the continuous construction of skills that allow students to be more aware of their learning process. For those reasons, teachers need to work with schools' directives to maximize the opportunities to help students develop decision-making skills.

On the other hand, this project shows that students have the ability to recognize and build skills that allow them to be successful in their own process (Locke & Latham, 2006). However, the implementation of decision-making strategies was only applied to a controlled group of participants to be able to continuously monitor progress. It took considerable time to work with each student. Therefore, one of the future pedagogical challenges is the development of dynamics that allow training in decision-making strategies with larger groups within the available times inside the classroom.

#### **6.5 Research Limitations on the Present Study**

During the implementation of the project, there were certain limitations that affected the implementation process. Therefore, the research plan had to be amended. Initially, a larger group of participants was going to be chosen, but training, creating study units, and collecting the data for each student required more time than was allocated by the university. Limiting the size allowed for adequate follow-up with the participants and a data set that could be analyzed within

the constraints of the school timetable and its dynamics. Additionally, the students needed training in a personalized process to achieve results, so a smaller group of participants was chosen in order to complete the phases of the process.

Another limitation of the investigation was collecting the data at the designated times. When training began, all the students had confirmed their participation in the project, but when it started, several conflicts with other school activities arose such as the closing of the students' grades and the events related to school closing. Additionally, according to school guidelines students could choose their recess times, which meant that not all participants worked during times that were established initially. Also, certain family and personal dynamics impeded the participation of the students in the allocated times. Thus, the researcher had to adapt the activities so that the participants could continue with the training, and the data collection process could yield significant results. Nonetheless, some students had to drop out of the project.

## **6.6 Further Research**

For deeper understanding of decision-making in the learning process, it is recommended that more research continues in certain ways. First, in the pedagogical implementation, training with a much larger population could provide a more complete understanding of the data obtained in this project and would increase the generalizability of the results. Second, it is also recommended that the implementation time could be longer to allow the researcher to observe a consistency of the results over time. Therefore, it could be determined if there is a more significant evolution. Third, it would be important to consider the implementation of decision-making in activities that involve the development of other language skills to see what effects have on them.

The research study considered the exploration of decision-making strategies within the English learning process. Students were trained in the use of certain tools such as the Covey matrix, data-based decision-making, and checklists. However, there is room for exploring other types of tools to contribute to the impact of decision-making on the learning process. This project focused on understanding decision-making in the learning process and its impact on learning English and emphasized endorsing autonomy and responsibility in the students' process. This research structure and purpose could apply to other academic contexts, and this would be an area for future investigation.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

The concept of autonomy has been explored in the field of education for a long time (Benson, 2007b; Candy & Phillip, 1992; Everhard & Murphy, 2015; Holec, 1981a; Little, 1991; Nunan, 1997). It has been concluded that this is a skill that is related to the student's ability to make decisions regarding their process. However, little attention has been given to classroom decision-making training. Therefore, this project focused on training students in decision-making for their English writing activities, in order to recognize which learning practices were shaped. The study showed that from this training, students gained autonomy in their language learning process. This was evidenced through the installment of regulatory behaviors, confidence growth to carry out activities, and the application of strategies from other life scenarios.

All in all, this research study supports continued development of studies of this kind in order to tackle language and learning challenges. Educational practices are developing to increase student responsibility in the school environment (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; LeBlanc, 2018; Mufwene, 2010; Smith et al., 2017). Both educators and learners have faced different challenges with the current dynamics that are implemented in the classroom. On the one side,

teachers have too many responsibilities to focus on pinpointing students' specific problems. On the other side, learners do not sufficiently engage in their learning and depend on the educators to build strategies to succeed in their academic performance when it should be a self-initiated process. Consequently, education performance rates in countries like Colombia have yet to improve and finding better strategies to support learners' needs is critical (García, 2015; Macías, 2010; Mora et al., 2019). Based on the research presented in this project, it is clear that education must institute practices that create student autonomy because it will benefit their schoolwork and further impact their lives beyond the classroom.

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**Appendix A:**

## Questionnaires

**Questionnaire 1**

*Adapted from Berlin University Autonomy Questionnaire*



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Process**

*Read each of the statements and choose one of the options provided. Make sure you only mark one answer. Take into account that if something is not important for you it is because you already know how to do it.*

Criteria:	I can't do this.	I want to learn it.	This isn't important For me
1. I can choose a task (type) that I already know in order to achieve my goal.			
2. I can choose an unknown task (type) in order to achieve my goal (for example, a task which was recommended to me).			
3. I can change an existing task (for example, from a textbook) so as to achieve my goal. For example,			

instead of writing down answers to questions in a listening comprehension task, I can give an oral summary.			
4. I can set myself a task based on authentic material in order to achieve my goal, for example splitting up a text and then piecing it together again in the right order or making a gap-fill exercise.			
5. I can work alone (for example, to complete a given task).			
6. I can complete individual tasks that I set myself.			
7. I can complete tasks that I have set myself even in more difficult phases (for example, if they are not as enjoyable as I had hoped, or if they are difficult).			
8. I can complete several connected tasks in order to achieve my goal.			
9. I can set up my workspace to optimize learning (for example, with reference works and learning materials).			
10. I can manage my learning time effectively (for example, by setting a sensible time limit for a particular task).			
11. I can prioritize strategies in my English learning to learn specific vocabulary and expressions, revise specific grammatical forms, work with certain worksheets or authentic materials, prepare for the interview structure, practice listening and interacting before finishing a topic.			
12. I can use a variety of materials and resources when learning.			
13. I can employ a variety of methods and strategies when learning.			
14. I can carry out my learning plan (making changes where necessary) in order to achieve my goal.			

### Learning Style

Criteria:	I can't do this.	I want to learn it.	This isn't important For me
1. I can recognize my own learning style (for example, whether I am a visual or auditory learner, whether I am a perfectionist or a risk taker) and/or reflect on this.			

2. I can recognize my learning strategies (for example, whether I am a deductive thinker, associate words, can see the global picture) and/or reflect on them.			
3. I am aware of my motivation for learning and/or can reflect on this.			
4. I am aware of my feelings when learning and/or can reflect on them.			
5. I can recognize when a language deficit prevents me from completing a task (for example, I can't tell someone about my degree course because I am lacking appropriate vocabulary).			
6. I can recognize whether I have chosen the right steps to complete a task (for example, whether I should take notes while reading a text in order to produce a short summary).			
7. I can recognize whether certain feelings hinder me from (effectively) completing a task (for example, boredom, fear of speaking in front of others, or emotional blocks).			

### Learning Abilities

Criteria:	I can't do this.	I want to learn it.	This isn't important For me
1. I can reflect on materials and resources I have used, in particular if they are suitable			
2. I can monitor and/or reflect on my learning (for example, by keeping a learning log).			
3. I can recognize when I need to discuss something with a learning advisor.			
4. After I have started learning, I can check my initial evaluation of my starting level.			
5. I can evaluate my progress			

6. I can evaluate the methods and strategies I used, in particular I can state if the materials are appropriate for my learning style.			
7. I can choose materials to help me achieve my goal bearing in mind my level and learning style.			
8. In order to achieve my goal, I can choose methods and strategies on my own			
9. In order to achieve my goal, I can choose methods and strategies with an advisor			
10. I can try out new and unfamiliar methods and strategies (for example, new methods to learn vocabulary or new exercises to improve my listening skills)			
11. I can evaluate my own language competencies.			
12. I can analyze my own needs			
13. I can set my own goals.			

## Questionnaire 2

Adapted from Borg, S., & Alshumaimeri, Y. (2019). Language learner autonomy in a tertiary context: Teachers' beliefs and practices. *Language Teaching Research*, 23(1), 9–38.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817725759>



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Teacher's Role

*Think about your language learning process and the teacher's role and answer accordingly.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I like the teacher to explain what and how I am learning.					
2. I like the teacher to give me problems to work on.					
3. I like the teacher to let me find my own mistakes.					
4. I like the teacher to tell me when I have to do the assignments.					
5. I like the teacher to give me all the necessary materials to learn the topics.					
6. I like the teacher to remind me the objectives of every task.					
7. I consider the teacher as the one that should provide me with English input.					
8. I consider the teacher as the one that has all the information.					
9. I consider the teacher as a facilitator of my process.					

### **The Student as Learner**

*Think about your language learning process and your role as a learner and answer accordingly.*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
1. I have a right to be involved in selecting the subject content.					
2. I have a right to be involved in selecting learning tasks and activities.					
3. I have ideas about learning which should be considered in developing learning topics.					
4. I like to be responsible for my own learning.					
5. I am basically interested in learning English in order to communicate, rather than learning the language for its own sake.					
6. I like to assess my own progress.					
7. I can be a more effective learner if I develop the knowledge and skills about the learning process.					

**Questionnaire 3**

Adapted from Borg, S., & Alshumaimeri, Y. (2019). Language learner autonomy in a tertiary context: Teachers’ beliefs and practices. *Language Teaching Research*, 23(1), 9–38.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817725759>



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**My Learning Preference**

Indicate your attitude to the following language learning activities by circling the appropriate number:

1. This is never true of me
2. This is generally not true of me
3. This is generally true of me
4. This is always true of me

	1	2	3	4
1. I like to learn by reading English newspapers.				
2. I like to learn by listening and using cassettes.				
3. I like to learn by language games.				
4. I like to learn through role-plays.				
5. I like to study by myself.				
6. I like to work in pairs.				
7. I like to work in small groups.				
8. I like to work with the whole class.				
9. I like to use the target language out of class.				
10. I like to read lists of vocabulary.				
11. I like to learn by watching English TV and movies.				
12. I like to learn by listening to English radios and songs.				
13. I like to learn by speaking to native speakers of English.				
14. I like to study grammar.				

## **Appendix B**

### Questions of the focus group

- What are your experiences regarding English learning? What is difficult and what is easy?
- Why do you think this school offers you the opportunity to learn English?
- Do you feel motivated to learn English? Why?
- What kind of activities have you done in English? Were they successful?



### **Appendix C**

#### Questions from the individual interview

- What do you think is to be autonomous?
- Do you consider yourself autonomous?
- Do you make decisions in your learning process?
- How can you evaluate if those decisions are the most appropriate?