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**Implementing Self- and Peer Assessment to Promote Learner
Autonomy in EFL Classrooms: Case of Master's Students
at the University of Tlemcen**

Thesis Submitted to the Department of English in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctorate in Didactics and Assessment

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Declaration of Originality

I, Oussama Boukhelkhal, affirm that the substance of the dissertation entitled: “Implementing Self- and Peer Assessment to Promote Learner Autonomy in EFL Classrooms: Case of Master’s Students at the University of Tlemcen” is my own work and was written as a result of my original research. This dissertation has not been submitted, presented, or used for any other degree or qualification. Furthermore, it is worth noting that all the sources used or cited in this work have been appropriately acknowledged.

Date: May 2026

Signed: Mr. Oussama Boukhelkhal

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my mother (Fouzia Euldji), whom I still miss every day, to my dear father (Mahfoud Boukhelkhal), who has devoted his life to see me succeed, to my sisters (Hadjer & Imane), for their constant encouragement and love, to the next generation of dreamers, my nephew (Mohamed Riyad) and my niece (Amira), to my uncle and aunt (Abdou & Houria), for their kindness and care, to my school teacher Mr. Mohamed Boukhatem, who helped me develop skills that benefited me at university, and to my supervisor Professor Zakia Djebbari, who was always there to offer help when I needed it the most.

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Abu Huraira reported: the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “He has not thanked Allah who has not thanked people” (Sunan Abi Dawud).

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ABSTRACT

Abstract

Learner autonomy is one of the main drivers and predictors of academic achievement. The ultimate goal of the Algerian higher education system has been lauded for many years as furthering the development of learner autonomy. However, higher-degree students in Algeria face an existential dilemma as they are trusted to transition from the familiar and scaffolded structure of coursework to the challenging and rigorous conventions of independent academic research. The responsibility to rebuild an environment conducive to autonomous learning and academic readiness lies firmly in the hands of the teacher. The present doctoral research, therefore, aspires to scaffold learner autonomy among university students, in the process of drafting their research proposals, through the implementation of formative student self- and peer assessment procedures, namely criteria-referenced rubrics. The study further aims to investigate how students perceived their participation in these forms of assessment. Thirty Algerian first-year Master's students majoring in Applied Linguistics at the English section of the Department of Foreign Languages, University of Medea, took part in the study. More specifically, students were actively involved in all stages of assessment, from co-constructing the criteria by which their work would be judged to applying these criteria in assessing both their own research proposals and those of their classmates. To this end, an action research design was adopted using four research instruments to cross-check the data gathered: learner autonomy scale administered before and after the intervention, pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, focus groups, and document analysis of students' rubrics. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were employed. The main findings obtained from the analysis revealed that self- and peer assessment, if co-constructed and managed properly, could cultivate different degrees of learner autonomy, particularly in social, cognitive, metacognitive, and affective dimensions, but students' dependence on the teacher decreased slightly after the intervention. In addition, students claimed that they have benefited from autonomous learning through their involvement in assessment and perceived it as a transferable skill that backs up lifelong learning. The implications for university teaching are that integrating formative assessment practices into the curriculum is feasible and rewarding, but students need to perform self- and peer assessment of their work on a regular and continuous basis to become more autonomous and thereby more adept research proposal writers.

Keywords: Learner autonomy, self- and peer assessment, research proposal writing, formative assessment, higher education.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AaL: Assessment as Learning
AI: Artificial Intelligence
AfL: Assessment for Learning
AoL: Assessment of Learning
AR: Action Research
BAC: Baccalaureate
BEM: Brevet d'Enseignement Moyen
CALL: Computer-Assisted Language Learning
CLT: Communicative Language Teaching
CRRs: Criteria/Criterion-referenced Rubrics
EAP: English for Academic Purposes
ELSUM: English Language Section, University of Medea
EFL: English as a Foreign Language
ELT: English Language Teaching
EMI: English as a Medium of Instruction
ESL: English as a Second Language
ESP: English for Specific Purposes
HE: Higher Education
IELTS: International English Language Testing System
LA: Learner Autonomy
LLA: Language Learner Autonomy
LCE: Learner-Centered Education
LLMs: Large Language Models
LMD: Licence, Master, Doctorate
M: Mean
MALL: Mobile-Assisted Language Learning
PA: Peer Assessment
SA: Self-assessment
SSA: Self-assessment Accuracy
SAPA: Self-Assessment and Peer Assessment
SD: Standard Deviation
SDT: Self-Determination Theory
SL/FL: Second Language/Foreign Language
TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language
UK: United Kingdom
USA: United States of America

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

General Introduction

The present dissertation was first registered under the title: “Implementing Self- and Peer Assessment to Promote Learner Autonomy in EFL Classrooms: Case of Master’s Students at the University of Tlemcen.” However, the researcher, with his supervisor’s approval, needed to slightly modify the title due to a few methodological challenges. This decision is justified by a number of practical reasons and benefits. For example, the researcher was then obligated to move the intervention of the study from Tlemcen to Medea University for two main reasons: (a) at the former university, research proposal writing is not part of the Master’s curriculum; (b) it has become impossible for the researcher to implement action research and teach at the same university. However, students who are enrolled at the University of Medea are required to write and submit a research proposal at the Master’s level (see Appendix H), and access to students was also available because of the lack of teaching staff at the Medea University. For these reasons, the researcher and his thesis supervisor considered the University of Medea a more accessible context in which to implement the action research study. To cite this work, use the following title instead: ***“Cultivating Learner Autonomy in Research Proposal Writing through Self- and Peer Assessment: An Action Research with Master One Applied Linguistics Students at Medea University”***. The researcher adopted and used the latter title throughout this work.

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, the history of language teaching, be it second or foreign, has always been much more preoccupied by a consistent search for more effective methods and/or approaches to move English language pedagogy forward. The most common answer to problems in English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) teaching was sought through the introduction of different and new teaching methods. A brief survey of the literature explicitly depicts the fact that the ‘post-communicative era’ i.e., the period since the year 2000, has witnessed an increased demand for interest in learner-centered approaches and activities in mainstream education, and the field of English language education is no exception. In the learner-centered paradigm, the learners’ task essentially is to assume more

proactive responsibility for their learning and assessment process. It makes sense to say that professors and students can, at academic tertiary levels, “share power” (Weimer, 2002, p. 23).

The goal of foreign language teaching must, so to speak, train students to be social agents or active architects of their unique and arduous educational experiences. In this very specific context, it is important to recall that one of the most valuable aims of putting an emphasis on the aforementioned modern teaching style is to build an autonomous classroom culture. In practice, scholars in the study of teaching methodologies view learner-centered instruction, in contrast to traditional classrooms, from three different, yet complementary perspectives: for one thing, it stimulates students’ active and agentic participation in the classroom, for the other, it cultivates co-responsibility between teachers and learners for content selection, methodology, and evaluation and thirdly, and it values equally all learners by reconsidering the specific competences each student brings to the classroom. Thus, stakeholders, especially EFL teachers, must place emphasis on the need to bring their focus of concern back to the learner.

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), the issue relating to teaching methods and learner-centered approaches can easily be addressed and unambiguously sorted out; learner autonomy, self-directed learning, and self-regulated learning are regarded as learner-centered approaches, not teaching methods. Many researchers have rightly pointed out that learner autonomy is at the center of the learner-centered paradigm in ELT. There is a growing consensus among researchers in language education about the importance of developing learner autonomy. Autonomous learning reflects a broader understanding of education, where learners take responsibility for managing their own learning and academic development, and it places autonomy as a valuable notion and a significant educational goal to pursue (Little, 1991).

Learners who possess autonomy are, for many researchers, considered good learners. According to O’Malley and Chamot (1990), these learners employ and control a wide range of learning strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective), and this in turn contributes to an optimal development of learner

autonomy. There is a wealth of empirical evidence showing that autonomous behaviors lead to higher academic achievement. Learner-centered approaches allow students to grasp lesson objectives better, select materials, and cooperate with their peers. More autonomy automatically entails a significant positive change in students' attitudes toward the role of the teacher, i.e., they no longer see the teacher as the only source of knowledge, which supposedly means less classroom culture of dependence. In a congruent way, research supports the position that learner autonomy may play a major role in the development of learning effectiveness and motivation. One would argue that, based on the above perspectives, improved autonomous learning appears to be such an important goal in higher education that it has implications for students' cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective dimensions of learning. Therefore, further research is needed to investigate more learner-centered approaches that may also cultivate autonomous learning, especially in Algerian adult education.

Indeed, it can be argued that only when teachers allow autonomy to occur is education empowering at all. However, before one sets off on how to stimulate learner autonomy, a brief yet precise definition of it is indeed a dire need. Holec (1981) states that autonomy in the context of foreign language learning is an ability that must be developed through formal education in more systematic ways. Dickinson (1987), on the other hand, claims that autonomy is an inborn ability that does not necessarily require the presence of teachers or teaching materials to be triggered. As Little (1991) pointed out, "autonomy can manifest itself in many ways" (p. 4). It is not an easy task then to define autonomy because of the wide range of abilities and competences it may involve.

Nevertheless, as far as the present research is concerned, the researcher proposes the following tentative definition, which is also widely accepted in the literature: learners' ability to assume proactive responsibility for their learning through critical reflection and evaluation, constructive collaboration, and emotional engagement. The effectiveness of this set of strategies is, to a larger extent, dependent on teachers' own autonomy and the instructional competence they bring to their classrooms. However, it is a commonly held view that only a few practitioners and institutions whose mission is to foster learner autonomy are committed to this endeavor (Smith, 2002).

Autonomous learning is, in effect, supported by constructivism because this learning theory argues that knowledge is not built on a spoon-feeding and hand-holding teaching strategy but must be actively constructed by learners themselves. Constructivist principles of learning will be further refined in the literature review.

One of the Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations to promote adaptability in today's complex world is lifelong learning. EFL teachers must "inculcate in their students a disposition towards lifelong learning" (Djebbari & Djebbari, 2018, p. 8). Learner autonomy is of crucial importance to achieve this important goal. Lifelong learning, a recent major theme in educational research that shows the need for learners to be able to continue learning over the course of their lifetime, adapt to new situations, and acquire new skills, is intertwined with the concept of learner autonomy. In this respect, Cooker (2015) rightly states that "autonomy is about developing as a language learner, but in ways which benefit the life of the learner over and above language proficiency" (p. 89). Indeed, the departure from traditional ways of learning and assessment necessitates that both teachers and students adopt more flexible and learner-centered approaches that underpin lifelong learning and learner autonomy.

Learner autonomy in Algeria is still an under-researched subject and unduly neglected by many researchers and teachers alike. This lack of research is explained by the emphasis of autonomy research on learners from more advantaged and well-resourced Western or East Asian contexts. Admittedly, Algerian higher education authorities, through the implementation of the new learner-centered LMD (Licence/Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate) system in 2004, made efforts to depart from traditional lectures or teacher-centered activities in an attempt to shift the focus toward learner autonomy and laboratory or student-centered activities. In Algerian new university curricula, the introduction of study skills and research methodology courses, for instance, is a type of important curricular change that reflects a tendency to focus on learner autonomy. However, it cannot be stated confidently that every EFL university classroom in Algeria has moved away from the teacher-led model. Many classroom realities continue to suffer the consequences of that predominant model. If learner autonomy is considered a cornerstone objective of all higher

education institutions, anything that hinders progress toward that objective should be subject to reconsideration.

It is worth remembering in this context Missoum's (2021) remark that some teachers, at a given Algerian university, "may hold a learner autonomy thwarting agenda by consciously or unconsciously adopting instructional strategies that prevent or discourage learners from adopting and developing autonomy attitudes and skills" (pp. 152-153). Arguably, this is justified by the over-emphasis on summative assessments and traditional assessment procedures and under-emphasis on formative/alternative assessments tools. The query of language assessment policies in Algeria appears to be that "summative testing represents the lion's share in the overall assessment process" (Benmostefa, 2014, p. 88). In summative assessment, learning is strongly examination-focused, and tests or final exams are used extensively and, in some cases, exclusively. In Lamb's (2017) terms, summative assessment is considered "as an instrument of control", and one which he argues stands as a dominant force throughout much of today's educational discourse (p. 181).

In Algeria, many university teachers nowadays still rely on a single end-of-semester exam to assess students' performance and language abilities. This kind of approach to assessment has a few problems: (1) the use of a single summative assessment at the end of a term does not accurately measure students' abilities because their performance constantly changes from one context to another; (2) it leads to an unhealthy competition classroom culture, which may lead to unwanted effects for the individual and for the educational system as such; (3) it mainly focuses on memorization and rote learning; (4) it does not provide concrete information about students' learning deficiencies, nor does it support systematic monitoring of their learning or assist teachers in making more informed instructional decisions; and (5) a heavy reliance on such traditional assessment tools can too stifle learner autonomy to a larger extent. A logical question might arise: Should the EFL testing system in Algerian universities be reconsidered so as to enhance the desired or lessen the undesired aspects of assessment?

The areas of learner autonomy and formative assessment in language education have a potentially close yet problematic relationship in practice. In a real pursuit of

learner autonomy, a radical shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered pedagogy, and from summative and traditional testing of knowledge to formative learning assessment practices is urgently required. There is currently agreement on the importance of using assessment for learning. In a narrow sense, formative assessment tools are designed to provide timely and constructive feedback to students, identify their learning gaps, and help educators adapt their teaching plans to achieve specific formative learning objectives. Learner autonomy can be one such objective. However, formative assessment practices have been neglected in Algerian EFL education (Zahaf, 2019), resulting in students' lack of autonomous learning which is one of the significant problems that needs careful attention. Algerian students at the university level are not exposed to formative assessment due to a variety of factors, including teachers' agendas for teaching and autonomous learning, contextual barriers, as well as students' attitudes toward learning and assessment.

If formative classroom-based assessment is to be considered the skeleton of learner autonomy pedagogy, using self- and peer assessment for formative purposes may represent its flesh and soul. These forms of assessment are among the most important drivers of quality within language formative assessment. Black and Wiliam (1998) argue that self-assessment is conducive to productive learning and should not be deemed "an interesting option or luxury; it has to be seen as essential" (pp. 54-55). Likewise, peer assessment is a fundamental component of the move toward more participatory learning approaches. However, Little (2003) posits that "many teachers found it difficult to accept that their learners were capable of arriving at a reliable judgement of their own target language proficiency" (p. 230). The successful implementation of self- and peer assessment, unlike summative assessment, as will be discussed in the review of literature, can cultivate some indispensable attitudes and abilities of autonomous learning, and thereby underpin students' academic readiness.

In fact, recent calls have been made to depart from traditional forms of testing toward the implementation of self- and peer assessment in Algerian university classrooms, notably in EFL settings (Benbellal, 2022; Benmostefa, 2014; Kerma, 2023; Missoum, 2021). Although learner-centeredness necessitates that student self-

and peer assessment should be part of the classroom assessment culture, research supports the position that neither self-assessment (Kadri & Amziane, 2021) nor peer assessment (Boudibi & Beleulmi, 2024; Rogti & Alhasani, 2025) is a common practice in the Algerian EFL setting. In the general academic discourse on classroom assessment in Algeria, self- and peer assessment are frequently overlooked, and classroom assessment seems to be under the control of the main authority figure: the teacher. Self- and peer assessment, however, challenge that teacher-dominated assessment framework.

Self- and peer assessment offer increased affordances for autonomous learning on the condition that they must be managed and performed appropriately. These forms of assessment could, from previous research, be expected to be complex skills. This also places constraints on the development of autonomy. In fact, they, if they are to be effective, require a considerable amount of time and effort in training. To dispel students' concerns and distrust about self- and peer assessment, many researchers seem to agree that teacher support, opportunities for task scaffolding and choice through practice and training, and explicit and transparent assessment criteria are all necessary during the preparatory, implementation, and reflection phases of self- and peer assessment. Moreover, the practice of student self- and peer assessment has witnessed a slow but deliberate shift from simple scoring or grading toward approaches that require students to make qualitative judgments and evaluations.

In particular, criterion-referenced qualitative rubrics, if combined with self- and peer assessment, are firmly believed to have a larger impact on the validity, reliability, and fairness of assessment. Learners' participation in constructing these rubrics and their criteria can also improve students' understanding of and interaction with the tool. Such familiarity and mastery of the tool would serve, especially in academic writing and research methodology courses, as a springboard for Master's students to devise a practical rubric which can be independently relied on so as to yield better assessment outcomes of their own work. In fact, the findings of Kharfi's (2018) study, based on both teachers' and students' perceptions, concluded that the use of rubrics is rarely employed. Besides, one of the reasons behind students' passive role in doing self- and/or peer assessment in Algerian EFL classrooms is that assessment criteria

are non-transparent. Thus, it is to this end that this research work touches on broad considerations of what a teacher ought to know about implementing self- and peer assessment using criterion-referenced rubrics within EFL classrooms in general and academic research writing contexts in particular.

This study calls for new interest in researching learner autonomy and research practices. Upon completing their Master's degree, Algerian students are placed in a genuine dilemma as they prepare to transition from a familiar learning environment to a new and challenging research-based setting, particularly in the humanities and social sciences disciplines. During this transition, Master's students must assume the role of novice researchers and are trusted to compose an academic research proposal and a dissertation in their first and second years, respectively. Illustratively, as early-stage researchers, they should learn to take part in narrowing down research questions to identify a research gap, and use existing literature to come up with a pertinent and novel research topic and justify its significance. Few, if any, prominent academics would disagree that higher-degree research is a "unique and paradoxical mode of institutional learning" (Cotterall, 2011, p. 413). This means that they should no longer rely on their teachers and/or supervisors and instead assume more responsibility for their research writing journey. In other words, they could be expected to make more and more decisions about their learning and writing than ever before, and actively engage in research to become critical and autonomous members of their classroom.

The locus of post-graduate pedagogy resides in generating new knowledge autonomously within discourse communities, as opposed to being passive consumers of it. However, some Algerian graduates seem to be in need of much assistance, as they show a lack of autonomy toward engaging with academic writing and research. In a similar context, Ghout-Khenoune (2015) rightly observed that "students have been shown to exhibit resistance and reluctance to be involved in activities that require autonomy (as for instance undertaking a research project or doing an oral presentation)" (p. 185). It is worth noting here that the impact of such seemingly difficult or new assignments on students differs from person to person. Students are left to navigate the complexities of academic research writing on their own. This conundrum is not peculiar to Algeria; students in higher education systems around

the world likewise face similar challenges. In recent years, there has been an incessant progress to bring research into post-graduate pedagogy and research-writing challenges back on stage (Liardet, 2023). However, these challenges are usually undiscussed in EFL studies research carried out in Algeria (Hamzaoui, 2021). This calls for future research to provide data about the challenges research students face when entering academic research.

The research thesis proposal serves as a stepping stone to dissertation writing. Although first-year Master's students at the English Language Section, University of Medea (ELSUM), are trained in research methodology and academic writing, many of them still lack the ability to write a decent thesis proposal and struggle to adhere to the scholarly research writing and ethical mandates. This is mainly due to two chief reasons: (1) the inadequate implementation of student-centered strategies and techniques to support students in academic writing and research, and (2) a lack of students' and teachers' awareness of the development of learner autonomy toward successful thesis proposal writing. Self- and peer assessment could help address these challenges and offer valuable benefits provided that these forms of assessment are implemented appropriately. Hence, more research is needed to ascertain that implementing formative assessment is carried out in such a way that suits students' diverse needs in academic research-based writing contexts. This project is motivated by the belief that there is a need for assessment practices that will be centered on developing autonomous learning and not on administrative and institutional procedures.

Another major argument for the need to incorporate autonomy-oriented approaches, such as self- and peer assessment, is the recent dramatic increase in the number of graduate students in Algeria, which has also influenced the student-to-teacher ratios. According to the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the number of those who enrolled in Master's programs increased unprecedentedly, i.e., it has jumped from 3,242 students in 2007–2008 to 287,543 students in 2014–2015 (MESRS-DGEFS, n.d.). The same reality applies to students who enroll in Master's programs in fields such as Applied Linguistics, Educational Assessment, Literature and Civilization, Translation, etc. The larger the class, the

more difficult it becomes for teachers to assess each student's work/performance. Arguably, it is specifically because of such aforementioned daunting conditions that educational stakeholders need to bring the development of autonomy to the forefront. The present research depicts a scenery of theoretical and practical frameworks to hopefully understand the place of self- and peer assessment in the context of autonomous research-oriented academic writing. Such research will have major implications for teacher training, curriculum design, assessment practices, and strategies for developing learner autonomy in developing countries.

To fill the aforementioned gaps of research, the teacher-researcher, via an action research study, takes the bold move of exploring learner autonomy among Algerian graduate students in the course of drafting their research proposals, and implements formative self- and peer assessment practices to prepare and support students to become more autonomous learners/researchers. Students will take an active role in the whole formative assessment process, including developing the assessment criteria and rubrics, engaging in the assessment of their own work and that of their peers through self- and peer assessment, and reviewing the quality of their research proposals. In view of this, the study serves to initially evaluate the awareness and level of learner autonomy demonstrated by first-year Master's ELSUM students as far as writing their research proposals is concerned. The main concern of the current study then revolves around investigating the impact of implementing self- and peer assessment on learner autonomy in research proposal writing at ELSUM. Although there are many studies that have examined the implementation of one or both of these forms of assessment on students' learning, few have focused on their impact on autonomous learning, particularly in the context of EFL research-based writing. Moreover, the study further aims to scrutinize ELSUM graduate students' perceptions of their involvement in self-assessment as well as peer assessment. The final aim of this study is to explore students' perceived impact of self- and peer assessment on learner autonomy and on achieving success in academic research writing. In a clearer picture, the objectives set for this research are:

- Investigate the extent to which Algerian university EFL learners are prepared to become autonomous in the course of writing a research proposal.
- Examine the impact of self- and peer assessment on learner autonomy in research proposal writing.
- Explore students' perceptions of their involvement in the process of assessing their own research proposals through self-assessment.
- Explore students' perceptions of their involvement in the process of assessing their peers' research proposals through peer assessment.
- Explore students' perceptions of the impact of these assessment practices on their autonomy and research proposal writing skills.

Accordingly, this research work will address the following research questions:

1. To what extent are first-year Master's ELSUM students ready to assume responsibility for drafting a research proposal?
2. In what ways does the implementation of self- and peer assessment impact learner autonomy among first-year Master's ELSUM students in research proposal writing?
3. How do first-year Master's ELSUM students perceive the process of assessing their research proposals through self- and peer assessment?

To investigate these questions and guide the study, the researcher puts forward the following hypotheses:

- First-year Master's ELSUM students' awareness and level of learner autonomy are limited to a large extent; therefore, students' academic readiness to draft a research proposal may be constrained.
- The implementation of self- and peer assessment may further the development of learner autonomy, which in turn will help to develop their research proposal writing skills.
- Students' perceptions of the use of self- and peer assessment would be significantly positive, because they can benefit enormously from both of these alternative forms of assessment.

To answer the above questions, this dissertation is organized into two parts. Part One consists of two chapters that focus on a review of relevant literature and discuss

some of the main concepts used in this work including learner autonomy, writing research proposals, and assessment in higher education with respect to self- and peer assessment. Chapter One is an attempt to build a clearer picture of learner autonomy and research-based EFL writing contexts. This chapter, in its first section, presents the main definitions and dimensions of learner autonomy and clarifies key terminology and the theoretical framework, and explores strategies for promoting autonomy. Regarding the second section of the chapter, the researcher discusses writing in general, research proposal writing, and identifies its main components. As for the third and final section, the researcher examines recent studies that have highlighted a gap in Algerian scholarship, namely the limited investigation of learner autonomy as far as the research-based writing process is concerned.

Chapter Two is devoted to an exploration of the role of self- and peer assessment in developing learner autonomy. The first section revisits traditional assessment practices in higher education, introduces alternative approaches, including self- and peer assessment, feedback, and the use of rubrics as a means to assess academic research proposals, as well as sheds light on recent debates on using artificial intelligence in self- and peer assessment. The second chapter ends up with a missing link in the literature, namely the role of learner autonomy and self- and peer assessment in research-based writing in Algerian EFL classrooms.

Part Two of this dissertation presents the methodology for this study. It is divided into three chapters. Chapter Three provides a detailed presentation of the methodology and procedures. Included in this chapter is a situational analysis of the EFL context at Medea University and a detailed description of the sample population and the research design, and it explains how the data collection instruments were developed and the rationale behind their use. The chapter concludes with some ethical research considerations. Chapter Four describes the data analysis methods, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches and presents the research results obtained from the research instruments. In Chapter Five, the researcher attempts to discuss the main findings from both approaches. It also draws some specific implications from the study's findings, and it concludes with the limitations of the study and the proposed directions for further research.

CHAPTER ONE: LEARNER AUTONOMY IN WRITING RESEARCH PROJECTS

CHAPTER ONE: LEARNER AUTONOMY IN WRITING RESEARCH PROJECTS

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Introduction

In light of the challenges of the current glocalized world, where global pedagogical infrastructures are thoughtfully adapted to meet local students' linguistic and learning needs, there has been growing interest among educators and foreign language specialists toward accepting and implementing learner-centered methods and approaches (e.g., communicative language approach, competency-based approach, project-based learning, etc.), which came as a reaction against the traditional teacher-centered methods (e.g., grammar translation method, audio-lingual method, etc.). As opposed to the student-centered approach to language teaching and learning, the traditional teacher-centered pedagogy is described as a “top-down and hierarchical pedagogy” (Kitiashvili, 2020, p. 553), which calls on instructors to exercise full control over the nature and quality of all aspects of the learning and teaching process (Dupin-Bryant, 2004). Although active learning and other similar strategies that place students at the center of the learning process are important ingredients of learner-centered teaching, they do not describe the complete philosophy of what it actually means to teach in a learner-centered fashion.

Furthermore, and to optimally exploit the pedagogical values underlying learner-centered teaching in classrooms, five qualities are proposed in this respect by Weimer (2013): (1) it involves students actively in the challenging tasks of learning; (2) it integrates explicit skills instruction to teach students how to learn, reason, and apply disciplinary knowledge independently; (3) it helps students to reflect on what and how they are learning; (4) it boosts students' motivation by giving them some control over the learning process; and (5) it builds a collaborative learning atmosphere where peers can learn from, and with, each other. However, one must bear in mind that a student-centered education at its purest form is almost never possible or necessary to achieve or to exist during all acts of teaching/learning. What is described as student-centered teaching fluctuates over time, i.e., it sometimes leans toward student-centered approaches, at other times toward teacher-centered practices, and mostly falls somewhere in between (Sium, 2014).

The Algerian Higher Education (HE) system, which still leans towards the behaviorist approach, must adopt current teaching and learning theories to keep pace

with rapid innovations in global pedagogy. In effect, it could be postulated that effective teaching is no longer regarded as the capacity to teach but as the capacity to make learners learn, instead. Unlike the traditional teaching environment, where the teacher is seen as a knowledge provider to passive recipients, student-centeredness stresses the role of the learner as an indispensable agent of change, being at the core of the learning process. In this very specific context, Kenny (1993) has rightly pointed out, “education as an emancipatory agent empowers a person’s autonomy, which allows new interpretations of the world and the possibility of change” (p. 440). The concept of Learner Autonomy (LA) has been widely explored across a variety of educational contexts. However, it is worth mentioning that the role of the educational system, and particularly that of the language teacher, is also necessary in the development of the learner’s capacity to make choices autonomously for his or her own learning (Littlewood, 1996). Accordingly, the present chapter aims to examine relevant literature on learner autonomy and the importance of promoting learner autonomy in the English Language Teaching (ELT) university curriculum, particularly in a research-based EFL writing classroom.

1.1. Introduction to Language Learner Autonomy

As mentioned in the General Introduction, learner autonomy has occupied a fundamental position in both research and teaching. This section of Chapter One provides an overview of learner autonomy in EFL classrooms. First, it is devoted to exploring the main definitions and dimensions of learner autonomy and aims to establish a theoretical framework for a better understanding of the concept. Then, it looks at the importance of learner autonomy and the various methods that can be used to develop it. Finally, the section discusses the specific challenges and opportunities of promoting learner autonomy in the Algerian higher EFL educational system.

1.1.1. Language Learner Autonomy: Definitions and Dimensions

It is not an easy task to put forward a precise answer to the question: What is language learner autonomy? Language Learner Autonomy (LLA) can be classified as a subset of learner autonomy. Despite being a central concern in Second Language/Foreign Language (SL/FL) pedagogy, language learner autonomy has long been the subject of considerable debate among applied linguists for a considerable

length of time. In other terms, the quest to define this concept has been an adventure in itself due to its interconnected layers of meaning and multidimensionality (Benson, 2013). From another angle, a clear and concise definition of language learner autonomy is hard to achieve due to the many different skills and abilities that it covers. For instance, over 100 competencies related to autonomy were identified by Candy (1991). One may observe that any learning competency, in one way or another, could be viewed as part of autonomy. According to Little (1991), “autonomy can manifest itself in many ways” (p. 4). Instead of attempting to define the term precisely, one alternative is to accept that it can appear in different forms, depending on specific contexts.

Originating from the fields of philosophy and politics, the concept of autonomy first came into prominence in ancient Greece (from the Greek *auto-nomos*), which referred to self-government as a right for citizens who have perfect liberty and freedom to be so independent that their lives are no longer subject to any given superior authority or power. From a language teaching and learning standpoint, the concept of language learner autonomy gained importance through several studies and has been subject to various definitions and interpretations. However, it first appeared through Holec’s (1981) project report with students at the Centre de Recherches et d’Applications Pédagogique en Langue (CRAPEL), University of Nancy, France, in the early 1970s. According to Benson (2007), Holec’s definition is learner autonomy’s most widely cited definition. He defines it as:

To say of a learner that he is autonomous is to say that he is capable of taking charge of his own learning and nothing more...to take charge of one’s learning is to bear responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning (Holec, 1981, p.3).

One can understand from Holec’s definition of autonomy that there are a few aspects of learner autonomy to take into account. First, autonomy is a process that can be achieved and learned rather than an innate ability. The second characteristic of learner autonomy is linked to the learner’s capacity to be engaged with learning. The last feature of an autonomous learner lies in their potential to assume

responsibility for the learner's decisions during the learning process. In brief, two main elements of learner autonomy are emphasized: capacity and responsibility.

Holec (1981) goes even deeper backing up his definition that “taking charge of one's own language learning” encompasses determining learning objectives, defining the learning content and progression, selecting learning methods and techniques, monitoring acquisition, and evaluating what has been achieved. Therefore, the role(s) of the language teacher for autonomous learners are to engineer opportunities that can help them work toward achieving those aspects. In the domain of research proposal writing, the aforementioned qualities seem to be of paramount importance since they urge students to set learning objectives regarding a given area of research, choose learning methods and techniques that are appropriate for undertaking research, monitor their research/writing progress, and constantly assess what has been researched and/or drafted.

According to Littlewood (1999), the capacity of ‘taking responsibility’ can be described as taking ‘ownership’, to use his term, of many learning processes, including decision-making about learning objectives, method selection, and evaluation (p.71). Moreover, Littlewood (1999) emphasized the role of autonomy for lifelong learning. In more precise terms, he states that taking responsibility for one's learning goes beyond students' current learning situation, as it also necessitates students to carry on learning even after graduation from university. In a similar line of thought, De León (2010) views autonomy as a part of an individual process in which the teacher becomes merely an observer or a guide. Thanasoulas (2000) mentioned that “the autonomous learner takes a proactive role in the learning process, generating ideas and availing himself of learning opportunities, rather than simply reacting to various stimuli of the teacher” (p. 2). This proactive attitude toward learning can be possibly achieved, provided that learners rely less on their teachers. (Littlewood, 1999).

In a nutshell, language teachers should inculcate in learners the following five main qualities:

1. Determining learning objectives
2. Defining the learning content and progression

3. Selecting learning methods and techniques
4. Monitoring acquisition
5. Evaluating what has been achieved.

Little's (1991) definition of learner autonomy seems equivalent to Holec's, yet it adds a psychological breadth of autonomy; he also points out that the social dimension of autonomy is of paramount importance to keep in mind, he states that:

Essentially, autonomy is a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. The capacity of autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts (Little, 1991, pp. 3-4).

Moreover, Little (1991) contends that autonomy cannot be developed without considering affective factors, including motivation. The latter has been considered for many years “one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second or foreign language (L2) learning. Motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process” (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 117).

According to Little's (1991) perspectives, learner autonomy remains a multifaceted construct that includes both personal initiative and social dimensions. In accordance with Little's (1991) understanding of autonomy, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Ryan and Deci (2000) provides a broader psychological framework for autonomy. SDT suggests that autonomy is one of the three innate psychological needs that are fundamental to an individual's motivation, psychological growth, and well-being. Within this framework, autonomy encompasses the feeling of volition and independence regarding initiating and controlling one's actions. Autonomy, therefore, includes not just the capacity for independent action but also involves critical reflection and decision-making, which requires a profound psychological connection to one's initiatives and choices. It is a truism to assert that these qualities could play a crucial role for students immersed in academic writing and research.

In line with the social aspect of autonomy emphasized by Little (1991), learner autonomy cannot be limited to being merely individual. Instead, it is perceived as “a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a socially responsible person” (Dam, 1995, p. 102). Cooperation with peers, therefore, is necessary in the development of learner autonomy. Just as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) underscores the importance of relatedness, autonomy is equally crucial. It not only complements our innate need for social interaction but is also crucial for self-regulation and personal growth. Educators, as highly influential social actors responsible for molding students’ cognitive and emotional development, hold a crucial position in autonomy-supportive pedagogy. In the process of drafting and developing a research proposal, for instance, social interactions play a major role. They may provide opportunities for student researchers to receive and give constructive feedback in order to upgrade their research skills and research projects alike.

It is important at this point to address a very common misconception regarding learner autonomy which stems from the very term itself. As Little (1999) rightly states:

The word ‘autonomy’, with its overtones of independence and self-determination, invites a focus on the individual rather than the group, which is no doubt responsible for the widespread misconception that learner autonomy is essentially a matter of learning without a teacher (p. 78).

In agreement with this, Thanasoulas (2000) rightly argues that “learner autonomy does not mean that the teacher becomes redundant, abdicating his/her control over what is transpiring in the language learning process.” The notion of autonomy in the teacher-student relationship may well, metaphorically speaking, be illustrated through an orchestra. Each musician, much like a learner, enjoys the freedom to interpret their own part, yet this freedom is dependent on other musicians and it goes hand in hand with the conductor’s leadership and the rhythm of the orchestra itself. The melody loses its soul if one performer misses the rhythm. In clearer words, the mission toward more autonomy can be possible when both teachers and students are involved as ready players/co-performers. In line with such a view, McRae (2022)

contends that, “If we bear in mind that the ideal goal is learner autonomy in the target language, the teacher’s success in working towards this goal becomes the touchstone” (p. 104). Thus, teachers are in fact expected to be working on the front lines to involve students in the project of learner autonomy from the earliest possible stage.

Based on the previous definitions of autonomy, Benson et al. (2001) argue that Holec’s definition of autonomy is problematic as it neglects the cognitive aspects that are essential in the context of language learning. By way of explanation, Benson et al. (2001) identify three levels of control in language learning that can describe autonomy more appropriately: learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content. For Benson (2011), control over learning management refers to the “behaviours involved in the planning, organization, and evaluation of learning” (p. 92). On the other hand, control over cognitive processes focuses on “the cognitive processes through which management and content are processed” (p. 100). He adds that the capacity related to this dimension of control involves metacognitive knowledge.

Of the various factors that reinforce and consolidate autonomous learning in language education is the role of metacognitive awareness (Cera et al., 2013). According to Fisher et al. (2007), students are “lacking in the metacognitive skills needed in order for the independent learning ... to be carried out successfully.” (p. 47). Metacognitive awareness could be considered as a set of mental strategies and skills learners use to plan and organize their learning, with problem-solving being no exception. The latter is defined as “stable, stable and sometimes fallible knowledge learners acquire about themselves as learners and the learning process” (Wenden, 1991, p. 163). Students need to be conscious of the fact that the learning process is a mental struggle, and should not always assume that learning will be effortless.

This metacognitive knowledge is classified into three main categories: person knowledge, task knowledge, and strategy knowledge. Flavell (1979) describes each category as follows:

- Person knowledge refers to general knowledge about how human beings learn and process information, and individual knowledge of one’s intellectual strengths and weaknesses in language learning.

- Task knowledge is defined as “what learners need to know about (i) the purpose of a task, (ii) the task’s demands, and (iii) implicit in these considerations, a determination of the kind of task” (Wenden, 1995, p. 185).
- Strategy knowledge refers to knowledge about the role of strategies in the learning process, that is, knowledge about the best way to tackle language learning. It also includes principles for the choice of learning strategies.

Put differently, Wenden (1998) defines the strategic component of metacognition as “general skills through which learners manage, direct, regulate, and guide their learning, i.e., planning, monitoring, and evaluation” (p. 519). She further explains that “the deployment of these three strategies in learning is referred to as self-regulation in cognitive psychology” (Wenden, 1998, p. 519). Yet, it is assumed that metacognitive skills have been found inadequate to lend themselves to the quality label of effective learning habits. Metacognition is only one piece of the puzzle of self-regulated learning; learners’ and teachers’ beliefs too play a major part (Zimmerman, 1989).

Control over learning content deals with the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of language learning, instead of ‘where’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ (Benson, 2011). Because language learning development requires interaction with others, “there is also a social aspect to control over learning content, which involves the learner’s ability to negotiate over goals, purposes, content and resources with others” (Benson, 1996, as cited in Benson 2011, p. 60). However, taking control over learning content may not be achievable because of government education policies, school curricula, and textbooks, which students must conform to (Reinders, 2010).

Supporting Benson et al.’s (2001) ideas and their notion of ‘contextualized autonomy’, Lamb and Reinders (2005) also underscore the importance of considering individual circumstances and contexts to better define how autonomy works. Language learning autonomy, according to Little (1991), should not be perceived merely as an individual trait or responsibility. Instead, it is a very dynamic process that is highly influenced by the social, cultural, and educational context in which the learner is situated. This goes hand in hand with Benson’s notion that autonomy is not

a one-size-fits-all construct but rather something that varies according to the specific contexts and circumstances of learners.

Thus, it becomes crucial for teachers to build an autonomy-supportive classroom climate, where learners are trained to develop more awareness and the ability to reflect on their learning processes. In this sense, both Little and Benson call for a more context-sensitive understanding of autonomy. The latter approach can, perhaps, result in a more meaningful view of learner autonomy in the educational context. The concept of ‘contextualized autonomy’ is perhaps one of the most pertinent aspects of autonomy in light of this study since it focuses on autonomy in a very particular context: the process of writing academic research proposals. In such a specific context, the study listens to the voices of graduates to enable the researcher to investigate autonomy further.

As stated earlier, scholars such as Holec (1981), Little (1991), and Benson (2011) have contributed significantly to shaping our understanding of learner autonomy. Holec’s seminal work introduced the concept of autonomy in foreign language learning; he emphasized the importance of learners assuming responsibility for their learning process. Little further expanded on this notion, and he differentiated between teacher-directed and learner-directed approaches to autonomy. Similarly, Benson’s research shed light on teaching and researching autonomy in language learning and on the complexities and challenges related to fostering learner autonomy. In simpler educational terms, Missoum (2021) proposed the following relevant definition of the concept: “the capacity for and practice by learners of the primary responsibility for planning, executing, monitoring, and evaluation of their own learning” (p. 02).

Broadly, Sinclair (2000) provides thirteen facets of learner autonomy. She includes aspects from previous definitions of autonomy, but adds other crucial points, which were not mentioned previously. They are listed as follows:

1. Autonomy is a construct of capacity.
2. Autonomy involves a willingness on the part of the learner to take responsibility for their own learning.

3. The capacity and willingness of learners to take such responsibility are not necessarily innate.
4. Complete autonomy is an idealistic goal.
5. There are degrees of autonomy.
6. The degrees of autonomy are unstable.
7. Autonomy is not simply a matter of placing learners in situations where they have to be independent.
8. Developing autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process, i.e., conscious reflection and decision-making.
9. Promoting autonomy is not simply a matter of teaching strategies.
10. Autonomy can take place both inside and outside the classroom.
11. Autonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension.
12. The exercise of autonomy has a political as well as psychological dimension.
13. Autonomy is interpreted differently by different cultures.

As a result, Smith (2003) believes that “a clear, though potentially discomfoting implication is that autonomy is a multifaceted concept, susceptible to a variety of interpretations” (p. 255). Along similar lines of thought, and by building on previous scholarship, Quoc Lap (2005) identified four main interconnected areas that are central to understanding and defining learner autonomy: cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and social factors. First, cognitive factors refer to learners’ ability or capacity to understand, process, and apply knowledge in different learning situations. This ability enables them to make informed decisions about their own learning and to assume responsibility for it. Secondly, affective factors such as attitudes, willingness, readiness, and self-confidence are needed to maintain motivation and perseverance throughout the learning process. Thirdly, metacognitive factors are involved when learners set specific goals, select appropriate materials, plan learning activities, monitor their own performance, and evaluate their progress. According to Wenden (1998), evaluation involves three steps: (1) learners analyze the outcomes of their learning; (2) they determine the criteria to be used to assess these outcomes; and (3) they apply these criteria to make judgments about their learning. Lastly, social factors, such as engaging in cooperative learning, interacting with peers, and

benefiting from scaffolding, would in turn lead to promoting independent problem-solving skills among learners.

According to many researchers, EFL learner autonomy develops under the influence of certain factors. Some of these factors actually come from the learner himself or herself, including persistence, motivation, and self-regulatory habits (internal), while others may arise from the learning environment, such as peers, teachers, and curricula, surrounding the learner (external) (Nguyen & Habók, 2020). In line with similar factors, Khotimah et al. (2019) have noticed that one's mindset, cultural orientation, and habitual learning patterns are internal factors, whereas teachers' professional experience, instructional strategies, classroom resources, and age serve as external determinants. Interestingly, depending on how they are addressed and triggered, both internal and external factors may turn out to be either positive or negative (Nguyen & Habók, 2020).

As it seems impractical to examine every dimension and competency of learner autonomy discussed in this section, this study will center on the most common areas, which are also relevant to the task of research proposal writing in EFL: cognitive, metacognitive, social (considering both the teacher's role and peer relationships), and affective dimensions. Ultimately, this study adopts a broad definition of autonomy, which states that autonomy means learners' ability to assume proactive responsibility for their learning through critical reflection and evaluation, constructive collaboration, and emotional engagement. This ability draws on cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective resources.

The choice of proposing this definition is not randomly decided or based on the researcher's guesswork. The involvement of students in the process of assessment (self- or peer assessment), as will be discussed later, is complex. Arguably, if the strategies emphasized in the proposed definition of autonomy are, to a larger extent, not fulfilled, writing academic projects becomes a far-fetched instructional goal. That is, the current study adopts a concept that fits the situation of writing in a research-based context. For instance, emotional engagement, though sometimes less visible, keeps learners invested and actively engaged when the task of writing a proposal becomes challenging or feedback is uncertain/ambiguous. Constructive collaboration

with peers and the teacher, too, is at the center of the writing process. The latter broader view of autonomy suggests that it is not an abstract phenomenon but a construct that functions and influences how learners learn.

More importantly, and perhaps more liberatingly, the notion of learner autonomy, as previously discussed, is similar to art in its slippery and ill-defined nature. This means that it is hard to agree on a precise and concise definition of it, but all individuals tend to know what it means in ways that resonate with their own personal learning experiences. Applied linguists appear to use the term learner autonomy in language learning as if it were well-understood, but they have not reached consensus on its definition (Chong & Reinders, 2022). Nevertheless, the focus of this study is not on how the concept is understood, but on how it can be cultivated.

Having examined the aforementioned aspects and dimensions of learner autonomy, it is crucial to differentiate it from other terms that educators find perplexing. Understanding what autonomy is not becomes significant in order to avoid confusion and misconceptions.

1.1.2. Autonomy Terms in the Literature: Clearing the Conceptual Fog

What is worth stressing is that learner autonomy is often used interchangeably with other terms in educational discourse. However, it seems fundamental to maintain the distinct identity of learner autonomy to shield its unique theoretical and practical implications. This would probably allow a more accurate application of the construct. Little (2007) expounded that autonomy might pose a challenge in terms of its precise definition, and he has also observed that a few misconceptions regarding autonomy exist:

1. Autonomy is not primarily a matter of how learning occurs. Autonomy is about taking responsibility for one's learning, which goes beyond the method or process by which learning happens.
2. Autonomy does not necessitate the teacher to abandon his or her control (self-instruction). While autonomy involves learners taking more responsibility, it does not mean that teachers should completely withdraw from their role. Instead, they guide and scaffold the learning process.

3. Autonomy is not a new teaching method. Autonomy is not a teaching method in itself, but rather a pedagogical goal that can be integrated into existing methods.
4. Autonomy is not one single behavior that is easy to describe or achieve by learners. Autonomy is complex and involves a range of behaviors that can vary depending on the learner, the context, and the specific aspects of learning.
5. Autonomy is not a state reached by the learner, i.e., autonomous behavior can, instead, be demonstrated in a multiplicity of ways, and learners can display high autonomy in one area while failing to prove equal autonomy in another.

In reviewing the literature, several terms associated with learner autonomy emerged. Many researchers, such as Benson (2011), view that ‘learner autonomy’ and ‘autonomous learning’ are not synonymous with ‘self-instruction’, ‘individualization’, ‘self-directed learning’, ‘self-access learning’, ‘distance learning’, or ‘learner-centeredness’. For this reason, it seems an opportune time to briefly define these terms that are usually associated with learner autonomy, so educators have a better level of understanding of what it exactly is that they are devoted to cultivate. They are defined as follows:

- Self-instruction: it has been defined as “a deliberate long-term learning project instigated, planned and carried out by the learner alone, without teacher’s intervention” (Benson et al., 2001, p. 131). Self-instruction, therefore, may fail to reach the goals of autonomy, considering both capacity and control.
- Individualization can be seen as an approach to teaching and learning that considers learner differences, yet it does not foster autonomous learning capacities or enable learners to control their learning.
- Self-direction: According to Dickinson (1987), self-direction is “the process of the techniques used in directing one’s own learning” (p. 11). In this definition, learners accept control but may lack capacity, so self-directed instruction is different from autonomous learning.
- Self-access learning: Sheerin (1991) defined self-access learning as “a way of describing learning materials that are designed and organised in such a way that students can select and work on tasks on their own (although this does not

preclude the possibility of some form of support) and obtain feedback on their performance” (p. 143). Promoting autonomous learning, however, suggests that learners take full control of their learning, moving beyond mere reliance on provided resources, to the extent that they have the freedom to select their learning goals, methods, and evaluation on their own.

- Distance learning: it does not entail any face-to-face interaction with a teacher or study peers; students study from the comfort of their own homes at their own pace. Hence, distance learning is not a synonym for autonomous learning.
- Learner-centeredness: it is a general paradigm in education, which may involve the already stated concepts, such as autonomy, self-directed learning, and self-regulated learning.
- Learner-centered teaching: it is “a style of instruction that is responsive, collaborative, problem-centered, and democratic in which both learners and instructor decide how, what, and when learning occurs” (Dupin-Bryant, 2004, p. 42).

In language education, learner autonomy should not be confused with the above various related terms. As a concept, autonomy has been associated with, but is not similar to, the terms discussed above. Moreover, the word autonomy in educational contexts is usually misinterpreted to be viewed as an individual construct. However, learner autonomy, in its broader sense, is both individual and collaborative. Put differently, Jacobs and Farrell, (2001) clarify that:

Learner autonomy is sometimes misunderstood as referring only to learners being able to work alone. By collaborating with their peers, learners move away from dependence on the teacher. Group activities help students harness that power and by doing so they build their pool of learning resources because they can receive assistance from peers, not just from the teacher (p. 6).

Over the last four decades, the concept of autonomy, as previously discussed, seems to be witnessing considerable stretching, for it has continuously been the focus of discussion in the learning-teaching practice across the globe (Stewart & Irie, 2012).

Nevertheless, instead of defining learner autonomy, it is vital to direct one’s attention to the main theories surrounding learner autonomy so as to reach a deeper

and solid understanding of the concept. Ideally, this investigation may help expand one's perception of autonomy in learning, which will be further explored through the lens of the social constructivist theoretical framework.

1.1.3. Theoretical Framework: Social Constructivism

The twenty-first century has witnessed the rise of constructivism as a dominant paradigm in educational theory and practice. The researcher elaborated the principles of a social-constructivist theoretical framework, borrowing from cognitive, constructivist, and sociocultural theories in order to explore how alternative classroom practices may be redefined to be more impactful in moving forward the teaching-learning process and cultivating an autonomous classroom learning climate. Constructivist learning theory supports learner autonomy; it also promotes student-centered teaching models. According to this theoretical orientation, autonomy implies that learners actively build their own knowledge by engaging deeply in learning activities, participating in cooperative social interaction (a major element of peer assessment), and performing careful reflection and self-evaluation (a necessary component for accurate self-assessment). In this view, learners can be described as “architects building their own knowledge structures” (Wang et al., 1993, p. 271). The subsequent section will address the core principles of constructivism and explain how these theoretical understandings may be put into practice to support the learning processes discussed.

The constructivist approach to learning, particularly as seen in the practices of the Greek philosopher Socrates, reveals early ideas that are still relevant in contemporary educational discussions. One of the famous Socratic thoughts was the notion that knowledge cannot be directly transferred from the teacher to the student (Vlastos, 1982). In this view, the role of the teacher is not to provide ready-made knowledge but to serve as a facilitator for the sake of prompting critical thought and reflection. Socrates further establishes a fine relationship between the concepts of learning and knowledge, which in turn underscores the importance of reflection and self-assessment in the learning process. Indeed, these Socratic teaching methods reflect a commitment to learner autonomy and the active construction of knowledge.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, another well-known philosopher whose educational

ideas are linked to constructivist theory, also contributed to the discourse on learning through his concept of “natural education.” From the moment of birth, human beings cannot survive without depending on others. The latter observation suggests that certain interactions are natural and that learning is, to a large extent, not independent of others. Rousseau, who did not receive formal schooling, proposed that learning should go hand in hand with students’ natural inclinations as opposed to being only guided by formal instruction (Peckover, 2012). According to Rousseau, educators should allow learners the freedom to follow their instincts and interests, and lead them toward becoming more responsible in their learning processes. Thus, teachers should not impose knowledge on students. Instead, their role would be to stimulate curiosity, pose problems, and then step back in order to allow the learners to discover the answers on their own. This approach suggests that education is less about direct teaching and more about building a supportive classroom environment where students are trusted to think critically and act autonomously.

Furthermore, another important thinker, Lev Vygotsky, impacted both psychology and education with his work on social constructivism. He argued that “human psychological development takes place in a historical cultural setting and cannot be understood apart from this setting” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 46). According to his Social Development Theory, learning, rather than being an individual process, occurs through social interaction, where people develop cognitive abilities through engagement with others. Vygotsky’s ideas, therefore, offer a different perspective because they place social interaction at the heart of learning and development. According to constructivist theory, knowledge acquisition is an active process that is underpinned by three core assumptions: the activation of prior knowledge, the value of social interaction, and the role of metacognitive skills in self-regulation.

Learners are seen as active agents who build on existing knowledge to interpret new information, and simultaneously work with real-world contexts rather than relying on isolated content from textbooks. MacKinnon and Scarff-Seatter (1997) document a statement from an elementary science teacher. The teacher remarks, “I am very anxious to return to my classroom and teach science. Constructivism has taught me [that] I do not need to know any science in order to teach it. I will simply

allow students to figure things out for themselves, for I know that there is no right answer” (p. 53). Nevertheless, such a view may show a limited understanding of constructivist pedagogy because it wrongly assumes that giving students freedom means the teacher does not need subject-matter knowledge.

Moreover, constructivism implies that learning is a social activity. Vygotsky (1978) argued that cognitive development is facilitated through interaction with others in socially constructed environments. This notion supports cooperative learning, where students work together toward shared goals, exchange ideas and refine their thinking through discussion. Finally, the theory underlines the importance of metacognition. Simply put, self-regulated learners, who engage in goal setting, self-assessment, and monitoring their learning, are better learners. These metacognitive practices are viewed as crucial both for learning within educational contexts and for lifelong learning (Zimmerman, 1989).

In the same vein, many constructivist theorists have criticized teacher-centered education. For instance, Richardson (1997) argues that when learning is too teacher-directed, it undermines students’ autonomy in constructing their own knowledge. Indeed, constructivism suggests that knowledge is better developed through active participation, problem-solving, and collaboration with others. In other terms, when education relies too heavily on teacher-centered methods, it may hinder the development of many important skills, such as critical thinking, independent learning, comprehension, etc. In this regard, constructivism supports a more student-centered approach that encourages learners to be active agents of change in both their learning and assessment processes.

It is worth mentioning that Windschitl (2002) adds that constructivist teaching cannot be directly applied from theory to practice. He notes that “classroom teachers are finding the implementation of constructivist instruction far more difficult than the reform community acknowledges” (p. 131). According to him, teachers must navigate a series of dilemmas, such as conceptual, pedagogical, cultural, and political factors that influence how constructivism is exercised in classrooms. Therefore, it seems critical for educators to assess their own assumptions (conscious or unconscious), reflect on their school practices, and gain a deeper understanding of

the broader, if not hidden, factors that influence their instructional decisions (Windschitl, 2002).

This research study explores learner autonomy within social contexts, particularly in the context of university students writing academic research proposals. The practice of scientific inquiry is in itself a social practice rather than a private one. To this end, social constructivism shares common ground with the integration of self- and peer assessment, interaction and collaboration with peers, critical reflection, and supports the development of autonomy. This is especially relevant to the proposal writing context, which involves collaboration with teachers/supervisors, peers, research participants, and others. Moreover, students must communicate and share their research proposals within a social context, which reinforces the interconnectedness of individual learning and social factors. Research, according to Hiebert et al. (2022), can be best carried out by “interacting with others along the way: soliciting feedback at each phase, taking opportunities to present work-in-progress, and benefitting from the advice of others” (p. 5). For this reason, this study applies constructivist learning principles for the purpose of promoting learner autonomy in the course of research proposal writing through the incorporation of self- and peer assessment activities.

In order to better understand how the principles of constructivist learning are implemented in this study, it is of paramount importance to note that “instead of talking about autonomy as some kind of fixed and rather abstract entity, we can see it as a dynamic process that teachers and learners collaborate to achieve” (Reinders, 2011, p. 48). In other words, learner autonomy can, indeed, be exercised at a wide range of levels of ability or capacity.

1.1.4. Levels of Language Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy needs to be reconceptualized as an evolving, situated, and plural project, not as a rigid doctrine. Scholars and researchers have put forward diverse notions of the levels of learner autonomy. For example, Reinders (2011) believes that “autonomy is not an either-or concept, but has to be seen as a continuum” (p. 48). Accordingly, one cannot claim that autonomy is about zero or total capacity. Instead, autonomy has to do with degrees or shades of capacity,

depending on the learner's capacity components. Thanasoulas (2000) notes that "there are degrees of learner autonomy and that it is not an absolute concept". In this sense, Benson (2007) argues that "autonomy is a matter of degree" (p. 23). Then, in 2011, Benson believed that highly autonomous learners have control over their learning and can determine its direction, while those with low autonomy can only perform specific autonomy-related activities. On the same basis, Nunan (1997) emphasized the term "degrees of autonomy" (p. 193). According to him, there are five autonomy levels in the context of language learning: awareness, involvement, intervention, creation, and transcendence. What follows, therefore, provides more details about the five principles of Nunan's (1997) model of autonomy:

Table 1.1***Stages of Learner Autonomy Implementation (Nunan, 1997, p. 195)***

Level	Learner Action	Content	Process
1	Awareness	Learners are made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the materials they are using.	Learners identify strategy implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own preferred learning styles/strategies.
2	Involvement	Learners are involved in selecting their own goals from a range of alternatives on offer.	Learners make choices among a range of options.
3	Intervention	Learners are involved in modifying and adapting the goals and content of the learning programme.	Learners modify/adapt tasks.
4	Creation	Learners create their own goals and objectives.	Learners create their own tasks.
5	Transcendence	Learners go beyond the classroom and make links between the content of classroom learning and the world beyond.	Learners become teachers and researchers.

The table above depicts the five levels of autonomy. Nunan (1997) asserts that some principles "are more readily incorporated than others" (p. 194). Each level

represents a deeper involvement of the learner in taking control of what and how they learn. In the awareness stage, the purpose for learners is to understand the learning objectives and content of the materials being used. As for the second step, the involvement phase, learners participate in setting goals and choosing ways of learning regarding the content. In the intervention stage, learners are expected to adapt and modify learning activities and materials in accordance with their needs and interests. The next stage is where learners fully participate in the learning process by coming up with their own learning goals and relevant assignments. At the final stage, relying on all the aforementioned levels, learners extend their learning experiences to real-life scenarios beyond the borders of the classroom, adopting a kind of autonomous teacher/researcher spirit.

Achieving these levels of autonomy depends on different factors, such as the learner's personality, their goals of studying the target language, the institution's principles, and the cultural environment where learning occurs (Nunan, 1997). These factors are most likely relevant for students whose aim is to write an academic research proposal. For example, how students approach research is dramatically influenced by their personalities, motivations, the guidelines and policies set by their institution, and where their research journey is taking place. It is no surprise that a good understanding of these factors may enable students to learn how to learn and become autonomous learners/researchers.

Nevertheless, it is not an easy task to trace a straight line through the stages proposed in Nunan's framework, nor to assume that autonomy can be exercised in an ordered fashion. The framework aims to guide learners from awareness to transcendence, assuming that learners progress step by step through clearly defined levels. In practice, however, this is not always the case. For example, some learners may reach higher levels of autonomy, such as creation and transcendence (levels 4 and 5), without necessarily mastering earlier stages, such as choosing among learning options (level 2) (Sinclair, 2009). In other words, what Nunan presents as a sequence may, in reality, be a flexible and context-dependent construct (Little, 2007).

Another model to conceptualize autonomy was the one proposed by Littlewood (1999). It was designed to view autonomy as a self-regulatory process through which

learners take charge of their own learning and progress. Littlewood (1999) introduced two distinct forms of learner autonomy. These two forms of learner autonomy can be further broken down into ‘proactive’ and ‘reactive’ autonomy. Proactive learning refers to full autonomy as learners “take charge of their learning, determine their objectives, select methods and evaluate what has been acquired.” (Littlewood, 1999, p. 75). In contrast, reactive autonomy does not build its own ‘directions’ to use Littlewood’s (1999) term. Reactive autonomous learners, therefore, cannot take charge of their learning unless a learning direction has been set for them. However, one distinction was noted by Benson (2006), who argued that reactive autonomy does not necessarily come before proactive autonomy but may exist on its own.

In conducting research, as a practical example, students may need to exercise both proactive and reactive types of autonomy. Proactive autonomy may entail students selecting their own topics for research, gathering relevant research/writing resources, and constantly seeking feedback on their writing from peers and advisors. Reactive autonomy, on the other hand, may be vital for learners’ ability to adapt their research methods or approaches based on unexpected obstacles that arise, be open to feedback, and act accordingly. The ability to balance these two types of autonomy may be crucial for success in carrying out rigorous research. Teachers, however, still play a crucial role in developing either proactive or reactive learner autonomy.

More tellingly, it seems that learner autonomy can be exercised in three main stages: awareness-raising, attitudinal change, and role transfer (Scharle & Szabo, 2000). At the very beginning stage, called awareness-raising, students depend heavily on their teacher because he/she needs to introduce the learning elements and frame tasks so that students, in a gradual manner, begin to see how activities relate to the lesson’s broader objectives. As for the next step, the attitudinal change stage, students are trusted to apply the new strategies, and they would presumably experience a change in their attitude. However, the teacher and student alike need to be patient enough during this stage. It is well known that repeated practice leads to new behaviors and gradually replaces previous ones. Last but not least, in the role-transfer stage, which can also be seen as the hallmark of learner autonomy, learners assume proactive responsibility toward their learning and thus the teacher becomes rather a

facilitator, who is expected to intervene only when necessary. This stage will allow students to make more decisions so that autonomous behaviors are more pronounced than before. Interestingly, these stages may also apply, at least to some extent, to the context of students engaged in research and academic writing. For example, a student-researcher who first needs help to identify research questions (awareness) may later attempt to refine them independently (attitudinal change) and finally come up with a research design with less supervision and teacher assistance (role transfer).

Sinclair (2000) also proposed that the degrees of learner autonomy rely on several factors, such as the “learner’s language proficiency” level, “affective” factors (e.g., mood), “environmental” factors (e.g., noise, temperature), “physical” factors (e.g., tiredness, hunger), and “motivational” factors (e.g., attitude towards the task, the subject matter, the teacher, materials, and co-learners) (p. 8). These factors interact with each other and contribute to the development of learner autonomy in language learning. Sinclair (2000) adds that these degrees of autonomy are by no means stable. On the other hand, Kumaravadivelu (2003) cautioned against directly correlating the stages of autonomy in language learning with levels of language proficiency. According to him, “it would be a mistake to try to correlate the initial, intermediary, and advanced stages of autonomy...with the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of language proficiency” (p. 144). The two dimensions should be regarded as separate entities with unique characteristics and development.

In a narrow sense, according to Benson (2012), autonomy can be developed in stages. He does not use the term general autonomy but believes that “personal autonomy” is the root of learner autonomy, which in turn supports language learner autonomy. He argues that:

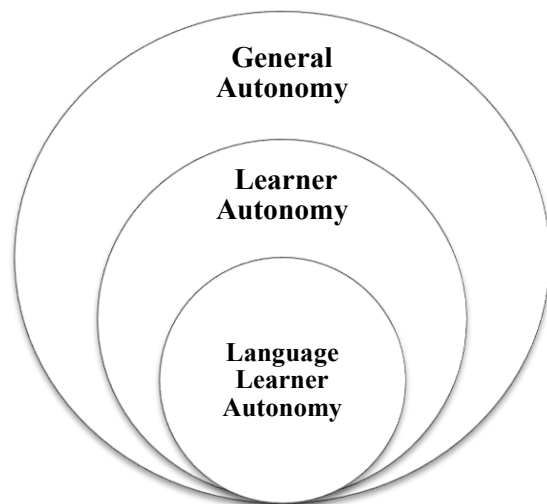
Personal autonomy entails learner autonomy, because the process of learning to be autonomous must itself involve autonomy. Learner autonomy entails language learner autonomy, because learning is largely a matter of language-mediated socialization and because personal autonomy itself entails self-expression and autonomy in language use (p. 37).

Therefore, these three stages of autonomy (personal autonomy, learner autonomy, and language learner autonomy) exist as concentric entities as opposed to being

overlapping processes. The following figure illustrates the “entailment,” to use Benson’s words, relationship between the autonomies:

Figure 1.1

The Concentric Structure of Autonomy



Supporting the researchers mentioned earlier, Benson (2012) implies that autonomy is not a fixed state, and that movement between the different types of autonomy works both ways, i.e., general autonomy leads to the ability to learn autonomously and also language autonomy, and the opposite direction is also possible. All in all, learner autonomy should be regarded as a long dynamic process in which “learners need to believe that they can make decisions and that the latter do not need to be perfect, especially at the early stages of learning. They need to be tolerant of failure as a step towards success in the learning process” (Missoum, 2021, p. 27).

Stated another way, Miliani (2003, cited in Hadi, 2018) distinguishes between two levels of learner autonomy: simpler ‘decision-taking’ in secondary education and active ‘decision-making’ in university settings. The former involves students in pre-university education taking some control over their learning process, whereas the latter requires students to take more complex and active roles in their academic pursuits. Such a description of learner autonomy seems helpful for one to obtain a broad snapshot of the concept, but it lacks specificity and localized interpretations of the term. This means that at the Master’s program level, for instance, students are put in situations where they may be involved in both the decision-making and decision-

taking processes. They make decisions about choosing their supervisor and/or thesis partners (co-authors), narrowing down the scope of research, selecting research questions, choosing the appropriate methodology, identifying preferred working styles, etc. Thus, there is a need for further investigation into this topic.

One would argue that moving from learner to researcher is a big transition that may necessitate more complex levels of autonomy that are still currently undiscussed in the literature. If it is true that the development of autonomy is subject to different stages or levels, as many researchers (e.g., Benson, 2012; Benson, 2007; Nunan, 1997) have demonstrated, then higher-level academic performance, such as writing a research proposal or a dissertation, requires a new level of autonomy that is more complex to be understood or achieved. Although the aforementioned stages or degrees of autonomy can also be relevant, to a larger extent, to students doing and writing research, there is nonetheless an urgent need to develop more models that can allow teachers to obtain a better image of how autonomy is manifested in terms of the complex scenario of academic research-based writing, especially in EFL settings. There is a dearth of empirical studies in the area of ‘researcher’ autonomy as opposed to learner autonomy or digital learner autonomy.

In the past few decades, attempts have been made to devise a measurement tool to assess learner autonomy. Attempts to assess autonomy through summative measures have faced strong criticism, as scholars argue that autonomy is multidimensional, developmental, and not directly observable (Benson, 2010). Measuring learner autonomy levels may be crucial for tailoring pedagogical approaches to individual needs. Several methodologies have been utilized to gauge autonomy, including questionnaires, observational methods, and reflective journals. Nevertheless, Lamb (2017) even goes so far as to say that:

Problems with measuring autonomy also affect the ways in which it can be researched, and research funding usually comes with expectations of impact measurement. It is not yet clear how these paradoxes can be addressed, but research needs to continue to engage with them and to make clear and trustworthy arguments to act as a counterbalance to such external demands (p. 182).

It is also possible, if not necessary, for researchers and teachers to devise their own context-sensitive assessment instruments of autonomy as a means to concentrate on the specific requirements and conditions of their own learners and learning objectives, which may not be identical to standard contexts.

It should be noted that in educational settings where autonomy is granted due importance and integrated into the learning process, the ability to plan, monitor, and assess one's own learning is therefore perceived as a ladder-like, long road toward academic achievement. Conversely, a lack of awareness of the stages of autonomy, as discussed earlier, and limited opportunities for decision-making and reflection may undermine learners' abilities and make them too reliant and dependent on their teachers and/or supervisors. Regardless of the varying degrees in which learner autonomy may manifest, it appears more pertinent for educators to direct their efforts toward its development because, as Thanasoulas (2000) contends, "it would be nothing short of ludicrous to assert that learners come into the learning situation with the knowledge and skills to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, or to make decisions on content or objectives."

1.1.5. Promoting Learner Autonomy among University EFL Students

The development of students' linguistic abilities is no longer the only concern of language specialists and educators. The main goal of the language classroom today is to promote a lifelong language-learning mindset by putting explicit emphasis on other non-linguistic competencies, such as learner autonomy. In this sense, Chetouane (2022, cited in Chetouane, 2022) rightly observed that "the immediate problem that rises when addressing this issue-investigations of learner autonomy is the sheer amount of academics who consider students at the department of English as mainly language learners" (p. 214). It goes without saying that assuming students in the English department are primarily there to develop their language skills only is, in effect, a misconception that educators need to address. This is because these students are also expected to acquire specialized content knowledge, such as research methodology, while using English as a medium of communication. Besides, cultivating learner autonomy in the English department is a core activity in higher education in countries within and beyond the Western world. In this very specific

context, Smith (2002) argues that “the promotion of a strong version of pedagogy for autonomy is not just a passing trend, is not the invention of ‘experts’, and can be a particularly appropriate idea in non-western as in western countries” (p. 13). Therefore, it seems of paramount importance to discuss the multifaceted approaches that can be employed to nurture and maintain a higher level of autonomy among EFL university students. Relying on existing theoretical frameworks and empirical research, Daflizar (2023) critically reviews the six approaches to learner autonomy proposed by Benson (2001): resource-based, technology-based, curriculum-based, teacher-based, classroom-based, and learner-based. Table 1.2 below comprises a summary of the six approaches put forward by Benson et al., (2001) and reviewed by Daflizar (2023) (see Table 1.2):

Tale 1.2

A Critical Look at Promoting EFL Learner Autonomy (Daflizar, 2023)

Approach	Studies	Findings	Recommendations
Resource-Based	Gardner & Miller (1999, 2014), Murray (2009), Littlejohn (1997)	Self-access centers and materials promote autonomy. However, activities need careful design to avoid hindering creativity.	Prioritize active and creative roles over tasks that involve reproduction.
Technology-Based	Intratat (2004), Lee (2011), Wang-Szilas et al. (2013), Sari & Sulistyo (2022)	Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) and e-tandem improve language skills and cultural understanding. Blogs and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) resources enhance autonomy and metacognition.	Incorporate a range of technological modalities to address the requirements of different learning styles.
Curriculum-Based	Ramírez (2014), Nix (2003), Stephenson & Kohyama (2003)	Project work and process syllabus involve learners in decision-making, promoting autonomy and self-evaluation skills.	Tailor projects to match learner abilities and needs.
Teacher-Based	Little (1995), Thavenius (1999), Vieira (1999)	Teacher autonomy is essential for fostering learner autonomy. Awareness training and reflective practices can be helpful.	Focus on changing teaching techniques and teacher personality.
Classroom-Based	Chauhan (2013). Nunes (2004), Brody & Albany (1998), Thomson (1998)	Portfolios, cooperative learning, and self/peer assessment can promote autonomy and peer interaction.	Balance interdependence and autonomy in cooperative settings.
Learner-Based	Nguyen & Gu (2013). Miceli & Visocnik-Murray (2005), Wenden (2001)	Learner strategy training, like learners' metacognitive knowledge and skills, can improve self-regulation and metacognitive awareness.	Provide diverse strategies to reach different learner needs.

The above table presents a range of approaches to promoting learner autonomy in language learning. These approaches are grounded in valuable studies and findings. To begin with, the Resource-Based Approach revolves around the establishment of self-access centers and learning materials as a means to make learners more autonomous. Another approach is the Technology-Based Approach, which highlights the positive impact of digital tools such as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) on language skills and metacognitive development. Moreover, the Curriculum-Based Approach focuses on the integration of project-based learning and process syllabi, which involve learners in decision-making and encourage autonomy and self-evaluation. Regarding the Teacher-Based Approach, it is clear that teacher autonomy plays a critical role in the development of learner autonomy. According to Thanasoulas (2000), “to posit ways of fostering learner autonomy is certainly to posit ways of fostering teacher autonomy.” Teachers who participate in reflective practices and awareness training are better equipped to adapt their pedagogical strategies and lay out a more autonomous environment. In the Classroom-Based Approach, portfolios, cooperative learning, and self- and peer assessment are employed as tools to enable both learner autonomy and collaboration. However, it is important, though perhaps not always emphasized, that a balance must be reached between interdependence and autonomy. Meanwhile, the Learner-Based Approach places a strong emphasis on the role of metacognitive strategy training in promoting self-regulation and autonomy. To a greater or lesser degree, these stated approaches demonstrate the importance of different strategies, the effective integration of technology, and the continuous development of teachers in supporting learner autonomy.

It must be underlined that assuming all students will understand how autonomy works simply by giving them the responsibility to take control of their learning is a mistake. Conversely, learners need to be trained to handle autonomy, as the process of learning to take the initiative is far more complex than simply stepping back and letting students take over. In support of this, Ribbe and Bezanilla (2013) identified three main principles for scaffolding learner autonomy derived from Little’s extension of Holec’s ideas: allowing learner involvement in defining learning targets,

methods, and content; encouraging learner reflection for self-monitoring and self-assessment; and immersing learners in authentic learning environments and a community of practice. Their study further underlined the important roles of tutors in providing scaffolding for learners throughout the process. The latter, they argued, can pave the way for a balance between independence and support for learner autonomy development (Ribbe, & Bezanilla, 2013).

Therefore, in higher education, it is the teacher who sets the stage and provides the necessary conditions for the development of EFL learner autonomy. Teachers, regardless of the challenges they face such as policy constraints and different characteristics of learners, play a major role in cultivating the skills and strategies that enable students to become autonomous learners (Wiraningsih & Santosa, 2020). It is no surprise that there is a strong correlation between the effective implementation of autonomous learning and teachers' own autonomy. Little (1995) was among the earliest scholars to identify this relationship:

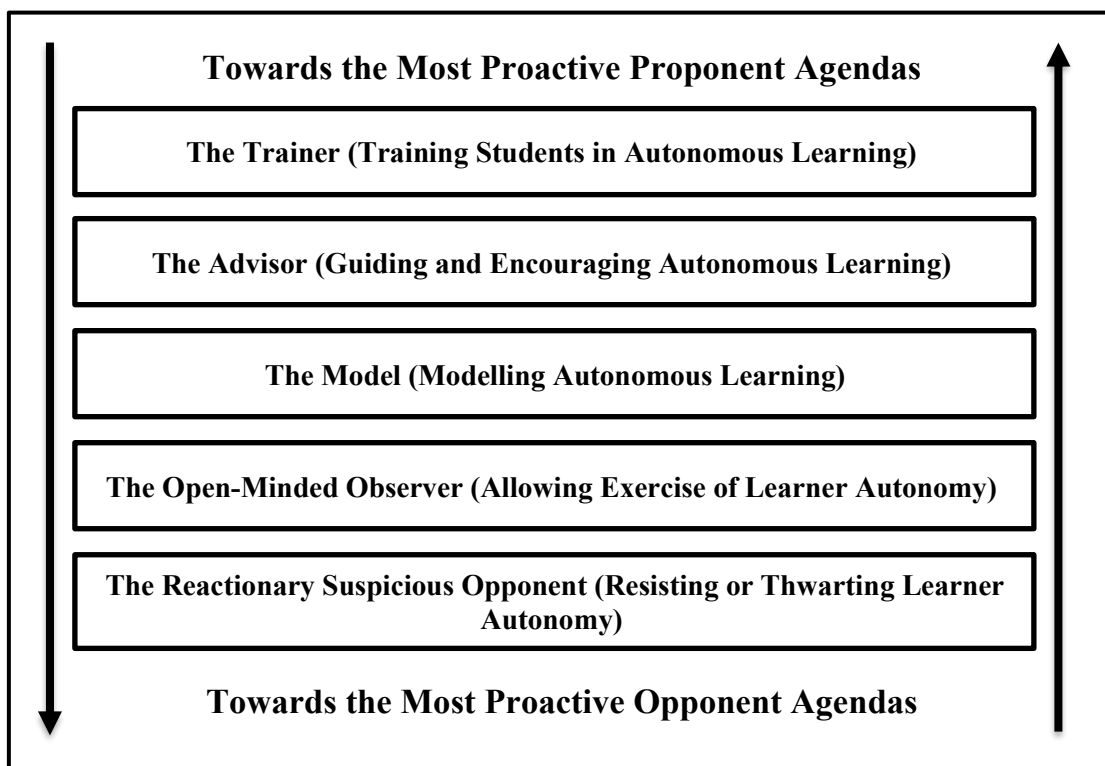
Genuinely successful teachers have always been autonomous in the sense of having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploring the freedom that this confers (p. 179).

Little (1995) further observed that “language teachers are more likely to succeed in promoting learner autonomy if their own education has encouraged them to be autonomous” (p. 180), pointing to teachers' own experiences of autonomous learning either as learners of the target language or as professionals.

To better understand how teachers can contribute to the development of learner autonomy, Missoum's (2021) recent model identifies six different teacher roles, or ‘agendas’ that reflect varying levels of support for, or resistance to, the cultivation of learner autonomy. According to Missoum (2021), these roles are not fixed; teachers may shift between them depending on their teaching style, the needs of their students, and the specific context of the classroom. The figure below is an illustration of these six teachers' roles:

Figure 1.2

A Model for Teacher Roles in the Development of Learner Autonomy (Adopted from Missoum, 2021)



As shown in the figure above, adopted from Missoum (2021), the end of the spectrum is the “Suspicious Opponent”. Teachers in this role, sometimes unintentionally, stay in the way of learner autonomy development, because their teaching strategies do not go hand in hand with the principles of autonomy and learner-centered teaching. For instance, in an Algerian university, Bensemmane-Ihaddaden (2008) found that some older teachers “view learner autonomy as a threat to their status” (p. 257). The “Open-Minded Observer” may allow possible situations where autonomous student behaviors are allowed but does not actively seek to develop them. On the other hand, the “Model” role involves teachers who can actively demonstrate autonomous learning themselves, which may help students understand what it actually means to be an autonomous learner. As for the “Advisor” role, teachers guide students toward autonomy by offering advice and feedback and they encourage self-reflection. At the most proactive end of the continuum is the “Trainer.” These are the kind of teachers that train students in the skills needed for autonomous learning. As a case in point, they explicitly teach a wide range of skills,

such as self-regulation, goal-setting, time management, self- and peer assessment, etc. In this very specific context, Thanasoulas (2000) notes that “there has to be a teacher who will adapt resources, materials, and methods to the learners’ needs and even abandon all this if need be.” It is further noted that teachers should be more aware of the roles outlined above, so as to make intentional steps to develop and maintain an autonomous classroom climate (Missoum, 2021).

Although teachers can use a range of roles and strategies to develop autonomous learning, no single approach has been proven as the only effective one. It is therefore sensible to claim that the most suitable approach is in combining several of the methods reviewed earlier by Daflizar (2023), with particular emphasis on the “Trainer” role in Missoum’s Model, particularly within the Algerian higher education system. However, autonomy, as Candy (1991) remarks “takes a long time to develop, and—simply removing the barriers to a person’s ability to think and behave in certain ways may not allow him or her to break away from old habits or old ways of thinking” (p. 124).

1.1.6. EFL Learner Autonomy in Algerian Higher Education

While the concept has been explored within language education for approximately 40 years, its specific implications for Algerian universities are a more recent area of investigation. Unlike Western and East Asian educational contexts, research on learner autonomy in Algeria is still limited (Smith et al., 2018). However, Smith et al. (2018) dispassionately argue that “it is precisely because the teaching and learning circumstances in developing countries tend to be so challenging that engaging and developing learner autonomy can be a pressing priority for participants concerned” (p. 14). The academic discourse surrounding learner autonomy has recently been gradually expanding in Algeria (Boukhelkhal, 2024). Research on learner autonomy in the Algerian EFL context began in the early 2010s. This growing focus on learner autonomy may reflect a push toward learner-centeredness. Since this study focuses on the university level, a review of studies on learner autonomy within the Algerian EFL context as it relates to the LMD reform becomes necessary. The following table presents a list of the research reviewed:

Table 1.3

EFL Learner Autonomy Studies in Algerian Higher Education (2012–2025)

Author(s)	Title of Research
Idri (2012)	Education and Reform to Reach Autonomous Learners: Between Reality and Myth
Ghout-Khenoun (2015)	Learner Autonomy in an EFL Context: A Study of Undergraduate Learners' Readiness for Autonomous Learning at Bejaia University
Hadi (2018)	Investigating Learner Autonomy Among EFL Students and Teachers: Readiness and Concept Perception
Yaiche (2019)	Incorporating Reflective Teaching Practice to Promote Autonomous Computer-Assisted Language Learning: The Case of EFL Learners at Naama University Center
Senouci (2019)	A Tutoring Course to Enhance English Language Learning Autonomy Within the LMD System: Case of First-Year Students at the Department of English at Setif 2 University
Tebib (2019)	Fostering Learner Autonomy Through Writing: Metacognitive Perspectives
Missoum (2021)	Exploring Teachers' Agendas for Learner Autonomy at the English Department of Blida 2 University
Lakehal (2021)	Autonomy in Advanced Language Education: Considerations of the Sociocultural Dimensions and Their Impact on EFL Algerian Students' Learning Expectations and Attitudes
Selama (2021)	Students' Attitudes towards Autonomous Learning in ESP Context
Mezhoud (2022)	The Impact of Online Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic on Foreign Language Learner Autonomy
Chetouane (2022)	Understanding students' learner autonomy in the Department of English in two Algerian universities
Boukhelkhal (2024)	From Learners to Researchers: Exploring Algerian EFL Graduate Students' Autonomy in Dissertation Writing
Arib & Schug (2025)	Students' Readiness for Learner Autonomy: A Comparative Analysis of EFL Learning in French and Algerian Universities

To begin with, Idri (2012) explored the connection among education, the Algerian LMD reform, and learner autonomy. The results of her study showed that,

despite the reform's emphasis on the development of autonomy, learner autonomy remained out of reach. However, the study's sample size is limited since it exclusively gathered qualitative data from twelve EFL students. Expanding on Idri's (2012) study, Ghout-Khenoun (2015) examined undergraduate EFL students' readiness for autonomous learning at the University of Abderrahmane Mira in Béjaïa, Algeria. A Likert scale questionnaire was shared with 68 third-year students to assess motivation, use of learning strategies, and perceptions of responsibility in learning English. The study showed that students continued to rely on instructors and showed hesitation toward self-directed learning tasks. In other words, her study participants "have been shown to exhibit resistance and reluctance to be involved in activities that require autonomy (as for instance undertaking a research project or doing an oral presentation)" (Ghout-Khenoune, 2015, p. 185).

In addition to Idri's (2012) and Ghout-Khenoune's (2015) research, Hadi's (2018) study sought to ascertain students' perceptions of their own and their teachers' roles, as well as investigate their understanding of learner autonomy. The case study was conducted in the English department at Tlemcen University and the University Center of Ain Temouchent. 100 EFL learners and 50 teachers, as well as two general inspectors of English, took part in her study. The researcher employed questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews to ascertain that students had difficulties exercising independent decision-making in their learning, displaying a solid dependence on teachers. In addition, both instructors and learners exhibited insufficient understanding of learner autonomy.

Aiming to cultivate EFL autonomous learning in Algeria, Yaiche's (2019) study provided an account of an action research case study that sought to explore correlations between reflective teaching, CALL, and autonomous learning. The sample consisted of sixty (60) first-year university students at Naama University Center. Her study relied on the learner autonomy scale, observation, journaling, and interviews to collect data. The study revealed that reflection could improve teachers' own pedagogical practices. Similarly, a study by Senouci (2019) examined the role of a strategy-based instructional (SBI) course in promoting learner autonomy among first-year EFL undergraduates. Her research, conducted using a quasi-experimental

design, revealed that SBI tutoring significantly enhanced learner autonomy across cognitive, affective, action-oriented, and social dimensions. The latter may also suggest that adopting SBI in research and academic writing training could be more effective than traditional lecture-based approaches that tend to focus solely on content knowledge. Last but not least, Tebib (2019) examined the development of autonomous learning among Algerian EFL students through a creative writing project, which was conducted at Constantine University with a sample of 56 third-year students. His study provided evidence that effective creative writing projects can promote learner autonomy beyond the classroom borders.

Although previous studies investigated students' perceptions and preparedness for learner autonomy and ways to promote it, Missoum's (2021) research concentrated on teachers' "agendas" to use the scholar's term, and the wider learning context surrounding learner autonomy in Algeria. His research investigated the attitudes and practices of 71 teachers and 230 students at Blida 2 University toward learner autonomy, relying on four research tools: a questionnaire, class recordings of teachers' lectures, teachers' corrective feedback on students' MA dissertations and exam papers, and teachers' course descriptions. The results suggested that there is a mismatch between the theoretical appreciation for autonomy and its practical application in classrooms. According to the researcher, this gap is due to some obstacles, such as societal viewpoints, institutional structures, and management within the higher education sector.

Likewise, Lakehal (2021) provided critical questions that allow researchers to interrogate the assumption of learner autonomy as a 'Western' construct, and insisted on the need to develop context-specific approaches toward learner autonomy in Algeria. His research used an ethnographic approach (classroom observation, questionnaires, and student interviews) with 122 (100 third-year students and 22 teachers) participants at the University of Ahmed Zabana, Relizane, Algeria. It was revealed that Algerian classrooms are still teacher-centered due to traditional educational beliefs that act as inhibitors of learner autonomy.

Similarly, Selama's (2021) research investigated a particular educational setting: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Algeria. 40 engineering students

participated in his study by completing an adapted survey questionnaire. The questionnaire explored their perspectives toward and readiness for autonomous ESP learning. The research findings indicated that Engineering students at L'Ecole Supérieure en Sciences Appliquées d'Alger were willing to engage in autonomous ESP learning but still perceived the teacher as the center of the teaching/learning process. These findings may underscore the paramount importance of developing context-specific strategies to foster autonomous learning in diverse educational settings.

Online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was anticipated to improve students' digital learner autonomy. However, Mezhoud's (2022) research revealed the contrary. Her research examined the influence of online education on the autonomy of foreign language learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. A sample of 60 second-year students from the ENS of Constantine participated in a questionnaire. According to the study's findings, the hypothesis that online education would foster autonomous learning among Algerian university students was disconfirmed. It was apparent that the study participants still lacked autonomous learning abilities. Thus, Mezhoud's (2022) findings go hand in hand with the majority of the aforecited studies (e.g. Ghout-Khenoun, 2015; Hadi, 2018; Idri, 2012; Lakehal, 2021; Missoum, 2021; Selama, 2021).

Conversely, Chetouane (2022) questioned the premise of Algerian students as inactive learners who lack learner autonomy. His mixed-methods study (questionnaires and interviews) involved students and teachers from two Algerian universities, and was aimed at investigating how learner autonomy is understood within English departments. Although his findings indicated common perspectives on learner autonomy as independence and responsibility, Chetouane suggested looking beyond language proficiency, cultural stereotypes, and classroom walls to better understand how autonomy functions and is achieved by learners in Algeria.

As far as the exploration of learner autonomy in the context of writing and doing research is concerned, Boukhelkhal (2024) examined learner autonomy among graduate students who are trusted to act as researchers and write their Master's dissertations. Through the use of an online questionnaire administered to teachers and

graduate students from six Algerian universities, the researcher investigated 65 participants' perceived significance of learner autonomy, students' readiness to engage in research, and the challenges they faced in maintaining autonomy in the course of writing their dissertations. Generally, the study revealed that, relying on both students' and teachers' perspectives, learner autonomy was widely reported as important; however, graduate students still struggled to exercise it during dissertation writing because of their reliance on supervisors and limited research-related skills.

Finally, in another recent study, Arib and Schug (2025) evaluated language learner autonomy among first-year undergraduate English majors in Algeria and France. A questionnaire was administered to students at two universities in the two countries. The findings showed that the majority of students had limited levels of learner autonomy. Many of them tended to rely heavily on teachers when making learning-related decisions, particularly among Algerian students. Therefore, raising students' awareness of learner autonomy and supporting its development in higher education, especially in Algerian universities, is more necessary than ever before.

It is now clear that researchers, as previously discussed, have given different interpretations of learner autonomy. One would argue that autonomy is but a heavily context-dependent (context-sensitive) construct. Its meaning may vary depending on where, when, how, and by whom it is used. Therefore, in the following section, it is important to consider the context of the current study, which focuses on EFL students' writing skills in general and their writing of academic research proposals in particular.

1.2. Research Proposal Writing in EFL Classrooms

Writing has continuously occupied a major status in post-graduate research, because it is the primary tool through which Master's and doctoral students express their research ideas and the main criterion on which their academic performance is assessed. Research proposal writing can be a source of high levels of anxiety. It may be even more challenging for Master's students who are required to compose a proposal without adequate experience/expertise. The emphasis on the EFL writing teaching-learning process was selected because English is the language most students in Algeria currently learn, and writing research in English in the higher education setting has recently become more significant than it used to be. Therefore, the

following section discusses key concepts related to writing as a broad language skill, and then more specifically to research proposal writing.

1.2.1. Nature of Writing

It is a truism to assert that, among the four skills required in language learning, writing is considered the center of teaching and learning for success in higher education. From a historical perspective, writing was seen as a graphic representation of speech and communication. In this context, Crystal (1995) views writing as “a way of communicating which uses a system of visual marks made on some kind of surface. It is one kind of graphic expression” (p. 257). One can understand that writing had been limited to the mastery of accurate knowledge of the language. However, with the emergence of language teaching and learning theories, the perception of writing has witnessed a considerable change among researchers due to its multidimensional nature. Writing is perceived by Kucer (2004) as:

Writing is not simply speech written down. Although there are times when the two language modes share many internal characteristics, especially when the context and purpose for the communication are similar, there also exist significant differences. Consequently, written language does not fully reflect any individual’s spoken language patterns (p. 67).

With the advent of communicative language teaching, the nature of writing has changed. In the EFL context, writing has become more valued, and the move toward “teaching language as a system of communication rather than as an object of study” (Weigle, 2002, p. 1) has become increasingly adopted by researchers. The idea that writing is only for pattern drills is no longer accepted. In light of this former view, the process of learning to write is considered complicated as it involves a good working knowledge of the language as well as a range of other important skills. Writing is also considered “a process of creating, discovering, and extending meaning rather than a process of putting down preconceived and well-formed meaning” (Raimes, 1985; Shaughnessy, 1977; Silva, 1990; Zamel, 1983, 1987, as cited in Tsui, 2002, as cited in Freeman & Richards, 1996, p. 97). For Brown (2001), writing is a thinking process. In other terms, writing can be regarded as a problem-solving activity in which students are required to employ their cognitive and mental effort, such as

brainstorming and generating ideas, planning, drafting, revising, and editing their written assignments.

Apart from the cognitive significance of writing, writing's social function is not meant to be neglected. Through the means of writing, individuals perform social roles and form relationships. Writing, like speaking, is a social activity. When drafting a research proposal, for instance, students follow specific guidelines, bearing in mind the purpose behind their writing. Lillis (2001) supports the latter stance. According to her, writing can be described as a form of social practice that necessitates the use of language with individual participation in both larger cultural settings and more specific educational interactions (Lillis, 2001).

Finally, as opposed to the speaking skill, enhancing writing, either in a native or second/foreign language environment, depends mostly on personal, cognitive, and social practice. For this reason, Flynn & Stainthorp (2006) underscore that writing is “a highly complex task that requires the orchestration of a number of different activities simultaneously and thereby places great demands on the cognitive system” (p. 54). Hence, it may be indispensable to explore how writing is instructed.

1.2.2. Approaches to Writing Instruction

When inquiring about the primary purpose of learning another language, the majority of learners would, perhaps, desire to reach fluency in the target language. Unlike speaking, it is noticeable that writing poses more obstacles for students and teachers alike. Of all the language skills, writing is possibly the most challenging skill through which to reach communicative competence (Chamot, 2005). Effective writing instruction results from teachers' awareness and knowledge based on scientific research, rather than guesswork, regarding methods and approaches to writing teaching. In effect, there exist many approaches and methods of writing instruction. It seems important to highlight the three most popular approaches: the product-based, process-based, and genre-based approaches. It is worth mentioning that each of these approaches has its merits and demerits, yet they can complement each other (Badger & White, 2000; White & Arndt, 1991).

1.2.2.1. Product-oriented Approach

As its name denotes, this approach primarily focuses on the end product of the student writer (Richards, 1990). Traditionally, this approach dates back to the audio-lingual method that emerged in the 1950s and early 1960s (Ferris et al., 2004; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Raimes, 1983; Silva, 1990). Teaching writing, under this approach, goes through four main stages: “familiarisation, controlled writing, guided writing, and finally free writing” (Badger & White, 2000, p. 153). To compose the final writing product, this approach requires learners to imitate a model text, taking into account the text given beforehand. For instance, students can be provided with a sample of a research proposal. They try to analyze its features carefully, imitate that example under the teacher’s guidance, and finally produce their research projects autonomously, considering the features they have learned from the given model. Here, the main focus is heavily put on the mastery of students’ linguistic knowledge, including grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling.

The product-based approach seems beneficial as it develops students’ grammatical accuracy and vocabulary, especially with lower-level students (McDonough & Shaw, 2003; Raimes, 1983; Zamel, 1983), who might need more scaffolding. However, this approach to teaching writing is criticized because it neglects the student writer’s process while drafting his/her work (G. Yan, 2005). In other words, the product-based approach does not take the writing process itself into consideration. In contrast to the product-oriented approach, which prioritizes the final written product, the process-oriented approach concentrates on the importance of the developmental stages of writing.

1.2.2.2. Process-oriented Approach

The process approach to instruction has generally come as a reaction against the shortcomings of the product-based approach because more attention was devoted to the underlying processes a student writer is engaged in when constructing a piece of writing, rather than the mere linguistic knowledge of the language. For this approach, the student writer is more important than the product he or she achieves. That is, the process-based approach sees a text as “a secondary derivation concern, whose form is a function of its content and purpose” (Silva, 1990, p. 16). Historically, this

approach traces back to the late 1970s. Unlike the product approach, the process approach enables students to develop strategies, including pre-writing, brainstorming, drafting, and editing, with less focus on linguistic knowledge aspects such as grammar (Badger & White, 2000; Hedge, 1988; Raimes, 1983; Tribble, 1996; White & Arndt, 1991; Zamel, 1983). With the process-based approach, there are different parts that are cyclical and interlinked (McDonough & Shaw, 2003; White & Arndt, 1991). They usually include the following processes:

1. Generating ideas: It is the departure point and presumably the most challenging stage.
2. Focusing: It means narrowing down the idea and considering the student writer's purpose behind writing.
3. Structuring: It refers to organizing ideas logically and creating a clear framework to follow for the writing process by organizing the introduction, body, and conclusion in a coherent manner.
4. Drafting: This means the stage when the student writer starts to organize the building blocks that make up the whole writing task, focusing on its openings and endings.
5. Evaluating: It means setting standards for evaluation by looking for grammatical and rhetorical flaws.
6. Reviewing: It is the final phase where writers realize the development of their writing product, which is approximately achieved.

Despite its popularity and dominance for a considerable length of time, the process approach has also been subject to criticism for several reasons. This approach does not support students with adequate information on the textual features or the social dimension to enable them to write successfully. In this sense, Myers (1997) posits:

I find that the university ESL population I teach is not one lacking in habits of observation, critical thought, or substance to express. Most of them are placed in ESL composition classes because they do not have enough control of English vocabulary or syntax to write fluidly, not because they cannot generate meaning (p. 1).

Badger and White (2000) held the same idea, suggesting that the process-oriented approach does not provide sufficient input, especially in terms of linguistic knowledge. Another limitation is that it does not prepare students for writing exams (Horowitz, 1986). Moreover, in this approach, assessment becomes problematic and difficult (Ivanič, 2004). Finally, the process approach does not consider the text type, context, and purpose of writing. In response to these limitations of the process approach, the genre-oriented approach emerged.

1.2.2.3. Genre-oriented Approach

As Hyland (2007) believes, the genre-based approach results from the communicative language teaching approach that eventually came to light in the 1970s. This approach may be considered an expansion of the product approach because both approaches draw attention to language knowledge. However, as opposed to the product approach, the genre-oriented approach looks at writing as a means of communication that links the student writer to the reader in a given social context (Badger & White, 2000). Hence, the primary emphasis of the genre approach is on the reader, considering the necessary conventions and principles that guide and control writing to reach readers' approval. The main features of the genre approach are summarized by Hyland (2007) as follows:

Table 1.4***Main Features of the Genre Approach (Adopted from Hyland, 2007)***

Explicit	Makes clear what is to be learned to facilitate the acquisition of writing skills
Systematic	Provides a coherent framework for focusing on both language and contexts
Needs-based	Ensures that course objectives and content are derived from students' needs
Supportive	Give teachers a central role in scaffolding students' learning and creativity
Empowering	Provides access to the patterns and possibilities of variation in valued texts
Critical	Provides the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses
Consciousness-raising	Increases teachers' awareness of texts to confidently advise students on writing

As is schematized in the table above, teaching under the genre orientation approach provides students with structured opportunities to examine and learn from authentic exemplars of diverse models of written discourse, including academic writing texts, creative writing, letters, emails, reports, etc. Therefore, this approach introduces students to different purposes of communication and written discourse patterns that match each genre. The genre-based approach to teaching writing found a wide echo in language teaching due to its advantages. The main merit of this approach is that it focuses on both text and context. In other terms, it recognizes that any piece of writing necessitates some kind of social setting. Furthermore, the genre-based approach permits students to engage in peer assessment/feedback activities, which can, in turn, benefit students in coming up with more decent compositions.

On the contrary, language specialists are also aware of the possible shortcomings of this approach. According to Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998), the genre approach is “restrictive, especially in the hands of unimaginative teachers, which is likely to lead to a lack of creativity and demotivation in the learners. It could become boring and stereotyped if overdone or done incorrectly” (p. 311). For this

reason, teachers may find it challenging to implement this approach when encouraging students to be creative and spontaneous. If appropriately used, however, it may lead to better writing outcomes.

From the previous discussion of the literature on writing approaches, it can be observed that the language classroom has been subject to a series of approaches to teaching writing. One can conclude that the three approaches mentioned above perceive writing differently, which leads to different dimensions of writing instruction, stressing three types of knowledge: text, process, and context. Therefore, Asiri (1997) proposes that, when different approaches are incorporated, considering the students' different types, their different processes, purposes, needs, readers, and context, as well as the entire social and academic context of the writing task, the student writer could reach the most satisfactory outcomes. Students need to be fully aware of the different writing processes by taking into account their readers' expectations when constructing a writing activity. In addition, they must use their linguistic knowledge of the target language in particular contexts to reach their communicative purpose.

After presenting relevant research about the learning and teaching of writing, it becomes vital to highlight the strategies used by EFL learners while writing.

1.2.3. Writing Strategies Used by EFL Students

For a significant period, researchers have been interested in the strategies employed by influential student writers. It is important to note that there is a systematic causal relationship between writing skills and student learner autonomy, in other words, performing well on a writing task is inevitably an indication and a reference about students' high levels of autonomy. In their recent study, Gultom et al. (2022) found evidence that there is a positive and close connection between autonomy and writing skills. It is worth noting that "students who have autonomy can manage and apply learning strategies to advance their language skills... [and] improve their writing skills" (Gultom et al., 2022, p. 1). Thus, a pertinent question worth raising here is: What are these language learning strategies?

Essentially, different models and classifications of learning strategies have been proposed in existing scholarship. For example, O'Malley and Chamot, (1990)

classification of language learning strategies is adopted in the present research regarding writing for academic purposes. O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) language learning strategy research is based on a cognitive psychological framework. According to the authors, learning strategies can be classified into three main categories: metacognitive, cognitive, and affective/social strategies. These categories were divided into 26 strategies. The reason behind selecting this model is inspired by the social constructivism theoretical framework of the development of learner autonomy discussed earlier. That is, their model, which is about cognitive, metacognitive, and affective/social strategies, approaches the process of writing in a more holistic manner, which also goes hand in hand with the different degrees and dimensions of learner autonomy, because the development of writing and learner autonomy both demand cognitive, metacognitive, as well as social and emotional aspects of learning.

1.2.3.1. Metacognitive strategies

In simple terms, metacognitive strategies are commonly described as thinking about thinking. For O'Malley and Chamot (1990), metacognitive strategies "refer to knowledge about cognition or the regulation of cognition" (p. 99). Knowledge about cognition may involve thinking about the cognitive processes exercised by oneself and others, whereas regulation of cognition may involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Brown & Palincsar, 1989; Brown et al., 1983, as cited in O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). In their opinion, the development of metacognitive skills depends on four main strategies: selective attention, planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation.

- **Selective Attention:** as discussed earlier, writing is considered a cognitive process; henceforth, recalling and reflecting on information are needed. In this sense, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) believe that selective attention occurs when learners are able to make decisions about specific information beforehand. Without this strategy, writing becomes a challenge for EFL students since remembering knowledge is the basic level within the cognitive domain identified by Bloom.

- **Planning.** Students cannot start drafting without careful planning in advance. Planning may involve different aspects, such as brainstorming, setting goals, selecting a strategy, and identifying specific common challenges. There exist many activities that assist students in planning effectively; using mind maps is no exception.
- **Self-monitoring:** as its name suggests, self-monitoring requires students to observe and become aware of their writing process, following the objectives they have set and whether their plan is being achieved. One can suggest that this strategy is useful as it improves students' independent spirit.
- **Self-evaluation:** as stated by O'Malley and Chamot (1990), self-evaluation can be considered as judging the outcomes of the student's final product. When students assess their work, they can work on their weaknesses and reinforce the strengths of their final product.

1.2.3.2 .Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies refer to the manipulation or transformation of the writing material. For O'Malley and Chamot (1990), cognitive strategies work directly on information by manipulating it to develop writing. Cognitive strategies encompass many strategies. Perhaps, the most practical ones in an EFL setting include note-taking, organization, summarizing, elaboration, transfer, imagery, and resourcing.

1.2.3.3. Social/Affective strategies

Social/Affective strategies mainly involve the learner in communicative interaction with themselves and others. For instance, they may involve cooperation, in which students collaborate with peers to compare and discuss ideas, solve problems, receive feedback, and so on; and self-talk, which is about what students say to themselves to feel encouraged to continue working. Social/Affective strategies play a crucial role in learning and writing. Similarly, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) state that affective strategies help learners better control their emotions, feelings, attitudes, and values.

The aforementioned strategies suggested by O'Malley and Chamot (1990), are summed up in Table 1.5 below:

Table 1.5

O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) Language Learning Strategies

Strategy	Example
Metacognitive Strategies	Selective Attention: It focuses on specific information during the writing process. Planning: Setting goals, brainstorming, selecting strategies, and identifying challenges. Self-monitoring: Observing and making sure the writing process is set with goals. Self-evaluation: Judging the final product to identify strengths and weaknesses.
Cognitive Strategies	Note-taking: Writing down key ideas in order to make use of them later. Organization: Structuring the writing logically. Summarizing: Condensing the main ideas. Elaboration: Expanding on ideas in writing. Transfer: Applying learned strategies from one task to another. Imagery: Visualizing ideas to aid writing. Resourcing: Using available resources for information.
Social/Affective Strategies	Cooperation: Collaborating with peers to discuss, compare ideas, and receive feedback. Self-talk: Encouraging oneself to stay motivated and continue writing. Affective Strategies: Managing emotions, attitudes, and feelings related to the writing task.

In light of the language learning strategies that can be used in a general writing EFL class, as clarified in the above table, Rivers (2001) even dares to argue that:

The accurate use of metacognitive, affective and social strategies to control the language learning process and the learning environment is the hallmark of self-directed language learning. In order for such learning to occur, learners must be able to determine accurately what their needs are, and they must have the freedom to take action to meet those needs (p. 287).

Thus, it is now necessary to explore the specific context needs of the present study: writing academic research proposals.

1.2.4. Research Proposal Writing in an EFL Context

This section deals with the components of a research proposal and the assessment aspect of it. According to Onwuegbuzie (1997), a research proposal can be defined as “a formal written plan which communicates ideas about a proposed study in order to obtain approval to conduct the study or seek funding” (p. 1). For first-year Master’s Algerian students studying in a research methodology classroom

at Medea university, coming up with a research proposal is part of the research methodology syllabus (see Appendix H). The objective here is to provide them with a detailed plan for their research dissertation and to have a better picture of what they aim to achieve in their second/final year. Usually, this is a challenging task for students in EFL contexts, especially because it is their very first research-based assignment that they need to write. The process requires students to review the literature, describe and formulate a problem, and present it in the form of a proposal (Gay, 1996).

Another common challenge students face is selecting a research topic. For instance, Henry (1994) observed that “on average, over half the students undertaking projects found it quite difficult to decide on a topic” (p. 58). Nonetheless, drafting a research proposal in itself can also be viewed as an opportunity for students to develop a wide range of transferable skills, such as communication (written and spoken), critical thinking, collaboration, decision-making, information technology skills, independent learning, etc. Developing a research proposal, as suggested by Van Ekelenburg (2010), helps students understand how to build a logical and solid argument that makes up a strong proposal. Similarly, Cadman (2002) maintains that writing and achieving a research proposal can be “a gatekeeping assessment tool used to confirm or deny the student’s entry from a first or probationary phase, into the second phase of candidature” (p. 89).

It is worth mentioning that the process and content of research proposal writing are usually different from one department or even from one teacher/supervisor to another. Therefore, it is crucial for students to carefully listen to and grasp the requirements, academic conventions, and styles that are instructed by their own department or classroom, and then adapt their writing/research accordingly. In terms of choosing research topics, for example, students can either have the possibility to choose their topics or select a topic from a list of research proposals that are suggested by teachers in a given department. The first option seems to be more common in the case of students at the Master’s level from the English department at Algerian universities. The first option, as observed by Styles and Radloff (2001), is generally less structured and therefore gives students the freedom and complete autonomy over

their chosen topic. When students produce these assignments, these proposals go through a detailed process of assessment and evaluation by teachers. This may require teachers to carefully examine each proposal against a specific set of standards to determine whether it adequately meets all the requirements for approval or further consideration. In addition, the task itself can also be used to test students' understanding of research methodology and other academic writing skills.

1.2.4.1. The Components of a Research Proposal

For a research proposal to exhibit the qualities of a well-written document, it needs to be clear, concise, and thorough. In other words, the concepts of the proposal must be logically structured and precise enough in order to justify the need and the significance of the study. To reach these objectives, three questions need to be answered: What will be achieved, why is it important, and how will it be done (Onwuegbuzie, 1997; Van Ekelenburg, 2010). A research proposal is usually composed of the following main components: title, table of contents, introduction, the literature review, proposed methodology, and references/bibliography. Some of these components are divided into other sub-components. The following table (Table 1.6) summarizes these main components and subcomponents:

Table 1.6

Main Components of a Research Proposal

Components	Brief Description
Title of the Proposal	Students are encouraged to formulate clear, concise, and informative titles that reflect the scope, variables, methodology, and context of their research (Cargill & O'Connor, 2013).
Table of Contents	Provides a concise overview of the structure and content of the research proposal, which is similar to a 'road map' for the reader (Dade, 2022).
Introduction	Includes background, research problem, significance of the study, objectives, research questions, and hypotheses. The introduction establishes a framework for the research (Wilkinson, 1991).
Literature Review	A review of existing research that identifies the need for the current study and demonstrates the student's understanding of the research area (Wiersma, 1995).
Proposed Methodology	Gives details about the research design, instruments, sample, data analysis, expected findings, and the study limitations.
References	Includes credible and relevant sources with proper formatting and consistency (Pears & Shields, 2013).

As clearly displayed in Table 1.6, a research proposal is not just a plan for conducting research; it can be viewed as a blueprint that outlines how the study will unfold. Each section of the proposal has its own purpose. The title is the first impression that the examiner/reader has of any research, so it must be clear, concise, and informative. It should accurately reflect the scope, methodology, and context of the research (Cargill & O'Connor, 2013). The table of contents comes next because it gives the examiners a quick guide to the structure of the proposal. This section helps readers navigate the document quickly and they can easily follow the research's logic and flow (Dade, 2022). Equally important, the introduction is another crucial part of any proposal because it sets the stage for the entire proposal. It provides background information, clarifies the research problem, and explains why the study is worthy of attention. The introduction allows readers to understand how the study fits into the larger academic conversation (Wilkinson, 1991). Once the introduction is developed, the student-researcher then needs to write the literature review, which demonstrates the researcher's familiarity with existing studies. It also identifies gaps in current

research and highlights the relevance of the proposed study (Wiersma, 1995).

The methodology section explains the approach the researcher will adopt to answer the research questions posed. This section consists of the research design, data collection methods, and how the data will be analyzed. It is important that the methodology is well-defined in order to assure the reader that the research will be carried out effectively. Moreover, it helps the researcher stay focused on their objectives. The last section of a proposal is the references section. This section is where the researcher shows the breadth and depth of their reading. According to Pears and Shields (2013), making the sources and references transparent proves the academic integrity of the proposal. To sum up, one may conclude that a research proposal is a well-organized document that clearly identifies the study's objectives, methods, and context.

Nevertheless, the aim of academic writing and research methodology classrooms is no longer limited to helping students meet research-related requirements only. In order to develop more efficient research skills among students, a growing emphasis must be placed on non-academic research competencies, such as learner autonomy. The latter, as discussed in this chapter, is necessary for any researcher, novice or veteran, to produce a well-structured research proposal and/or dissertation, particularly in learning contexts where finding and accessing appropriate resources is not easy.

1.3. The Missing Link: Learner Autonomy in Writing Research Projects in Algeria

Boukhelkhal (2024) posits that more focus should be placed on the development of learner autonomy in the context of research-based writing in Algeria. The research on how much learner autonomy is exercised when writing academic research projects, such as a research proposal, Master's or doctoral dissertation, is very limited. Existing literature on this issue is scarce, and Algeria's higher education context is no exception. Recent studies by Bakhou and Bouhania (2020), Hamzaoui (2021), Benballel (2021), and Djouima et al. (2022) have identified different challenges that EFL graduate students encounter when writing research projects in Algeria. The studies provided an in-depth analysis of these challenges and put forward

recommendations to address them.

Bakhou and Bouhania (2020) investigated the challenges faced by Algerian EFL Master's students who are required to write a dissertation. According to the study's findings, the students perceive linguistic difficulties as less challenging than sociocultural constraints, such as lack of supervision and family support, lack of cooperation from research participants, and insufficient academic training and preparation. One of the important recommendations of their study is that students need to take more responsibility for their learning to overcome the challenges encountered during the writing and research processes.

Similarly, Hamzaoui (2021) conducted a study on the challenges that EFL learners face in academic writing and research at an Algerian university. The study also tackled teachers' attitudes toward their students' research projects. It was revealed that coming up with a research-based project is among the most difficult challenges faced by EFL students. Also, teachers displayed negative attitudes toward their students' research due to a lack of motivation, insufficient background knowledge about research, lack of library resources, a sketchy number of courses related to research, and the unavailability of the Internet inside the university. Hence, it is of paramount importance to "review research methods courses offered in the Algerian universities, in terms of contents and teaching approaches" (Hamzaoui, 2021, p. 486).

In more specific writing-based writing contexts, the work of Benbellal and Khaldi (2021) addressed the difficulties experienced by graduate students in constructing the literature review chapter of the dissertation at another Algerian university. Based on qualitative data analysis, the study showed several significant hurdles that are mainly linked to linguistic issues, such as integrating recent and relevant scholarship, paraphrasing, summarizing, identifying research gaps, and other similar linguistic challenges. They also found that the primary factor that contributed to these difficulties is the inadequate opportunities for learners to improve their skills in this area. It was recommended that more relevant training workshops, focused on specific components of the dissertation, such as the literature review chapter, should be organized.

With a similar research focus, Djouima et al. (2022) explored another challenge that many Algerian students face in a research-based context: selecting a good topic for a thesis. Their research revealed that novice researchers' main challenges in selecting a research topic are low personal interest, lack of choice and freedom in the research topic selection, and time constraints. They also found that the participants expressed a preference for more "autonomy with regard to their choice of topic and supervisor" (Djouima et al., 2022, p. 433). The authors argue that the existing program lacks sufficient emphasis on research skills and call for curriculum revision so that research methodology becomes a fundamental component.

Henceforth, the aforecited studies have brought to light a gap in Algerian academic research, specifically the lack of exploration into learner autonomy during the research-based writing process.

Conclusion

In this chapter, learner autonomy in the context of writing research has been explored. The different dimensions of autonomy may account for the different ways researchers define and discuss the concept. Developing learner autonomy in writing research projects is not an easy process. From a pedagogical perspective, it is useful to view learner autonomy in writing research as a combination of knowledge, strategies, and behaviors that learners can cultivate by relying more on themselves. However, the degree of language learner autonomy is not stable. It depends on the learner, the task, the context, and the level of linguistic challenge.

One strategy that teachers can use to help students write more decent research proposals is to involve them in the assessment process of their work. In this respect, as Ho and Crookall (1995) rightly note, "while it is the role of teachers to engineer situations in which autonomy can be exercised, it is the learner who must actually do the exercising" (p. 242). It is a widely held belief that student self- and peer assessment in writing, if prepared and implemented properly, is most likely a logical extension of the pedagogy for autonomy since it places learners in the very space in which autonomy can be put into action. Therefore, the next chapter presents a critical analysis of the relevant body of literature by shedding light on the use of student self- and peer assessment in writing research proposals in EFL.

CHAPTER TWO: SELF- AND PEER ASSESSMENT TO CULTIVATE LEARNER AUTONOMY

CHAPTER TWO: SELF- AND PEER ASSESSMENT TO CULTIVATE LEARNER AUTONOMY

Introduction

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Conclusion

Introduction

Although pedagogy for autonomy has raised ample interest in theory and academic discourse for such a long time, it “still remains a minority pursuit in practice” (Smith, 2002, p. 21). Aiming to intentionally promote learner autonomy, one method that can be used by teachers is to involve students in the assessment process for learning purposes. Researchers and teachers need to “address the over-emphasis on summative assessments and evaluations and under-emphasis on formative assessments and evaluations” (Spector et al., 2016, p. 66). Formative language assessment is learner-centered. One of the most effective tools teachers can use to incorporate and improve formative assessment classes is self- and peer assessment (Burner, 2023). In his review, Burner (2023) also points to a growing field of research in formative language assessment tools that aim to develop students’ writing skills.

However, despite the wealth of research in writing, there remains a significant gap in data regarding research proposal writing in EFL, which is the context of the present study. Studies have demonstrated that the integration of self- and peer assessment for learning purposes is widely accepted and highly praised in the literature; however, it is far less widespread in the Algerian context, as many teachers are most likely to thoroughly underestimate its possible positive outcomes, and therefore, tend to resist its implementation. Teachers at university who may be willing to employ self- and peer assessment as a learning procedure need a stronger body of research upon which to base their decisions.

Accordingly, the present chapter takes a closer look at the relevant research done and explores how it relates to the current study. It starts by looking at assessment and evaluation in higher education. It goes on to present previous research on rethinking traditional assessment practices, as well as alternative assessment practices. The chapter then focuses on introducing self- and peer assessment to higher education and examines the role of these forms of assessment and feedback in EFL classrooms. Next, it discusses the use of rubrics as a self- and peer assessment tool to assess research proposals, and also considers the potential impact of artificial

intelligence on these assessment practices. Finally, the chapter reviews studies on the effects of self- and peer assessment on learner autonomy.

2.1. Self- and Peer Assessment in Writing Research Proposals

The section at hand is an attempt to explore the role of student self- and peer assessment in research proposal writing. It aims to show how these assessment methods can benefit students by enhancing their writing skills. By examining both summative and formative assessment types, we can see how self- and peer evaluations encourage students to take an active role in their learning. The section will also discuss the practical aspects of using these techniques, such as selecting appropriate rubrics and implementing the assessment in the classroom. The exploration, therefore, aims to elucidate the ways in which self- and peer assessment can promote student engagement and facilitate the development of independent and critical thinkers within EFL contexts.

2.1.1. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education

Assessment is a vibrant and diverse field. It is, without question, an indispensable component of the language learning-teaching process. When reviewing the literature, evaluation, assessment, and testing are terms in everyday use as far as the tertiary education sector is concerned. It may seem vital to clarify them. In reference to classroom practice, evaluation and assessment have long been employed interchangeably. The difference between the two terms, however, is not made clear in the literature. Richards and Schmidt (2002) define evaluation as a broad term that involves making judgments on the quality or value of both the education program and the individuals in the program to take necessary decisions and actions. It is worth mentioning that evaluation procedures are carried out through assessment. As far as the purpose is concerned, evaluation is undertaken to serve the whole educational program, whereas the assessment's primary concern is related to the students' achievement and progress. Similarly, Reeves (2000) states that "the term of evaluation should be used mainly for programs while assessment to students". He adds that, "in short, we assess people and evaluate things" (p. 102).

Despite its popularity in the literature, it seems hard to define assessment. There is no clear-cut definition of assessment because scholars look at it differently.

According to the researcher's review of the literature, researchers seem to look at assessment from three different perspectives: purpose, use, and context. As far as the EFL/ESL setting is concerned, assessment is used primarily to describe a range of procedures used to obtain information about students' learning and progress (Miller et al., 2009). To elaborate, assessment can be considered a process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data regarding students' performance and learning.

The outcome of the assessment is integral to the evaluation process. In line with this view, Nunan (1992) draws attention to the fact that evaluating learners is not a straightforward or isolated practice. Instead, it involves a layered process: on one hand, it requires the careful collection and interpretation of evidence about student learning (what we typically refer to as assessment) and on the other, it serves as a foundation for making informed decisions that shape the broader educational program. In this sense, evaluation operates both diagnostically and strategically within the learning environment.

2.1.2. Rethinking Traditional Assessment Practices

Assessment plays a central role in higher education because it dramatically influences how teachers teach, how students learn, and how universities make decisions. According to Gipps (1994), assessment practices, in recent decades, have been dramatically redefined “from a testing and examination culture to an assessment culture” (p. 1). Illustratively, she further adds that the traditional psychometric model, dominated by discrete-point items, does not suffice to address purposes of assessment beyond comparing an individual's performance or knowledge with that of others. She also warned that if tests are designed for purposes other than to improve learning, they may, as Gipps (1994) argues, lead to negative washback effects on both the individual and the educational system.

Essentially, there exist two main approaches to assessment: traditional and alternative assessment. One can also mention that assessment can be regarded as summative or formative. Other researchers refer to the two approaches as Assessment of Learning (AoL) and Assessment For Learning (AfL) (Stiggins et al., 2007). The late 1980s marked a turning point in the study of AfL, partly as a result of Crooks (1988) influential review of classroom assessment and Sadler's (1989) study on the

positive role of using formative assessment. Unlike AoL, the principles of AfL seek to place the student at the center of the learning experience (Crooks, 1988). In order to clarify how traditional assessment differs from more modern approaches, especially in terms of their purpose, target audience, and how they are carried out, the table below compares Assessment for Learning and Assessment of Learning , based on the summary provided by Stiggins et al. (2007):

Table 2.1***Differences Between Assessment for Learning and Assessment of Learning****(Adopted from Stiggins et al., 2007)*

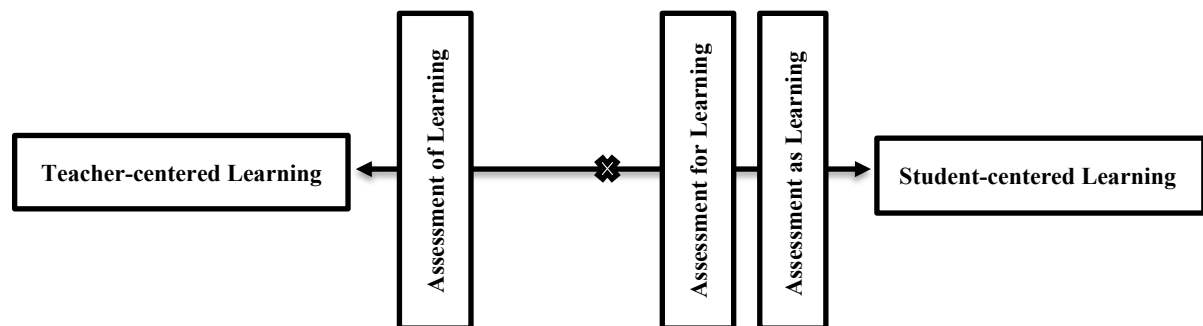
	Assessment for Learning	Assessment of Learning
Reasons for Assessing	Help students meet more standards; support ongoing student growth; improvement	Document individual or group achievement or mastery of standards; measure achievement at a point in time for purposes of reporting; accountability
Audience	Students about themselves	Others about students
Focus of Assessment	Specific achievement targets selected by teachers that enable students to build toward standards	Achievement standards for which schools, teachers, and students are held accountable
Time	A process during learning	An event after learning
Primary Users	Students, teachers, parents	Policy makers, program planners, supervisors, teachers, students, parents
Utility	Provide students with insight to improve achievement; help teachers diagnose and respond to student needs; help parents see progress over time; help parents support learning	Certify student competence; sort students according to achievement; promotion and graduation decisions; grading
Teacher's Role	Transform standards into classroom targets; inform students of targets; build assessments; adjust instruction based on results; offer descriptive feedback to students; involve students in assessment	Administer the test carefully to ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness of results; use results to help students meet standards; interpret results for parents; build assessments for report card grading
Student's Role	Self-assess and keep track of progress; contribute to setting goals; act on classroom assessments to be able to do better next time	Study to meet standards; take the test; strive for the highest possible score; avoid failure
Primary Motivator	Belief that success in learning is achievable	Threat of punishment/ promise of rewards
Examples	Using rubrics with students; student self-assessment; descriptive feedback to students	Achievement tests; final exams; placement tests; short cycle assessments

As summarized in Table 1.6, AoL occurs after instruction has concluded for the sake of checking what students have learned and to communicate their achievement to external stakeholders, be it through standardized tests, final exams, or report card grades. The criticism surrounding grades is as old as the system itself. The literature has shown that “grades are inaccurate and unreliable; they provide overly simplistic reductions of student achievement; and they orient students towards competition rather than learning” (Nieminen et al., 2026). In contrast, AfL is embedded within the learning process itself because it is used formatively to guide instruction, support student learning, and trigger a sense of agency in learners. The focus in AfL is not on measuring performance for external reporting, but on supporting learners through feedback that helps students better understand how to move forward.

In addition to AoL and AfL, Earl (2006) introduced a third category called Assessment as Learning (AaL). The following figure clearly illustrates how these three forms of assessment differ in purpose and focus (see Figure 2.1):

Figure 2.1

Earl’s (2006) Framework for Learning Assessment



According to Earl’s (2006) framework, the aforementioned forms of assessment can be positioned along a continuum that ranges from teacher-centered to Learner-Centered Education (LCE). At the teacher-centered end lies the AoL approach, in which educators assume responsibility for the assessment process. Teachers, as far as AoL is concerned, are expected to gather evidence of student achievement, determine whether learning objectives have been met, and assign grades. In stark contrast, AaL is situated at the learner-centered end of the continuum, where students take an active role in monitoring and evaluating their own learning progress, and teachers act as

facilitators. The third type of assessment is AfL, which occupies a middle ground between the two extremes because it calls for a more collaborative approach wherein both teachers and learners share responsibility. Accordingly, AfL and AaL are generally seen as formative, whereas AoL remains summative in nature.

It seems vital to provide an overview of the terminologies mentioned above related to assessment. In effect, traditional assessment means quantifying or measuring students' performance or ability through tests. Therefore, it can be said that traditional assessment is used to refer to testing. For Brown (2004) and Richards and Schmidt (2002), a test is a formal and systematic way used to collect quantitative information about students' ability, knowledge, or performance. In other terms, testing includes scoring students' performance in a particular area. Basically, tests are mainly undertaken to come up with scores for evaluation purposes for the sake of administrative procedures.

It is relevant to differentiate between two common types of tests: standardized tests and teacher-based tests. While the former are a formal test, the latter are seen as an informal sort of test. In more precise terms, experts mainly design standardized tests or examinations, whereas a teacher-based test, as its name denotes, is prepared by teachers. The main difference between them is in their content and format, but the objective remains the same: measuring students' progress or achievement. For instance, language proficiency tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) are examples of standardized tests.

From a purpose standpoint, traditional assessment can be considered a summative assessment. The latter approach refers to assessment tasks that produce a grade or score, which is then used to evaluate how well a student has performed (Irons, 2008). These judgments, Irons (2008) adds, "will be used to determine the classification of award at the end of a course or programme" (p. 7). Thus, summative assessment summarizes students' achievement, and it focuses on a score or mark. It is usually done periodically after a given period of teaching, especially at the end of a school term, course, or teaching unit, for the sake of measuring what the students have acquired.

From a historical perspective, traditional assessment traces back to behaviorism, taking into account “the product” instead of “the process” (Brown, 2004, p. 8). For a considerable length of time, testing dominated the field of assessment research. It was firmly believed that traditional assessment is objective, reliable, and valid (McNamara, 2000). Nevertheless, from the standpoint of education and language learning, traditional assessment has been criticized and challenged. At present, testing is viewed as “a time-consuming and effort-demanding activity, and all too often it uses up valuable class time usefully” (Benmostefa, 2014, p. 67). Benmostefa (2014) adds that:

The ELT situation in Algeria is still largely dominated by the three ‘T’s’: teacher, textbook and test, in other words, a teacher-centred pedagogy in which the prescribed textbook is the only teaching-learning material and ultimately, summative testing represents the lion’s share in the overall assessment process (p. 88).

Arguably, researchers criticized traditional assessment because it does not “provide the day-to-day information needed in the classroom” (Stiggins et al., 2007, p. 34). That is to say, since testing is undertaken at the end of instruction, the focus is not on how well students’ knowledge and skills have improved but rather on measuring how much students have learned. Supporting Stiggins et al.’s (2007) view, Gipps (1994) concluded that when teachers use the teach-to-the-test method, students seem to be unable to transfer their knowledge entirely and in an authentic manner to new situations.

French et al. (2023) argue that high-stakes testing can lead educators to “naturally align their curriculum with assessment, narrowing the content they teach to what will (and can) be assessed within the final examination” (p. 902). As a logical consequence, instructional focus shifts toward test preparation rather than deep learning, which can hinder students’ ability to transfer and apply their knowledge beyond the testing context. The education system seems to rely on testing to grade and rank students based on narrow criteria. If the dominant role of assessment is to classify learners by rank instead of using it as a tool to guide instruction, teachers are

denied the chance to identify and address learning gaps at an early stage (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Further, many researchers agree that summative assessment's prominent role is to assess students' lower-order thinking skills only. Shepard (2000), for instance, suggests that traditional assessment tools have focused on measuring discrete bits of knowledge and skills at the expense of critical reasoning and problem solving. In this sense, Gulikers et al. (2006) state that "the testing culture is characterized by so-called objective, standardized test instruments that focus on measuring atomized bits of knowledge at the expense of more complex, higher-order knowledge and skills" (p. 383). Put differently, traditional assessment deals with superficial learning taking into consideration memory and recall of separate pieces of information that might skip students' minds ten minutes after the end of the test. For this reason, scores seem to be low indicators of achievement as they fail to provide more reliable information about students' strengths and weaknesses in language learning.

One of the most famous critics of traditional testing in applied linguistics is Elana Shohamy (e.g. Shohamy, 2001), who observed that tests "are instrumental in reaffirming societal power and in maintaining social order, which explains their dominant position and the fact that not only are they unchallenged, unmonitored and uncontrolled, but in fact enjoy enormous trust and support on the part of the public and of institutions" (Shohamy, 2001, p. 375). Therefore, one can conclude that traditional assessment's main goal is to classify students into different types instead of providing reliable and constructive feedback on their progress and learning.

Moreover, the traditional type of assessment can be seen as "passive", to use Sadler's (1989, p. 20) term, because students are not involved in the assessment practices. To elaborate more, such assessment practices portray learners as objects of evaluation rather than active participants in learning and assessment (Boud, 2000). What is more, researchers go even deeper explaining the negative consequences of students' disengagement with assessment in any form. In their recent study, Ismail et al. (2022) found that summative assessment was less effective than formative assessment in enhancing students' motivation, lowering anxiety, and improving self-regulation skills among students.

These limitations are significant, since, as Shohamy (1982) argues, the psychological costs of assessment practices can lead to weaker learning outcomes. In addition to this, tests can help track students' progress in language learning, but as Hamayan (1995) points out, "they are not particularly useful for collecting information about students' attitudes, motivation, interests and learning strategies" (p. 229). Last but not least, when standardized tests take center stage, teachers may lose touch with their own assessment practices and feel less capable of and confident in judging student progress (Black et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, the main aim of the current investigation is "to find ways to fend off the negative effects of externally imposed tests and to develop instead classroom assessment practices that can be trusted to help students take the next steps in learning" (Shepard, 2000, p. 12). Due to the drawbacks of traditional assessment mentioned above, researchers have attempted to innovate in this area by reconsidering students' potential and vital role in assessment practices. Consequently, new techniques and forms of assessment practices came out under one broad term: alternative assessment.

2.1.3. Alternative Assessment Practices

The field of assessment in language teaching has been continuously developing in recent years. Alternative assessment was introduced in the field of language testing as a new approach in assessment (Bachman, 2000). Although widely used in educational assessment scholarship, the concept of alternative assessment remains somewhat loose and is subject to various definitions. Shohamy (1996) suggests "multiple" or "complementary" assessment as a more accurate term than alternative assessment. When viewed through a pedagogical lens, the term "refers to procedures and techniques which can be used within the context of instruction and can be easily incorporated into the daily activities of the school or classroom" (Hamayan, 1995, p. 213). As implied by its name, the latter came as a reaction against the shortcomings of formal/traditional assessment, not least the "standardized tests" (Brown, 2004, p. 251). Alternative assessment provides teachers with information about how well students are doing and whether they need more scaffolding (Brown, 2001).

According to Black and Wiliam (1998), alternative assessment can be defined as “all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged.” (pp. 7-8). For example, the Baccalaureate (BAC) and the Brevet d’Enseignement Moyen (BEM) exams rely heavily on numerical scores and fail to provide the kind of qualitative feedback that alternative assessment offers, which could play a critical role in informing both teaching practices and learner development (Benmostefa, 2014). It is designed to increase students’ learning as opposed to standardized testing. In close relation to this point, alternative assessment “consists of any method of finding out what a student knows or can do that is intended to show growth and inform instruction” (O’Malley & Pierce, 1996). For them, it is “by definition criterion-referenced and is typically authentic because it is based on activities that represent classroom and real-life settings” (O’Malley & Pierce, 1996, pp. 1-2).

According to Richards and Schmidt (2002), alternative assessment can be defined as a systematic process of gathering information and making inferences about students’ learning using a wide range of sources from real-world tasks. A variety of alternative assessment methods have been proposed, such as portfolios, conferences, diaries, self-assessment, and peer assessment (Brown & Hudson, 1998). Among the various assessment procedures, Falchikov (2004) considered self- and peer assessment to be the most effective because they help students take a more active role in their own learning and assessment.

In contrast to traditional assessment, alternative assessment is described as formative assessment. Formative assessment appears to be one major pillar in the teaching-learning process. Perhaps the clearest definition of formative assessment is that it facilitates situations in which “students guide their own subsequent learning, and teachers modify their teaching methods and materials so as to make them more appropriate for students’ needs, interests, and capabilities” (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 98). In similar and brief words, formative assessment refers to an ongoing process in which teachers and learners use feedback to improve both instruction and learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998). One would infer that this type of assessment does

not put only teachers in the position to make decisions. Instead, it enables both teachers and learners to collaborate for the common good.

Along the same lines, Sadler (1989) believes that it “is concerned with how judgments about the quality of student responses (performances, pieces, or works) can be used to shape and improve the student's competence by short-circuiting the randomness and inefficiency of trial-and-error learning” (p. 120). From the latter definition, one can understand that formative assessment’s primary goal is to orient students toward personal and academic development rather than students’ results or marks. It is considered assessment for learning (Dochy et al., 2006). Put differently, while traditional assessment is a quantitative procedure that is limited to gain information about students’ learning at the end of a school year, for example, alternative assessment is a form of a continuous process undertaken to gain qualitative information with the goal of facilitating students’ learning.

It is worth stressing that formative assessment, unlike summative assessment, gives teachers and students excellent opportunities to partake in the assessment process. In other words, to reach better learning outcomes, both teachers and students can make judgments on students’ work with the wish to improve learning. Unlike the summative assessment, the students’ role in the assessment practice is of paramount importance. One of the main functions of alternative assessment is to enable “students to see their own accomplishment and progress and consequently allow them to endorse part of responsibility for their learning” (Benmostefa, 2014, p. 171). It goes without saying that involving students in the assessment process, be it through self-assessment or peer assessment, is in effect a considerable responsibility that educators are to assume both pedagogically and ethically; it requires the development of a transparent assessment framework, the cultivation of critical thinking and learner autonomy, and the implementation of a classroom culture where feedback is constructive, collaborative, and formative.

In addition, formative assessment, as opposed to traditional testing, is continuous and ongoing and takes place during the learning process. These opportunities for continuous refinement and revision, though not sufficient on their own, may help students to monitor their practices more effectively and to build the

conditions necessary for more autonomous long-term development. Woods (2015) suggests that the regular use of formative assessment can increase learners' self-regulation skills and motivation. Black and Wiliam (2009) argue that one of the most important benefits of such an approach is that it enables moments of contingency through which assessment can guide the learning process in a more purposeful and effective direction. In brief, the primary concern of formative assessment, as suggested by Stiggins et al. (2007) is "to improve learning while there is still time to act — before the graded event" (p. 46).

To provide more input about alternative assessment, one can emphasize the main characteristics of nontraditional or alternative assessment. According to Hamayan (1995), the characteristics of formative assessment can be listed as follows:

1. "Proximity to actual language use and performance": O'Malley and Pierce (1996) viewed them as authentic assessments because they occur in real-life contexts.
2. "A holistic view of language": Alternative assessment provides the opportunity to evaluate students' "social, academic, and physical situation".
3. "An integrative view of learning": Alternative assessment enables teachers to assess and evaluate learning based on different dimensions.
4. "Developmental appropriateness": Unlike traditional testing, alternative assessment can provide information about individual students' lives and experiences.
5. "Multiple referencing": It permits teachers to gather a range of important sources of learning.

(Hamayan, 1995, pp. 213-215).

As discussed earlier, assessment is used as a general term for all attempts to gain information regarding learners' performance and ability. The most important role of assessment in education is to encourage and support learning (Gardner, 2006). Therefore, studies have demonstrated that effective learning occurs when assessment is integrated and seen as a central ingredient of the learning process. However, assessment may currently be regarded as a practice that is done by teachers alone. In other words, students might not be allowed to assess themselves and reflect on their

work progress. In fact, in the field of 21st-century education, proper attention has been paid toward the role of the learner as an indispensable agent of change in not only the learning process but also assessment practices.

To summarize the main concepts discussed earlier, the following table describes the main differences between traditional and alternative assessment practices (see Table 2.2):

Table 2.2***Traditional Assessment Versus Alternative Assessment***

Aspect	Traditional Assessment	Alternative Assessment
Type of Assessment	Summative (Assessment of Learning - AoL).	Formative (Assessment for Learning - AfL).
Purpose	To measure student learning and achievement.	To improve learning by providing feedback during the learning process to guide student development.
Focus	Focuses on quantifiable measures of student achievement at a particular point in time.	Focuses on qualitative feedback and understanding students' progress over time.
Feedback	Feedback is provided after the test, and it focuses on scores or marks.	Feedback is integrated throughout the learning process to inform and improve student performance.
Student's Role	Students have little involvement in the assessment process (passive role).	Students are involved in assessing their own and peers' work (active role).
Objective	To rank or classify students based on their performance.	To guide students' development and give feedback on their strengths and weaknesses.
Testing Approach	Tests are designed and administered by experts or teachers.	Assessments are designed collaboratively with students and sometimes based on real-life contexts.
Cultural and Ethical Implications	It reinforces societal power and does not promote learning (Shohamy, 2007).	It aims to democratize assessment and give students more voice and control over their learning.
Examples	TOEFL, IELTS, paper-and-pencil exams, and standardized tests.	Portfolios, peer assessment, self-assessment, and other authentic assessment practices.
Approach to Learning	It focuses on the final product, not on the process of learning.	It focuses on both the process and the product of learning.

As depicted in the table above, a detailed comparison between traditional and alternative assessment practices in the context of EFL/ESL education is presented.

Traditional assessment is primarily summative because it focuses on measuring students' performance at a fixed point in time through standardized or teacher-based tests. In contrast, alternative assessment is formative since it calls for continuous feedback, active student involvement, and real-world tasks to improve learning throughout the educational process. The table also deals with some differences in reliability, validity, impact on learning, and cultural implications.

Classroom assessment is no longer just about recording students' achievement; it now plays a critical role in supporting learning. Even though alternative and formative assessments are known to upgrade self-regulation skills, motivation, and higher-order thinking, their use in everyday classroom practice appears to be very limited. One common explanation for this gap is the persistence of institutional routines that tend to privilege traditional testing practices, as well as the lack of professional development that equips teachers with the confidence and expertise needed to implement these innovative techniques effectively (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Heritage, 2010). To obtain a clearer picture of what is problematic in an exam-centered education system, the following Heron's (1988) quotation exposes the core contradiction in how a student's competence is perceived and evaluated in traditional assessment practices:

He is seen as rationally competent to grasp the discipline taught by his academic superiors and to respond appropriately to their assessment. Yet, paradoxically, he is not seen as rationally competent to participate in determining his own academic destiny, nor in assessing his own competence (p. 77).

Are Algerian teachers, then, prepared to adopt innovative assessment practices and willing to embrace the principles of alternative assessment that may allow their students to be more autonomous?

In a recent study conducted in an Algerian context, Zahaf (2019) investigated the impact of formative assessment on the writing skills of EFL first-year Master's students, who were enrolled at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University in Mostaganem, Algeria. The study also sought to address a critical concern: the limited implementation of formative assessment practices in writing classrooms. The

findings revealed that formative assessment was not widely integrated into the teaching of writing skills at the University of Mostaganem. However, responses from both teachers and students indicated that formative assessment could have a significant positive impact on students' writing abilities. As stated in the introduction earlier, this study focuses on the implementation of self-assessment and peer assessment at the tertiary level. Therefore, the next section takes a closer look at these concepts, which are embedded within the broader term of formative assessment.

2.1.4. Introducing Self- and Peer Assessment to Higher Education

In today's higher education era, substantial attention is currently paid toward the students' role in assessment practices, as many researchers believe that teachers' assessment is not adequate to reach students' expectations regarding their learning and performance. According to Oscarson (2009), "as the role of writing in EFL learning increases, the students' ability to self-assess their EFL writing skills also becomes progressively more important" (p. 14). Hence, it seems more than necessary for students to take responsibility for controlling their learning and assessment. Paris and Ayres (1994) state that "students need to be active participants in assessment of their own learning rather than passive respondents to a series of tests." (P. 7). In effect, the literature on formative assessment is primarily based on Self-assessment and Peer Assessment (SAPA). The motives behind introducing these assessment practices are diverse.

2.1.4.1. The Role Self-assessment in EFL Classrooms

It seems a truism to assert that Self-assessment (SA) is a vital component of alternative assessment. Self-assessment, according to Black and Wiliam (1998), is considered "a sine qua non for effective learning" (p. 26). Little (2005) further observed that achieving student self-assessment practices in the language classroom are not the pursuit of the majority of teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to present a critical analysis of the relevant body of literature by shedding light on the concept of self-assessment.

In general terms, self-assessment deals with learners' involvement in evaluating their performance or tasks (Falchikov & Boud, 1989). In the view of Mousavi (2012), self-assessment can be defined as the students' own evaluation of their language

ability. He adds that students assess their ability in language with respect to three main aspects: students' ability in specific language skills, such as speaking or writing; their ability to use language in different domains or contexts, such as the university or office; and their ability to use different styles of language, such as formal or informal styles. As Andrade and Brown (2016) explain, self-assessment is a human and internal psychological process that enables learners to evaluate the quality of their own work by carefully considering three key dimensions: psychological factors (such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and motivation); interpersonal psychological factors related to interactions with peers, parents, and instructors; and other external or perceived standards. Moreover, it is an efficient technique that encourages learners to become aware of their learning process's strengths and weaknesses.

Similarly, Andrade and Du's (2007) definition of self-assessment is of paramount importance as they describe it as a formative process. In their words, self-assessment can be regarded as:

a process of formative assessment during which students reflect on and evaluate the quality of their work and their learning, judge the degree to which they reflect explicitly stated goals or criteria, identify strengths and weaknesses in their work, and revise accordingly (p. 160).

From the above definition, one can understand that self-assessment is a continuous and ongoing process that necessitates students to regularly and systematically review their own performance to increase their language abilities mentioned in Mousavi's definition of self-assessment.

Furthermore, Andrade and Valcheva (2009) seem to point out that students must assume responsibility for their own assessment by actively thinking about their performance via constant revision. The role of students in the process of assessment, then, is highlighted enough. The need to have criteria while assessing is also emphasized in their definition. Supporting this view, Taras (2005) agrees that a judgment cannot be appropriately achieved without standards and goals. Therefore, self-assessment is not a random process, yet it is a clear and guided process that allows students to assess their work in accordance with specific criteria. Obviously, criteria are considered the main characteristic of self-assessment procedures. Yet,

Boud (1995) says that the task itself is complex since learners must interpret and negotiate those criteria in ways that are determined by context and prior experience. Falchikov and Boud (1989) argue that “training of assessors should also aim to maximize discussion, understanding, and explicitness of evaluation criteria” (pp. 426-427). Last but not least, revision is also a vital feature of self-assessment identified in the above definition. Hence, self-assessment provides the students with necessary opportunities to review their own work on a regular basis. In turn, such a strategy may dramatically develop students’ language abilities and skills, and their overall learning experience.

As stated above, self-assessment is primarily undertaken by students. However, students’ success in assessing their work is critical due to the complex nature of the assessment process itself. The teachers’ role in student self-assessment should not be thoroughly neglected. Ross (2006) argues that many of the common pitfalls associated with the practice of self-assessment, such as the tendency to inflate grades, can, in fact, be effectively addressed, and even minimized, through deliberate teacher intervention. In this context Taras (2003) notes that:

self-assessment without tutor feedback cannot help students to be aware of all their errors’ and ‘student self-assessment with integrated tutor feedback is one efficient means of helping students overcome unrealistic expectations and focus on their achievement rather than on the input required to produce their work (pp. 561-562).

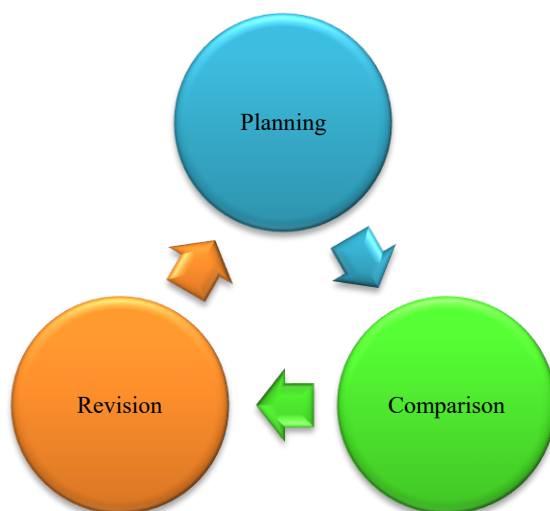
In much the same manner, Hancock (1994) stressed that assessment requires active participation from both learners and educators because each party should contribute to the process in cooperative ways. Samuels and Betts (2007) argued that self-assessment is a way to orient teachers to understand “good” practice.

When a new pedagogical practice does not achieve its intended outcomes, it is most likely that the way of implementation should be criticized rather than the innovation itself. To involve students in effective self-assessment, three important steps are recommended according to Andrade (2010): the articulation of expectations, during which the expectations or goals for the task are clearly set by the teacher or the teacher and their students together; self-assessment, through which students

monitor their progress by comparing their work taking into account the articulated expectations or goals; and revision, which is basically a necessary final step as students need to deeply reflect on and provide feedback for revision purposes. According to Bensemmane-Ihaddaden (2016), it is of paramount importance “to develop the critical capacities of the learners to enable them to know themselves through self-reflection, to become active and confident learners who can think for themselves and learn how to learn” (p. 163).

As stated before, self-assessment is considered an ongoing and continuous process that should be incorporated in the language classroom and not as a separate activity at the end of it. Despite the expanding body of literature on self-assessment for a considerable length of time, researchers and educators have yet to establish a comprehensive theory or model for this process. However, drawing on Sadler’s (1989) and Andrade’s (2010) model, this study proposes a three-step cyclical model for self-assessment. In this model, self-assessment is implemented through three interconnected and continuous stages: planning, comparison, and revision, as illustrated in the Figure 2.2 below.

Figure 2.2
Self-assessment Cycle



- **Phase 1: Planning**

For Andrade (2010), this phase is viewed as “expectation” (p. 4). It involves setting clear and achievable assessment objectives while identifying specific criteria for assessment. During this phase, students direct their attention to the assessment

requirements and discuss the specific criteria by which their work will be evaluated. These criteria help them grasp the performance expectations, setting the stage for the next phase: comparison. With the shift away from a competitive culture, which can at times be harmful and unhealthy, toward one focused on competence, Boud (2000) posits that self-assessment should be framed around a particular level of achievement, rather than in comparison to oneself or others.

- **Phase 2: Comparison**

This phase involves assessing progress toward the desired performance by comparing current work with pre-established criteria (Sadler, 1989). When students clearly understand the expectations and criteria set during the planning phase, they can compare their current performance with the targeted goals. In other terms, this comparison provides valuable information that helps students enhance their performance in the final phase. Arguably, “the current trend of making assessment criteria more explicit in higher education may have a deleterious effect on students' learning” (Norton, 2004). By way of explanation, when writing a research proposal, students first draft their work and then assess their performance by identifying strengths and weaknesses in their composition. They use various strategies to evaluate their writing in order to ensure that their work meets the task requirements, such as content, layout, academic tone, etc.

- **Phase 3: Revision**

In this final and critical phase, students are expected to make use of the feedback they receive so they can implement the necessary changes to enhance their performance. Sadler (1989) stresses that students must interpret the feedback they acquire throughout the assessment process. Therefore, students re-examine their own compositions, compare their assessments with the teacher's assessment, and make informed decisions about necessary modifications. As a case in point, when drafting a research proposal, a student might initially pose a vague research question or an underdeveloped methodology section. Through student self-assessment, particularly when the assessment is guided by a set of clear criteria, the student may be more aware that the research objectives need to be more specific or that the proposed data collection methods are misaligned with the research aims. Revision, in this way,

becomes more than a mechanical correction of errors; it evolves into a reflective practice that cultivates autonomy and critical thinking, which are both critical ingredients in research-based writing classes and beyond.

Fundamentally, these three phases form a recursive framework through which self-assessment unfolds. As Sadler (1989) points out, they should not be viewed as sequential steps; rather, they must function in a concurrent manner.

In their recent study, Panadero et al. (2024) sought to introspect about the internal processes that are involved in self-assessment. Their study's findings led to the formulation of the Self-Feedback Model (SEFEMO), a three-phase framework that consists of six main actions: read, recall, assess, compare, redo, and rate. The first phase allows students to be prepared for the assessment process by reading and recalling relevant information. In the second phase, as highlighted in SEFEMO, learners critically evaluate their own work and compare it to established standards or exemplars. The model also suggests that it is of paramount importance for students critically reflect and revise their work. Finally, the third phase students are expected to arrive at a well-reasoned judgement/assessment about the quality of the work achieved.

As stated earlier, more interest is directed toward self-assessment as one of the central components of formative assessment practices. According to researchers, self-assessment, if appropriately exercised, has a wide range of benefits. For instance, Dickinson (1987) believes that self-assessment is an indispensable tool, especially for language learners. It is suggested that student self-assessment motivates students to engage in more learning activities (Boud, 1995) and provides higher-quality dialogues among learners and instructors because learners have detailed information about educational goals (Orsmond et al., 2000). Likewise, self-assessment can also improve intrinsic motivation as learners assess themselves according to the goals that they frequently set. More importantly, some aspects of language learning, such as effort and learner beliefs are internal and can only be assessed via self-assessment. Thus, one might argue that autonomy, in its pedagogically meaningful sense, necessitates a teaching practice that aims to involve students in assessing their own work.

It is strongly believed that one of the most valuable conditions for promoting lifelong learning in ELT is the early development of learners' capacity to utilize self-assessment. Stefani (1998) argues that the primary objective of education is to upgrade self-regulated and lifelong learners. However, to cultivate such abilities, students must first develop proficiency in self-assessment. In agreement with Stefani, Boud (2000) argues that when classroom assessment is solely controlled by teachers, it becomes challenging for students to master their learning and acquire the self-regulation skills necessary for lifelong learning. In the EFL classroom, without reflection and self-monitoring, it becomes difficult for students to identify what they have mastered and which areas still require improvement. It may be inferred that doing self-assessment, henceforth, is considered both as a learning process and a teaching tool.

Admittedly, one of the less discussed yet pertinent benefits of using self-assessment lies in its potential to ease the burden of the evaluation process. In other words, it can dramatically minimize the teacher's workload by shifting part of the evaluative responsibility to the learner himself or herself. In many instructional contexts, particularly those known by large class sizes or intensive writing tasks, teachers find themselves overwhelmed by the sheer volume of feedback required. What self-assessment does, in such cases, is not a total replacement of teacher input, but rather a redistribution of responsibility that allows learners to revise their own work.

When learners are trained to apply clear criteria, as Andrade and Valtcheva (2009) have rightly pointed out, teachers spend less time correcting recurring issues. Understandably, some educators may hesitate to relinquish control over assessment because they may fear that such a shift might compromise the perceived rigor or reliability of evaluation. However, Boud (2000) posits that teachers benefit from self-assessment practices by being able to orient themselves toward higher-order tasks, rather than spending precious time providing feedback on lower-order concerns.

Similar to what has already been discussed, other researchers have also provided strong evidence of the significance of self-assessment. Oscarson (1989) summarized

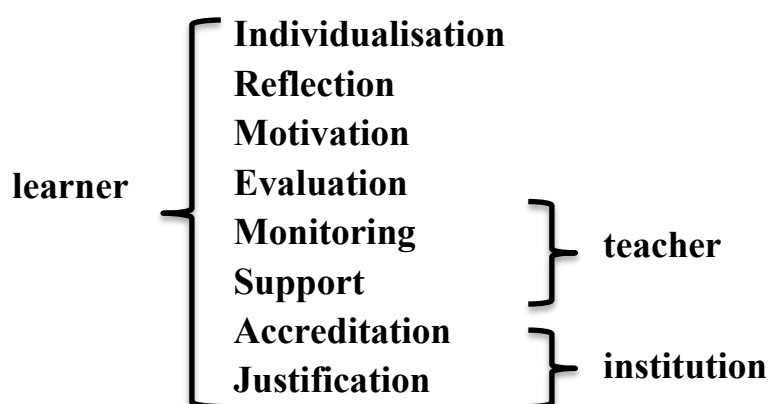
the advantages of self-assessment procedures in language learning (pp. 4-6) as follows:

1. Development of learning: self-assessment provides a kind of evaluation training for students, which in turn upgrades their learning.
2. Raised awareness: training in self-assessment results in increased awareness about the course content and assessment principles.
3. Improved goal-orientation: the practice of self-assessment makes students more aware of the possible goals within the context of learning a language.
4. Expand the range of assessment: the learner's own appreciation of his or her competence in the language may be superior to that of an outside tester.
5. Shared assessment burden: students' engagement in assessment leads to alleviating the teacher's assessment burden (Dickinson, 1987).
6. Beneficial post-course effects: training students in assessment encourages autonomous language learning after the course is achieved.

It is particularly noteworthy that self-assessment is valuable not only for students but also for all educational parties (teachers and institutions). The advantages of integrating self-assessment techniques are not limited to learners alone; they may also positively influence teachers and, by extension, the broader institutional context, as illustrated in Figure 2.3 below:

Figure 2.3

The Benefits of Self-assessment (From Gardner, 2000, p. 51)



One might argue that the integration of SA into language education brings about benefits that are not related solely to the learner. As Gardner (2000) maintains, self-

assessment, if managed correctly, can benefit learners, teachers, and institutions. From the learner's perspective, it enables new learning habits of evaluation and reflection, encourages goal-setting, and increases individualization in learning by allotting students more space to monitor their own individual progress and identify their own strengths and weaknesses on their own. On the other side of the corner, teachers benefit from the insights learners generate through self-assessment, which can enhance evaluation, guide monitoring, and help provide targeted support where it is most needed. Institutions, for their part, may draw on the cumulative data produced through self-assessment practices, and in turn can use it to demonstrate learning outcomes, support accreditation processes, justify the use of resources, and assess the overall effectiveness of teaching and learning. This would also justify and validate the use of different resources, such as funds, materials, and instructional time. Thus, student self-assessment may reinforce the value of autonomy, reflection, and accountability across all these levels of the educational system.

To better understand its process, it is important to briefly discuss Brown's (2004) suggested guidelines for how self-assessment should be carried out. First, it is important for students to be aware of the purpose of the assessment because they might not appreciate or accept the idea at the outset. Second, the tasks and instructions should be clearly defined. That is, learners should be given clear instructions and clear criteria with respect to how they are supposed to undertake student self-assessment. Martin and Albir (2003) assert that, "it is our belief that clear explanation of assessment criteria in class promotes the learning process because it helps students to understand what the course seeks to achieve and what is expected of them" (as cited in Postigo Pinazo, 2009, pp. 195-196). Third, one of the drawbacks of self-assessment is the threat of subjectivity. Learners, therefore, should be encouraged to avoid being either too severe on themselves or self-flattering and make sure their assessment is as objective as possible. Last but not least, teachers are expected to provide feedback on learners' self-assessment through interviews, for example, for the sake of gaining more reliable outcomes.

To reach the intended goals in an innovative teaching/learning practice, involving students in assessment (both self- and peer assessment) becomes therefore

a must. The literature dealing with classroom-based assessment in general, and alternative assessment in particular, reveals that self-assessment and peer assessment may also be seen as two sides of the same coin. These two practices are closely connected because each tends to strengthen the other in working toward a shared objective: building a learning atmosphere that supports learners to become more autonomous.

2.1.4.2. The Role of Peer Assessment in EFL Classrooms

Few, if any, language specialists would disagree that students rarely learn in isolation. The classroom as a social space invites learners to collaborate and share responsibility for learning through interaction with the teacher and with each other. Although teachers' assessment of students' work is an indispensable component of classroom practice, the literature supports the view that learners ought to be exposed to alternative perspectives, most notably those of their peers. Peer Assessment (PA) (also termed collaborative assessment, peer evaluation, peer feedback, peer review, or peer critique) is approached in accordance with social constructionist principles (e.g., Vygotsky, 1986), as it revolves around the role of social interaction among learners in the classroom. As discussed earlier, if students do not socially interact with peers, teachers, and/or parents, their development is less likely to take place. One can easily notice that the incorporation of peer assessment within higher education has been common for years. Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000) suggest that the use of peer assessment can, in effect, be considered a 'world-wide phenomenon' (p. 287).

Researchers have always considered peer assessment as one of the core principles of formative assessment and assessment for learning. Recently, there has been a considerable rise in a broad swath of well-documented literature on the implementation of peer assessment and feedback in the university context (Evans, 2013; Gielen et al., 2010). Peer assessment, most commonly, is perceived by educators as a rewarding didactic tool within the learning/teaching scenario. In educational terms, peer assessment can be unambiguously defined as "an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality, or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status"

(Topping, 1998, p. 250). It is a technique that allows peers to assess one another in which it may or may not include criteria that both teachers and students agree upon (Falchikov, 1995). Students can also actively participate in developing those standards (Boud & Falchikov, 2007).

In simpler words, peer assessment involves peers' grading and giving feedback on the works done by others (Davies, 2006). Other researchers concentrate on the collaborative nature of peer assessment. Supporting the latter stance, peer assessment is usually linked with teamwork. In this sense, Patri (2002) observed that students could figure out the assessment criteria collaboratively while implementing the assessment. Hence, peer assessment seems to deal with both the learning processes and outcomes.

In their meta-analysis, Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000) synthesized 48 studies with the goal of comparing peer assessment to teacher assessment. Surprisingly, the findings demonstrated that many of these studies confirmed the existence of similarities between the two forms of assessment. Likewise, Sahin's (2008) study investigated the use of peer assessment as an alternative evaluation tool in higher education, trained students to use the tool, and then compared their results to teacher assessment. Peer and teacher assessment methods yielded similar results. In light of this latter view, peer assessment can be a reliable and effective method that educators can use confidently. However, Thomas et al. (2011) assert that for peer assessment to be effective, teachers must integrate themselves into the process and abandon the role of sole assessor, which facilitates a necessary transfer of power to promote student peer assessment.

It is commonly agreed that peer assessment is also considered identical to self-assessment to a larger extent. According to Brown and Hudson (1998), "a variant of the self-assessment is the peer assessment, which is similar to the self-assessment except that, as implied by the label, students rate the language of their peers" (p. 666). Other researchers view the use of peer assessment as a dialogue between students. Sadler and Good (2006) suggest that when using peer assessment, it is important to clearly show learners the strengths of their writing and how it could be possible to improve it, in case there exists any weaknesses. Offering and receiving feedback is a

necessary ingredient of peer assessment. The latter should be seen as a dialogue that enables better feedback among students to ensure productive learning (Nicol, 2010). To reach this objective, Nicol (2010) adds that students ought to be given the opportunity to reach their own understanding based on the received message. In other words, students should be exposed to a lot of analysis by asking questions, discussing, and connecting it with prior knowledge.

Peer assessment at higher education institutions plays a crucial role in students' learning in EFL contexts. It may be as effective as, or even more effective than, teacher assessment in developing students' learning outcomes (Jongsma et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2019). According to many researchers, peer assessment allows students to improve a wide range of abilities and skills as a result of evaluating the work of their peers. Students may have the chance to analyze, monitor, and evaluate different problems of learning and the works of other students. More precisely, peer assessment may trigger students' higher-order thinking skills in a way that encourages student-centered learning. Like self-assessment, peer assessment plays an important role in helping classrooms become more learner-centered. Alzaid (2017) observed that:

Peer assessment is an important part of the move towards more forms of participatory learning. There is a need to apply it in our schools and universities since it is more adaptable to modern developments in the assessment of learning outcomes (p. 168).

In line with this view, Gipps (1994) believes that peer assessment is a social sort of technique that helps students upgrade interpersonal relationships among learners within groups. Peer assessment is also found to be a crucial instrument to help students become better cooperative learners (Van Gennip et al., 2009).

Another recent direction in research on peer assessment concluded that the practice of providing feedback was found to be more advantageous for students than receiving it (Cao et al., 2019; Harland et al., 2017; Ion et al., 2019), whereas other research supports the stance that both receiving and providing peer assessment deserve their fair share of consideration (Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Gao et al., 2023; Huisman et al., 2018; D. Nicol et al., 2013; Wanner & Palmer, 2018). These findings, to a considerable extent, confirm the assumption that in peer assessment contexts, the

processes of giving and receiving feedback, may be perceived, metaphorically speaking, as two sides of the same pedagogical coin.

Many studies have evidenced that using peer assessment is more beneficial than the traditional methods of assessment. For instance, in a study conducted by Sivan (2000), students expressed that peer assessment is an effective pedagogical strategy. To elaborate, they viewed it as a useful tool for developing critical thinking, learning from others' work, exercising more responsibility, making informed decisions, and developing a cooperative spirit in class. In the same vein, Lew et al., (2008), relying on a student survey, found that peer assessment had a positive influence on students' overall learning experience. In addition, the findings indicated that learners believed it had been carried out with a reasonable degree of objectivity. Put another way, students were able to assess each other's work to a realistically accurate extent.

In another study, Van Zundert et al. (2010) carried out a systematic review on the impact of peer assessment in tertiary education. More tellingly, perhaps, the findings of this study outline four dimensions underpinning the utility of the latter type of assessment. Firstly, the psychometric qualities of peer assessment (reliability and validity) are shown to improve when peer assessors receive adequate training and practical experience. Secondly, peer assessment-based revisions seem to play a central role in the development of domain-specific skills. Thirdly, the development of peer assessment skills tends to improve with training, and is influenced by learners' thinking style and academic achievement. Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, student attitudes towards peer assessment are positively impacted by both training and experience.

Similarly, Panadero and Brown (2017) conducted a large-scale survey in Spain that targeted teachers working in primary, secondary, and higher education. It was aimed at exploring these teachers' perspectives and experiences regarding peer assessment. 751 teachers completed all items related to peer assessment. The results showed that while teachers reported only occasional use of peer assessment in their classrooms, their experiences with it were generally positive. Also, about half of the participants believed that students were capable of assessing their peers in a reasonably accurate manner. Teachers who believed that students should participate

in assessment and who were willing to incorporate peer assessment were more likely to use it on a regular basis. In terms of their attitudes, the findings suggest that teachers' engagement with peer assessment is impacted more by their own mindset than by external constraints or institutional policies.

Until recently, Adesina et al. (2022) conducted a study that involved 165 first-year undergraduate students at a UK university assessing the impact of peer assessment on their engagement during group work. Their results revealed that both students' attitudes toward peer assessment and their use of it seemed to influence how they interacted and learned within the group setting. Moreover, the researchers argue that peer assessment has proven to be a rewarding tool for managing student engagement, particularly in modules or assessments involving large cohorts, where individual assessment becomes a far-reaching goal. For instance, if a teacher has a large class and is required to assess every student's research proposal, the monitoring process becomes difficult. This difficulty necessitates the use of alternative assessment strategies, such as peer assessment.

Furthermore, Lutze-Mann (2015) has described more benefits of peer assessment for students:

- It delivers consistent results across various evaluation criteria and tasks in a short timeframe.
- The data on student achievement generated by peer assessment is partially consistent with teacher assessment information.
- It develops interpersonal skills via explicit training on how to evaluate their peer's work.
- Through peer assessment, students gain the necessary skills to handle their learning autonomously.
- It involves students in the learning process and develops critical thinking skills.
- Students benefit from the critical evaluation and feedback provided by their peers.
- It also promotes social skills, such as cooperative learning.

Additionally, Race (1998) states that peer assessment can equip students with different qualities, such as:

- It boosts classroom motivation by satisfying students' core psychological needs for autonomy and relatedness.
- It allows students to take responsibility for their learning and development.
- It builds a learning environment in which mistakes are not considered failures but rather important opportunities for student learning and growth.
- It facilitates the acquisition of transferable skills, specifically those related to assessment, which are critical for lifelong learning.
- It redirects students' focus toward deep learning instead of rote memorization and shallow learning. (as cited in Vickerman, 2009, p. 222).

Although peer assessment introduces new opportunities for language evaluation, language testing specialists have voiced some challenges that require careful attention. First, students may have doubts and hesitations about doing peer assessment because they believe that the teacher is the sole assessor who can provide an accurate and reliable assessment (Kollar & Fischer, 2010; Spiller, 2009). According to Kennedy (2005), students' doubts about the fairness and reliability of peer assessment, along with their reluctance to assess their classmates, may undermine the validity of the instrument. Another reason for the invalidity of this assessment method could be students' insufficient language proficiency (Panadero, 2016). As a logical consequence, students may not approach peer assessment seriously or be actively involved in the task (Ashraf & Mahdinezhad, 2015). Second, there is no clear consensus on what makes effective peer assessment or on which practices can improve student learning whilst maintaining the reliability and validity of the tool. The reasons behind this lack of consensus lie in the many ways peer assessment can be practiced or used, as well as in the different approaches researchers have taken to explore its effectiveness from multiple angles (Van Gennip et al., 2009). In other terms, the main problem is that the wide variation in peer assessment conditions, methods, and outcomes makes it difficult to identify clear cause-and-effect relationships or draw consistent conclusions from existing research.

Third, according to research by Vu and Dall’Alba (2007), peer assessment may be a time-consuming method for it increases the workload for both teachers and students, especially at the beginning stages, since effective use of this tool requires adequate time for preparation, training, supervision, and intervention. As a result of that, peer assessment, as opposed to teacher assessment, becomes incompatible, if not in conflict, with an education system that is heavily focused on a testing and examination culture (Zhao, 2018). Fourth, students’ feedback during peer assessment may be biased or unrealistic because of their limited knowledge or experience with assessment criteria and procedures (Vu & Dall’Alba, 2007). Last but not least, students may also encounter ethical issues when assessing their peers, as they come from diverse backgrounds and have different learning styles and academic achievement levels; thus, their peer assessment may lead to “feelings of hurt or betrayal from comments or unexpected marks” (Vu & Dall’Alba, 2007, p. 542)

To address or lessen the effects of the above-mentioned shortcomings of using peer assessment, Fleckney et al. (2024) have recently proposed several measures that educators should keep in mind to reduce students’ hesitation and ensure the effectiveness of the process. Teachers need to:

- Explain the purpose and importance of peer assessment as early as possible, and demonstrate how it relates to the intended learning outcomes and course objectives to build student engagement (Adachi et al., 2018; Yucel et al., 2014).
- Include several iterations of peer assessment that allow students to review drafts, apply feedback, and improve their work (Kaufman & Schunn, 2011; Tuğlu et al., 2021).
- Position peer assessment as a formative learning opportunity rather than a summative assessment tool (Lerchenfeldt et al., 2019; Reddy et al., 2021).
- Design flexible peer feedback processes that can adapt over time and thus meet students’ divergent learning needs and perceptions about giving and receiving feedback (Howard et al., 2010; Reddy et al., 2021; Rotsaert et al., 2018).

- Use peer assessment actively and purposefully to help students learn the main content of the subject and ensure that it aligns well with the course learning goals (Hoffman, 2019; Sadler, 2010).
- Combine peer assessment with self-assessment to improve students' metacognitive awareness and feedback literacy and help them reflect on both their own and others' work (Cheong et al., 2023; Wanner & Palmer, 2018).
- Help students develop feedback literacy so they can better understand, evaluate, and apply the feedback they receive (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Carless & Boud, 2018).
- Provide clear assessment tools such as rubrics, scripts, checklists, and question prompts, and offer calibration and task scaffolding through training, modeling, and practice opportunities (Cheng et al., 2015; Gielen & De Wever, 2015; Latifi & Noroozi, 2021; Mercader et al., 2020; Noroozi et al., 2016; Reddy et al., 2021; Wanner & Palmer, 2018).
- Teachers should be provided with training, support, and institutional resources to design effective peer feedback processes and rubrics, feedback literacy, and emotional/cognitive feedback awareness (Ashenafi, 2017; Bharuthram & van Heerden, 2023; Cartney, 2010; Ibarra-Sáiz et al., 2020; Latifi et al., 2021).

Furthermore, to reach the aforementioned benefits of using peer assessment, teachers should be aware of a clear and detailed plan or template while attempting to design peer assessment techniques. Similar to self-assessment, the introduction of peer assessment necessitates a step-by-step progression process. Researchers, in effect, suggest that good organization of peer assessment and teachers' knowledge about the main features of peer assessment may lead to better learning outcomes. It seems useful to briefly summarize the main steps teachers need to follow when implementing peer assessment procedures. The following table summarizes this:

Table 2.3***Organizing Peer Assessment (Topping, 2003)***

Actions to Take
1. Collaborate with colleagues
2. Clarify the purpose, rationale, expectations, and acceptability
3. Identify cognitive, attitudinal, social, or emotional benefits
4. Specify the works to be assessed
5. Introduce the process to students gradually
6. Engage students in developing and refining assessment criteria
7. Make sure that participants have similar initial abilities
8. Organize contact sessions and determine the number and duration
9. Provide training, examples, and practice opportunities
10. Offer feedback and guidance during practice sessions
11. Share guidelines, checklists, and other support materials
12. Consider provisions for early and late finishers
13. Monitor progress and provide coaching
14. Evaluate the quality of peer feedback
15. Assess and moderate the reliability and validity of feedback over time
16. Communicate feedback to students
17. Conduct an evaluation

According to the data presented in Table 2.3, there are a number of steps that teachers need to bear in mind if they decide to implement peer assessment strategies. For Topping (2003), the practice of peer assessment needs to start with collaboration among colleagues to define goals and expectations for students. That is, it seems important to introduce the process gradually and involve students in developing those assessment criteria. It is also suggested to ensure that students have similar abilities and to plan the number and length of contact sessions. Thus, it should come as no surprise that both teachers and students need training and practice opportunities, and ongoing feedback before they can engage with self- and peer assessment. In addition, students are expected to have access to relevant resources in order to address the needs of early and late finishers and regularly monitor progress. Last but not least, the researcher would argue that there is a dire need for the feedback itself to be evaluated on a continuous and regular basis.

2.1.4.3. Feedback in the Context of Self- and Peer Assessment

Feedback, whether teacher-, peer-, or self-generated and whether positive or negative, holds significant value in formative and learning-oriented assessment practices. Research supports the view that feedback in classrooms should promote

students' learning and achievement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008). The influence of feedback on assessment practices is pervasive and powerful, and can be clearly seen in how it helps make assessment more developmental/constructive and less judgmental.

Recent scholarship on feedback at the higher institutional level does not have a similar focus to earlier research on the concept. According to Carless (2015), the old paradigm is concerned with feedback information, whereas the new paradigm deals with the feedback process, especially with the students' active role in demystifying feedback and putting it into practice. In a similar train of thought, Buckley (2025), in his recent article entitled, "What's so new about the 'new paradigm' of feedback?", contends that:

The fundamental insight of contemporary feedback research does not seem to be that there is a wider feedback process in which students need to play an active part; it is perhaps that students can actually be helped, encouraged and taught to play that part (p. 01).

Furthermore, the prevailing belief that negative feedback is most likely to harm students' affective engagement and decrease their motivation has, in recent scholarship, been subject to criticism. For instance, the findings of a recent study by Thao and Thuy (2025) showed that "negative feedback, while initially perceived as demotivating, often acts as a catalyst for renewed vigor and focus in students" (p. 01). This, basically, is obviously another way of saying that in delivering feedback, teachers and students need to reconsider how to strike a balance between offering critical/constructive feedback and keeping learner motivation high, so that feedback builds resilience and thereby backs up a growth mindset.

Admittedly, feedback is at the heart of the assessment process, but it is also considered a daunting and complex task. It is even more challenging for university teachers who already pour so much of themselves into the classroom because any attempt to provide feedback requires effort, resources, and costs. As a logical consequence, there needs to be a more clearly structured methodology to actively involve students in the assessment process, such as self- and peer assessment, if the situation is to improve and bring about the expected efficient feedback. It is

unfortunate to note that these new forms of assessment are not without their own challenges, since they, too, require a significant amount of time dedicated to preparation and training. However, is the perceived need to adopt these techniques so great that it justifies the effort needed? The response to the issue at hand lies in the following quotation:

We can also use self-assessment, peer-assessment and group assessment, none of which should be regarded as a ‘quick fix’, because they take considerable briefing, training and rehearsal if they are to be effective, but can, when properly managed, save some staff time and they are extremely valuable in helping students interpret criteria. As these methods also encourage students’ metacognition (that is, a means of learning about their own learning), they are also very effective in encouraging deep rather than surface learning (Brown, 2005, p. 85).

This quotation clearly states that investing adequate time and effort in preparation, design, and ways of implementing self- and peer assessment is of utmost importance in formative feedback settings.

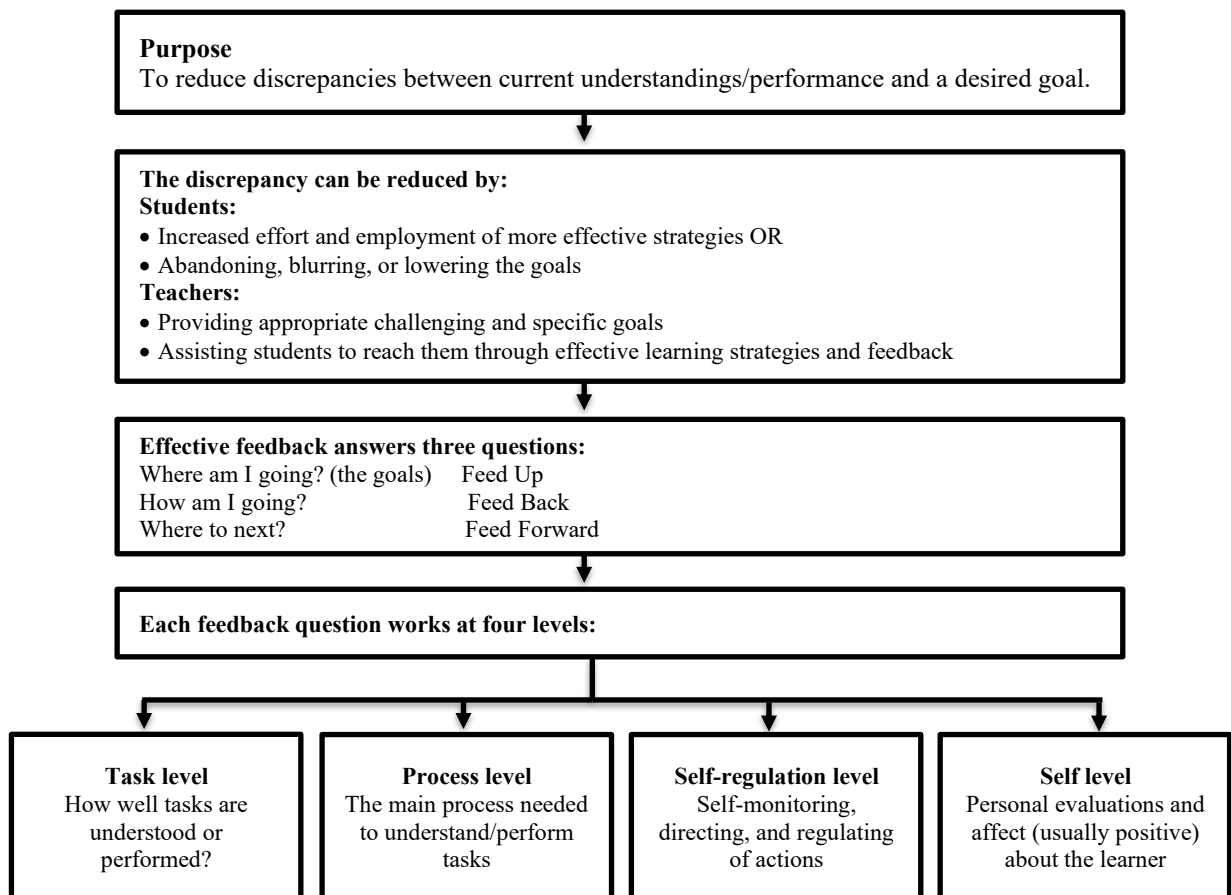
Feedback-literate teachers and students alike understand how to deliver or welcome feedback as a tool to promote effective learning. In other words, practitioners need to work on what is called ‘feedback literacy’, i.e. “the ability to read, interpret and use written feedback” (Sutton, 2012, p. 31). In close relation to this point, Carless and Boud (2018) describe feedback literacy as “the understanding, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies” (p. 1316). Put simply, feedback literacy has been proposed to describe what students need to know about feedback in order to make better informed decisions throughout the giving/receiving feedback process with the wish to optimize learning.

The gap between students’ actual understanding/performance and their desired learning objectives can be bridged by providing and receiving feedback from multiple sources in classroom assessment. However, promoting learning, not least in ESL/EFL settings, through feedback is a difficult skill that needs to be harnessed, not assumed. A recent study by Dalsgaard et al. (2025) challenged the widely held claim that

students generally lack feedback literacy. According to these researchers, “the main challenge lies in bringing students’ hidden feedback literacy to the fore. Teachers should design learning processes that authentically integrate peer feedback, rather than treating it as a separate sub-task” (p. 01). Thus, it is to this end that this research takes up the consideration of how teachers may uncover and bring to light students’ ‘hidden feedback literacy’. Below is a figure adopted from Hattie and Timperley (2007) showing a model of feedback that is designed to improve students’ learning experience:

Figure 2.4

A Model of Feedback for Learning (Adopted from Hattie and Timperley, 2007)



As clearly shown in Figure 2.4, this model provides a clear explanation of how feedback functions as a process that can be shared between teachers and students. It demonstrates that such gaps can be reduced when students increase their effort, use more effective learning strategies, or adjust their goals, whilst teachers provide challenging objectives and support learners with feedback. Moreover, formative

feedback, if appropriately incorporated into the language classroom, provides teachers with three main aspects: feed up, feed back, and feed forward. Feed up (Where am I going?) gives information about the learning objectives to both teachers and students; feed back (How am I going?) informs students about their strengths and areas that need further improvement; and feed forward (Where to next?) focuses on the necessary steps forward that need to be taken based on the feedback gained. These questions also work across four levels that interact with one another: the task level (how well a task is performed), the process level (the strategies used to perform it), the self-regulation level (how learners monitor and direct their own actions), and the self level (the learner's personal evaluations and feelings). Oscarson (2009) warns that "feedback should be about the students' work, in relation to previous performance and set criteria, not about the self or amount to a comparison with others. It should consist of concrete advice on how to improve" (p. 62). The above model appears to be even more suitable in situations where students are doing self- and peer assessment for the sake of giving more voice to autonomy-supportive pedagogy.

In overall terms, self- and peer assessment, as discussed earlier, have emerged to occupy a large part of the language educational assessment literature related to improving the teaching-learning process. Feedback in self- and peer assessment is not a single event used to assess students' work, nor is it the sole responsibility of the teacher. It is high time classrooms became a place where students are prepared to face the challenges of classroom assessment wishing to improve their feedback skills in a collaborative and independent way. It may be necessary now to shed light on the specific self- and peer assessment techniques and tools used by teachers in the EFL writing classroom. Rubrics can, to a larger extent, aid in the effective implementation of these types of assessment.

2.1.5. Self- and Peer Assessment Techniques Used in Writing

Self- and peer assessment can be integrated using different forms and techniques, such as rubrics, scripts, checklists, portfolios, and conferences. However, because the researcher in the current study employed a criterion-referenced rubric, it may seem indispensable to describe this self- and peer assessment technique in more detail.

2.1.5.1. Selecting the Rubric as an Assessment Instrument

The literature is abundant with claims that a rubric can be most effective when viewed as a tool to scaffold students' self- and peer assessment in formative learning classrooms (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Reddy & Andrade, 2010; Prins et al., 2017; Pang et al., 2022). If we are to achieve success with assessment rubrics, we must bring our focus of concern back to the teacher because he/she needs to actively teach and support students in using them appropriately (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013; Panadero & Romero, 2014). Within the bulk of literature, many researchers such as Dawson (2017) have pointed to the increasing use of rubrics in both education and research in recent years, due to their valuable contribution to students, teachers, and even programs (Halonen et al., 2003). Indeed, it appears clear to say that one of the most popular forms of self- and peer assessment in language learning in general and English Language Education in particular is rubrics.

According to Andrade (2000), a rubric can be described as a document that lists assessment criteria, which focus on different levels of quality, from excellent to low, for a specific task (Andrade, 2000). In other words, a rubric is a scoring technique employed to assess students' performance on a given task; it also shows the assessment criteria with varying levels of achievement to enable comparison of students' work for the sake of identifying the degree to which standards are achieved. However, there is a consensus that a rubric is more than a checklist (Andrade, 2005).

In general, rubrics contain three main features: a list of the assessment criteria, a scale for the different levels of performance, and a description of each level (Panadero et al., 2012). According to the findings of Wolf and Stevens (2007), the strength of the rubric is grounded in its power to improve student learning in a multiplicity of ways:

- (1) Rubrics make the learning target more clear,
- (2) Rubrics guide instructional design and delivery,
- (3) Rubrics make the assessment process more accurate and fair,
- (4) Rubrics provide students with a tool for self-assessment and peer feedback,
- (5) Rubrics have the potential to advance the learning of students of colour, first generation students, and those from non-traditional settings (pp. 12-13).

On the same train of thought, though it is noticeable that many teachers currently use rubrics to grade student performance merely, rubrics can not only evaluate but teach, as well (Andrade & Du, 2005). One vital feature of a well-designed rubric clearly explains the kinds of errors students may make. Also, a good rubric provides students with a vivid picture of the expected work that needs to be done. Fors and Gunning (2014) state that a rubric should include clear categories or descriptions of the assignment and clear performance levels that represent evaluation criteria, which may or may not be linked to numerical scores. Panadero et al. (2016) assert that “with the aid of explicit criteria, students are thought to become more motivated to perform the task and also able to set more realistic goals for themselves” (p. 306).

It is believed that there are two types of rubrics: holistic and analytic. A holistic rubric requires the assessor to develop a global judgment on the quality of the work, whereas an analytic rubric requires the assessor to come up with a score for every single dimension being assessed in the task separately (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007). Accordingly, holistic rubrics are likely to be advantageous when the main objective of the assessment is summative. An analytic rubric, on the other hand, serves a more formative assessment purpose because it requires the teacher or students to assess each criterion on its own, then combine these individual scores to reach the overall evaluation (Moskal, 2000). In other terms, analytic rubrics might provide more accurate and detailed feedback about students’ work than holistic rubrics. According to Jonsson and Svingby (2007), analytic scoring is more appropriate for EFL writing classes because composition, as discussed earlier, is so complex that it necessitates a focused and detailed type of assessment rubric.

Thus, the rubrics used in this study are not only meant to assess students’ work, but also to help them reflect on their own work and that of their peers via self- and peer assessment practices. More specifically, they are designed to guide learners as they revise and improve their research proposal drafts before submitting a final version. As a result, the analytic type of rubric was adopted in this study. The functions of a rubric in writing an academic research proposal are two-fold: (1) it serves as a purposeful roadmap for students’ writing of their proposal and (2) it offers a clear and consistent reference for supervision throughout the feedback process.

However, the idea of merely sharing rubrics, especially those already available online, has not proven to be efficient due to the fact that it may result in students receiving these tools without proper adaptation or development, without instructional feedback, and, even worse, without any real engagement with the criteria (Andrade, 2000; Fraile et al., 2017). It has thus become necessary for educators to rethink how rubrics are introduced and used, and perhaps students themselves must have a voice in the assessment criteria. In Fraile et al.'s (2017) words, “co-creating rubrics may influence students’ activation of learning strategies” (p. 69). The shift from teacher-designed rubrics to co-constructed rubrics with students is an indication of the pedagogical changes that come along with the trend toward assessment for and as learning.

Developing an effective rubric can be challenging, especially when it comes to defining clear and meaningful level descriptors (O’Donovan et al., 2001). For assessment, teachers set clear criteria in the form of a rubric for each task or assignment. These criteria are usually in accordance with the learning objectives for the task. As it is rightly pointed out, a rubric is “an assessment tool that saves grading time, gives useful feedback, and helps students learn” (Stevens & Levi, 2004). It provides a consistent approach to grading and allows teachers to give timely and helpful feedback. Such a strategy makes it easier for both students and teachers to identify areas where students need more attention or improvement.

Nevertheless, rubrics are not without a few limitations. Indeed, despite their seeming popularity among EFL classrooms, researchers’ concern is whether rubrics are valuable. For instance, Rubrics have faced criticism concerning their validity, reliability, and fairness, especially in student assessment (Andrade & Du, 2005). Likewise, Sadler (1989) argued that some rubrics can be unclear or imprecise because the standards used in the descriptions are context-dependent. The evaluation of different levels may vary depending on what is being assessed, but the verbal descriptions of what is being measured will remain unchanged.

Although they seem to have the aforementioned positive impact on students and learning, rubrics might do more harm than good when employed as a summative assessment tool (Andrade, 2008). In this regard, Andrade (2008) made the following

comment, “rubrics can be a powerful self-assessment tool—if teachers disconnect them from grades and give students time and support to revise their work” (p. 60). To elaborate more, if their main goal is summative, using rubrics might pull students away from willing to achieve skill-development objectives at the expense of grade-focused ones, especially if the tasks assessed are product-oriented in nature.

For this reason, researchers on assessment have recommended that rubrics should be systematic and appropriately developed following proficient models to ensure notable effects on students’ self-assessment, peer assessment, self-regulation, and learning (Andrade, 1999). Despite these concerns, there is steadily increasing confidence about the utility of rubrics (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). When used judiciously and correctly, Sadler (1989) maintains that rubrics could be a useful learning tool:

The student comes to hold a concept of quality roughly similar to that held by the teacher, is able to monitor continuously the quality of what is being produced during the act of production itself, and has a repertoire of alternative moves or strategies from which to draw at any given point (p. 121).

Similarly, many researchers support this former view and believe that rubrics can dramatically boost learning outcomes (e.g. Andrade, 2008; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Sadler & Good, 2006). The researchers mentioned that utilizing rubrics as a self- and peer assessment technique can guide students throughout the writing process, which results in better learning experiences. Using a rubric, therefore, can upgrade learning because of its valuable role in clarifying expectations, fostering reflection, improving students’ motivation, and reducing anxiety.

Another advantage of using rubrics is that they guide students toward informative and constructive feedback about their learning progress. Some studies reported that rubrics do provide insightful and useful feedback that helps students improve the quality of their work (Al-Jarf, 2011; Van Helvoort, 2010). Supporting this point, rubrics also support the feedback process in ways that benefit both students and instructors (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Cooper and Gargan (2009) affirm that teachers can use rubrics to ensure they are teaching the main points of a subject and that their students are learning them effectively. Consequently, rubrics are likely to

move both teaching practices and student learning outcomes forward. This quality-oriented dimension of well-constructed rubrics leads us to assert that, now more than ever, rubrics play a pivotal role in helping students maintain motivation and become more invested in their learning, especially in EFL settings.

Moreover, rubrics can be directly or indirectly helpful in many ways. Based on his qualitative investigation of students' reflective journals, Tshering (2019) mentioned nine benefits of using rubrics:

1. Encouraging independent learning
2. Clarifying teacher expectations
3. Ensuring consistent and objective assessment
4. Guiding students throughout the learning process
5. Supporting goal setting and planning
6. Providing meaningful feedback
7. Increasing students' motivation to learn
8. Promoting self- and peer assessment
9. Reducing anxiety

In another recent study by Dang and Le (2023), the rubrics designed by lecturers and used in EFL classes were found to be of high quality and well-received by student participants. Their study revealed that integrating rubrics was very beneficial and supported the aforementioned literature. They found that rubrics helped students prepare better for speaking tasks because they provide them with detailed requirements and clear teacher expectations. Furthermore, rubric-based peer and self-assessment allowed students to focus on the main points of the assignments, revise their work to meet the criteria, and therefore, it was a fair and transparent assessment practice. The study also showed that the use of rubrics eventually led to an increase in students' motivation, responsibility, and confidence, as well as their teamwork, self- and peer assessment, and critical thinking skills.

To achieve the latter benefits of rubrics' incorporation, Brualdi (1998) maintains that teachers could either make use of already designed rubrics or devise their own rubrics. Since this study aims to promote student learner autonomy in writing a research proposal, it was important for the researcher-teacher to collaborate with

students and design their own rubrics. To come up with a concrete example of rubric-based assessment in higher education, the researcher refers to the work of Wolf and Stevens (2007), who developed a detailed rubric that can be deployed in university-level research methods courses. It was designed for students pursuing master's degrees in education (see Table 2.4 below):

Table 2.4***Rubric for Research Project in Education (Adopted from Wolf & Stevens, 2007)***

	Below Proficient	Proficient	Above Proficient
Abstract	The abstract is missing, incomplete, or inaccurate.	The abstract summarizes the study in 50-150 words (essentially drawing a sentence from each of the main sections of the completed research report).	The abstract concisely summarizes the study in 50-150 words.
Introduction	The introduction section may be incomplete or unclear. Potential problems may include a vague problem statement, research question(s) may not be measurable, or constructs may not be clearly defined.	The introduction section includes a rationale, problem statement, literature references and research question(s). The rationale and problem statement are clear and credible. Three or more literature references are cited. The research question is stated and can be addressed with empirical evidence. Constructs are defined and variables explained.	The introduction section is complete and clear. Additionally, the rationale and problem statement are compelling (and may be linked to a conceptual framework) and the research question(s) insightful.
Methods	The methods section may be incomplete or unclear. Possible problems may include insufficient information about subjects/informants, instruments not fully described in terms of their conceptualization or aligned with the research questions, or procedures not accurately reported.	The methods section provides essential information about the subjects, data collection procedures, and, if appropriate, treatment. The research question has been translated into appropriate choices at the design level. Subjects are described in terms of number and important characteristics. Data sources and collection procedures are described in terms of underlying conceptualizations. If appropriate, scales are described, and examples of items given. Data collection protocols (e.g., questionnaires, interview questions, structured observation protocols) are included in the appendix.	The methods section provides essential information about the subjects, data collection procedures, instruments, procedures, and, if appropriate, treatment. In addition, the instrument or procedures, for example, might represent a novel and insightful approach to the research project.

Table 2.4

Rubric for Research Project in Education (cont'd.) (Adopted from Wolf & Stevens, 2007)

	Below Proficient	Proficient	Above Proficient
Results	Results are inaccurate or incompletely presented. Typical problems include incorrect statistical analyses in quantitative studies and unsupported claims in qualitative-type studies.	The results section in a quantitative study presents only the “facts.” Brief and accurate interpretation is offered, indicating understanding of how the data respond to the research questions. Tables or graphs are easy to interpret and correctly present the data. In a qualitative study, results and interpretation may be interwoven, and each theme is illustrated with two or more data segments (e.g., quotes from informants).	Results are correctly presented and the analyses are extensive and sophisticated.
Discussion/ Conclusion	The discussion section may be incomplete or not clearly connected to the results.	The discussion section soundly interprets the findings. The discussion section may also include conclusions, limitations of the study, recommendations for action, and future study directions.	The discussion section soundly interprets the findings and is carefully connected with all sections of the report, including the introduction, research questions, instruments, and results.
Limitations	Limitations of the study are not discussed.	Limitations of the study are discussed.	Limitations are extensively described.
References	References may be missing, incomplete, or incorrectly cited.	References are given (and correctly cited in the body of the report and included on a separate reference page in APA format).	References are correctly cited in body of the report and on a separate reference page in APA format.
Written Report	The written report is incomplete or unclear. Typical problems include missing or inadequately described sections.	The written report is clear and well organized. The vocabulary in the report demonstrates an understanding of key terms and concepts (e.g., construct, subject, treatment). The report contains few mechanical errors (e.g., punctuation) and is in APA format. Study is ethical.	The written report is clear and well organized and demonstrates an understanding of basic and advanced research concepts and terms.

Table 2.4 shows a rubric that can be used to assess students’ research projects in education, which was adopted from Wolf and Stevens (2007). It outlines clear

criteria for each section of a given research project, including the abstract, introduction, methods, etc., and assesses these sections against three levels of performance: Below Proficient, Proficient, and Above Proficient. This rubric may be helpful for both teachers and students because it contains expectations for clarity, structure, and academic conventions, and therefore can be a practical tool in the development of students' research and writing skills.

2.1.5.2. Assessing Students' Research Proposals Using the Rubric

In the field of educational assessment, particularly within higher education, the assessment of students' scientific reasoning is one of the most important areas. For this assessment to be effective, it needs to be done carefully using approaches based on solid literature. There exist in the literature two principal approaches to assessment: norm-referenced assessment and criterion-referenced assessment (Dunn et al., 2003). The most dominant approach to assessment in tertiary education is norm-referenced assessment (Rust et al., 2003). According to Biggs (1999), the main rationale for using norm-referenced assessment is for administrative purposes; it does not benefit any educational objectives. Assessment necessitates that attention is focused on both content and skills, but norm-referenced assessment is concerned with measuring content only (Bond, 1996). This approach to assessment, therefore, has been criticized.

Criterion-referenced rubrics (CRRs) can enable learners to experience a type of assessment that is more reliable, valid, and transparent, and therefore improve their learning. Unlike norm-referenced approaches, which gauge performance against students' peers, CRRs enable the assessment taking into account a predefined set of explicit criteria and standards and provide a clear and objective measure of a student's mastery of specific learning outcomes (Burton, 2006). Thus, CRRs may also be beneficial and suitable in the context of assessing students' academic research proposals.

The advantages of using CRRs in assessing research proposals are manifold. One of the strengths of CRRs is their ability to provide clarity and transparency in the assessment process. For example, because specific performance criteria for the components of the research proposal, such as the research question, methodology,

and literature review, are defined, rubrics help students clearly understand what is expected from them. According to Andrade and Du (2005), this transparency allows students to engage more deeply with their work because they can easily assess their progress against the rubric's criteria. Furthermore, the transparency of the rubric design provides students with the tools to reflect on their own learning and enhance their ability to refine their proposals in a more proactive manner (Taylor et al., 2024).

In addition, CRRs can improve the reliability and validity of the assessment process. When multiple assessors, perhaps from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, evaluate proposals, the subjectivity of human judgment can make the assessment less valid and reliable. However, when these assessors are trained and guided by a well-designed CRR, the assessment will be based on the same set of criteria, which in turn minimizes subjectivity issues and increases the reliability of assessment. He and Canty (2012) observe that the consistent use of a CRR allows for a fairer assessment by reducing the risk of bias since all students are assessed against the same standards. If the course aims to develop students' ability to design a feasible research methodology, the CRR would include criteria to assess the clarity, appropriateness, and ethical considerations of the proposed methods, which ensures that the assessment measures what it is supposed to measure (Wolf & Stevens, 2007).

Nevertheless, the development and effective implementation of CRRs are not without their challenges. CRRs demand considerable expertise, time, and a solid understanding of the area being assessed. The criteria must be comprehensive yet concise, the performance descriptors unambiguous, and the language accessible to both assessors and students. The primary goal of CRRs is to provide clear and actionable feedback for improvement, rather than simply ranking students (Andrade & Du, 2005). In response to these concerns, some scholars suggest integrating CRRs in a peer assessment practice. Peer review, for example, can encourage students to engage with the assessment criteria in a more interactive way and improve students' reflection on their own work and that of their peers (Topping, 2009). Thus, the current study focused on the use of both criterion-referenced self-assessment and criterion-referenced peer assessment in order to increase the validity and reliability of the formative assessment process.

2.1.6 Artificial Intelligence in Self- and Peer Assessment

In our new information age, the focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and classroom assessment from a higher education perspective is pertinent and increasingly becoming an issue of concern. The possibility of using AI-powered instruments in HE in general and assessment practices in particular has recently become a heated topic of debate in global scholarship. AI may have a transformative impact on the development of the English language teaching/learning process in the near future. GPT-generated feedback, for instance, has been shown to positively impact students' writing performance as well as their "cognitive and affective-motivational outcomes" (Meyer et al., 2024, p. 01). Accordingly, this explicit recognition of AI in assessment might lead key stakeholders including researchers, policy-makers, curriculum designers and university teachers to urgently deal with:

The often-problematic relationship between AI-based systems and the EFL learning/teaching practice at the University of Medea in Algeria and other similar higher education institutions, wherein a comprehensive framework for AI-enabled education, at this juncture at least, remains enveloped in a veil of uncertainty (Boukhelkhal, 2025, p. 93).

Hence, the process of introducing AI tools to HE, particularly in EFL classroom assessment, is no doubt a complicated and extremely challenging decision.

Artificial intelligence is a multifaceted phenomenon and has been defined in various ways throughout the mainstream literature. The term "Artificial Intelligence" was first coined by Minsky and McCarthy, who were the pioneers of the field, in 1956 at Dartmouth College in the United States of America (USA). Artificial intelligence, etymologically speaking, originates from Latin, combining *artificialis*, meaning made by human skill, and *intelligentia*, which denotes understanding. However, related questions worth raising here are: Can AI, in any meaningful sense, actually be considered intelligent? If so, what kinds of tasks, especially in the context of English language assessment, can it realistically perform, scaffold, or even replace? To what extent can AI accurately assess students' learning/performance in ways that are fair, valid, and reliable? Perhaps the answers to these thought-provoking questions will open new room for scholars to help pave the way for a more effective and informed

use of AI in HE worldwide and the field of language learning/assessment is no exception.

The post-AI era has witnessed some of the greatest changes in the history of technology in the field of computer science. According to Cole (2024), AI, by 2022, had developed from tools such as Alexa, Siri, and Google Assistant, which were mainly, to a larger extent, capable of translation and answering questions, into Large Language Models (LLMs) that are able to generate and write an infinite number of different text genres, such as poems, academic essays, and software programs, and even to successfully pass entrance examinations in law and other professional studies. Along similar lines, Chapelle and Jamieson (2008) have rightly pointed out, “the computer itself does not have a philosophy of teaching, learning, and assessment. However, the professionals who develop AI applications and conduct research on the use of AI applications do” (p. 3). Thus, one might pose another question: will future developments render computers (or robots controlled by computers) as intelligent as or more intelligent than humans?

The relentless AI phenomenon can be defined as “the capacity of computers or other machines to exhibit or simulate intelligent behaviour; the field of study concerned with this” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). In educational terms, Baker and Smith (2019) defined AI as “computers which perform cognitive tasks, usually associated with human minds, particularly learning and problem-solving” (p. 10). Based on this definition, AI, so to speak, is primarily interested in mirroring and stretching human cognitive abilities, such as thinking, reasoning, learning, decision-making, problem-solving, assessment, etc. In doing so, one may arrive at a clearer perception of what AI entails. It should be noted, nonetheless, that AI-enabled education/assessment, regardless of the seemingly revolutionary role it appears to play in EFL contexts, ought to be employed critically and responsibly, making sure that its drawbacks, limitations, and ethical concerns are not underestimated.

As discussed in the previous sections (see 1.3.4.1 and 1.3.4.2), existing research does not ignore some of the prevalent shortcomings and concerns around the implementation of self- and peer assessment. Regarding self-assessment practices, for example, students may not be sufficiently assessment literate to be able to provide

an accurate judgment on their own work (Andrade & Du, 2007; Brown & Harris, 2014). Moreover, cultural and psychological factors, such as fear of self-criticism, limited metacognitive skills, and uncertainty about assessment standards, can also harm the validity and reliability of self-assessment results. On the other hand, students doing peer assessment may be doubtful of their peers' ability to assess their work correctly (Kennedy, 2005; Kollar & Fischer, 2010; Spiller, 2009). Other barriers surrounding peer assessment were also highlighted earlier, including a lack of constructive feedback literacy, problems of bias, fairness, consistency, and reliability. To get around with the problems mentioned above, the researcher may allow himself to formulate the following pertinent questions: Can artificial intelligence provide solutions to any of these self- and peer assessment challenges? Could AI, for instance, scaffold students whilst assessing their own work and that of their peers? Might AI be used as a mediating agent to promote fairness and objectivity in alternative assessment practices?

Needless to say, the limited emphasis on the role of AI in self- and peer assessment practices seems to be due to, at least in part, the fast-changing nature of the technology. A great deal of recent literature has rather dealt with the effectiveness of digital technologies (non-AI-based ones), such as web-based platforms, wikis and blogs, Google Drive, vlogs, mobile learning apps, and other tools in facilitating and enhancing the processes and outcomes of self- and peer assessment. The advent of AI-powered instruments coupled with their computational processes, which are, in essence, a definite challenge to traditional, human-based practices of assessment, has given new impetus to the field of educational assessment, particularly self- and peer assessment. In response to the questions regarding the use of AI in self- and peer assessment raised above, and the needs of the digital intelligence age in which interaction between EFL learners and digital agents has become commonplace, emerging research has thrown considerable attention on novel theoretical frameworks that explicitly aim to enable learners to interact successfully with AI-based tools when involved in self- and peer assessment. A more elaborate explanation of these frameworks should be highlighted to draw a wider picture of the advantages and challenges of these AI-driven tools in self- and peer assessment.

Framing the AI-supported self-assessment practices in EFL, one would think straightaway of the words “formative” or “learning-oriented” assessment. Using AI for self-assessment purposes is, in a sense, an automation of formative assessment. Among the most recent technological innovations in EFL learning are AI-based self-assessment tools, which can take the role of silent mentors and may be correlated with ample opportunities for learners. For students learning in a language other than their mother tongue, conducting self-assessment may be exceptionally challenging for them owing to their limited proficiency level in the target language. AI-supported self-assessment systems, perhaps, can scaffold students’ own learning processes and increase their feedback literacy. Likewise, it was revealed that AI-powered tools can provide immediate, detailed, and targeted feedback on students’ writing, including grammar and structural coherence (Tang et al., 2024). From a similar intricate level, Ng et al. (2024) found that the use of automated writing evaluation tools has a positive impact on learners’ academic writing, motivation, and revision practices. The advantages of AI appear to be more pronounced among assessors who are more in need of support than those who are already higher-performing.

Furthermore, there is *prima facie* evidence on the effects of LLM-generated feedback on student self-assessment. According to a recent study by Liebenow et al. (2025), while LLM feedback did not generally improve Self-assessment Accuracy (SAA) among all learners, its impact was contingent upon students’ initial accuracy levels rather than their general performance. That is to say, those with lower SAA at the outset benefited most from the intervention. Their study, therefore, confirmed that LLM-based feedback may become a scalable and efficient tool to better support assessors who are most in need of assistance in implementing self-assessment. More studies that focus on the accuracy of self-assessment are needed because a great deal of research appears to be more concerned with the time-saving and speed aspects of AI. As Boukheikhal (2025) remarks, “immediate feedback, however, does not necessarily guarantee reliable and accurate feedback” (p. 104).

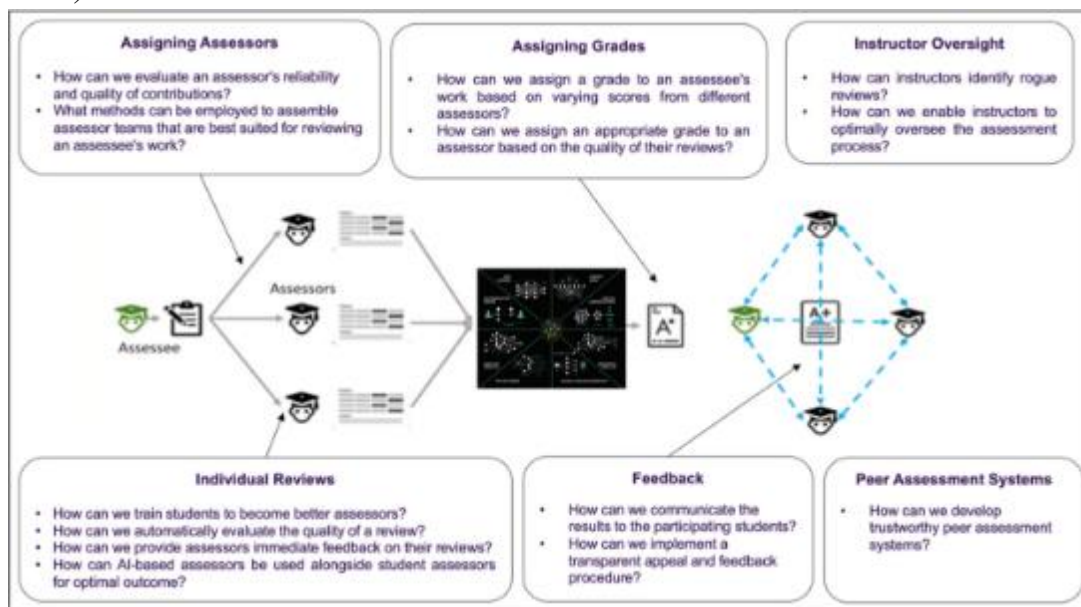
Regarding the use of AI in peer assessment contexts, Topping et al. (2025) posit that “AI is making inroads into peer assessment, but there is still a considerable way to go, particularly in the under-researched areas” (p. 1). In line with such a trend, Guo

(2024) proposes a new AI-enhanced approach to feedback generation in peer assessment for writing. The study introduces EvaluMate, an online peer review system powered by ChatGPT, which is designed to assist students in providing higher-quality feedback. EvaluMate is believed to upgrade the quality of reviewers' comments, which in turn would also enhance the peer assessment process. However, it is uncertain how well this tool will perform in different writing contexts. It also raises an important question as to whether the introduction of this tool and others will actually promote the formative goals of peer assessment.

In another recent study by Topping et al. (2025), entitled “Enhancing Peer Assessment with Artificial Intelligence” the authors proposed a framework on how AI-based tools can help overcome some of the barriers to the implementation of traditional classroom peer assessment. Figure 2.5 below illustrates this framework (Adopted from Topping et al., 2025):

Figure 2.5

A Framework on AI-Supported Peer Assessment (Adopted from Topping et al., 2025):



As highlighted in the above figure, Topping et al. (2025) demonstrate that student work is reviewed by assessors (peers), the AI system processes these reviews to assign grades and generate feedback, and the results are monitored by instructors before being communicated back to the students. They suggested six main areas of

AI-supported peer assessment, which can be listed as: assigning peer assessors, enhancing individual reviews, deriving peer grades/feedback, analyzing student feedback, facilitating instructor oversight, and improving peer assessment systems. These areas underline the vision of strengthening the experience of peer assessment using AI among students, and they can be summarized as follows:

- **Assigning Assessors:** AI can monitor how peers are selected and grouped in order to improve the quality and fairness of the peer assessment process/outcome.
- **Individual Reviews:** AI can assist in evaluating the quality of reviews automatically, providing assessors immediate feedback on their reviews, helping students become better assessors, and using AI-based assessors alongside student assessors for more reliable outcomes.
- **Assigning Grades:** AI can synthesize scores from different assessors to assign fair grades to assessees and give appropriate grades to assessors based on the quality of their reviews.
- **Enhancing Feedback:** AI can clearly communicate results to students, support a transparent appeal and feedback process, and enhance the quality and content of the feedback provided.
- **Instructor Oversight:** AI can help instructors to identify flawed reviews and better oversee the PA process.
- **Peer Assessment Systems:** AI can help build trustworthy peer assessment systems that guarantee both automation and the integrity of the assessment process.

Nevertheless, it is worth remembering in this context Topping et al.'s (2025) remark that the feedback generated by the AI-based tools is actually “only a guide and may be inaccurate and asks students to assess whether the feedback is correct” (p. 26). The incorporation of AI-based technological aids in different learning and assessment settings, according to Yu and Guo (2023), may bring about four problems: opacity and lack of explainability, data privacy and security, personalization versus fairness, and ineffectiveness and unreliability. Hagendorff (2024), in his part, expands the issues surrounding AI, including hallucinations, interaction risks, and the

potential negative impact on students' critical thinking, creativity, writing, and research skills. To unleash their full potential, teachers and students, in particular, need to be aware of these issues when approaching large language models and AI-supported self- and peer assessment opportunities.

As stated in the introduction, this study aims to see whether self- and peer assessment procedures can promote learner autonomy in a research-based writing context. The following section sheds some light on the empirical works carried out in the field of EFL to investigate the impact of self-assessment, peer assessment, and the combination of the two assessment instruments on learner autonomy.

2.2. The Effects of Self- and Peer Assessment on Learner Autonomy

Assessment is the backbone of any curriculum design. The former must be reformed to allot more space for students to make decisions regarding the objectives, content and strategies of learning. In fact, the tension between affordance and constraint in the exploration of the correlation between assessment and autonomy is a convenient theme in the literature. The dominance of the summative assessment paradigm is incongruent with developing autonomous attitudes and/or abilities, whereas the formative assessment approach should somehow play an important role in shaping the kinds of learning habits on which the development of autonomy depends. As a logical consequence, it can be argued that “adequate curricula must combine learner training with congruent assessment methods to support teachers' agendas for learner autonomy” (Missoum, 2021, p. 195).

Therefore, it is of paramount importance for teachers to accept the fact that their students are, to a greater or lesser degree, capable of reaching reliable judgments of their own learning and performance through the appropriate use of self- and peer assessment strategies. To better understand the current study, it is pertinent to consider the scholarly literature concerning the main variables of this research: learner autonomy and self- and peer assessment. The vast majority of research that has been carried out so far on self- and peer assessment in the EFL context focuses on the role of the former in developing students' learning and language proficiency. There is an astonishing paucity of empirical studies dealing with how autonomy can be fostered using formative self- and peer assessment techniques, despite Cooker's

(2015) assertion that assessment is “a means by which learners are able to know themselves better and to make better-informed judgments about their progress as autonomous language learners” (p. 89).

Indeed, it was not easy to locate studies that draw links between self- and peer assessment and learner autonomy. At this juncture, it seems, there is no empirical research reported regarding the use of self- and peer assessment as a means to promote learner autonomy in the area of writing research projects or in any kind of research-based writing settings, particularly in the Algerian higher education system. The researcher then, as displayed in the Table 2.5 below, attempts to review twelve studies that have mainly focused on the EFL/ESL learning context and that were carried out in different national and international contexts in the last two decades. The purpose of these studies was to examine how learner autonomy can be influenced by the implementation of self-assessment, peer assessment, or the combination of both forms of assessment:

Table 2.5***Studies on Learner Autonomy and Self, Peer, and Self vs. Peer Assessment in the Last Two Decades***

Author(s) & Year	Participants	Context	Research Design
Learner Autonomy and Self-assessment			
Sierra & Frodden (2003)	11 students, Colombia	General English	Action research case study
Djoub (2016)	48 students, Algeria	Writing	Experimental
Gholami (2016)	49 students, Iran	General English	Quasi-experimental
Kharfi (2018)	57 students and 15 teachers, Algeria	General English	Case study
Ngo (2019)	97 students, Vietnam	Listening & Speaking	Experimental
Learner Autonomy and Peer Assessment			
Suludere (2012)	14 students, Turkey	Writing	Case study
Czura (2013)	44 students, Poland	General English	Quasi-experimental
Shen et al. (2020)	70 students, China	Writing	Experimental
Learner Autonomy and Self- and Peer Assessment			
Ashraf & Mahdinezhad (2015)	48 students, Iran	Speaking	Experimental
Ebrahimi et al. (2021)	120 students, Iran	Writing	Quasi-experimental
Liao (2023)	39 students, Taiwan	Speaking	Experimental
Phan (2025)	88 students, Vietnam	Speaking	Experimental

The table above describes research studies with some details about the type of participants involved, the context, and the research design employed. As clearly seen in the table, these reviewed studies show that, in an attempt to understand the impact of assessment on learner autonomy, self-assessment has been explored in general English, writing, and listening and speaking contexts (e.g., Sierra & Frodden, 2003; Djoub, 2016; Gholami, 2016), peer assessment has been investigated mainly in writing and general English skills (e.g., Suludere, 2012; Czura, 2013; Shen et al., 2020), and self- and peer assessment have been studied in speaking and writing skills

(e.g., Ashraf & Mahdinezhad, 2015; Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Liao, 2023). These studies will be discussed further in the remainder of this chapter.

2.2.1. The Effects of Self-assessment on Learner Autonomy

In the broader educational literature, self-assessment is considered an important ingredient that can stimulate learner autonomy and also contribute to a “conceptual shift from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered instruction” (Li & Zhang, 2021, p. 190). From a FL/SL learning standpoint, self-assessment entails learner autonomy, because, as Holec (1981) suggests, “autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's learning” (p. 3) and the process of assessing oneself must itself involve autonomy which also helps learners exercise this ability. Put differently, just as autonomous learners are trusted to decide what and how to learn, and just as they control the pace and scope of their own studies, so self-assessors would, as a logical consequence, decide what to assess concerning their learning/performance, when to assess it, and how to assess it in order to monitor their own level of individualized progress in a given task. On his part, Little (1991) establishes a fine relationship between self-assessment and learner autonomy. He argues that self-assessment is central in learners’ capacity “to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning” (p. 2). He further adds that self-assessment is “fundamental to the practice and development of learner autonomy at every stage and in every phase” (Little, 2003, p. 223).

Self-assessment is lauded as a valuable instrument in “the toolkit of autonomous language learners” (Gardner, 2000, p. 49). For Gardner (2000), SA can be regarded as a self-monitoring instrument that allows students to gain timely feedback on their proficiency and adjust their learning strategies accordingly. He adds that self-assessment has a two-fold aim: for one thing, it can be used as a systematic motivational device that can lead to a responsibility over the learning process; for another, it provides a clear structure for teachers to support the process and allows them to explain its benefits, demonstrate how it can be used, and help learners make better sense of the assessment results (Gardner, 2000). It is worth mentioning that the underlying basis or principle of self-assessment is related to learner autonomy. The latter is an unavoidable quality of effective language learners (Brown, 2004). Therefore, if a learning goal is for learners to be autonomous and independent in

performing complex tasks in the target language, then training students in the experience of self-assessment is highly needed in order to dispel their concerns and distrust about the method.

One of the early studies on the impact of self-assessment on learner autonomy was carried out by Sierra and Frodden in 2003. This study provides an account of an action research case study aimed at promoting learner autonomy by integrating self-assessment and learning strategies in an English course at a Colombian university. The sample consisted of 11 undergraduate EFL students (six female and five male) aged between 18 and 28. To collect data, the study relied on students' reflections on their linguistic and attitudinal problems at the beginning of the course, their self-assessments on linguistic and attitudinal aspects, and interviews at the end of the course. Students reported that self-assessment had a positive impact on their motivation, attitudes toward learning, responsibility, linguistic performance, and use of metacognitive and self-regulation strategies. This study clearly shows a significantly positive relationship between self-assessment and learner autonomy.

However, the findings of Sierra and Frodden's (2003) research are not concordant with Djoub's (2016) study regarding the widely positive impact of self-assessment on learner autonomy. Djoub (2016) explored the use of portfolios as a means of self-assessment in a written expression course to promote learner autonomy among learners. 48 first-year EFL students from Mostaganem University in Algeria participated in the study. Based on an experimental research design, data were gathered from pre- and post-tests using Kashefian's (2002) Learner Autonomy Questionnaire. The study revealed that using self-assessment through portfolios did not make a considerable contribution to the development of the participants' autonomy because their dependence on the teacher remained apparent. However, the portfolio experience enabled them to have certain control over their learning process and helped them develop positive self-assessment attitudes, reflection, planning, and goal setting, allowing them to gain more awareness of their learning needs and difficulties.

Sierra and Frodden's (2003) findings are in agreement with those of Gholami's (2016), which also studied the effect of self-assessment on learner autonomy and

language proficiency among EFL learners in Iran. He conducted a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest study with 49 intermediate participants, who were divided into a control group (25 participants) and an experimental group (24 participants). Participants were asked to complete the PET test to measure language proficiency and a multidimensional learner autonomy questionnaire to assess their autonomy levels. Students in the experimental group practiced self-assessment over 25 sessions during a three-month period. The results showed that learner autonomy among the study participants was somehow improved. For example, students developed a better understanding of the importance of the class teacher, since they viewed the teacher more as a facilitator, improved confidence, especially in defining their learning objectives, and recognized the role of self-assessment in motivation. Participants also expressed positive attitudes toward using self-assessment. However, the results did not indicate improvement in other areas of autonomy, including readiness for self-direction, independent work in language learning, engagement in activities outside class, selecting learning content, and interest in other cultures. Moreover, self-assessment did not have any noticeable effect on learners' language proficiency. According to Gholami (2016), the growth of the movement toward autonomy-supportive instruction "is not a matter of one or two techniques; rather it needs a planned approach" (p. 50).

With an emphasis on students' and teachers' perspectives and practices, Kharfi's (2018) study aimed to explore the role of self-assessment in developing language learner autonomy in the Algerian context. 57 first-year Master students and 15 teachers at Guelma University responded to two questionnaires. The results revealed that both students and teachers suggested that self-assessment could be a very useful operational approach for autonomous learning provided that students' self-assessment literacy and relevant training are developed within the Algerian local context. In short, the study showed that self-assessment was a practice they were already familiar with to some extent, and that students had some opportunities to engage in autonomous learning to enhance their self-monitoring skills and ability to reflect on their performance through different assessment criteria and tools; however, they reported that using rubrics as a self-assessment tool was a very rare practice.

Unlike Kharfi's (2018) study, the present research makes use of criteria-referenced rubrics and involves students in every stage of the assessment process, from co-developing the criteria to applying them in both self- and peer assessment practices.

Also, considering the effects of self-assessment on learner autonomy, Ngo (2019) asked 97 second-year non-English major students from a Vietnamese university to participate in a 15-session program where they completed three main activities: weekly listening logs, group role-plays, and video-recorded conversations. These activities were facilitated through self-assessment. The results indicated positive relationships between self-assessment, reflection, and learner autonomy (both in independent learning and perceived improvement in listening and speaking skills). Ngo (2019) also found that involving students in structured self-assessment and reflection activities appears to be of paramount importance. Her study further showed that students were able to monitor their own learning, found self-assessment techniques beneficial, made progress in the target language skills, and were prepared to, in their future learning, implement these strategies on their own as university students.

The aforecited studies have slightly divergent findings: while Sierra and Frodden (2003), Gholami (2016), Kharfi (2018), and Ngo (2019) reported that self-assessment can positively influence learners' motivation, reflection, goal-setting, and sense of control over learning, Djoub (2016) found that using self-assessment through portfolios did not significantly improve learner autonomy, as students still relied on the teacher. To explore more benefits of using self-assessment for autonomous learning goals, it is of utmost importance to provide sufficient training and practice, clear criteria, and structured reflection activities (Djoub, 2016; Kharfi, 2018; Ngo, 2019). Considering the fact that peer assessment is but 'a variant of self-assessment' (Brown & Hudson, 1998, p. 666), does the implementation of the former yield any similar results in the development of autonomy?

2.2.2. The Effects of Peer Assessment on Learner Autonomy

Because learner autonomy entails that learners play an active role in making better-informed decisions about their own learning, and collaborative learning backs up joint attempts toward shared learning goals, peer assessment meets both of these

aims. As discussed earlier in Chapter One, seeking an appropriate definition of learner autonomy is, in fact, a challenging task, because of its diverse dimensions, but among the definitions (e.g., Dam, 1995; Little 1991) that have informed current understandings of the term were those that underscored the social facet of learner autonomy. For instance, Little (1991) expanded the concept of autonomy as a social phenomenon, and Dam (1995) emphasized that an autonomous learner, in the process of classroom learning, is “a socially responsible person” (p. 102).

A fundamental reason for peer assessment is that it serves as a precondition for learner autonomy. Though there is a small body of research that suggests that self-assessment can promote learner autonomy, it is not yet evident that peer assessment can achieve the same results. There is also a gap in the literature in the use of peer assessment for promoting learner autonomy, particularly in the research-based EFL writing class. What seems to be noticeable from the literature is that studies on peer assessment in relation to learner autonomy are less prevalent than those on self-assessment and autonomy.

Suludere (2012) conducted a case study in a Turkish online learning context to examine whether using peer assessment can positively influence learner autonomy in writing. Fourteen EFL university students enrolled in a writing course participated in the study, and data were collected through two questionnaires and interviews. During a period of five weeks, the students joined an online forum, received training on how to provide peer feedback, and were asked to write essays online while assessing their classmates' work. The findings showed that peer assessment had a positive effect on the development of learner autonomy. According to the results, it can be said that using peer assessment in online EFL writing contexts helps trigger behaviors characteristic of autonomous learners, namely learners' awareness of their own learning, taking responsibility for their learning, active engagement in the learning process, and self-evaluation. However, not the same exact effect was observed in all these four categories of qualities of autonomous learning.

Notwithstanding the results achieved in Suludere's (2012) research, not all studies point to the positive effects of peer assessment on learner autonomy. For example, Czura (2013) used a quasi-experimental method to investigate the influence

of peer assessment on the level of autonomy in lower secondary school students in Poland. To this end, 44 EFL learners were selected and divided into an experimental group and a control group. Her study was based on mixed methods research, relying on three main data gathering tools: questionnaires, classroom observation, and interviews. The study results indicated that the application of peer assessment did not increase the level of autonomy of the participants; however, it did have some positive effects on specific instances of autonomous behaviors, such as learners' ability to apply assessment criteria, and their involvement in cooperative learning.

Supporting Suludere's (2012) study, Shen et al. (2020) investigated the impacts of peer assessment on learner autonomy in an English writing class, focusing on English major sophomores from a college in China. Seventy participants took part in this study and were randomly divided into two groups: control (35 students) and experimental (35 students). Students in the experimental group were offered peer assessment for one full academic semester, while those in the control group received traditional teacher feedback. To assess students' learner autonomy levels before and after the intervention, a pre-test and post-test questionnaire was administered. At the same time, a number of ANCOVA analyses were conducted to measure the effects of peer assessment on their learner autonomy. The applied methodology helped to discover that the levels of learner autonomy could be improved as the result of the treatment. In addition, the study's findings revealed that peer assessment increased students' confidence in their learning ability and decreased their dependence on the teacher, but it failed to improve other aspects of autonomy, such as learners' independence and their metacognitive abilities (ability to evaluate the learning process, and learning strategy use).

In summary, the aforementioned studies on peer assessment and learner autonomy show both similar and diverging findings. Suludere (2012) and Shen et al. (2020) reported that peer assessment positively influenced learners' awareness, responsibility, engagement, and confidence. In contrast, Czura (2013) found that peer assessment alone did not increase autonomy, and it had only limited effects on specific autonomous behaviors/attitudes. However, if peer assessment is combined with self-assessment, one would argue that they will positively trigger more

autonomous behaviors, especially in the process of drafting a research proposal in the EFL classroom. Few recent studies have elaborated on the merits of engaging students in these forms of assessment processes and also inspected which method of assessment has more impact on learner autonomy and language proficiency, but the context was EFL speaking or writing classrooms.

2.2.3. The Effects of Self vs. Peer Assessment on Learner Autonomy

Investigating the role of both self-assessment and peer assessment in furthering the development of learner autonomy and speaking skills, Ashraf and Mahdinezhad's (2015) study focused on the Iranian EFL context. To accomplish this, 48 learners with similar proficiency levels were selected and divided into an experimental group (n=24) and a control group (n= 24). The groups then completed the speaking skills and learner autonomy pre-tests. The experimental group was then involved in peer assessment activities throughout 12 sessions, in which students evaluated their classmates' language performance using a variety of exercises. The students in the control group, however, evaluated their own language performance after each session through self-assessment. The groups received the same post-tests for speaking skills and learner autonomy after the 12-session program. The analysis of the data revealed that the participants in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group on both post-tests. In fact, the results demonstrated that peer assessment had a more significant positive effect on the speaking ability and autonomy of Iranian EFL learners compared to self-assessment.

With an emphasis on writing abilities, Ebrahimi et al. (2021) conducted a quasi-experimental study on the impact of writing self-assessment and peer assessment on the autonomy and metacognitive awareness of Iranian EFL learners. 120 participants were selected through convenience sampling. They were allocated to two experimental groups and one control group. Each group was composed of 40 learners. Four data collection tools were employed in this study: (1) the Nelson Placement Test, (2) the Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI), (3) Zhang and Li's autonomy questionnaire, and (4) a rubric. The study concluded that when both self-assessment and peer assessment were applied during the writing process, learners were much more likely to develop autonomy and metacognitive awareness. In

addition to this, and in stark contrast to Ashraf and Mahdinezhad's (2015) findings, Ebrahimi et al.'s (2021) study indicated that self-assessment showed better outcomes than peer assessment, and students revealed a capacity for their knowledge in writing, teaching, lexicography, spelling, and grammar.

In another study, Liao (2023) investigated the effects of the implementation of self- and peer assessment on L2 English speaking skills and learner autonomy. The sample for this study consisted of 39 students majoring in English at a college in Taiwan. An online platform called VoiceThread was used. An experimental group used this platform to perform self- and peer assessment, while the control group did not. The outcomes measured were speaking proficiency, learner autonomy, and participants' perceptions of online assessment, which were collected through an open-ended survey. In general, the findings showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in speaking performance and learner autonomy. Moreover, the participants expressed that these forms of assessment allowed them to have more control over their learning process, and thereby increased their cognitive capacity and reflection to handle L2 speaking better than those in the control group. Thus, Liao's (2023) findings go hand in hand with those of Ashraf and Mahdinezhad (2015) and Ebrahimi et al. (2021).

Until recently, Phan (2025) asked 88 first-year non-English majors in Vietnam to participate in a fifteen-week general English course. The students were divided into two groups: the first experimental group conducted self-assessment, whereas the second group conducted peer assessment. Finally, all participants completed pre- and post-test questionnaires to measure learner autonomy in four main dimensions: planning, initiating, monitoring, and evaluating. The results, supporting previous research, showed that both self-assessment and peer assessment significantly enhanced these four dimensions, although students' goal-setting skills did not change. The impact of self-assessment on the dimension of initiating exceeded that of peer assessment, and this difference was statistically significant.

Most studies mentioned earlier advocate the direct benefits of self- and peer assessment in developing learner autonomy and foreign language learning. It has been reported that these assessment practices allowed learners to take greater control

of their learning, improved their self-regulation, and improved reflection and metacognitive awareness (Ashraf & Mahdinezhad, 2015; Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Liao, 2023; Phan, 2025). However, these studies have demonstrated some minor differences. Peer assessment was found to be more effective than self-assessment in developing learner autonomy in Ashraf and Mahdinezhad's (2015) study, but Ebrahimi et al.'s (2021) study showed the opposite. Findings on self- and peer assessment are also influenced by the specific conditions and techniques under which they are carried out and the different factors involved. These elements include unclear instructions, lack of experience, and students' limited language skills, among others. It is evident that, when used judiciously and appropriately, self- and peer assessment can contribute much to learning itself, or to an environment conducive to autonomous learning.

There are some gaps in the existing research on the effects of self- and peer assessment on learner autonomy. First, self- and peer assessment and learner autonomy are typically examined separately in studies of classroom-based interventions. There is still a limited amount of research specifically tapping into the impact of the former on the latter, especially in the Algerian higher education setting. In the present study, the two approaches (and two literatures) are viewed together with respect to a single teacher-researcher's pedagogical approach and classroom context. Second, throughout the aforementioned studies, one may conclude that these studies focused mainly on different dimensions of learner autonomy, such as learners' motivation, attitudes, responsibility, self-monitoring, and reflection (Gholami, 2016; Kharfi, 2018; Ngo, 2019; Sierra & Frodden, 2003), control over learning, planning, and goal-setting (Djoub, 2016; Phan, 2025), and confidence and engagement in learning tasks (Suludere, 2012; Shen et al., 2020; Czura, 2013).

Nevertheless, the present study is meant to reinforce the findings of the earlier studies, but attempts to gain a better understanding of learner autonomy development because it sheds light on five main aspects of the concept, namely cognitive, metacognitive, the teacher's role, social conditions such as peer interaction, and affective constructs. Based on the previous studies' conclusions, the present research will attempt to explore more possible effects of using a combination of self-

assessment and peer assessment procedures on attitudes and behaviors related to autonomous learning.

Third, in Algeria, not much attention has been directed toward the role of self- and peer assessment in developing learner autonomy among EFL university students. This is partially obvious in the lack of literature on this topic in Algeria. In the last ten years, it seems that only two studies (e.g., Djoub, 2016; Kharfi, 2018) investigated this subject, but also focused on the use of self-assessment only. Perhaps, this study will be the first study in Algeria to examine the impact of the appropriate use of both self- and peer assessment on learner autonomy. Fourth, most, if not all, studies mentioned earlier (e.g., Ashraf & Mahdinezhad, 2015; Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Liao, 2023; Phan, 2025) were conducted in the field of English language education, with a particular focus on language productive skills.

However, there is a need for more intervention studies to evaluate the specific benefits that self- and peer assessment can bring to Algerian graduate students with regard to their learner autonomy in writing academic research proposals. The current dissertation seeks to contribute to this direction by conducting an empirical study to explore the different ways in which both forms of assessment impact autonomous learning and to elicit students' perspectives on their experience participating in such formative assessment practices. The focus of previous studies is different from the present study in that the present study targets autonomy in research-based writing classes.

Last but not least, concerning research methods, most of the previous studies (e.g., Ashraf & Mahdinezhad, 2015; Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Liao, 2023; Phan, 2025) have opted for experimental or quasi-experimental research designs to answer research questions and gain an understanding of learner autonomy in relation to the use of self- and peer assessment in class. Although these research methodologies have proven to be effective to a lesser or greater degree, this study will make use of action research because, as already mentioned in Chapter One, the development of learner autonomy in classroom-based learning environments necessitates the teacher to step in and take a responsible role in this process (Dam, 2003; Little, 1995).

At present, teachers' use of self- and peer assessment is mostly intuitive and without a sound theoretical and empirical underpinning since research on the roles and effects of these assessment practices in developing learner autonomy, especially in EFL teaching, is scarce. Users of self- and peer assessment, either for formative or summative purposes, still have to face skepticism from those who insist that these assessment practices have nothing to do with autonomous learning. This study contributes to the body of literature about self- and peer assessment in EFL teaching, by providing another stepping-stone on the road toward a pedagogy for autonomous learning. There is a need to learn from actual classroom practice in order to identify how to cultivate learner autonomy via formative assessment in Algeria and comparable contexts.

Conclusion

This chapter provides the theoretical underpinning of this research. The present review of the literature has dealt with distinguishable ideas into the research on learner autonomy and self- and peer assessment in EFL studies, which is the context and primary aim of this study. The researcher has highlighted the literature on traditional versus alternative assessment, and then focused on self- and peer assessment as a means to promote learner autonomy in academic research proposal writing. Finally, he reviewed twelve studies that center around the role of self-assessment and peer assessment in developing learner autonomy, and commented on the accuracy of their results. It is hoped, although the nature of research should be as free as possible from any form of subjectivity, that the current study will add more data with reference to the development of university students' understanding and level of autonomy in writing academic research proposals through the implementation of self- and peer assessment using criteria-referenced rubric in the Algerian setting.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH ROADMAP: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER THREE:**RESEARCH ROADMAP: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY****Introduction****3.1. Towards a Glocalized English Language Education**

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Introduction

As mentioned earlier, the current study aims to examine the extent to which self- and peer assessment procedures are influential in supporting learner autonomy in writing academic research proposals within the Algerian EFL setting. The concepts of learner autonomy and self- and peer assessment have been thoroughly discussed in the review of relevant literature (Chapter One and Chapter Two). Moreover, the theoretical background of these research variables has been explored to pave the way for the exploration of autonomy. This chapter (Chapter Three) is methodological, as it addresses the practical aspects of the study where both the methods and processes used to collect primary data are explained. It offers the reader a comprehensive explanation of the nature and methodology of the research. This study adopts an action research approach, which involves selecting participants, designing research instruments, collecting data, and analyzing the data. Thus, the chapter includes several sections, such as a contextual (or situational) analysis of the setting, the research sample, the research design, and the data gathering tools.

Since the present research is conducted within an EFL context, the first section focuses on an analysis of the EFL setting that encompasses the Department of Foreign Languages, English Language Section, at Yahia Fares University, Medea. In the situational analysis, the researcher emphasizes the importance of English in higher education, highlights the background of this department, and identifies the various branches of the Department of Foreign Languages and the modules within the English section, respectively. The next part of this chapter presents the sample population and the research design, focusing on the demographic profile of the students who participated in this study. Regarding the research design section, the researcher introduces and explains the methodological approach used in the present research work. In addition, the different research instruments and their procedures are described in detail with respect to their objectives. After that, this chapter presents the different methods of data collection tools. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations.

3.1. Towards a Glocalized English Language Education

Today, the English language plays an unprecedented role in social and

ideological norms worldwide (Kachru, 1992). Basically, English is now considered an international language of communication and the most dominant lingua franca, whose non-native speakers, who use English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL), are outnumbered by its native English speakers (Crystal, 1997). As a logical consequence, English is no longer tied solely to its native-speaking countries but rather a flexible bridge to global communication. Besides, English is “used for more purposes than ever before” (Graddol, 1997, p. 2). It could then be assumed that English has become a kind of linguistic democracy that belongs to any individual who can express oneself in the language regardless of his/her geographic or socio-cultural background.

In spite of its global presence, the “acquisition of English relates to local interests” (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 198), because learners may actively mold the target language to fit their own unique local perspectives, practices, and products. Put differently, “English has always been local” (Pennycook, 2010, p. 87). For instance, Algeria's education faces globalization, equity, and decolonization conflicts (Lahmar, 2024). Accordingly, Rose et al. (2020) note that “the rise of English as a global language has led scholars to call for a paradigm shift in the field of English language teaching (ELT) to match the new sociolinguistic landscape of the twenty-first century” (p. 157). Interestingly, some scholars suggest that even in countries where English is learned as a foreign language, and Algeria is no exception, speakers may use forms of English that do not rely on the linguistic norms established by native speakers in the USA or UK.

There is a dire need for a more inclusive pedagogical approach to English language learning, which also values local voices and practices while simultaneously engaging with English as a global lingua franca. According to Wright (2025), the English language learner, the development of learning materials, and teacher education should reflect principles of “glocalization”, to use the researcher’s term, such as using English to express local identities and narratives, incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into learning materials, and using a more reflective pedagogy that is constantly developing in response to the local context and community needs. These principles might necessitate that the English language teaching-learning

process should be both globally informed and locally relevant. In the context of the present study, Smith (2002) posits that:

if pedagogy for autonomy is to become genuinely mainstream in practice, there is a continuing need for theories and ideas to be derived out of attempts by teachers to engage in appropriate (context-sensitive) experimentation, and to share insights regarding their practice, in resistance to the ever-changing fashions in top-down discourse on language education to which they are so often subjected (p. 13).

3.1.1. English in Algeria

In Algeria, English is seen as a foreign language, while French is more of a second language. However, Algerians deeply understand the value of English, mainly for academic and professional development, and constantly strive to learn and use it in their own unique ways, which are also influenced by their limited exposure to more formal or advanced forms of the language. Miliani (2000) asserts that:

In Algerian society, English has benefited a lot from very favourable attitudes of a majority of users and non-users as well... The main element in the argumentation of those who want to replace French by English is that the latter is the language of technology and science so vital for the country (pp. 21-22).

Miliani's statement brings to the fore the widely held assumption that the introduction of English has the power to conquer economic, technological, and educational difficulties. His visionary proposal regarding the need to introduce and reinforce the English language in the Algerian setting in the past is now being observed and gradually achieved in the present era. English is now taught as a foreign language in primary, middle, and secondary schools, and has also been recently introduced as a means of instruction in all Algerian universities.

3.1.2. English as a Medium of Instruction in Multilingual Algeria

Over the last three to four decades, there has been intensive interest in language education policy in Algeria. This trend, according to the literature, necessitates an urgent need for more studies in diverse Algerian contexts, using solid research methods, that aim to demystify the complexity of Algeria's language education policies. However, it is unwise to grasp the country's language situation without

considering its historical, social, and political contexts. It is worth remembering in this context Djebbari's (2014) remark that:

Algeria absorbed heavy colonial impact not only in its social life but also in its educational policy. French controlled all aspects of life, namely government, business, economy and education for around 132 years. The French imperialism tried to follow the policy of removing Algerian cultural identity and moulding it along French lines. The results of this colonial policy, which continued to exist even after independence, have perhaps been one of the most evident impacts on the current Algerian educational system (p. 113).

In recent years, higher education institutions in Algeria have shown a growing interest in adopting English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). As defined by Macaro et al. (2018), EMI means "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English" (p. 37). The goal of this drastic policy shift is, perhaps, to improve students' readiness for the current modern world and future intercultural encounters. However, in the case of Algeria, where French has historically been the dominant language in education, and with the presence of local languages such as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), Derjda (colloquial Arabic), and Tamazight, the introduction of EMI may bring both opportunities and challenges with respect to using English as the sole medium of instruction. For example, these challenges might include a lack of English language proficiency of students and teachers alike, inadequate resources and support, and lack of continuing training and professional development opportunities (Ouarniki, 2023).

One promising pedagogy to address the latter barriers to the implementation of EMI in multilingual Algeria is to explore the potential of translanguaging within higher education. Translanguaging, as defined by García and Wei (2014) calls for the flexible use of multiple languages in communication. As opposed to traditional bilingual approaches that separate languages, translanguaging treats them as part of a unified linguistic system. This pedagogy would eventually enable learners to draw on all their linguistic resources/repertoires for learning. In particular, translanguaging has been shown to improve students' comprehension, engagement, and critical

thinking as it allows them to connect new knowledge with their existing linguistic and cultural experiences (Canagarajah & Gao, 2019). The success of embracing translanguaging as a pedagogy depends on teacher training, flexible curricula, and stakeholder support, all of which are still limited in Algeria.

Therefore, a strategic approach to educational reform in Algeria should prioritize the development of teacher competencies in translanguaging, the design of curricula that accommodate multilingual practices, and the establishment of supportive policies and infrastructures. On the same train of thought, Lahmar (2024) concludes that: “For educational adjustments to be both effective and sustainable, they should be carefully aligned with Algeria’s cultural heritage, knowledge systems, and historical context while still drawing from the best international educational practices” (p. 21).

In view of the changing sociolinguistic reality of English, the current study intervenes to investigate Algerian learners’ experiences in a research-based writing context.

3.2. Situational Analysis in Medea

The researcher is meant to undertake a careful investigation at the English Section under the Department of Foreign Languages at Yahia Fares University, Medea, Algeria. To reach this objective, it seems vital to provide broad information and facts about the current research context.

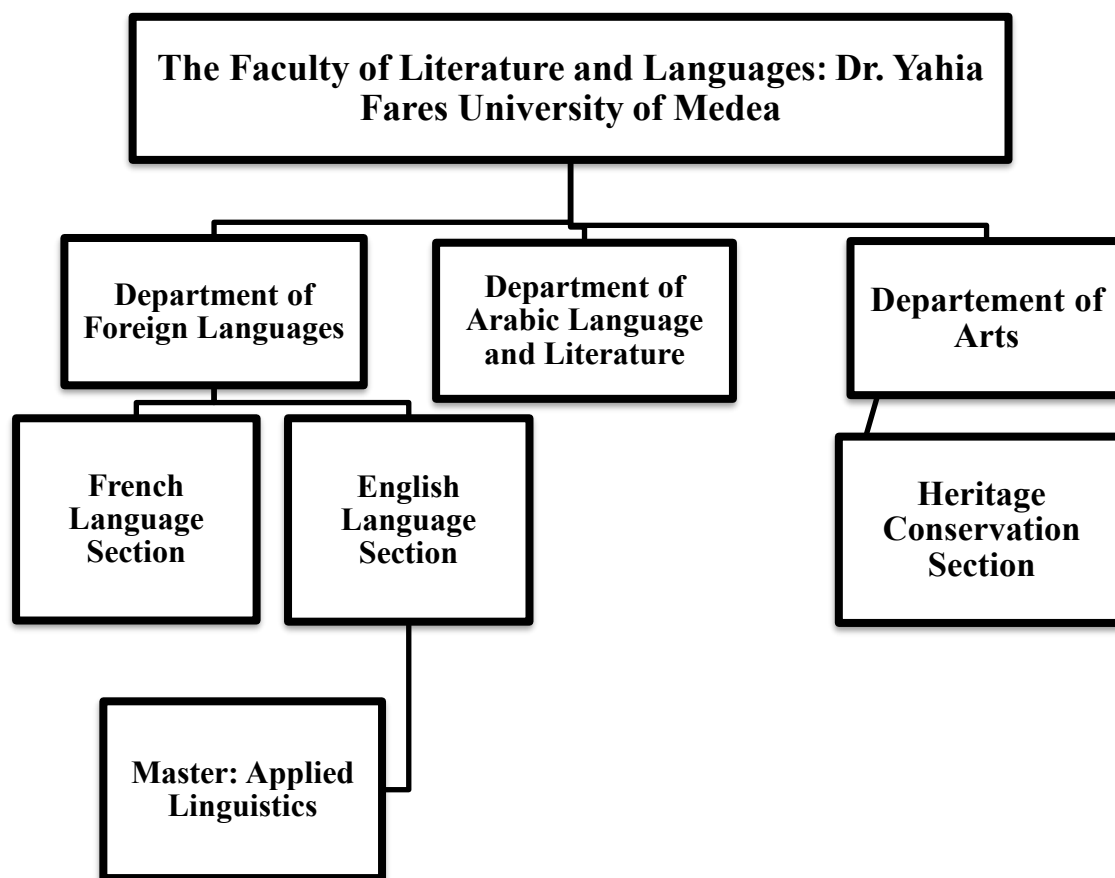
3.2.1. The Department of Foreign Languages: English Section

Yahia Fares University is a public university located in Medea Province, a city in the north-central region of Algeria, known as the base of Wilaya IV during the Algerian War of Independence. It is about 81 km south of the capital, Algiers. The University of Medea was named after Yahia Fares, a dedicated military doctor and martyr who played a crucial role in Algeria’s war of independence (L'Echo d'Algérie, 2022). This research context was selected because the researcher has been working as a part-time teacher in this department, and, thus, it was more convenient to have access to the necessary resources to carry out and achieve the present research (Creswell, 2012). Similar to other Algerian universities, Yahia Fares University offers a range of courses, research opportunities, and services to undergraduate,

graduate, and postgraduate students. The university was founded in the academic year 1988-1989 with a mission to provide higher education in areas such as a core curriculum in technologies and a short-term training program in electrical engineering. In 2000, it became a university center with four institutions: the Institute of Literature and Languages, the Institute of Economics, Business and Management Sciences, the Institute of Science and Technology, and the Institute of Legal Science and Administration. Currently, Yahia Fares University has six faculties. These include the Faculty of Science, the Faculty of Technology, the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, the Faculty of Economics, Business, and Management Science, the Faculty of Law and Political Science, and the Faculty of Literature and Languages.

The Faculty of Literature and Languages was established as an institution in the 2000-2001 academic year. Later, it was turned into a faculty of Literature and Languages. It consists of three main departments: Arabic Language and Literature, Foreign Languages, and Arts. Since the foundation of the Foreign Languages Department, it has trained hundreds, if not thousands, of students from all regions in Medea province to be teachers of Arabic, French, and English at different levels: primary schools, middle schools, high schools, and even universities. It is worth mentioning that, unlike the Arabic and French sections, the English section has recently been established or added, as it dates back to 2014, perhaps due to the increasing number of students who expressed a strong interest in pursuing a degree in English. The Department of Foreign Languages welcomed the first students of the LMD program in the academic year of 2005-2006. The following figure (3.1) illustrates the detailed structure of the Faculty of Literature and Languages:

Figure 3.1

The Faculty of Literature and Languages and its Departments

As shown in the figure above, the faculty of Literature and Languages has three departments, namely Foreign Languages, Arabic Language and Literature, and Arts departments. The Foreign Languages department has two different branches or sections, the French Language and the English Language. Unlike the Foreign Languages department, the Arabic Language and Literature department does not have any sections, while the Arts Department has one section, under the name Heritage Conservation. Concerning the English section, students in the third year do not seem to possess the freedom to choose from multiple specialties or fields because there is merely one specialty so far, called Applied Linguistics. This specialty was first initiated or started during the academic year 2017-2018, incorporating students who are part of the LMD system, which stands for Licence, Master, and Doctorate. The goal behind introducing the LMD could be “to create an overall innovation within the Algerian universities and permit learners to follow the flow of technological growth

to keep pace with the world's educational system" (Djebbari & Djebbari, 2020, p. 52). The system requires students to complete three years of study to earn a License degree, which is organized into six semesters (two per year). Students must continue for an additional two years to obtain a Master's degree (four semesters). To obtain a Doctorate degree, students must successfully complete an additional three years of training, publish an article, participate in national and international conferences, and submit and defend a doctoral dissertation successfully.

3.2.2. The Curriculum of the Applied Linguistics Master's Program

As stated before, Master's students complete four semesters, with each semester featuring its own curriculum. At the Department of Foreign Languages, English section, of Yahia Fares University, Master's students can choose one main field: Applied Linguistics. Because the sample for the current research consists of Master one students who are enrolled in the field of Applied Linguistics, the following table outlines the curriculum for each semester that English students must complete to earn their Master's degree:

Table 3.1

The Modules Taught in The Applied Linguistics Master's Program at Medea University, English Section

Master 1		Master 2	
Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 1	Semester 2
Ethics and Deontology	Discourse Analysis	Translation	Dissertation Writing and Defense
Research Methodology	Text Linguistics	Communication and Presentation Technique	
Text Linguistics	Psycholinguistics	Theories of Learning and Teaching	
Cognitive Psychology	Applied Linguistics	Semiotics	
Sociolinguistics	Writing Styles	Pragmatics	
Applied Linguistics	Research Methodology	Contrastive Linguistics	
Academic Writing	Philosophy of Education	Entrepreneurship	
Linguistics Theories	Cognitive Psychology	Research Methodology	
Philosophy of Education	Translation	Content and Language Integrated Learning	

The above table describes the curriculum structure for the Master's degree program, Master 1 and Master 2. In Master 1, the first semester comprises modules such as Research Methodology, Text Linguistics, and Academic Writing. These courses aim to equip students with the necessary tools to conduct research, analyze various types of texts, and improve their academic writing skills so as to write a research proposal and a master's dissertation, which are both considered as mandatory assignments for success in the obtention of the master's degree. As for the second semester of Master 1, students engage with modules such as Psycholinguistics, Cognitive Psychology, Applied Linguistics, and Research Methodology. Students, through the exploration of the complex workings of language from a psychological perspective and studying its practical implications, may gain ideas about the sophisticated nature of language and its relationship to cognition and learning.

Regarding Master 2, in the first semester, students focus on modules such as Writing Style, Research Methodology, Contrastive Linguistics, and Entrepreneurship. These courses are meant to further sharpen students' writing and presentation skills, as well as introduce them to entrepreneurial competencies, startup expertise, and innovative leadership. The Contrastive Linguistics module aims to strengthen their ability to compare and contrast language structures across different linguistic systems. Moreover, the research methodology module enables students to design and submit an original research proposal as a way to prepare them for the fourth semester, where they are required to use it as a plan to write and achieve their master's dissertation research project. Finally, in the second semester of Master two, students encounter modules, such as Philosophy of Education, Translation, and Content and Language Integrated Learning. Although these modules may not directly address needs relevant to academic writing and research methodology, they may provide students with some useful perspectives on educational philosophies, language translation processes, and innovative language teaching methodologies. As a result, these modules may enlarge students' understanding of applied linguistics.

Academic writing and research methodology modules throughout the master's degree program may play a central role in developing critical thinking, scholarly inquiry, and effective communication within the fields of linguistics and language

education. According to Missoum (2021), “opportunities for self-assessment and peer assessment may also hone critical thinking” (p. 165). Therefore, these modules are expected to equip them with important skills to do research and be able to write a research proposal as well as a dissertation about research topics that interest them. The study’s classroom context is Research Methodology, which includes three hours of tutorials and a 90-minute lecture each week. It is offered during the first three semesters of the master’s program. One would presume that students, in this course, are trained to have a good working knowledge of research methodology.

The rationale for selecting the Research Methodology module lies in the importance of integrating self- and peer assessment practices in the early stages of the students’ writing process, especially in higher education. According to Boud (1995), self-assessment skills should be developed in the early phase. Similarly, Brown et al. (1998) argue that students can be more receptive to peer assessment when introduced at the beginning stages of their studies. Furthermore, given that students are expected to have a basic understanding of research methodology, it is logical to incorporate this course throughout the master’s program. Such integration supports the objectives of this study because it may prepare them to assess both of their own work and that of their peers more effectively. The next section seems crucial as it describes the essence of the current study: the sample population.

3.3. Sample Population

This section introspects the individuals who form the heart and soul of the present research, shedding light on their diverse backgrounds and experiences. In the context of any educational research, it is necessary to include participants from a specific category to represent the population of a given study. According to Gorard (2013), population can be described as the entire set of cases, units, or individuals that are part of the study. To generalize the findings of the present study, the investigation was structured to collect data from a sample that accurately reflects the larger population. The population intended for the current research is first-year Master’s students at the English Language Section, University of Medea (ELSUM).

The English section of the department has a total of eighty (80) Master one LMD students enrolled for the 2024/2025 academic year, but the number of students

who attend classes regularly is forty-three (43) students. Due to the scope of the research problem, the necessary data, and time restrictions, it was not workable to examine all students. Therefore, the research narrowed its focus to a representative sample, which consisted of two groups. At the University of Medea, students are usually grouped according to the alphabetical order of their family names by the administration. According to Kothari (2004), sampling involves a deliberate plan to choose a sample from a population and decide how many units it should include. For Dörnyei (2007), there is a clear distinction between selecting a sample and studying the entire population. A sample is defined as “the group of participants whom the researcher actually examines in an empirical investigation and the population is the group of people whom the study is about” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 96). In this study, the sample consisted of thirty (30) students, with seven (7) males and twenty-three (23) females, all of whom were trusted to engage in and produce a similar task: drafting an academic research proposal.

Selecting Master one students as the sample of the present study is not the result of a random decision. To start with, the feasibility and workability of the research work itself depend largely on the students’ academic readiness to compose academic research proposals in English. It is most likely that Master one students, as opposed to undergraduates, are best prepared to accomplish such a task successfully; therefore, they would actively participate in the research process, because they have already been equipped with certain writing abilities during their prior training for three years at university. In fact, the development of learner autonomy, one would argue, is particularly important for Master one students because of the complex research-based tasks that they are asked to achieve, which also makes meeting their teachers’ expectations exceptionally challenging. Furthermore, the researcher chose to carry out the study at this university because he had easy access to the Master one research proposals. In addition, being a member of the teaching ELSUM staff, the researcher could easily invite potential participants to contribute to his research since the students who accepted to be part of the study were his students. A further reason behind the selection of these Master One students is to investigate the differences, if any, in perceptions regarding the incorporation of alternative assessment procedures,

particularly self- and peer assessment, and learner autonomy, since they do not share, to a greater or lesser degree, the same exact socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. These slight differences may allow the researcher to reach a more detailed and well-founded understanding of assessment and learner autonomy in the context of writing academic research proposals.

3.4. Objectives and Research Questions

The primary purpose behind conducting an extensive review of related literature (See Chapter One and Two) was to show how each part of the dissertation should be structured according to frameworks in the field of learner autonomy and alternative assessment practices. The discussion of the previous intervention studies aimed at casting light on the major limitations and, hence, identifying the research gaps and presenting the need for further investigation of the areas that were neglected in those studies. The researcher has also paid particular attention to showing how previous studies gave the lion's share of their concentration on using self- and peer assessment in writing or speaking, while research proposal writing, despite its paramount importance, was neglected. Based on these claims, the current research aims, as a first step, to assess ELSUM students' awareness and levels of learner autonomy in the course of drafting their research proposals, and then to explore the impact of implementing self- and peer assessment on their learner autonomy. The main goal of involving ELSUM students in the assessment practices is to determine whether the latter strategy improves their learner autonomy and their overall academic research proposal writing. The study also seeks to gather students' perceptions on the impact of self- and peer assessment on their learner autonomy as well as the quality of their research proposal writing. To this end, the research design was devised based on the aforementioned research objectives and the need to answer three questions.

Indeed, the results of the studies discussed in Chapter 1, which focused on the challenges that prevent students from writing and carrying out research successfully in general, as well as the challenges observed by the teacher-researcher in ELSUM students' engagement with research proposal writing in particular, increased the researcher's interest in investigating the extent to which these students are prepared to assume responsibility for their own academic research projects at an early stage of

their Master's studies. The researcher then assumes that the following question is deemed important since learner autonomy is regarded as one of the main drivers of academic achievement, especially in postgraduate research contexts:

1. To what extent are first-year Master's ELSUM students ready to assume responsibility for drafting a research proposal?

Having the opportunity to investigating students' level of learner autonomy will inevitably lead the researcher to explore possible pedagogical practices that are likely to enhance students' capacity for higher levels of learner autonomy in writing research proposals. In this respect, the incorporation of self- and peer assessment, as discussed in Chapter Two, were proved useful for autonomy-supportive pedagogy. To this end, the following research question is raised:

2. In what ways does the implementation of self- and peer assessment impact learner autonomy among first-year Master's ELSUM students in research proposal writing?

Finally, the third question aims at exploring the students' perceptions of this process as they are involved in the assessment process, from co-constructing the criteria by which their work would be judged to applying these criteria in assessing both their own research proposals and those of their classmates. Moreover, the goal here is to explore students' views on the effects of performing self- and peer assessment on their learner autonomy levels. Accordingly, the following research question is asked:

3. How do first-year Master's ELSUM students perceive the process of assessing their research proposals through self- and peer assessment?

3.5. The Research Hypotheses

Furthermore, this work attempts to provide arguments for the research hypotheses that can be formulated as follows:

- First-year Master's ELSUM students' readiness for learner autonomy to draft a research proposal might be lacking.
- The implementation of self- and peer assessment may further the development of learner autonomy.

- Students' perceptions of the use of self- and peer assessment would be significantly positive, because they can benefit enormously from both of these alternative practices of assessment.

3.6. The Research Design

The concept of autonomy in language learning has been the subject of extensive research. Increasingly, scholars voice the complexity of the development of language learner autonomy (See Chapter One above). In the context of writing academic research projects, it was found that the integration of self- and peer assessment procedures, according to students' and teachers' perspectives, might contribute to the development of autonomy (Boukhelkhal, 2024). Nevertheless, one might argue that the implementation of self- and peer assessment alone does not guarantee increased autonomy unless supported by other practices, such as the approach used by the teacher. On the other hand, achieving progress in learner autonomy in itself may be an impossible mission without the key stakeholder in the learning-teaching scenario: the teacher. Little (1995) maintains that attention must be shifted back to the teacher in the pursuit of the development of learner autonomy. In the same vein, Dam (2003) states that the primary responsibility for fostering learner autonomy in the classroom is in the hands of teachers.

The role of teachers as central figures in promoting learner autonomy may also necessitate them to become researchers in their own classrooms. Thus, adopting Action Research (AR) as a research design in this study may allow the teacher-researcher to find collaborative solutions to the problem of low autonomy in research proposal writing rather than merely generalizing findings. In terms of the selected context of writing academic research proposals, the findings of a study by Bouazid, (2017) revealed that teachers play a critical role in developing students' skills during all stages of drafting a proposal. In practice, AR requires a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach (Burns, 2010). Teachers, through AR, can deeply reflect on their methods, gather information, and make changes based on direct research-based data from their classrooms.

3.6.1. Action Research Defined

As its name denotes, the terms 'action' and 'research' is essentially about the

principal characteristics of the method itself: (1) exploring aspects within teaching to generate new knowledge, and (2) enhancing practice (Borgia & Schuler, 1996). Cohen et al. (2000) comprehensively defines it as:

Essentially an on-the-spot procedure designed to deal with a concrete problem located in an immediate situation. This means that ideally, the step by-step process is constantly monitored over varying periods of time and by a variety of mechanisms (questionnaires, diaries, interviews and case studies, for example) so that the ensuing feedback may be translated into modifications, adjustment, directional changes, redefinitions, as necessary, so as to bring about lasting benefit to the ongoing process itself rather than to some future occasion (p. 192).

Action research, therefore, can be considered as applied research that aims to improve a given situation, come up with novel theoretical perspectives, and centers around reflection and change.

From an educational standpoint, AR has recently become a hot topic in academia among scholars in the field of ELT. For instance, teachers can implement action research in their classroom to explore teachers' and students' perspectives and practices. Due to their deep immersion in the complex and contradictory realities of classroom practice, teachers possess a mode of understanding that is distinct from that gained solely by external investigation (Brumfit & Mitchell, 1990). Put differently, being a teacher and a researcher at the same time may yield a more nuanced understanding of the teaching process than is possible through either role alone. According to Burns (2010), teachers who undertake action research can possess the agency to critically analyze their pedagogical approaches and therefore make better evidence-based decisions. Moreover, Nunan (1992) asserts that action research can benefit both teachers and students alike because it allows a more personalized approach to learning and teaching. Thus, relying on action research in the process of promoting learner autonomy through self- and peer assessment has a two-fold benefit: the teacher's engagement in continuing professional development and the development of students as writers and researchers. In his terms, Sagor (2000) views action research as "a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those

taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the ‘actor’ in improving and/or refining his or her actions” (p. 1).

3.6.2. Principles of Action Research

Borgia and Schuler (1996) identified five main principles that define action research as a more secure strategy for professional growth, including: commitment, which requires an investment in time, i.e. participants need to understand that the project demands engagement over a significant duration; collaboration, where every voice is carefully listened to and highly valued; concern, which fosters a network of trust and mutual support to encourage more critical reflections; consideration, which means the deliberate practice of reflecting on one’s professional practices to improve instruction; and change, where embracing innovation and purposeful adaptation is crucial for practitioners to constantly improve. This study takes these principles into careful consideration so as to improve learner autonomy among learners. Besides, self- and peer assessment can also drive change, which, in turn would allow participants to adapt and improve their practices continuously toward a more responsible learning environment.

3.6.3. Characteristics of Action Research

From a methodological standpoint, it is of paramount importance to differentiate AR from traditional educational research. According to Mills (2011), action research is constructivist, situational, practical, systematic, and cyclical.

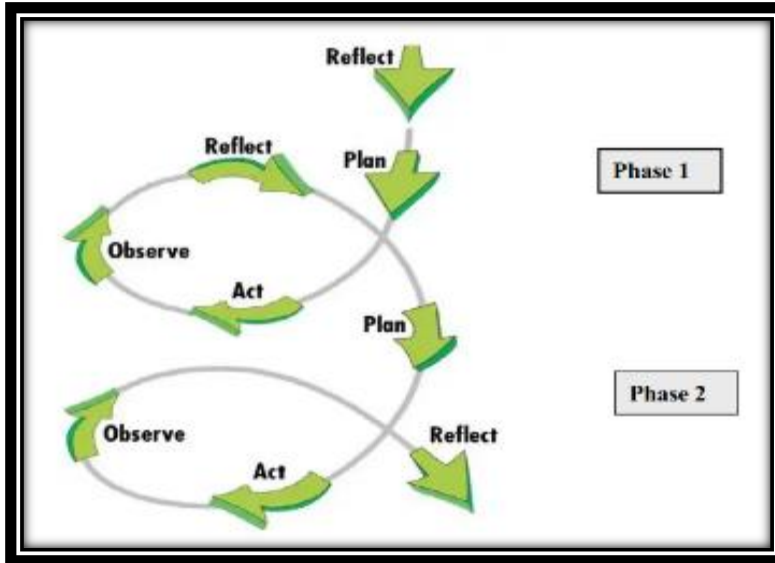
- **Constructivist:** Action researchers are considered to be producers of knowledge, as opposed to simply consuming knowledge that originates from outside specialists. In this study, the researcher, with a constructivist mindset, seeks to understand how students actively build their capacity for autonomy in drafting academic research proposals through their direct engagement in self- and peer assessment practices.
- **Situational:** One primary aim for action researchers is to understand the unique context of their investigations and the research informants that are recruited in the process. As explained earlier in this chapter, the researcher conducted the study in students’ natural environment, the University of Medea, and particularly in the master 01 research methodology class in order

to address the challenges for students in acting as autonomous writers and researchers, namely in the perplexing and complex task of writing an academic research proposal.

- **Practical:** The research questions action researchers choose to investigate are informed by their own professional contexts and areas of interest, and the findings of their studies are also relevant to their practice as teachers. From this perspective, having been in charge of the research methodology in the master's program for three years, the researcher selected the research questions under the urgent need to prepare EFL students for the difficult task of writing a research proposal, a task that requires a higher level of autonomy.
- **Systematic:** For action research to yield trustworthy and meaningful results, a systematic and methodological process is considered necessary. Despite its subjective and qualitative nature, AR does not give carte blanche to teachers to make conclusions about their classrooms based on subjective and intuitive impressions. In this AR study, the researcher intended to adopt and stick to the systematic aspect of action research, such as clear research phases, structured data collection, ongoing reflection, and a focus on continuous improvement. However, one might argue that it is unlikely to be completely free of assumptions.
- **Cyclical:** Action research is a cyclical process that begins by posing a question and concludes with the practical implementation of the knowledge obtained. This application, however, is not an endpoint but rather an opportunity for new questions and a new cycle of research.

The following is a description of an adopted diagram that shows the necessary stages of an action research model:

Figure 3.2

Cyclical Diagram Model (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988)

Action research is not a straightforward task. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) describe action research as a cyclical process, which they illustrate through four stages. The first stage is planning. It involves identifying the problem and preparing actions to address it. Next, in the action phase, the planned strategies are put into practice. The third stage, observation, focuses on gathering data to evaluate the effects of the actions. Finally, the reflection stage allows for the analysis of the data to assess the impact of the actions and guide adjustments for future cycles. These stages form an ongoing cycle, where reflection leads to refined planning in the next iteration, which would promote continuous improvement and development. This approach is systematic because it provides a framework for practitioners to adapt their methods based on real-time observations and outcomes.

3.6.4. Criticism of Action Research

In spite of the benefits of action research mentioned earlier, its implementation in the fast-changing context of higher education is not without challenges. Such difficulties can sometimes impede educators' ability to effectively explore the phenomenon they are researching and, as a result, to develop their teaching strategies. As academics, however, it is important to constantly be prepared to navigate any pedagogical problems, act as role models to the learners, and contribute to research.

The dual role of researcher/teacher within the same institution can lead to

several ethical dilemmas. For example, because participants are our students, they, especially freshmen, might perceive their participation as mandatory and feel compelled to uncritically follow their teachers' instructions. Yet, this AR study was conducted with Master's level students, and such a concern is not unique to the present study; in fact, it is common in many research frameworks.

Another potential issue with action research is the generalizability of its findings, which can be limited due to the limited scope and scale of the investigation. In this regard, Denscombe (2007) argues that “the ‘work–site’ approach affects the representativeness of the findings and the extent to which generalizations can be made based on the results.” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 131). One might argue that while generalization is a significant aspect of quantitative-oriented research methodologies, the primary purpose of the current action research differs: it aims to identify a specific problem and implement pedagogical practices that can inform further research. Moreover, it is worth mentioning here that autonomy, as discussed in chapter One, is a multifaceted phenomenon that is already complex to research and, consequently, cannot be easily measured using one approach merely.

Furthermore, Cain and Harris, (2013) challenged the viability of action research and pointed out that it can be time-consuming, ethically complex, and often unpaid. In contrast, these demerits may be insignificant compared to the merits it can provide. It is true that teaching and being engaged in teacher research requires efforts, but according to Borg (2010), AR provides teachers the opportunity to consider the classroom as a setting for testing educational theories and generating new knowledge. Hence, it also gives the teacher valuable opportunities for professional development. Without a detailed action plan, however, AR is unlikely to yield clear and actionable findings.

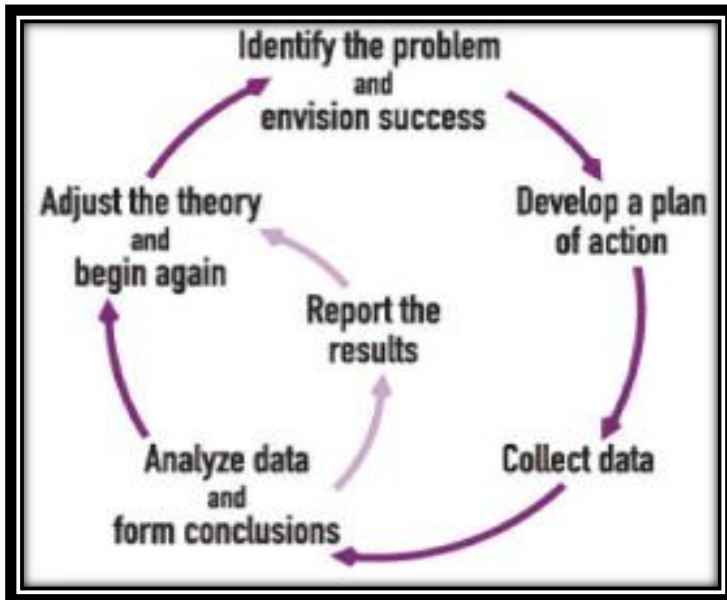
3.6.5. Action Plan Description

The current study selects the Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) model of action research, as it goes hand in hand with the objective of exploring the effects of self- and peer assessment on both students' levels of autonomy and their experience in research proposal writing. Along these lines, Burns (2010) considers the AR Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) proposed model as valuable because “it summarizes very

succinctly the essential phases of the action research process” (p. 8). The following diagram outlines the necessary steps a researcher, within the action research framework, should keep in mind:

Figure 3.3

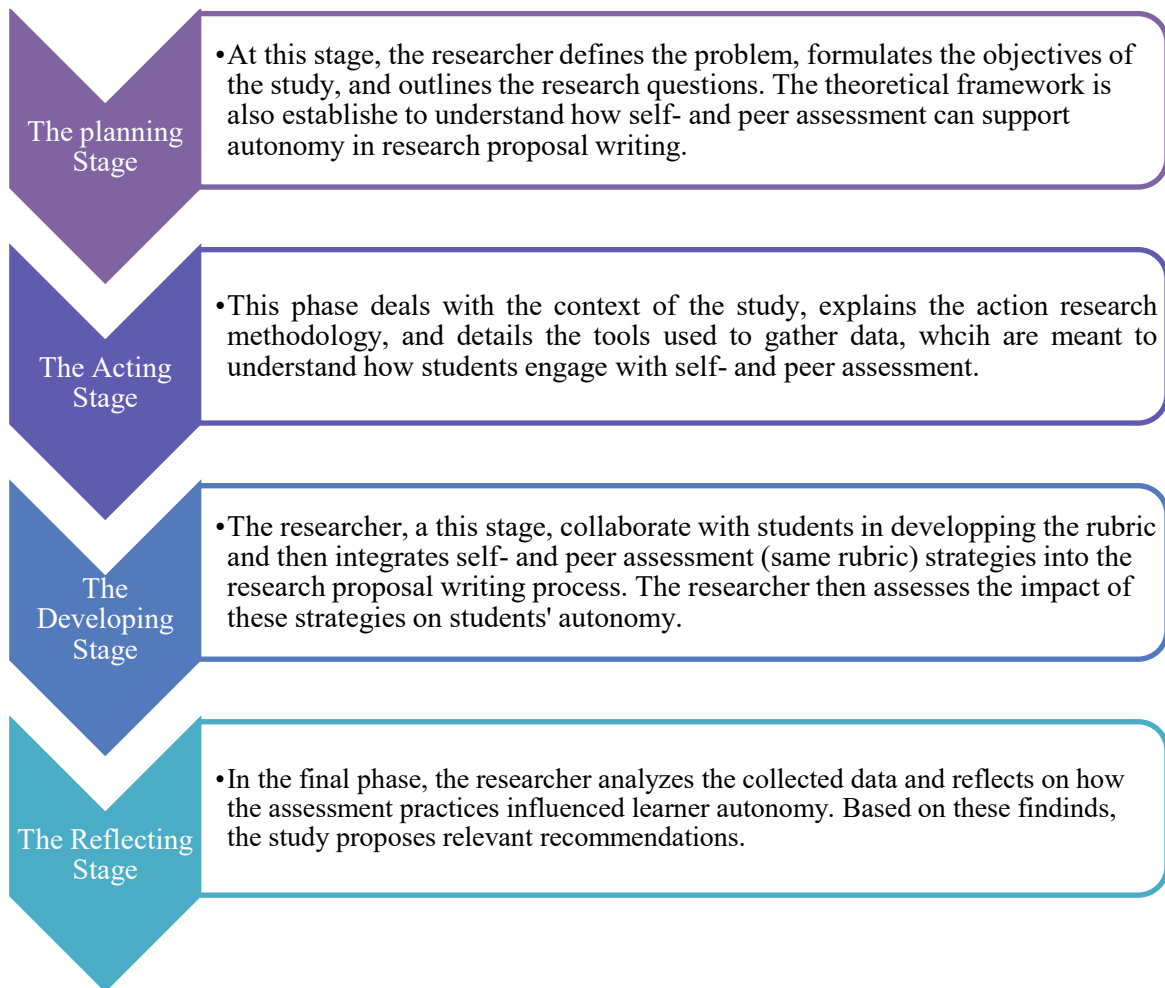
The Process of Action Research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988)



As shown in the figure above, Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1988) model outlines a clear sequence of steps that guide the action research process. It begins with identifying the problem and envisioning success, which shapes the direction of the study. The next step is to develop a plan of action, followed by collecting data to monitor its impact. After that, researchers analyze the data and form conclusions, then report the results. Finally, the theory is adjusted based on the findings, and the process begins again. Each step builds on the previous one, which also leads to a structured and ongoing cycle of improvement.

In line with this model, the present study will proceed through the following steps to carry out the action research process:

Figure 3.4

The Plan of Action Research**3.6.6. Process of Action Research**

It seems important to then explain how action research is carried out in a more detailed manner. In particular, the specific various steps that any teacher-researcher needs to follow. The figure below, adopted from Nunan (1992), clarifies the different stages of an action research process.

Figure 3.5

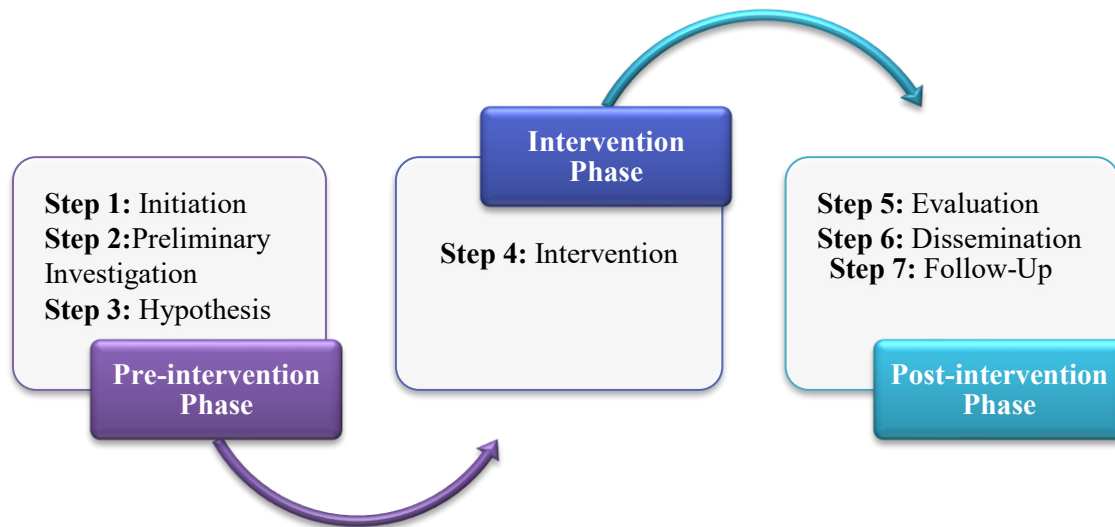
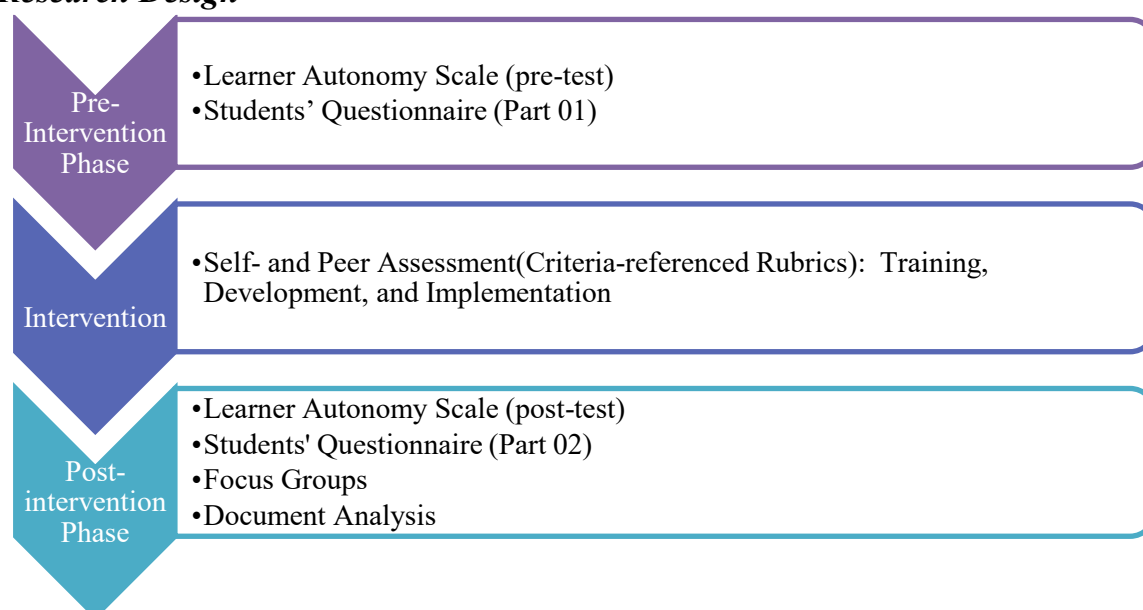
Steps of an Action Research (Nunan, 1992)

Figure 3.5 illustrates the various stages of an action research process, which is composed of seven steps that were suggested by Nunan (1992). These steps are categorized into three major phases: pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention. The pre-intervention phase includes three key steps. Initially, it begins with the identification of the problem, where the teacher observes an issue/problem in the classroom. The second step is about conducting a preliminary investigation, which may include methods like observing, questioning, and/or interviewing. The objective of this step is to gather data, which leads to the third step: formulating research hypotheses. Once the research hypotheses are identified, the intervention phase follows. More specifically, the fourth step allows the teacher to implement their own intervention plan designed to address the issue/problem. This intervention is based on the data analysis from the second and third steps (i.e., it is not an arbitrary solution but one grounded in prior research). The plan is then executed over a set period, such as three weeks, a semester, or an academic year, depending on the situation. The subsequent phase is the post-intervention stage, which also involves three steps. The fifth step requires the researcher to assess the impact of the intervention. This evaluation can include methods such as questioning, interviewing, recording, or testing to determine the effects on the participants (i.e., checking the success of the intervention). The sixth step is dissemination, where the teacher shares their findings by presenting the research at a conference, for example, to allow fellow

colleagues to provide feedback and suggestions. Last but not least, the follow-up step means that the researcher may continue their investigation to implement further interventions within the same context.

Accordingly, the present action research study is composed of three phases: pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention. At the outset, and in the pre-intervention phase, the researcher identifies the various difficulties students face in being autonomous during the writing of their research proposals. The data obtained from this phase aids the researcher in developing hypotheses about the problem at hand. The second stage requires the researcher to introduce an intervention (using self- and peer assessment) that is grounded in the research hypotheses established in the first phase. This aims to promote learner autonomy among students. After the intervention, the researcher assesses its effects on students' levels of learner autonomy and their perceptions of its impact on their autonomy during research proposal writing. In other terms, the last phase seeks to examine whether the intervention resulted in higher learner autonomy among the participants. To fulfill the objectives of each phase, the action research requires the researcher to employ different data gathering tools at different stages. The following figure illustrates the research design of the study, which is divided into three main phases: the pre-intervention phase, the intervention phase, and the post-intervention phase.

Figure 3.6
Research Design



The figure above details the different steps involved in each phase of the research process of this study. In the pre-intervention phase, the focus is on collecting baseline data to assess students' initial learner autonomy levels and gather perspectives on their perceptions of their autonomy, autonomy levels, and research proposal writing experience. To this end, the researcher used Learner Autonomy Scale (pre-test) and the first part of the Students' Questionnaire. During the intervention phase, the focus shifts to the implementation of self- and peer assessment strategies using a criteria-referenced assessment rubric. This phase revolves around training students in self- and peer assessment, development of the self- and peer assessment (criteria-referenced assessment rubric) with students' collaboration, and active implementation of these assessment tools. The last stage, post-intervention, deals with the evaluation of the impact of the intervention. Data collection during this phase includes a post-test using the Learner Autonomy Scale, a follow-up questionnaire (Part 2) for students, focus group discussions, and a document analysis of students' self- and peer assessment criteria-referenced rubrics. Each phase is thoughtfully structured to meet research objectives and to monitor the intervention's development as it continues to progress.

A timeline of the procedures of the research is listed in Table 3.2, which illustrates at what point in time during the study each of the instruments was used with regard to the three phases of the present research:

Table 3.2

Timetable of the Data Collection Procedures

Phase	Week / Dates	Activity
Pre-Intervention	Week 1: 1 st Oct, 2024	Learner Autonomy Scale (Pre-Test)
	Week 2: 17 th Dec, 2024	Students' questionnaire (Part 01)
Intervention – Training	Week 1: 4 th Feb, 2025	Rubric co-development and introduction to self- and peer assessment
	Week 2: 11 th Feb, 2025	Training Students in self- and peer assessment
	Week 3: 18 th Feb, 2025	Workshop on effective feedback principles
	Week 4: 25 th Feb, 2025	Self-assessment practice
	Week 5: 04 th Mar, 2025	Peer assessment practice
	Week 6: 11 th Mar, 2025	Peer assessment and feedback discussion
Post-Intervention	Week 1: 8 th Apr, 2025	Learner Autonomy Scale (Post-Test)
	Week 2: 15 th Apr, 2025	Students' Questionnaire (Part 02)
	Week 3: 15 th Apr, 2025	Focus Groups
	Week 4: 29 ^h Apr, 2025	Document Analysis

There appears to be a need to thoroughly explain the intervention phase in a more elaborate manner.

3.7. The Intervention: Content and Process

The intervention in this action research was the design, training, and implementation of the criteria-referenced self-assessment rubric (See Appendix A) and criteria-referenced peer assessment rubric (See Appendix B). A noteworthy point is that the study took place during the first and second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year in the Research Methodology module. The pre-intervention phase occurred in the first semester, whereas the intervention and post-intervention phase occurred in the second semester.

The research aims to actively involve students in all stages of the assessment process. So, the intervention was intended, first and foremost, to improve students' ability to critically evaluate and revise their own research proposals as well as those of their peers. Scholarly research, as discussed in Chapter Two, supports the position

that formative assessment tools, if well designed and integrated, can lead to better learning outcomes and higher levels of learner autonomy (Andrade & Du, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Under appropriate conditions, students can accurately self-assess and self-regulate (Paris & Paris, 2001).

What is particularly noteworthy, and rather uncommon in many academic contexts, was that these rubrics were not simply handed down to students. Instead, students were active participants in the design and construction stages of the rubrics. Accordingly, the design of the criteria-referenced self- and peer assessment rubrics resulted from a collaborative process in which Master's students co-constructed the criteria alongside their teacher-researcher. In contrast to the traditional and prevalent top-down model of imposed assessment procedures, it can be argued that more student responsibility and accountability are achieved when both teacher and students collaborate in the development of assessment tools. Bottom-up approaches show better results than top-down models (Skedsmo & Huber, 2019). Andrade (2010) posits that students "can and should be considered the definitive source of formative assessment information". In particular, the rubric co-construction process is, from students' perspectives, a crucial factor in improving understanding of rubrics and the broader assessment practice (Kilgour et al., 2019).

Beyond autonomy and its emphasis on freedom, structure is a crucial element in the learning process. Jang et al. (2010) suggest that establishing a more organized learning environment that balances between structure and learner autonomy tend to improve students' learning and engagement dramatically. To fulfill such an environment, there is a need to provide clear learning expectations that describe the steps for task completion, recommend suitable learning strategies, and explain the outcomes associated with either achieving or failing to meet the learning objectives (Van Loon et al., 2012).

Henceforth, the criteria-referenced rubric was carefully chosen for this study because it provides structure with clear and specific criteria and was simultaneously used as a flexible guide, rather than being strictly followed, to achieve more autonomous learning. As opposed to norm-referenced assessments, which rank students in comparison to peers, criterion-referenced rubrics assess the extent to

which individual work meets predetermined standards or learning objectives. Such an approach goes hand in hand with educational goals focused on mastery, formative feedback, and clear communication of realistic expectations (Brookhart, 2013). In order to establish a comprehensive understanding of the rubrics used, it seems important to shed light on the study's intervention in terms of both content and process.

3.7.1. The Content

In terms of the criteria used, both the self- and peer assessment rubrics are identical. They differ only in the instructions provided: one is intended for students to assess their own work, while the other is designed for assessing the work of a peer. Each criterion in the rubric has a twofold objective: (1) to identify the characteristics of a quality written research proposal, and (2) to function as a clear learning goal for students to achieve in the revision process of students' written research proposals. The criteria that were developed are, in the same order as the rubrics, examined as follows:

- **Cover Page**

The objective of the cover page criterion is to help students learn to present their work professionally and in accordance with academic writing conventions and formatting. Cover pages, though sometimes undervalued, are exceptionally important because they establish a positive first impression, demonstrate professionalism, present the key components of the research, and offer immediate context for the reader (Birk, 2024). Moreover, a well-formatted cover page clearly demonstrates organizational skills and an understanding of academic norms, both of which are crucial in higher education settings.

- **Title of the Proposal**

The second criterion, title of the proposal, encourages students to formulate clear, concise, and informative titles that accurately reflect the scope, variables, methodology, and context of their research. A precise title is vital because it is expected to clearly specify the academic field and stimulates the reader's curiosity about the study (Cargill & O'Connor, 2013). Therefore, training students to craft

effective research proposal titles may well help them harness their communication skills to express their research focus succinctly and academically.

- **Table of Contents**

The third criterion is one of the most important elements of a research proposal or any other scientific document: Table of contents. Similar to the cover page, the objective of an accurate table of contents in one's research proposal is to provide a concise overview of its structure and content for the reader/examiner. To put it differently, the heading and subheading in the table of contents section is supposed to illustrate a "road map" to guide the reader (Dade, 2022). An accurate table of contents signals logical sequencing and coherence in academic writing and students' ability to structure lengthy documents effectively.

- **Introduction**

Another more complex section of the research proposal assessment rubric is the introduction. The reason behind writing the introduction is "to establish a framework for the research, so that readers can understand how it is related to other research" (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 96). Thus, the objective of the fourth criterion is to assess the extent to which students have met the expectations of including the fundamental components of a research proposal, such as the background of the study, the research problem, and other important elements:

- ✓ **Background of the Study:** It introduces the research context and rationale. The objective here is to help students situate their inquiry within broader academic debate.
- ✓ **Research Problem:** It clarifies the specific problem being addressed. According to Hiba (2025), a research problem statement can be understood as "both a research method and a transformative approach to critical thinking, positioning it as a pivotal *modus operandi* that transcends the limitations of conventional research practices." (p. 1). Hence, this sub-criterion's objective is to tap into students' own critical thinking skills, as well.
- ✓ **Significance of the Study:** It prompts students to justify the importance of their research. That is, "the theoretical framework and the predictions

make clear how the study will increase the field's understanding toward achieving a goal of shared value" (Hiebert et al., 2022, p. 108).

- ✓ **Research Objectives:** It guides students in defining clear and measurable goals to focus their study effectively.
- ✓ **Research Questions:** It cultivates precision in formulating specific and answerable questions that must go hand in hand with the objectives and other components of the study.
- ✓ **Hypotheses:** It basically asks students to formulate hypotheses that are applicable and based on the literature review.

It seems that dividing the introduction into smaller sections may be a better way to teach research writing because it helps students write more structured and better organized introductions.

- **The Literature Review**

The fifth criterion used in the co-constructed rubric is the literature review. It needs to clearly "establish the need for the research and indicate that the writer is knowledgeable about the area" (Wiersma, 1995, p. 406). Furthermore, one may add that writing a literature review is in itself a clear demonstration of students' critical thinking skills, as it requires them to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate existing research to construct a coherent scholarly argument. However, due to the brevity nature of the proposal, students were asked to provide a rather concise form of a literature review based on their readings and understandings. This criterion then serves the following multiple objectives:

- ✓ **Define the Knowledge Gap:** Students learn to identify what is already known and where their research can contribute new interpretations or findings in the literature.
- ✓ **Explain the Conceptual Framework:** This helps students articulate and define the key concepts and variables concerning their study.
- ✓ **Identify the Theoretical Framework:** It makes sure that students demonstrate their understanding of the theories and concepts that inform the argument they made in the research proposal.

- ✓ **Synthesize Arguments:** This develops students' critical reading and writing skills through the integration of diverse and relevant scholarly sources from reputable journals.
- ✓ **Coherent Presentation:** This not only provides evidence that students are familiar with previous research, but also demonstrates that their work reads well, similar to a logical and well-structured essay.

- **Proposed Methodology**

It is apparent that the purpose of writing the methodology section is to persuade the examiners/readers that the methodology is valid and is the most appropriate strategy to address the research problem of a given study. Also, all the choices students make throughout their research process need to be reported and justified in the proposed methodology section. Each methodology sub-criterion addresses the following research skills:

- ✓ **Research Design:** It makes sure that students can outline a feasible and appropriate research approach to answer the research questions.
- ✓ **Instruments:** They clarify how data will be gathered.
- ✓ **Sample:** A sample is any subset of the research population. It is a chunk of the population, which is important for the validity of one's study.
- ✓ **Data Analysis:** It develops students' ability to anticipate and explain how data will be treated.
- ✓ **Expected Findings:** It helps students consider expected results based on the methods used, objectives, and the literature.
- ✓ **Limitations:** It focuses on the study's constraints and ethical considerations.

The abovementioned criteria should ultimately guide students to construct a research proposal that is supposed to be methodologically sound.

- **References**

This is a space where students are required to properly credit all their sources throughout their research proposal. References lend credibility and authority to the ideas used throughout a manuscript (Pears & Shields, 2013). Accordingly, this

criterion is meant to promote scholarly integrity and academic literacy by requiring a minimum number of credible and relevant sources, proper formatting, and consistency throughout. Different disciplines use different style guides, such as the American Psychological Association (APA) style, the Modern Language Association (MLA) style, and the Chicago style, among others; however, the style that is used by the Social Sciences, and for the participants' studies, is the APA style.

- **Language Used**

The researcher-teacher and students agreed to place the 'language used' criterion as the penultimate one in the rubric because we intended for the assessor to pay more attention to the science and ideas than language. So, the criterion assesses students' command of academic English, including grammar, cohesion, coherence, and tone. The degree to which academic proposals are readable and of scholarly quality is, to a larger extent, dictated by the clarity and formality of their language.

- **Further Questions**

Last but not least, this final criterion invites students to assess the proposal's strengths and weaknesses and asks students to make recommendations and set goals and actionable decisions based on the following questions:

- ✓ What is your overall feedback and recommendation regarding the research proposal?
- ✓ What steps will you (your peer) take to improve the quality of your research proposal?

In addition to the criteria, the rubric is composed of a number of guiding procedures that were carefully included to make sure the self- and peer assessment practices remain, as much as possible, valid, reliable, and constructive.

- **Guiding Procedure Used for Self-assessment:**

For the criteria-referenced self-assessment rubric, students were guided to:

- ✓ Read each criterion carefully to understand what constitutes quality work.
- ✓ Rate their own proposals honestly on a 1-4 scale based on the rubric.
- ✓ Write reflective comments identifying what was done well and what needs improvement.

- ✓ Set achievable goals to improve their proposals based on their assessment.

The rationale behind these instructions lies in the role of self-assessment as a form of, to use Andrade's (2010) term, a "metacognitive act" (p. 10). In addition to this, there is ample evidence that suggests that honest and critical self-evaluation, though challenging, could improve academic achievement. The rating scale used in both rubrics ranged from 1 to 4, where 1 indicated "Needs Improvement" 2 signified "Approaching Expectations" 3 represented "Meets Expectations" and 4 stood for "Excellent". As for the reflective comments section in the rubric, it was used as a scaffold, helping students to articulate their thoughts clearly and set targeted goals. Toward the conclusion of the self-assessment rubric, students were reminded of a widely recognized principle in second language writing: "writing is rewriting". Finally, for self-assessment to be more reliable and objective, it "needs to be done on a continuous basis with constant guidance from the teacher" (Muñoz & Alvarez, 2007, p. 1).

- **Guiding Procedure Used for Peer Assessment:**

The criteria-referenced peer assessment rubric instructed students to engage in several steps, such as:

- ✓ Read each criterion attentively in order to grasp the underlying expectations and standards.
- ✓ Critically assess their peer's proposal against these criteria.
- ✓ Assign an objective rating on a scale from one to four.
- ✓ Offer specific and detailed comments directed at the proposal itself rather than the peer or writer.
- ✓ Avoid discussing their assessments with others throughout the peer assessment process.

The rationale underpinning these instructions is largely concerned with improving the validity and fairness of peer assessment processes and outcomes. Research suggests that students frequently hesitate to offer candid criticism of their peers, due to social pressures or the desire to maintain amicable relationships (Falchikov, 2004). In this regard, Topping (1998) supports the view that interpersonal

dynamics can compromise the objectivity of peer feedback. In addition to fairness, the practice of providing detailed comments resonates with Nicol's (2010) framework, which positions feedback as a constructive and interactive dialogic process, not a mere trivial exercise for grading.

Furthermore, limiting opportunities for feedback discussions during the actual practice of peer assessment may reduce social influence pressures that might otherwise undermine the objectivity of students' judgments. Nonetheless, it remains important to acknowledge that the effectiveness of these practices can depend on various contextual factors, including group dynamics and learner engagement/autonomy. To close the peer assessment rubric, students were prompted to consider an important concept within second language writing scholarship that writing is "a social act". This served to remind students that drawing on the perspectives and support of others, such as classmates, teachers, family members, friends, etc., may be integral toward developing stronger writing skills.

Before moving to the process of the intervention, it is worth noting here that the teacher-researcher understands that students are not yet expert researchers, but they are trusted to behave as such to come up with decent research proposals and meet the aforementioned assessment criteria to a great extent. Thus, students, during the intervention process, were asked to use the rubrics as an opportunity to assess and improve their research proposal projects, regardless of their skill levels in academic writing and research.

3.7.2. The Process

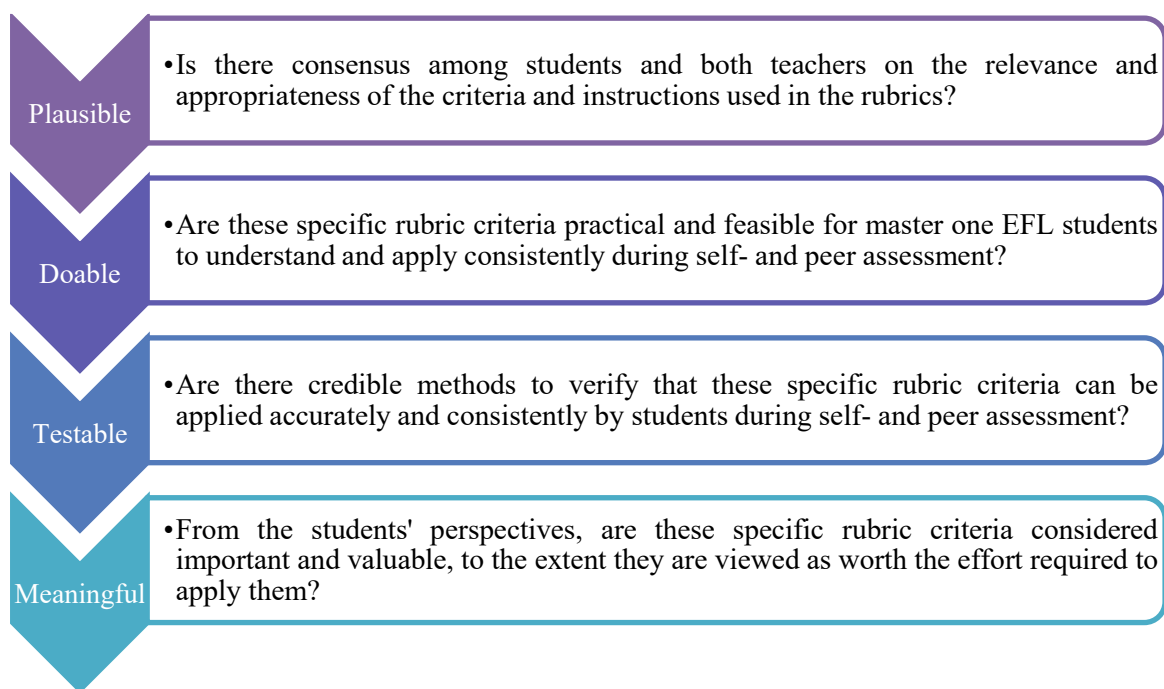
Students were invited to work in small groups (3-4 students) to develop a rubric that could be used to assess their research proposals. The rubric criteria were required to go hand in hand with the course content and the learning objectives covered in previous classes. This exercise provided an opportunity for students both to review the material and to contribute to the development of the assessment tool. Subsequently, the groups presented their rubrics to the entire class. The class then collaboratively selected the most relevant rubric and refined it further with the teacher's help. The criteria were formulated based on a series of lectures and workshops on writing research proposals that the students had attended during the

first semester. Given this prior exposure, the task was not very difficult for them, although the teacher provided support with the organization and structuring of the rubric.

Before wider implementation was carried out, the teacher-researcher invited a colleague from the same department, with expertise in second language writing and rhetoric, to collaborate on reviewing the rubric. A possible method to accomplish this is to test and pilot the rubrics that have been developed in order to verify the clarity of the guidelines criteria, and the layout of both of the self- and peer assessment rubrics. This preliminary testing and piloting of the rubrics made sure that they are based on clear and relevant criteria, parallel with the assessment objectives, and that they function effectively in assessing student work in a consistent manner. In doing so, Connell and Klem's (2000) broad framework of "Theory of Change" was employed to assess the extent to which the intervention was meaningful, testable, doable, and plausible:

Figure 3.7

Assessing the Quality of Rubric Criteria: An Adaptation of Connell and Klem's (2000) Framework



Based on the adapted Connell and Klem (2000) framework presented in Figure 3.7, the teachers undertook a careful examination of the rubrics developed. To

elaborate, this process entailed a critical assessment of the rubric criteria based on specific questions derived from the four principles of the framework. For instance, evaluating “Plausibility” involved considering whether students and teachers agreed on the criteria's relevance and appropriateness. As for assessing “Doability”, it required the examination of the practical feasibility of these criteria for consistent application by Master one students during self- and peer assessment. Furthermore, the idea of “Testability” necessitated the teachers to verify the accurate and consistent application of the criteria by students. Finally, the evaluation of “Meaningfulness” addressed whether students perceived the criteria as sufficiently important and valuable to warrant the effort needed for their use. Thus, the application of the framework was instrumental in confirming that the assessment instrument meets, relying on two teachers’ and students’ perspectives, the four criteria of the framework to a larger extent.

Likewise, although students demonstrated a solid understanding of the rubric, partly due to their active participation in its development, the researcher also conducted a practical pilot study to gather more authentic feedback from the students’ perspectives on whether the rubrics are doable and efficient. Three students volunteered to use the rubric and assess a research proposal that was previously used in the course for research methodology training. The task was a form of ungraded homework assignment. In light of the suggestions received from participants, small revisions were applied to the rubric. For example, they recommended narrowing the focus of the literature review criterion to three specific main elements: the knowledge gap, the conceptual framework, and the theoretical framework. So, some items were removed to make sure the assessment is more practical/relevant.

More importantly, one student suggested an additional space for qualitative feedback. The old rubric was constructed solely around a 1-to-4 scale, with the intention that students would write their comments separately on their own research proposal drafts. However, it became apparent that students preferred to include qualitative judgments/comments directly on the rubric itself. When two other students expressed similar views, the researcher added a new column to the rubric where students could provide comments. They were then given the option to write their

qualitative feedback either in the new column of the rubric or within their proposal drafts. Once the rubric was developed, the researcher's focus was directed to training students how to perform formative self- and peer assessment practices effectively.

3.7.2.1. Training Students in the Use of Self- and Peer Assessment

It is unwise to assume that students already possess a good working knowledge of how to assess their own work and that of their peers. Self- and peer assessment are, after all, complex skills to use. As Falchikov and Boud (1989) point out, "self-assessment may be regarded as a skill and, as such, needs to be developed. It has been suggested that good assessment practice, whether ratings be made by students or by teachers, should include training of assessors" (p. 426). Therefore, training students in self- and peer assessment is a necessary first step (Lindblom-ylänne et al., 2006; Vickerman, 2009b). Ross (2006) adds that, "the strengths of self-assessment can be enhanced through training students how to assess their work and each of the weaknesses of the approach (including inflation of grades) can be reduced through teacher action" (Ross, 2006, p. 1).

The training provided to students on how to employ self- and peer assessment took around two weeks of the second semester. It is highly recommended that the training period should ideally be of adequate length (Sluijsmans et al., 2002). The training was, as discussed in Chapter Two, informed by established models that describe self-assessment as a cyclical process with three key stages: planning, comparison, and revision (Andrade, 2010; McMillan & Hearn, 2008; Sadler, 1989). This theoretical framework guided the design of the training, which was adapted to address practical challenges such as unclear assessment criteria and students' confidence in using rubrics.

At the start of the second semester, students were reintroduced to the self- and peer assessment process, with an emphasis on the purpose and benefits of these practices. During this initial briefing, the expectations behind each rubric criterion in (self- and peer assessment rubrics) were carefully explained using examples and group discussion. Because students had participated in developing the rubric, they generally demonstrated a clear understanding of its components and criteria. Students

were also invited to apply the rubric to a sample proposal provided by the teacher. The goal here was to help students build their assessment literacy skills.

Moreover, in the second week of the training, students participated in a workshop that focused specifically on the principles of effective feedback inspired by different researchers, including Dalsgaard et al. (2025), Fleckney et al. (2024), and Hattie and Timperley (2007), which were mentioned in the literature review (see Chapter Two). In this study, the researcher believed that participants, if guided by a well-designed rubric, would eventually bring their “hidden feedback literacy” skills (Dalsgaard et al., 2025, p. 1) to the forefront. Students were also trained to adopt a constructive and respectful tone when giving or receiving peer feedback. Other discussions dealt with how to balance critical observations with strong and positive points in assessing their own work or that of their peers. Last but not least, the teacher shared a few examples of feedback excerpts that focused on the kinds of feedback based on guided problem-solving questions in order to develop a dialogue and a positive relationship between the assessor and the assessed.

Throughout this training, the teacher-researcher played the role of a guide or facilitator. He answered questions and clarified expectations. In addition, he continuously explained the purpose of self- and peer assessment to help students become more motivated and better prepared for the intervention phase. As explained in the literature, explaining the purpose and importance of doing self- and peer assessment as early as possible is a precondition for guiding students toward more engaging assessment practices.

When the rubric and training were achieved, participating students were invited to apply the criteria-referenced self- and peer assessment rubrics in practice (intervention phase). The process involved multiple cycles of assessment: students submitted draft proposals, practiced self-assessment, then peer assessment, reflected on their feedback, and revised accordingly. This phase lasted three weeks: one week for self-assessment and two weeks for peer assessment. During the self-assessment procedure, students critically evaluated their own proposals, and had the opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses and set goals to revise their work. In peer assessment, students reviewed a classmate’s proposal individually, applying the

rubric criteria, rating each aspect, and writing detailed qualitative comments. Students were briefly reminded of key principles of peer assessment, such as avoiding discussion of assessments with peers during the evaluation process. Afterward, students shared and discussed their feedback with one another.

After the intervention ended, students were invited to share their perspectives and experiences of conducting self- and peer assessment using some data collection tools.

3.8. Research Instruments

In order to fulfill the different aims of its action research phases, the present study employs several research instruments: the learner autonomy scale, a students' questionnaire, focus groups, and content analysis.

3.8.1. The Learner Autonomy Scale

The Learner Autonomy Scale (LAS) (See Appendix C) was specifically developed to assess students' autonomy and academic readiness. This scale focuses on multiple dimensions of autonomy, such as cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective aspects. The design of the scale drew inspiration from existing instruments, such as the Learner Autonomy Questionnaire (LAQ) (Gholami, 2016) and the Learner Autonomy Scale for Distance Education Students (Bei et al., 2019), both of which were adapted to suit the specific goals of this research. Additionally, some items were devised based on the theoretical framework, the constructivist learning theory, introduced in the literature review (See Chapter One).

The scale comprises of a total of twenty (20) items, and uses a 4-point frequency scale, where participants are asked to indicate how often they experience each statement, with options ranging from (1) 'Always' to (4) 'Never'. These items are distributed across five key sub-sections: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, the teacher's role, social conditions, and affective constructs. Further, these components are central to the constructivist approach to learning. A detailed description of these sub-sections is provided in Table 3.3 below:

Table 3.3

Dimensions of the Learner Autonomy Scale (LAS)

Dimension	Sub-section	Items	Focus
Dimension 1	Cognitive Strategies	4 items	Use of note-taking, organizing, summarizing, and resourcing strategies in writing.
Dimension 2	Metacognitive Strategies	4 items	Goal-setting, planning, monitoring progress, and evaluating writing.
Dimension 3	Teacher's Role	4 items	Dependence on teacher feedback and guidance during writing.
Dimension 4	Social Conditions	4 items	Peer collaboration, feedback sharing, and social interaction during writing.
Dimension 5	Affective Constructs	4 items	Motivation, emotion management, and confidence in research-based writing.

The Cognitive Strategies sub-section looks at how students use specific techniques during the research-based writing process. Illustratively, this section includes four (4) items that measure how often students apply these strategies to manage and improve their proposal writing on their own, including taking notes, organizing their ideas, processing information from sources, and supporting their work with relevant academic resources. For the second dimension, the metacognitive strategies sub-section focuses on students' ability to plan, set goals, monitor their progress, and reflect on their work. As for the Teacher's Role sub-section, four (4) items explore the extent to which students depend on their teacher's guidance and feedback. Mainly, it is about understanding how much students value the role of their teacher in their writing development. The social conditions sub-section, also with four (4) items, assesses students' engagement with their peers during the writing process. That is to say, it examines how students collaborate with their classmates, ask for feedback, and share ideas, which, in effect, may be helpful in improving their research proposal writing, as discussed in Chapter One. Last but not least, the affective constructs sub-section touches on the emotional side of writing and doing research. This part includes four (4) items that explore students' motivation, confidence, and emotion management. It basically deals with how students stay motivated and

manage their emotions, especially when faced with challenges in research proposal writing.

To make sure the wording of the statements was clear and matched the students' level of understanding, the scale was initially piloted. After reviewing the participants' responses, it was clear that the students had no issues interpreting or answering the statements. However, a few small changes were made to improve clarity. Out of the total 47 students in both groups, 30 students completed the main scale, which was administered before the self- and peer assessment intervention took place.

As mentioned earlier, the pre-scale was designed to measure the students' level of autonomy in the context of writing for academic purposes. Thirty (30) students completed the Learner Autonomy scale after the intervention. The purpose of the post-scale was to assess any changes in the students' autonomy and see if there was a significant improvement after the intervention. To have a clear idea about the reliability of the scale, the researcher applied the test-retest method. So, the scale was administered to the same group of students a few weeks apart, and the strong correlation between their first and second scores suggested that the scale reliably measures some relevant aspects of learner autonomy. In addition, informants' identities remained confidential when answering the items of both the pre- and post-scales in accordance with research ethics. Another data-gathering tool used in this action research, which also aimed to partly assess students' autonomy in writing research and their understanding of the concept based on their own perceptions, is the students' questionnaire.

3.8.2. Students' Questionnaire

A questionnaire is considered as a structured set of written questions, which are designed to gather specific information within a short time frame. Questionnaires generally gather three types of respondent data: factual (who they are), behavioral (what they do/did), and attitudinal (what they think) (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). The questionnaire, therefore, becomes a valuable instrument to elicit precise and reliable data regarding learner autonomy and writing behaviors that may significantly inform

the findings of this action research. Questionnaires have several advantages, which are best summarized by Dornyei (2003):

The main attraction of questionnaires is their unprecedented efficiency in terms of (a) researcher time, (b) researcher effort, and (c) financial resources. By administering a questionnaire to a group of people, one can collect a huge amount of information in less than an hour ... Furthermore, if the questionnaire is well constructed, processing the data can also be fast and relatively straightforward, especially by using some modern computer software... They are also very versatile, which means that they can be used successfully with a variety of people in a variety of situations targeting a variety of topics (p. 168).

Due to their efficiency, versatility, and ability to quickly collect meaningful data, questionnaires appear to be a valuable data-gathering tool in educational research.

The students' questionnaire, which was designed to investigate the role of self- and peer assessment in autonomous research proposal writing, employed a blend of closed and open-ended questions in order to elicit both breadth and depth of data. This is to say, by administering a questionnaire that focused on these two kinds of data, it can yield both structured data for analysis and open space for participants' local voices to be heard.

As for the closed-ended questions, three main types were used to elicit specific, measurable information:

A. Dichotomous Questions: These are straightforward questions requiring a single response, such as ticking either 'Male' or 'Female' for gender, or choosing 'Yes' or 'No' to indicate agreement or preference. These questions served to quickly collect factual data with minimal cognitive load for the participants.

B. Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQs): Some items offered a set of options from which respondents could select one or more answers. For example, participants were asked to identify which academic modules supported their preparation for research proposal writing. This format helped gather broader data across the sample, such as which parts of the curriculum were perceived as most helpful.

C. Rating Scale Questions: These types of questions were particularly useful

in measuring students' attitudes, perceptions, and self-reported behaviors. A Likert-type scale was used in several parts of the questionnaire, especially when the researcher attempted to investigate the perceived impact of self- and peer assessment on motivation, confidence, critical thinking, and responsibility. This scale allowed participants to indicate the strength of their agreement with various statements, for example.

In addition to these, the questionnaire made deliberate use of open-ended questions, especially in the early and final sections. Unlike closed items, these questions did not offer predefined response options. Instead, students were invited to explain their understanding of learner autonomy, describe autonomous behaviors in writing, reflect on their experiences with assessment, and comment freely on the challenges they faced. This approach provided richer qualitative data that could not have been easily gained through structured formats alone.

The combination of these question types had a two-fold aim: (1) it offered the clarity needed for systematic analysis, and (2) it provided a space for deeper reflection and expression. Hence, the research was able to access a wide range of student perspectives, including factual data, emotional responses, and self-reflection, which would pave the way for a deeper understanding of learner autonomy within the context of doing research.

In the present study, the students' questionnaire was structured in two parts to serve different phases of the study. The first part (See Appendix D) was administered prior to the intervention and aimed to gather data on students' perceptions of the concept of learner autonomy, the levels of autonomy, and their experiences and challenges in writing academic research proposals. This part of the students' questionnaire was meant to come up with pertinent information regarding students' self-perceived abilities, attitudes, and the difficulties they faced in writing their academic research proposals before being introduced to self- and peer assessment strategies.

The second part of the students' questionnaire was administered as a follow-up questionnaire (See Appendix E) after the intervention. Its goal was to evaluate any changes, if any, in students' experiences related to self- and peer assessment, and how

this process was perceived to impact their learner autonomy in research proposal writing after being involved in the assessment process. In particular, the follow-up students' questionnaire during the post-intervention sought to examine the perceived development in areas such as cognitive and metacognitive strategies, collaboration, motivation, and confidence in the context of research and writing for academic purposes.

3.8.2.1. Students' Questionnaire (Part 01)

The students' questionnaire opens with a short paragraph that briefly states the aim of the study and invites the participants to kindly answer the questions. In this paragraph, the participants are informed that their answers will be only used for research purposes and their identities will remain anonymous. At the end of the paragraph, the participants are thanked for their willingness to participate in the research.

Since the study's purpose was to explore the role of self- and peer assessment as tools for promoting learner autonomy in the process of writing academic research proposals, the researcher believes it is appropriate to structure and divide the questionnaire into sections that correspond to each part of the scope of the current study. Each section includes a set of questions about a specific part of the research. One may assume that such a structure would help in the analysis to better understand and identify the students' perceived impact of self- and peer assessment in promoting their learner autonomy. A detailed description of the questionnaire may help the researcher in defining the main objectives of the study, which are presented in the tables below.

Section One: Background Information

This section includes a set of personal questions (Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5) about the participants' factual demographic information and their academic background. The main objective here is to collect relevant data, particularly concerning their writing experience and academic development, that could influence students' responses to the rest of the questionnaire. The following table outlines the objective of each item:

Table 3.4

Objectives of Each Item in Section One of Students' Questionnaire

Question Number	Objective
1	To collect demographic data on participants' gender. Although this question is not directly relevant to our study, it is used as a way to encourage engagement with the research
2	To determine the age group to which research participants belong. It is only included at the beginning to encourage participants to engage with the research
3	To have an idea about the participants' language learning background, which could affect their autonomy level, as well as their academic writing skills
4	To determine students' exposure to academic writing at university and their prior experience with writing for academic purposes
5	To understand the students' familiarity with research-based tasks, such as a research proposal project

Section Two: Learner Autonomy

This section intends to gauge students' understanding of learner autonomy, its importance, and its practice within the context of writing a research proposal. The questions focus on how students define autonomy, the extent to which they consider it valuable, what autonomy in the context of drafting a research proposal means to them, and how they perceive their own level of autonomy. See the table below for details:

Table 3.5

Objectives of Each Item in Section Two of Students' Questionnaire

Question Number	Objective
6	To gain an in-depth understanding of students' own definitions of learner autonomy
7	To check if participants are aware of the importance of learner autonomy
8	To identify some characteristics related to higher autonomy in the research proposal writing process
9	To identify students' perceived level of autonomy in the course of writing a research proposal

Section Three: Experience with Research Proposal Writing

This section revolves around students' experiences with writing research proposals. It aims to identify how well the students feel prepared for the writing task, the challenges they might face, which academic modules helped them in the process, and how they think about self-, peer, and teacher assessment. The objectives of each question item in this section are presented in Table 3.6 below:

Table 3.6

Objectives of Each Item in Section Three of Students' Questionnaire

Question Number	Objective
10	To know which modules supported students in research proposal writing
11	To know the challenges students experienced in the research proposal writing process
12	To know if the students encountered difficulties in selecting their research topic
13	To identify which sections of the research proposal were the most challenging for students to write
14	To find out whom students believe should assess the research proposal
15	To identify students' level of confidence in assessing the quality of their own research proposal
16	To identify students' level of confidence in assessing the quality of their peers' research proposal

The structure of the Students' Questionnaire (Part 01) was designed to confirm that each section and question go hand in hand with the current action research objectives. The background information section sets the stage to understand the context in which the students are writing their proposals. The learner autonomy section explores students' understanding and the degree to which they think they are autonomous writers and researchers. Finally, the research proposal writing experience section assesses students' preparedness, challenges, and initial views on self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher assessment. After the description of the Students' Questionnaire (Part 1), it seems important to shed light on the follow-up

questionnaire (Part 02), which was administered after the intervention, as explained earlier in this chapter.

3.8.2.2. Students' Questionnaire (Part 02)

The students' Questionnaire (Part 02) (See Appendix E) deals with sections four and five. Section Four of the questionnaire aims to examine students' perspectives and practices regarding self- and peer assessment, and how these assessments could contribute to furthering the development of learner autonomy. As an illustration, some questions ask students to reflect on their experience developing, with the help of the teacher, a set of criteria to assess their proposals, as well as the challenges and benefits of being actively involved in the assessment process for learning purposes. This follow-up part of the questionnaire, hence, intends to examine how self- and peer assessment can increase cognitive and metacognitive skills, collaboration and responsibility, confidence, and motivation in students.

Section Four: Self- and Peer Assessment

The aim of Section Four of the Students' Questionnaire (Part 02) is to understand how students, after the intervention, perceive self- and peer assessment practices, the usefulness of these activities, and the challenges they faced when using them in the context of research proposal writing. Each question in this section attempts to get an idea about students' prior exposure to, and their current attitudes toward, these new assessment procedures. Table 3.7 describes the objectives of each question asked in this section:

Table 3.7

Objectives of Each Item in Section Four of Students' Questionnaire

Question Number	Objective
17	To know about students' prior experience with self- and peer assessment activities before the intervention
18	To understand students' opinions on the extent to which self- and peer assessment practices were used in the classroom before the intervention
19	To explore how students viewed their experience of being part of the criteria-referenced assessment rubric development
20	To assess students' level of understanding of the research proposal assessment criteria
21	To evaluate students' perceived effectiveness of self- and peer assessment strategies
22	To identify the challenges students encountered during the self- and peer assessment process

By understanding the students' perspectives and practices on self- and peer assessment, the study can better identify areas for improvement and refinement, which will increase the effectiveness of these tools in learner autonomy development.

Section Five: Self- and Peer Assessment and Learner Autonomy

The main purpose of the last section of the Students' Questionnaire (Part 02), Section Five, is to investigate the perceived impact of self- and peer assessment on students' autonomous research proposal writing. Thus, the main emphasis is on how these assessment practices may influence students' independence, motivation, confidence, and ability to identify strengths and weaknesses in their writing. The following tables provides more details about the objectives of each item. Table 3.8 below addresses the questions related to self-assessment:

Table 3.8

Objectives of Each Item in Section Five (part 1) of Students' Questionnaire

Question Number	Objective
23.1	To assess students' self-perceived ability to evaluate their own writing
23.2	To measure how students perceive the effectiveness of self-assessment in enhancing their writing quality
23.3	To explore whether self-assessment increases students' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses
23.4	To determine if self-assessment encouraged students to be responsible for their writing development
23.5	To assess whether self-assessment helps students set focused and actionable goals
23.6	To measure if self-assessment contributes to students' autonomy in finding resources to improve their writing
23.7	To explore whether self-assessment develops students' critical thinking
23.8	To assess if self-assessment contributes to a deeper understanding of strategies for organizing and processing information in writing
23.9	To examine if self-assessment increases students' confidence in identifying weaknesses
23.10	To explore whether self-assessment boosts students' motivation to improve their work, an important factor in autonomous learning

The objectives of questions related to peer assessment are tackled in Table 3.9 below:

Table 3.9

Objectives of Each Item in Section Five (Part 02) of Students' Questionnaire

Question Number	Objective
23.11	To measure students' confidence in their ability to assess others' work, which is central to peer assessment practices
23.12	To determine whether feedback from peers is perceived as valuable for improving students' writing
23.13	To measure if giving peer feedback enhances students' understanding and the quality of their own work
23.14	To explore whether peer assessment helps students recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, which is crucial for autonomous learning
23.15	To assess whether peer assessment encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and writing improvement
23.16	To determine if peer assessment helps students set specific goals for improving their writing and supporting their autonomy
23.17	To assess whether peer assessment develops students' collaborative skills and their ability to find solutions together, which fosters a cooperative learning environment
23.18	To measure whether peer assessment improves students' critical thinking
23.19	To explore whether working with peers through peer assessment increases students' confidence in identifying their weaknesses
23.20	To assess whether peer assessment fosters a more open and comfortable environment to discussing their own work
23.21	To evaluate whether peer assessment motivates students to improve the quality of their writing

In the following table (3.10), the researcher provides open-ended questions to explore students' viewpoints on the impact of self- and peer assessment tools on their learner autonomy. The objective of each question is outlined below:

Table 3.10

Objectives of Each Item in Section Five of Students' Questionnaire

Question Number	Objective
24	To determine students' perceived impact of using self-assessment on their learner autonomy in writing research
25	To determine students' perceived impact of using peer assessment on their learner autonomy in writing research

As shown in the table above, participants are allowed to reflect on how the opportunity of doing self- and peer assessment can promote their learner autonomy. In addition to the Students' Questionnaire, focus groups were employed as an important tool to cross-check and validate the findings.

3.8.3. Focus Groups

When the follow-up students' questionnaire is achieved, the next stage of the study is to plan and conduct focus groups (See Appendix F). Due to its length, the students' questionnaire did not include all the questions that could have been included. After administering the students' questionnaires, the researcher thought it would have been necessary to conduct focus groups with students so as to allow them to have a space where they could voice their thoughts and elaborate on their answers. The primary goal of this stage, therefore, is to tap into students' experiences, understanding, and attitudes regarding the subject under investigation.

As defined by Dörnyei (2007), a focus group method is “based on the collective experience of group brainstorming, that is, participants thinking together, inspiring and challenging each other, and reacting to the emerging issues and points” (p. 144). Put differently, focus groups, as opposed to individual interviews, center on group dynamics and interaction among participants so as to come up with new ideas and perspectives. Supporting this view, Morgan (1997) maintains that focus groups “are intended to generate data through interaction among participants” (p. 3). In a focus group format, the conversation or discussion is facilitated by a moderator rather than an interviewer. Similarly, Bloor et al. (2001) describe focus groups as “an approach to data collection where a group of individuals are brought together to discuss a particular topic under the guidance of a trained moderator” (p. 10). It can be deduced

that what distinguishes a focus group is its emphasis on group interaction, a specific topic or issue of discussion, and a supportive atmosphere in which the moderator takes a step back and allows participants to interact with one another.

Focus group has its own merits as a data collection method in qualitative studies. As a case in point, it is cost-effective as a research tool because it enables researchers to collect as much data as possible in less time (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). This element might be crucial when resources are scarce. Furthermore, the research informants, in a focus group mode, are allowed to converse and question each others' viewpoints and/or divergent beliefs and attitudes (Ivanoff & and Hultberg, 2006). This kind of data might not be yielded through individual interviews, for instance. Bloor et al. (2001) add that a focus group is a highly flexible data gathering tool since it offers the participants a way to collaborate and think critically during the conversation, which can lead to unexpected and new themes. As mentioned before, discovering new questions and ideas is another objective of the current action research study.

In this investigation, the purpose of the focus groups is to develop a more nuanced understanding concerning the participants' perspectives and practices on the integration of self- and peer assessment, specifically in relation to the criteria-referenced rubrics they used and how the experience influenced their learner autonomy. Likewise, the researcher's decision to make use of focus groups in this study came from the observation that students, during the intervention phase, already conducted peer assessments in small groups. Due to the collaborative nature of peer assessment, exploring the study's participants' perspectives and practices in a group setting, rather than through individual interviews, seemed more appropriate. Put differently, the focus group format, which also relies on the sharing of ideas and feedback among participants, may be a unique opportunity to draw relevant conclusions about how learner autonomy is exercised through peer assessment dialogues. In this respect, participant homogeneity is recommended to increase participants' comfort in sharing their perspectives and to minimize the influence of strongly divergent points of view from other group members (Asbury, 1995). To achieve this, the approach of segmentation, as proposed by Morgan (1997), is used in

this study, where participants are sorted based on similar characteristics to ensure homogeneity within each group. In each group of the focus groups, participants were, to some extent, already familiar with each other because they had previously shared and discussed their research proposals together, which helped build a welcoming and cooperative space for conversation.

It is worth noting that other important factors that researchers should take into account, when using the focus groups method, is the size of the group and the number of groups. Traditionally, focus groups usually take place within a size of a group that is limited to a maximum of twelve participants (Asbury, 1995; Smithson, 2008). Dörnyei (2007) recommends that the number of participants in each focus group should be between six and eight. Nonetheless, the number of participants may sometimes differ and can be between three and twelve individuals per group (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). In terms of the number of groups in focus group research, Morgan (1997) noted that data saturation can be achieved with three to six groups. Accordingly, the current study will employ three separate focus groups, with a size of six to eight participants per group: six participants in the first and second groups and eight in the third one (a total of twenty participants). This group size is deemed appropriate when one considers the context in which the data is being gathered.

Another important element for researchers to pay close attention to before preparing and leading focus groups is the order of their questions. It is generally agreed that the sequence of questions in focus groups consists of three phases: introductory questions, transition questions, and key questions. In the first phase of the focus group tool used in this study, introductory questions are used to establish the participants' connection with the topic and to set the context for the discussion. The main goal here is to help participants think about their personal experiences and engagement with research proposal writing. In the second phase, transition questions are introduced to direct the participants' attention to central themes of the study. In essence, the researcher/moderator intends to shift the conversation from general experiences to specific topics, such as self- and peer assessment and learner autonomy. The final phase tackles the students' perceived impact of the strategies used on learner autonomy in research proposal writing. Last but not least, these key

questions will also invite them to reflect on similar learning scenarios in the future. Further details regarding the objectives of each question at each stage are provided in the following tables:

Table 3.11 below covers the objectives of the questions asked in phase one, the introductory phase:

Phase One: Introductory Questions**Table 3.11*****Objectives of Each Question of the Introductory Questions in Focus Groups***

Question Number	Objective
1	To understand the motivation(s), if any, behind the participants' decision to enroll in the master's program
2	To determine the participants' expectations and goals as master's students
3	To identify any challenges the participants faced during the research proposal writing process

The objectives of the second phase questions, part of the transition stage, are outlined in Table 3.12:

Phase Two: Transition Questions**Table 3.12*****Objectives of Each Question of the Transition Questions in Focus Groups***

Question Number	Objective
4	To identify challenges related to the lack of learner autonomy in the proposal writing process
5	To identify the strategies participants used to promote their learner autonomy

The last table, Table 3.13, provides an overview of the objectives behind the questions from the third phase, the key questions:

Phase Three: Key Questions

Table 3.13

Objectives of Each Question of the Key Questions in the Focus Groups

Question Number	Objective
6	To know about the participants' experience in developing the rubric
7	To identify the perceived benefits and challenges of self-assessment
8	To know about the perceived pros and cons of peer assessment
9	To examine the effect of self- and peer assessment on the participants' learner autonomy
10	To investigate whether the participants are willing to use self- and peer assessment procedures in future learning situations

After transcribing the focus group discussions in full, the researcher segmented the data into discrete units of speech. For the purposes of this study, a unit of speech is defined as a sequence of words forming a complete sentence with a subject-verb-complement structure. In light of the informal and semi-structured focus group format and the oral aspect of participants' contributions, units of analysis were, as much as possible, framed mainly according to meaning and the shortest grammatical sentence structure. The concept of the unit of speech was also used to identify codable units. The researcher implemented inductive coding where the emerging meaning of the transcribed texts came from reading through sections of the text. Next, he noted down observations of common themes that participants used to discuss their reflections to come up with the codes. The researcher relied on Corbin and Strauss's (2008) definitions of coding as they illustrated how large categories can encapsulate small concepts.

In practical terms, coding means attaching specific labels or names to the texts or statements produced by the respondents. In other words, the researcher reads the statements produced by the respondents and organizes them thematically according to what they describe. The aim behind this process is to identify relationships between data sets. In the analysis of data, to gain deep insight into the respondents' statements,

the researcher used line-by-line coding, where he coded each line of the text to extract all emerging thematic categories that describe in detail what the respondents said .

Ten questions were asked to engage students in conversations to reflect on self- and peer assessment in relation to learner autonomy in their proposal writing process. To triangulate the data and enhance validity, document analysis, as another research tool, was conducted in addition to the students' questionnaire and focus groups.

3.8.4. Document Analysis

Document analysis, in this action research study, is an integral research tool that is employed for data collection. Within the triangulation framework, document analysis is commonly combined with other research methods to lessen the effects of bias by cross-checking data collected through different research tools (Bowen, 2009). According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), document analysis is defined as:

a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic – (computer-based and internet transmitted) material.... document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge (cited in Bowen, 2009, p. 27).

In a similar vein, Merriam (1998) describes these documents as “of all types, [they] can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (p. 118). There are several types of documents that can be analyzed in qualitative research. O’Leary (2004) identifies three main types of documents for analysis: public records (official organizational documents like mission statements and syllabi), personal documents (first-person accounts such as emails and journals), and physical evidence (objects found in the study setting like flyers and handbooks).

Similar to the aforementioned research tools, document analysis has several advantages as well as drawbacks. One of its main advantages is that it allows researchers to work with data that is already available/accessible, so it can reduce costs and avoid the need to recruit research participants (Kutsyuruba, 2023). The tool is considered less time-consuming because it focuses more on selecting relevant data than on collecting new data (Bowen, 2009). Yet, certain documents may provide only

small portion of data that contains the information needed to answer the research question (Bowen, 2009). Another limitation of the document analysis research tool could be, to borrow Yin's (2003) terms, "biased selectivity" (p. 80) which refers to the practice of selecting only documents that support a particular perspective. To maintain the reliability and validity of the study, it is imperative to carefully assess the subjective nature of documents and how the researcher perceives and interprets the content at hand (Bowen, 2009). Arguably, if applied carefully, document analysis remains such an important and flexible research instrument.

The researcher chose to analyze criteria-referenced rubrics used for self- and peer assessment of research proposals written by Master's students at the University of Medea. The corpus of documents analyzed consists of a random sample of fourteen (14) rubrics. Seven of these rubrics were designated for self-assessment, whereas the remaining seven were intended for peer assessment. The rationale behind selecting these documents for analysis is that, one of the critical signs of learner autonomy, as discussed in Chapter One, is students' ability to assess and reflect on their own learning and that of their peers. Therefore, the researcher sought to look into how students evaluate their own progress and that of their peers, and how these evaluations might influence their autonomous learning. The act of doing self-assessment and peer assessment itself reflects students' ability to take responsibility and control of their learning. Another key indicator of learner autonomy is the use of specific learning strategies, which can be effectively traced through students' rubrics. These documents enable the researcher to assess whether students are engaging in behaviors that lead toward more autonomous learning or indicate a departure from it. Students' feedback is a reflection of their autonomous learning. The data gained from document analysis would complement the results from other research tools. This approach may increase the reliability of the study.

The current action research adopts a mixed-methods approach, which integrates both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Such an approach, it is argued, enables a more nuanced exploration of the research questions, since it facilitates the comparison and triangulation of findings across multiple data sources.

While the quantitative data provide measurable outcomes, the qualitative data focus on more contextual ideas that contribute to a better understanding of the study.

To achieve these objectives, a variety of research tools were employed, including those previously mentioned. These tools, which are designed to explore both the breadth and depth of the data, may help the researcher draw meaningful conclusions and raise more pertinent questions about self- and peer assessment and learner autonomy. Besides data gathering instruments, research ethics are a precondition for carrying out responsible research, especially when human participants are involved.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

Ethical dilemmas are present in every stage of the research process. Creswell (2012) argues that “ethics has become a more pervasive idea stretching from the origins of a research study to its final completion and distribution” (p. 23). The process of planning and designing an action research project, without exception, raises complex ethical concerns. The nature of the teacher-researcher’s collaborative relationship with student participants plays a role in these challenges. Mills (2011) explains that:

What makes the subject of ethics particularly challenging for teacher researchers is the intimate and open-ended nature of action research. The dual and sometimes ambiguous role of the teacher and the researcher may lead to ethical dilemmas. Mirvis and Seashore (1982) noted that most ethical dilemmas in such studies arise “not because roles are unclear, but because they are clearly in conflict (p. 87).

To navigate the above-mentioned issues, the researcher has attempted to keep the ethical guidelines and principles of scientific research at the forefront of his mind. Accordingly, key steps were taken to adhere to these principles:

- **Institutional Approval:** Before the study began, the researcher obtained formal approval from the head of the Foreign Languages Department at the University of Medea and provided the institution with an explanation of the action research procedures. (See Appendix G)

- **Informed Consent:** All participants voluntarily agreed to take part in this action research by signing a consent form. They were fully informed about any potential risks and outcomes and assured of their right to withdraw at any time. Also, their identities were confidential. (See Appendix G)
- **Consent for Document Analysis:** To conduct the document analysis, the researcher selected some self- and peer assessment rubrics submitted by students as part of their research proposal writing assignment and reached out to each student to obtain their consent for using these materials in the study.
- **Consent and Confidentiality in Focus Group:** During the focus group sessions, the teacher-researcher recorded the student discussions after taking permission from all participants. Students were clearly informed about the purpose of the recordings, how the data would be used and stored, and their right to withdraw at any time. To respect confidentiality agreements, all recordings were securely stored, and some identifying details were removed during transcription.

Conclusion

As already mentioned, the present study is designed to explore the impact of using student self- and peer assessment on learner autonomy among graduate Applied Linguistics students at the University of Medea, Algeria. In order to accomplish this objective and answer the research questions, we conducted a study using an action research design applying a mixed-methods approach. The study was carried out with thirty first-year Master's students. To collect data from the participants, we used four research instruments: a learner autonomy scale, a questionnaire, focus groups, and document analysis. The use of four research tools allowed the researcher to obtain a large amount of data on the topic under discussion, achieve triangulation, and hence, lend credibility to the findings, which will be presented and interpreted in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: ILLUMINATING THE ROAD AHEAD: DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

CHAPTER FOUR:

ILLUMINATING THE ROAD AHEAD: DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Introduction

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Conclusion

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the researcher presented the research methodology used in the current study. The next step, in any research design, is to proceed to data analysis and interpretation to formulate plausible answers to the three research questions raised in the earlier chapter. This step is also crucial for the researcher because it sheds much light to illuminate the way ahead for recommendations and drawing the final conclusions. Therefore, Chapter Four consists of two main sections. The first section outlines the data analysis procedures. The researcher analyzed the data both qualitatively and quantitatively to increase the reliability of the results. The second section focuses on the analysis of the results from the pre-intervention, the intervention, and the post-intervention phases. This section examines the four data collection tools used in the study, which can, so to speak, be likened to peeling away the layers of a fruit to reach its core.

4.1. Methods to Data Analysis

The aim of this section is to describe the methodological procedures employed in this research. To make sense of the research findings, the researcher must be familiar with the terminology and procedures of data analysis to critically interpret the collected data. As Dörnyei (2003) notes, gathering the necessary data is ‘half the battle’; therefore, researchers must address the remaining half, which entails analyzing that data. After completing data collection using different research instruments, the researcher moves on to the data analysis phase. In this action research study, multiple forms of data are gathered through research tools such as questionnaires, focus groups, and document analysis. Each instrument yields both quantitative and qualitative data. Consequently, the researcher employed two distinct methods of analysis to address these data types: qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis.

The researcher chose to integrate both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods through a triangulation process. The term ‘triangulation’ in social research describes the practice of using a combination of research methods and different data sources. Supporting this method, Mackey and Gass (2005) posit that “triangulation involves using multiple research methods and multiple sources of data

in order to explore the issues from all feasible perspectives” (p. 168). Therefore, gathering data through different instruments would open the door to more perspectives of the phenomenon under investigation, which, in turn, would also increase the validity and reliability of the gathered data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2009).

Because a range of factors may underlie the development of learner autonomy, the researcher employed multiple research instruments, such as questionnaires, focus groups, and document analysis, to investigate the subject from diverse vantage points. Each set of data from one research tool is validated through confirmation with other sources of data in the other tools used in order to cross-analyze data for better accuracy and reliability. The quantitative data were derived from the pre-test and post-test learner autonomy scales, whereas the qualitative data primarily came from the analysis of students’ focus groups and document analysis conducted at the end of the study. In addition to this, the students’ questionnaires provided the researcher with both quantitative and qualitative data.

4.1.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

The researcher employs the quantitative type of analysis to quantify the numerical data obtained from the learner autonomy scale and student questionnaires. In contrast to qualitative analysis, where interpretation depends on various narratives or explanations provided by respondents, quantitative analysis revolves around numerical data via statistical measures such as the mode, mean, and range of scores. Nonetheless, despite the reliance on numerical indicators in quantitative analysis, Cohen et al., (2007) insist that “quantitative data analysis has no greater or lesser importance than qualitative analysis” (p. 501). In other words, both approaches are equally important. Cohen et al. (2007) added that numerical data gathered from the research instruments can be processed and analyzed using software such as the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Minitab, or Excel. Accordingly, this study employs Excel for its data analysis needs.

4.1.1. Qualitative Data Analysis

This form of analysis focuses on qualitative data, which can be gathered using research instruments such as focus groups, questionnaires, and document analysis.

Cohen et al. (2007) explain that qualitative data analysis involves categorizing, describing, explaining, and interpreting data in relation to participants' perspectives. It enables the researcher to understand, summarize, portray, and identify the frequency of specific phenomena. In this respect, Dawson (2009) describes qualitative analysis as "a very personal process, with few rigid rules and procedures" (p. 116). He further identifies three steps involved in this approach. First, the researcher must continuously reflect on the data while assembling it. Second, there is a need to evaluate the significance of the collected information. Finally, the process involves interpreting and drawing conclusions from the data in a way that aids readers' understanding of the phenomenon under study. In analyzing qualitative results, the researcher may choose to categorize or summarize responses rather than examining the entire dataset verbatim. However, in some instances, it is necessary to preserve the exact words collected to illustrate particular phenomena or support specific claims. To elaborate, Cohen et al. (2007) maintain that:

Some studies include a lot of verbatim conversations; others use fewer verbatim data. Some researchers feel that it is important to keep the flavour of the original data, so they report direct phrases and sentences, not only because they are often more illuminative and direct than the researchers' own words, but also because they feel that it is important to be faithful to the exact words used (p. 461).

The study employs multiple data collection methods, including questionnaires, focus groups, and document analysis. To analyze the information gathered through these instruments, the researcher employs qualitative analysis. This process entails several activities: categorizing responses, describing patterns, explaining themes, providing examples, and interpreting the underlying meanings within the data. The researcher, when engaging in these steps, aims to draw meaningful conclusions from the qualitative data.

4.2. Analysis of the Pre-Intervention Phase Result

The section at hand examines the data collected before the intervention. It revolves around the first part of the 'Students' Questionnaire' and 'Learner Autonomy Scale (Pre-test)'. Both of these research instruments serve to establish a

preliminary scaffold for the sake of understanding students' perceptions of learner autonomy, their levels of autonomy and academic readiness to engage in writing research, and the challenges they face in writing research proposals. However, it is important to acknowledge the fact that self-reported measures have limitations. This analysis provides not only an overview of the data but also raises questions about how these initial findings might affect the results of the intervention.

4.2.1. Students' Questionnaire (Part 01)

This section focuses on the first part of the students' questionnaire, which aimed to collect the participants' background information and explore their perceptions and practices on learner autonomy and the process of writing academic research proposals. As discussed in the previous chapter (see Chapter Three), the questionnaire sought to gather a broad range of data, such as demographic details, students' understanding of learner autonomy, academic readiness, and their prior exposure to academic writing and research skills. Students were asked to respond to a combination of closed and semi-open-ended questions. The closed questions provided quantifiable information about participants' gender, age, etc., whereas the open questions invited students to express their perspectives using their own words. The data collected through these questions, both quantitative and qualitative, are instrumental in illuminating students' challenges and readiness in research writing and contribute to answering the first research question of this study.

Section One: Background Information

A straightforward definition of the study sample may provide other researchers with the means to gauge how the results of the present research might extend to their own research contexts. To provide relevant context for this study, the following table sheds light on the background information on participants' demographics and relevant academic experience; it summarizes students' responses to Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5:

Table 4.1***Participant Demographic Information***

Variable	Categories	Number (30)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	24	80.0
	Male	6	20.0
Age Group	Under 20	0	0.0
	20-25	29	96.7
	26-30	1	3.3
	Over 30	0	0.0
Years Studying English	11 years	24	80.0
	12 years	3	10.0
	13 years	2	6.7
	14 years	1	3.3
Years Studying Academic Writing	4 years	25	83.3
	3 years	5	16.7
Years Studying Research Skills	2 years	16	53.3
	3 years	1	3.3
	4 years	13	43.4

As displayed in Table 4.1, the researcher targeted Algerian university students from Yahia Fares University in Medea, Algeria. The sample consists of 30 participants. 80% (24) of these respondents are female, whereas males represent 20% (6) of the sample. Female participants exceed male participants by a considerable margin. The study participants are divided into two main age groups. The first group represents the majority of students (96.7%) aged between 20 and 25 years. The second group consists of a small minority (3.3%) whose age ranges from 26 to 30 years. No participants were reported to be under 20 or over 30 years old. However, it should be noted that the preceding questions on age and gender do not have, in one way or another, any connection with the objectives of the present study.

As for their experience studying English, the majority of students (80%) reported studying English formally for 11 years. Some students (10%) indicated 12 years of study, while 6.7% reported 13 years. Only 3.3% stated that they have studied English formally for 14 years. With regard to their academic writing training, most participants (83.3%) have studied the module at the university for four years. A smaller percentage of respondents (16.7%) said that they have been studying it for three years. Regarding the module of research methodology/skills, more than half of the students (53.3%) have studied it for two years. A large group (43.4%) reported

studying it for four years, but only a few (3.3%) mentioned three years. In general, the results suggest that most students have spent a seemingly good amount of time learning about English, academic writing and research methodology in the course of their university education.

Section Two: Learner Autonomy

Section two of the Students' Questionnaire explores learner autonomy through a series of relevant questions for the participants.

Question 6: Student's Conceptualization of Learner Autonomy

Students' understanding of and awareness about learner autonomy inform their own view of how autonomous learners should be as well as their willingness to act accordingly. To this end, this section summarizes the main ideas students shared in response to the sixth open-ended question in the questionnaire: What does learner autonomy mean to you?

The analysis of student responses to this question reveals that different interpretations of the concept exist among them. However, the vast majority of students defined learner autonomy as responsibility and independent learning from both their teachers and peers. Learner autonomy, for many of the participants, is the ability to learn by oneself. For example, the following extracts support this view. One student (S2) stated that, "It has many definitions but for me it is self-responsibility and independence, relying on himself not on anyone else to do his works or studies." In a similar vein, another student (S8) explained that, "Learner autonomy means the learner ability of taking decisions, the learner is the only one who is responsible for his studies." Likewise, S14 related learner autonomy to the idea of "taking full responsibility for one's studies and asking for help only when it's highly needed" because, as S3 admits, "We can't always depend on others that might bother who we are depending on." S11 went even deeper and explained the different roles the teacher and student should play vis-à-vis achieving academic success. He/she declared that:

Any achievement of a student is personal effort u can't blame anyone for your loss that is to say a learner is a master of his own fate, a teacher is a guide through but the major work or let's say responsibility is on the learner shoulder.

Finally, and in a broader sense, autonomous learning occurs “when the student does not lean on the curriculum decided by the government. It's the rebellion of the student upon himself... to seek knowledge individually” (S18).

Furthermore, the results revealed that some students focus on the psychological dimension of the concept and simply define autonomy as self-motivation. In his/her brief words, learner autonomy means “the motivation to study.” (S20). Similarly, another student (S15) offered a similar opinion that supports the intrinsic side of motivation: “For me learner autonomy means learning because of curiosity and enjoyment not because of external pressure.” In a similar vein, S27 commented, “learner's autonomy is the ability of oneself to reach his objectives, study for his own sake and be committed to studies without any help from others.” In other words, being autonomous entails using “his full motivation, hard work and commitment while doing a task (S30).

Apart from self-motivation and independent learning, a few students said that autonomous learning may also involve a wide range of difficult skills to possess, such as critical thinking, goal setting, effective use of resources, and time management. For example, one student (S17) underlined the cognitive and metacognitive dimensions of autonomy, so for him/her, autonomy “means being a good critical thinker, having the ability to make sound reasoning, setting goals as well as adopting a leadership mindset.” In a similar vein, another student (S19) shed light on the ability to make use of resources independently. He/she stated that, “To be able to use other resources available to learn other than relating only on formal resources.” Elaborating further on this skills-based definition of autonomy, S29 noted that being autonomous involves learning “how to manage his energy and time to fulfill a mission.” To sum up, “learner autonomy means the capacity of learners to do anything related to the learning process without any external influence.” (S26). Last but not least, three students (S1, S5, and S10) acknowledged that the task of developing autonomy is not easy for learners. For example, as one student (S1) put it, “Well, we can say that being an autonomous learner can be quite challenging.” Similarly, S3 commented, “It's not an easy skill that everyone can master.” It is also worth mentioning that, of all the

participants, only two other students (S7 and S13) said that they are not familiar with the term.

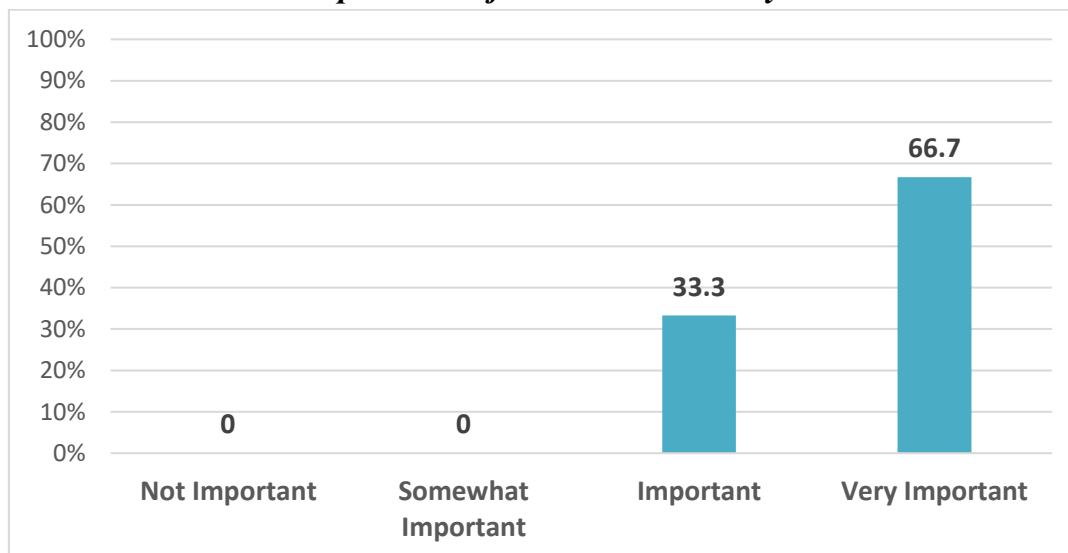
It can be concluded that, from the students' perspectives, it seems that there was a general consensus among most participants that learner autonomy means assuming responsibility for learning and being less dependent, if not entirely dependent, on the teacher, peers, or others. Some students also defined the concept in terms of self-motivation, and a few other participants reported that autonomous learning simply means the mastery of higher-order thinking skills.

Question 7: Students' Views on the Importance of Learner Autonomy

The following figure summarizes students' perceptions regarding the importance of learner autonomy for university students:

Figure 4.1

Students' Perceived Importance of Learner Autonomy



Students' views on the value of autonomy in relation to learning are illustrated in Figure 4.1. A great majority of the students view learner autonomy as either important (33.3%) or very important (66.7%). No respondent rated learner autonomy as somewhat or not important. Therefore, there is a strong consensus among all students regarding the critical role of learner autonomy in higher education.

Question 8: Signs of Being Autonomous in Research Proposal Writing

Despite the students' definitions of learner autonomy, it was also of utmost importance to explore the perceived characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes of autonomous learners that can be manifested as far as the specific context of writing a

research proposal is concerned. Student responses to the question “In the process of writing a research proposal, what specific actions, behaviors, feelings, or characteristics show that a student is highly autonomous?” revealed several clear signs of learner autonomy.

First, a great majority of students (22 out of 30) identified certain proactive behaviors, that are related to self-direction, as the hallmark of highly autonomous researchers. Put differently, autonomy, according to these participants, is when a student models certain aspects of autonomous skills and abilities rather than a vague or abstract concept. For instance, one student (S12) reported that autonomy involves “creating their own study plan and timeline without waiting for the supervisor to set it.” Supporting this, S27 declared that autonomous learners/researchers are skillful in “time management, goal setting, and reflection.” S23 stated that, “Prioritize tasks ... starting by the difficult parts that might take more time and energy.” Such skill-based interpretations that are relevant to the process of doing and writing research were also expressed by S15, “Creating their own study plan and timeline (without waiting for the supervisor to set it), using a wide variety of resources, and monitoring their progress and meet deadlines.”

Similarly, about half of the students (14 out of 30) highlighted the need to exercise the psychological and affective dimensions of autonomous learning in the context of writing a research proposal, such as confidence, curiosity, and grit. For example, S4 described that a highly autonomous researcher is the one who is “driven by curiosity.... and trusts his abilities.” On the same train of thought, S1 shared, “They are confident, organized, persistent, self-aware, motivated, and focused.” Interestingly, some participants declared that the psychological burden on the autonomous researcher is very challenging because the process of doing research requires students “to manage the problems he face smoothly and to solve them” (S32). A similar comment was given by S25, “Passion towards the topic...being unstoppable by the fear of making mistakes.... have discipline to carry out the work” while another remarked, “Anxiety can push students to take action and develop new habits needed to reach their goals”.

In addition to the skill-based descriptions of autonomous learners that the students mentioned, around nine (9) students emphasized the cognitive and metacognitive aspects. These participants suggested that being an autonomous researcher means to have a ‘skeptical eye’ toward one's own performance. As S7 pointed out, “A student who reviews and critiques their work to improve it, while following instructions, is clearly autonomous.” According to S7, an autonomous learner is someone “who monitors and tries to criticize his own work to improve.” S18 added that “it’s students who ask: Is this strong enough? What’s missing?” In contrast, to the students’ understanding of learner autonomy as being totally independent that was discussed earlier in question 6, a small number (about five) illuminated the collaborative and social side of the concept. For example, S2 noted that an autonomous person “seeks feedback from peers and professors and uses it accordingly,” while S31 stressed “asking for help, searching online, staying motivated, and working hard” as important actions. However, S3 said, “dealing with teamwork while keeping individual responsibility is hard” (S3).

To sum up, students identified the following indicators of learner autonomy in the course of research proposal writing:

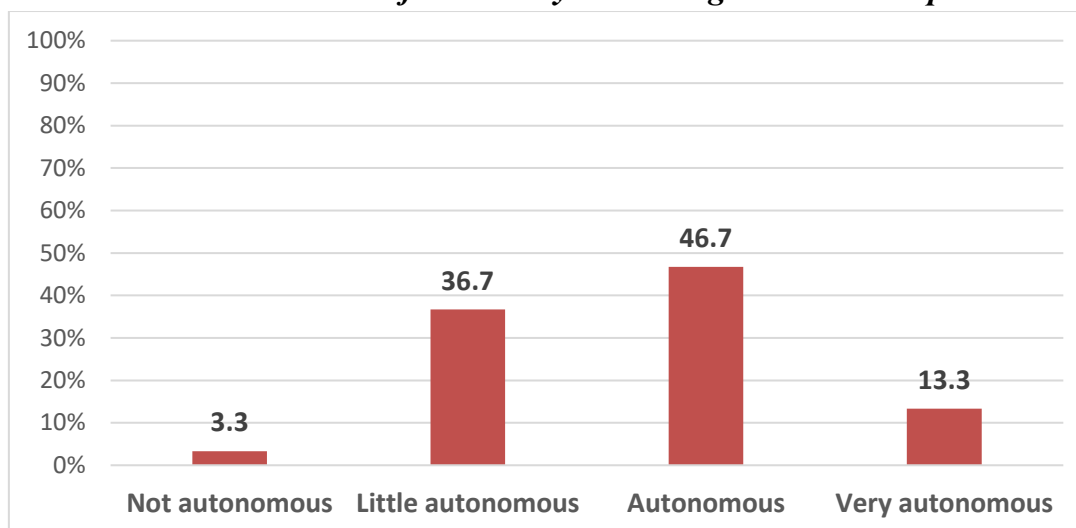
1. The ability to develop a work plan without relying much on a supervisor.
2. Persistence and academic grit when facing challenges related to research.
3. Effective time management skills and the ability to meet deadlines.
4. The ability to search for relevant resources.
5. Engagement in self-assessment practices.
6. Revision of one’s work on a regular basis.
7. The ability to manage stress and anxiety and maintain motivation.
8. Attempts to resolve research obstacles independently.
9. Collaboration with peers.
10. Seeking feedback from peers and teachers.
11. The ability to navigate disagreements and divergent views among peers to avoid conflict.

Question 9: Students' Perceived Level of Autonomy in Writing Research Proposals

The figure below presents students' own perceptions of how autonomous they are/feel in the course of writing their research proposals.

Figure 4.2

Students' Perceived Level of Autonomy in Writing Research Proposals



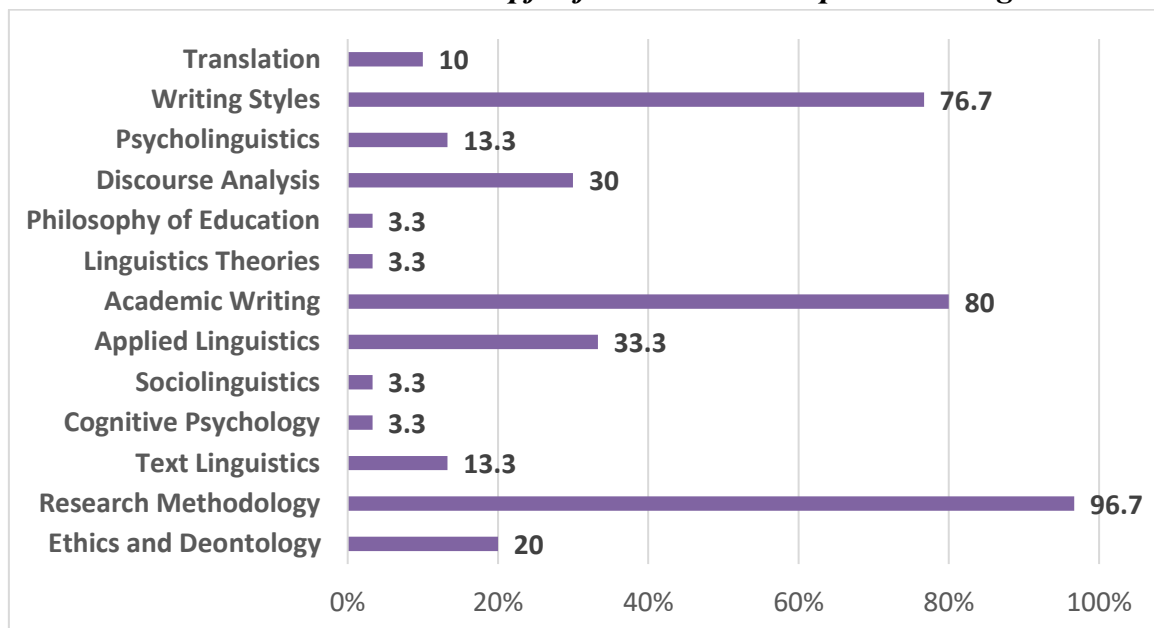
In question 9 (Q9), the students were asked to rate their level of learner autonomy concerning the process of writing a research proposal. According to the data presented in the figure above, the majority of M1 students see themselves as autonomous (46.7%), and 13.3% of them claim that they are very autonomous when it comes to writing research proposals. However, a good percentage of the students (36.7%) consider themselves little autonomous, and only one student (3.3%) states that they are not autonomous at all. It can be inferred from the above data that while most graduate students believe that they are autonomous with differences in the degree of autonomy, a considerable number of them seem needy of much assistance with autonomous learning in order to compose a research proposal.

Section Three: Students' Experience with Research Proposal Writing

This section sheds light on students' own reflections on their experiences as Master's students involved in research proposal writing, which is the main context of the present study.

Question 10: Modules Students Perceived as Helpful for Research Proposal Writing

The following figure shows how students responded when asked which modules helped them prepare for writing research proposals during their Master's studies. They were invited to choose all the modules they found most useful for developing research proposal writing skills:

Figure 4.3***Modules Students Perceived as Helpful for Research Proposal Writing***

Regarding Question 10 (Q10), the participants were asked to indicate which module(s) were the most helpful to take for writing a research proposal. As is illustrated in Figure 4.3, nearly all students state that Research Methodology is the most helpful module in preparing them for writing research proposals. The latter module was cited by almost all the students (96.7%). As for the other modules, Academic Writing (mentioned by 80% of the participants), Writing Styles (mentioned by 76.7%), Applied Linguistics (mentioned by 33.3%), and Discourse Analysis (mentioned by 30%). In contrast, fewer students consider Ethics and Deontology (20%), Text Linguistics (13.3%), and Psycholinguistics (13.3%) as important in this regard. Modules such as Cognitive Psychology, Sociolinguistics, Linguistic Theories, and Philosophy of Education were each chosen by only 3.3% of the participants. In addition to this, Translation was mentioned by only 10% of the students as useful. On the whole, from the above figure, it seems that there is a strong

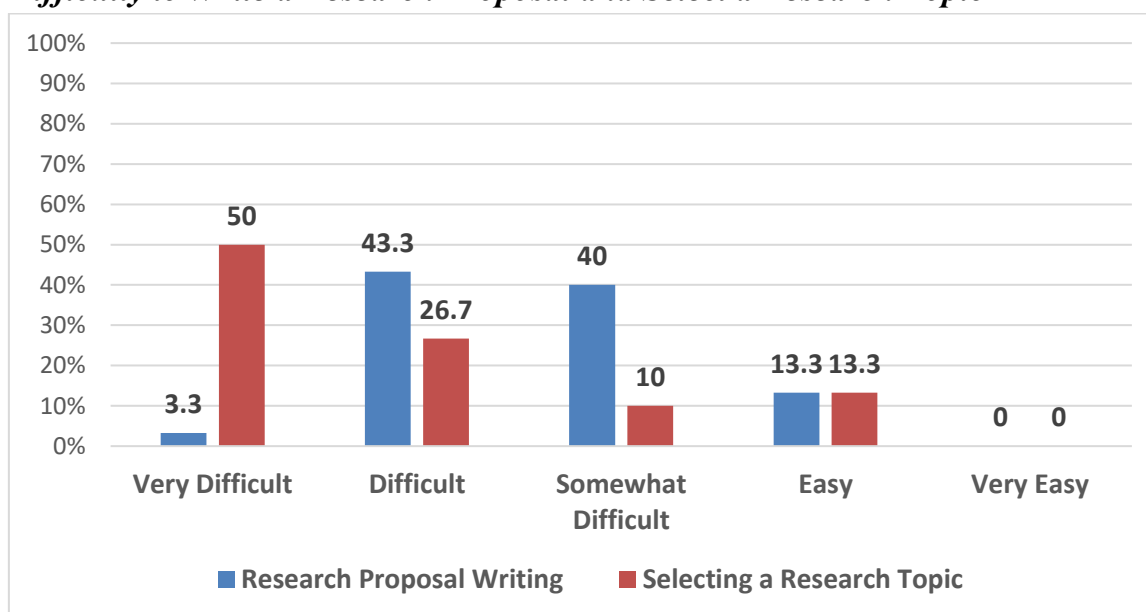
consensus among the far majority of students that Research Methodology, Academic Writing, and Writing Stylistics are the most useful when it comes to research proposal writing.

Question 11 and 12: Difficulty of Writing Research Proposals (Q1) and Selecting Research Topics (Q2) as Perceived

Students' responses regarding the difficulty of writing research proposals and selecting research topics are outlined in the figure below:

Figure 4.4

Difficulty to Write a Research Proposal and Select a Research Topic



When asked about the extent to which selecting a research topic and writing a proposal were difficult (Q11 and Q12), none of the students reported that both tasks were easy to achieve, especially deciding on a research topic. In fact, the far majority agreed that both tasks were by no means easy, with differences in the level of difficulty. As can be seen in Figure 4.4, thirteen students (43.3%) described the process of writing a research proposal as 'Difficult', followed by 'Somewhat Difficult' with twelve answers (40%). A small number of students (13.3%) considered the task 'Easy' and none rated it as 'Very Easy'. Only one student (3.3%) viewed the process as 'Very Difficult'. Based on the findings, it is evident that writing a research proposal is far from easy, as reported by the far majority of students.

Choosing a topic for research, as illustrated in the above figure, is even more challenging for learners than writing a proposal. More precisely, half of the students

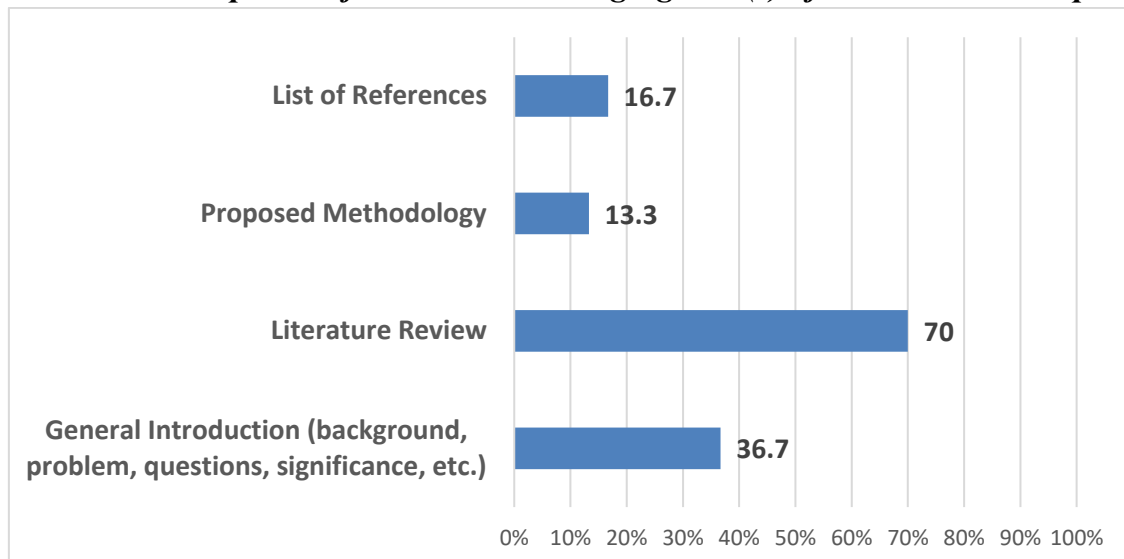
(50%) found selecting a research topic to be ‘Very Difficult’ and eight students (26.7%) described it as ‘Difficult’. A smaller percentage, 10% of the participants, said that the task was ‘Somewhat Difficult’ and 13.3% considered it ‘Easy’. No student reported the task as ‘Very Easy’. Such findings suggest that the far majority of students believe that choosing a research topic poses significant challenges that require careful attention.

Question 13: Students’ Perceptions of the Most Challenging Parts of Research Proposal Writing

Figure 4.5 below shows which parts of their research proposals students found the most challenging to write, and they were allowed to choose more than one answer:

Figure 4.5

Students’ Perceptions of the Most Challenging Part(s) of the Research Proposal



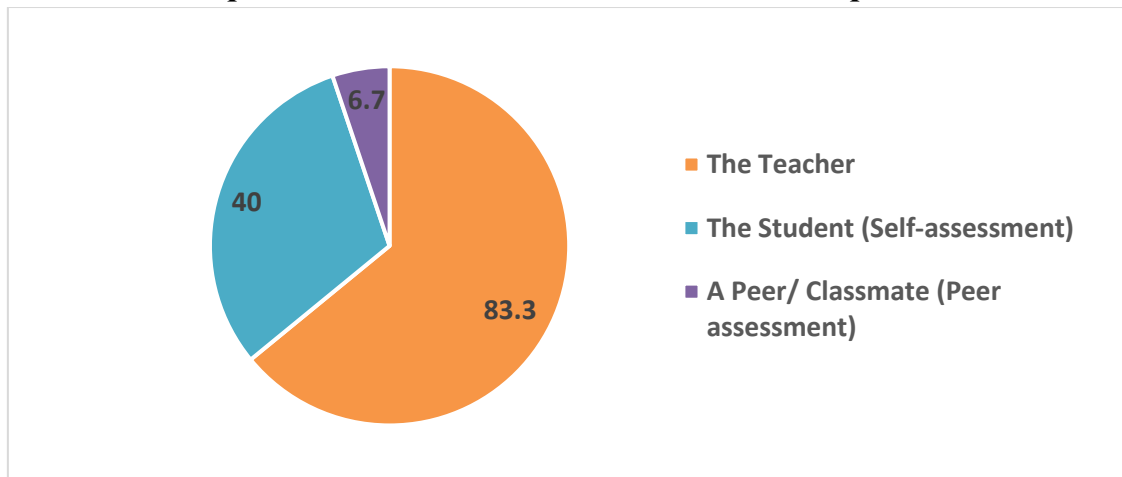
According to the data presented in the figure above, the majority of students, twenty-one (70%) identified the literature review as the most challenging part to write. In other words, the ability to critically review and synthesize existing research was not an easy task for participants. Eleven (36.7%) of the participants stated that writing the general introduction, including the background, problem statement, and significance, etc., was challenging. Only five (16.7%) students found compiling the list of references difficult. The remaining students (13.3%) reported that the proposed methodology was a challenging section to draft.

Question 14: Students' Perceptions on Who Should Assess Research Proposals

The following figure deals with students' perceptions regarding who should assess their research proposals, and students were allowed to opt for more than one answer:

Figure 4.6

Students' Perceptions on Who Should Assess Research Proposals



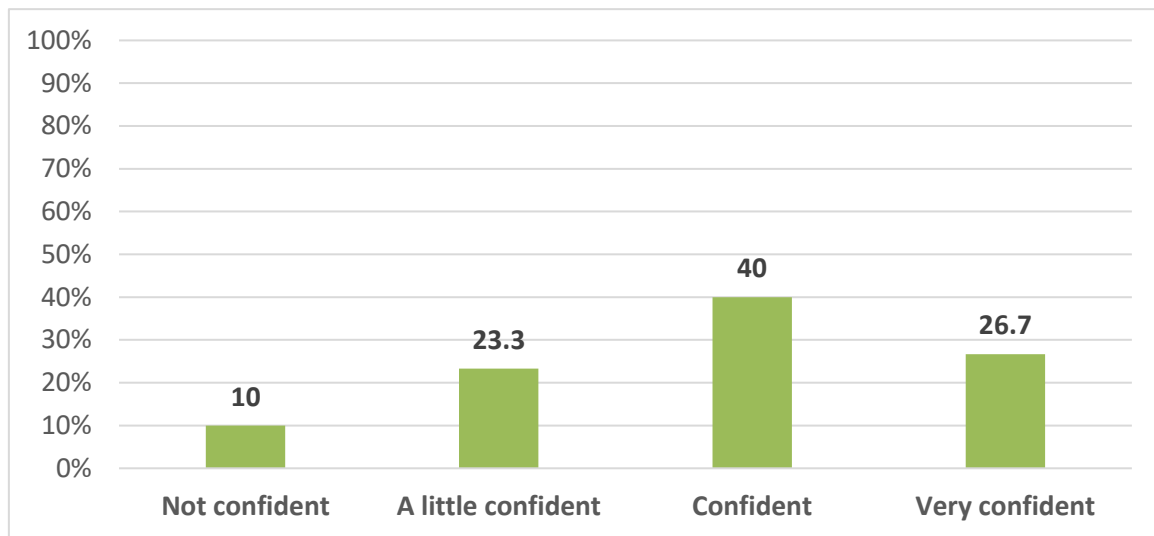
Question 14 aimed at knowing whom students believe should assess the research proposal. As Figure 4.6 shows, the majority of students believe that teachers should assess research proposals; 83.3% of the participants selected 'the teacher' option. In addition, 40.0% of students considered that self-assessment can be an important part of the evaluation process. Unlike the majority, a small percentage of students (6.7%) declared that peer assessment can be appropriate for this purpose. Such findings reveal that the overwhelming number of students consider teachers as the primary ones responsible for assessment, and some of them do value the idea of assessing their work. Peer assessment, however, is viewed as less relevant or reliable in this context.

Question 15: Students' Perceived Readiness for Self-assessment

Students' perceptions of their own ability in assessing their own research proposals may reflect important aspects of readiness for learner autonomy. Indeed, the analysis of students' responses revealed such levels of readiness with respect to self-assessment. They are laid out in the following figure:

Figure 4.7

Students' Perceived Readiness for Self-assessment



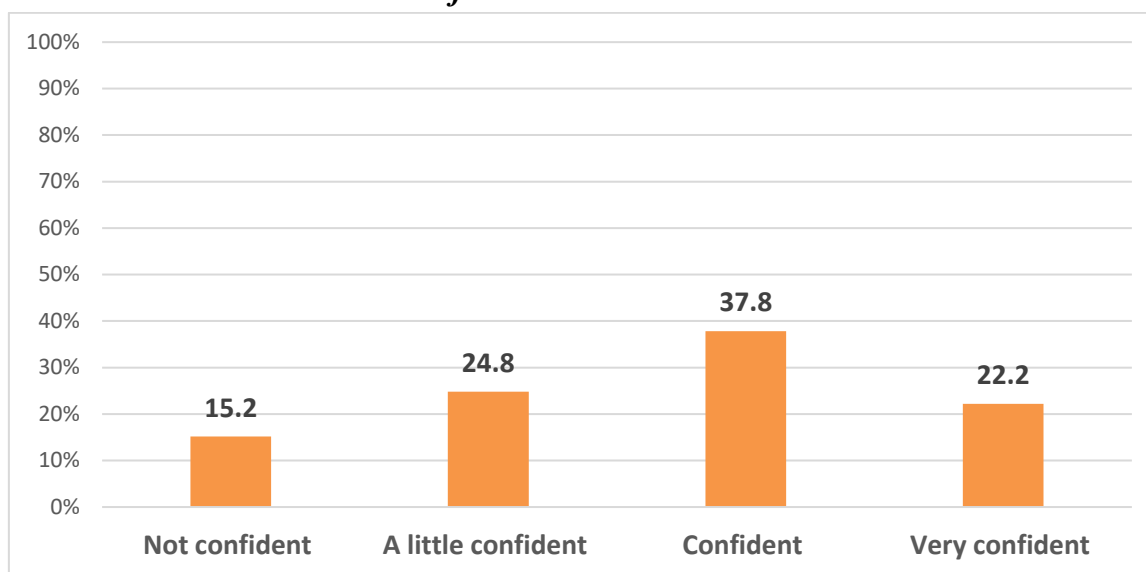
According to the data presented in Figure 4.7, the results demonstrated that the highest percentage of students (40%) considered themselves capable of performing self-assessment, while others (26.7%) reported being very confident in doing self-assessment. In addition, 23.3% of the students described themselves as a little confident, and only 10% of the students stated that they are not confident at all. In general, it can be said that the results show that students feel capable of performing self-assessment to some extent.

Question 16: Students' Perceived Readiness for Peer Assessment

Students' perceptions of their ability in assessing their peers' research proposals, similar to practicing self-assessment, may also provide insight into their readiness for learner autonomy, particularly with regard to its social and affective dimensions. The analysis of the students' answers is highlighted in the figure below.

Figure 4.8

Students' Perceived Readiness for Peer Assessment



Also, when students were asked about their perceived confidence in performing peer assessment, no strong consensus was found because their responses varied. As illustrated in the figure above, 22.2% of students reported being very confident in doing peer assessment, and 37.8% described themselves as confident. In contrast, 24.8% of students said that they were a little confident, while 15.2% stated that they were not confident. In general, it is noticeable that students expressed more readiness and confidence in self-assessment than peer assessment. That is, these findings provide a clear picture of how students perceive their ability to perform self- and peer assessment.

In addition to the students' questionnaire, the researcher also employed a learner autonomy scale as another research tool to assess students' readiness for learner autonomy in the course of writing their academic research projects.

4.2.2. Learner Autonomy Scale (Pre-Test)

In this study, the learner autonomy scale is used as the primary quantitative data collection tool. It consisted of multiple items measured on a Likert scale (see Appendix C). This section first presents the results of the pre-test Learner Autonomy Scale administered during the pre-intervention phase of the current action research study. Frequencies and percentages are employed to report students' levels of autonomy across five sub-scales: Cognitive Strategies, Metacognitive Strategies,

Teacher's Role, Social Conditions, and Affective Constructs. This subsection reports the findings from the learner autonomy scale that was carried out at the pre-test phase.

The tables below present the frequencies and percentages for each item within the five sub-scales of the learner autonomy pre-test conducted during the pre-intervention phase. This is followed by the overall means and standard deviations for each sub-scale as well as for the entire scale.

4.2.2.1. Cognitive Strategies

The following table provides an overview of how frequently students reported using cognitive strategies before the intervention:

Table 4.2

Responses for Cognitive Strategies Items (Pre-Intervention)

Response	Note-taking	Structuring	Summarizing	Resourcing
Always	12 (40%)	13 (43.3%)	10 (33.3%)	12 (40%)
Sometimes	15 (50%)	12 (40%)	10 (33.3%)	14 (46.7%)
Rarely	3 (10%)	5 (16.7%)	7 (23.3%)	2 (6.7%)
Never	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	2 (6.7%)

Table 4.2 shows students' responses to the cognitive strategies sub-scale use before the intervention. About forty percent of the participants (40%) said that they always took notes, while around half (50%) said they used them sometimes. Only a few students (10%) said they rarely used this strategy. For the ability to organize and structure their writing, 43.3% of students said they always applied it, and 40% said they sometimes did so. A smaller group (16.7%) said they rarely used such strategies in their writing. When it comes to summarizing, only 33.3% of students said they always summarized ideas before using them in their drafts when writing, while the same percentage said they did so sometimes. Meanwhile, 23.3% rarely summarized, and 10% never practiced it. Regarding the use of different resources to support their research proposal, 40% of students said that they always used this strategy, 46.7% sometimes, and a few said they rarely (6.7%) or never (6.7%) used it. To sum up, it appears that most students use some cognitive techniques in writing to different degrees before the intervention.

4.2.2.2. Metacognitive Strategies

The table below shows how often students used metacognitive strategies before the intervention:

Table 4.3***Responses for Metacognitive Strategies Items (Pre-Intervention)***

Response	Goal-setting	Self-monitoring	Self-evaluation	Planning
Always	14 (46.7%)	14 (46.7%)	15 (50%)	16 (53.3%)
Sometimes	13 (43.3%)	12 (40%)	10 (33.3%)	12 (40%)
Rarely	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	4 (13.3%)	2 (6.7%)
Never	0 (0%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	0 (0%)

Table 4.3 depicts responses for the metacognitive strategies sub-scale during the pre-intervention phase. Regarding setting specific goals, nearly half of the students (46.7%) reported always doing so, while 43.3% indicated they sometimes set goals. A small percentage (10%) rarely engaged in this practice. For monitoring progress, 46.7% of participants reported always doing this, with 40% doing it sometimes. The item on evaluating one's own work showed that half of the students always reflected on their writing to identify areas for improvement. About one-third (33.3%) sometimes evaluated their work, while the remainder rarely (13.3%) or never (3.3%) did so. Finally, in terms of planning the writing process, 53.3% of students always planned ahead, and 40% sometimes engaged in planning. Although these findings were consistent among all participants, they show that most students demonstrated a relatively high use of metacognitive strategies, such as setting goals, planning, monitoring progress, and evaluating their writing.

4.2.2.3. Teacher's Role

Table 4.4 reveals the distribution of ratings over learners' views of the importance of the class teacher in writing their research proposals before the intervention.

Table 4.4***Responses for Teacher's Role Items (Pre-Intervention)***

Response	Teachers' Guidance	Teachers' Feedback	Teachers' Help	Teachers' Influence
Always	16 (53.3%)	16 (53.3%)	15 (50%)	10 (33.3%)
Sometimes	11 (36.7%)	9 (30%)	11 (36.7%)	11 (36.7%)
Rarely	3 (10%)	4 (13.3%)	3 (10%)	4 (13.3%)
Never	0 (0%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	5 (16.7%)

Table 4.4 displays students' perceptions of their teacher's role in the research proposal writing process before the intervention. More than half of the students (53.3%) stated that they always rely on their teacher for orientation during writing, while 36.7% said that they were sometimes dependent on them. Similarly, 53.3% of participants always depended on their teacher's feedback to improve their writing, and 30% of them said that they relied on it sometimes. As for the item about seeking help to understand the assignment requirements, half of the students (50%) always sought their teacher's assistance, and 36.7% sometimes did so. However, regarding the influence of teacher feedback on their progress, only 33.3% of students reported that feedback always positively impacted their research writing, while 36.7% stated that it sometimes influenced them. In contrast, 16.7% of students indicated that teacher feedback had no influence on their progress at all. In general, these results permit us to assume that students, before the intervention, showed a high degree of dependence and reliance on their class teacher throughout the research proposal writing process.

4.2.2.4. Social Conditions

Focusing on social conditions, the following table identifies students' self-reported frequency of their collaboration with peers:

Table 4.5***Responses for Social Conditions Items (Pre-Intervention)***

Response	Collaboration with Peers	Feedback from Peers	Discussion with Peers	Sharing with Peers
Always	7 (23.3%)	7 (23.3%)	7 (23.3%)	8 (26.7%)
Sometimes	10 (33.3%)	10 (33.3%)	11 (36.7%)	11 (36.7%)
Rarely	5 (16.7%)	5 (16.7%)	5 (16.7%)	4 (13.3%)
Never	8 (26.7%)	8 (26.7%)	7 (23.3%)	7 (23.3%)

The table above reveals students' responses about the social factors affecting their writing before the intervention. Although less than one quarter of the participants (23.3%) claimed that they always worked with peers, 33.3% reported they sometimes collaborated with their classmates. However, a noticeable percentage of students either rarely (16.7%) or never (26.7%) engaged in peer work. When asked about seeking feedback from peers, only 23.3% of participants admitted they always asked their peers for help, while 33.3% indicated they sometimes did so. Still, 26.7% of the participants revealed they never sought feedback from their classmates. Regarding discussions with peers to gain different viewpoints, about a quarter of the students (23.3%) stated that they always took part in such discussions, whereas 36.7% reported they sometimes participated. As opposed to this, the highest percentage of students (40%) said that they rarely or never engaged in such conversations. Finally, 26.7% of students always felt comfortable sharing their writing with peers, 36.7% felt comfortable sometimes, and 23.3% never felt at ease sharing their work. Therefore, it can be assumed that, based on these results, many students were less inclined to socially engage with peers in the course of their research proposal writing.

4.2.2.5. Affective Constructs

The initial (pre-intervention) responses regarding affective constructs are detailed in Table 4.6 below:

Table 4.6***Responses for Affective Constructs Items (Pre-Intervention)***

Response	Motivation	Emotion Management	Positive Attitude	Confidence
Always	12 (40%)	11 (36.7%)	13 (43.3%)	14 (46.7%)
Sometimes	14 (46.7%)	12 (40%)	12 (40%)	13 (43.3%)
Rarely	4 (13.3%)	6 (20%)	4 (13.3%)	3 (10%)
Never	0 (0%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	0 (0%)

According to the data presented in the table above, students' responses concerning affective constructs related to writing during the pre-intervention phase differ. Regarding motivation to write and improve, 40% of students said that they 'always' felt motivated, while nearly half of them (46.7%) indicated they 'sometimes' felt motivated. However, no student said that he/she lacked motivation. For managing emotions effectively during research proposal writing challenges, 36.7% of students responded positively to this question and stated that they 'always' felt capable of managing their emotions, while 40% said they 'sometimes' managed their emotions well. A smaller percentage (20%) chose the 'rarely' option, and the remaining students (3.3%) stated that they 'never' did. In terms of maintaining a positive attitude toward writing, 43.3% of students 'always' maintained a positive attitude toward writing their proposals, while 40% 'sometimes' did so. Only 3.3% 'rarely' or 'never' maintained a positive attitude. Finally, regarding confidence in writing, 46.7% of participants claimed that they 'always' felt confident, and 43.3% 'sometimes' felt confident. On the other hand, 10% of students said that they 'rarely' expressed confidence, and none of the participants ticked the 'never' option.

4.2.2.6. Overall Pre-scale Results

The table below summarizes the average scores (M) and standard deviations (SD) for each pre-scale sub-component of learner autonomy, which includes cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, teacher's role, social conditions, and affective constructs. For the overall pre-scale, all item responses from the participants were combined (20 items $\times$ 30 students=600 responses), and the mean and sample

standard deviation were calculated from this pooled data using the coding scale (1=always, 4=never)

Table 4.7

The Pre-scale Overall Descriptive Statistics for Learner Autonomy

Sub-scale	M	SD
Cognitive Strategies	1.83	0.82
Metacognitive Strategies	1.64	0.73
Teacher's Role	1.76	0.88
Social Conditions	2.42	1.11
Affective Constructs	1.76	0.76
Overall	1.88	0.91

As shown in Table 4.7 above, the means for the sub-scales range from 1.64 to 2.42, which indicates that students' responses mostly fell between 'always' and 'sometimes' except for the social conditions sub-scale, which was closer to the 'sometimes–rarely' range. The lowest mean scores were observed in metacognitive strategies (M=1.64, SD=0.73) and affective constructs (M=1.76, SD=0.76), which may suggest that students were more engaged in these areas. In contrast, social conditions had the highest mean score (M=2.42, SD=1.11), which clearly shows that peer collaboration and peer feedback were less reported. From the overall mean of the learner autonomy scale (M=1.88, SD=0.91), one would estimate that the level of learner autonomy before the intervention was somehow leaning toward high levels of autonomy, but the students' use of autonomous learning strategies was not very consistent along all the areas covered in the scale.

Before addressing the data analysis of the post-intervention phase, it is important to first provide an overview of the intervention phase.

4.3. Analysis of the Intervention Phase Results

This study's intervention centers around the application of self- and peer assessment activities in the revision phase of the proposal writing process. Accordingly, this section illustrates the instructor's own observations on the practice of self- and peer assessment.

4.3.1. Preparing the Students for the Intervention

The research methodology course in the first and second semesters of M1 focuses on preparing students to write their MA proposals for their thesis (See

Appendix H). The table below demonstrates the course content of both semesters designed and taught by the teacher-researcher:

Table 4.8

Research Methodology Course Plan (Master 1/ Semester 1 and 2)

Session	Course Content
First Semester	
Session 1	Why Research Methods Matter?
Session 2	Academic Research: Definition and Types
Session 3	Characteristics of Good Research
Session 4	Back to the Future: Review of the Literature
Session 5	Main Research Methods in Applied Linguistics
Session 6	Data Gathering Tools
Session 7	Conducting Research Ethically
Session 8	Analyzing a Primary Research Paper
Session 9	Analyzing a Primary Research Paper: Practice
Session 10	From Topic of Interest to Research Questions
Session 11	Drafting and Refining Topics Suggested by Students
Session 12	Understanding the Framework of a Research Proposal
Session 13	How to Write a Research Proposal?
Session 14	Analyzing an Example of a Research Proposal
Second Semester	
Session 15	Developing a Criteria-Referenced Rubric for Assessing Research Proposals
Session 16	Using the Criteria-Referenced Self-Assessment Rubric
Session 17	Using the Criteria-Referenced Peer Assessment Rubric
Session 18	Sharing and Discussing Peer Assessment Feedback
Session 19	Applying Feedback from Self- and Peer Assessment to Research Proposals
Session 20	Teacher's Assessment of Students' Research Proposals
Session 21	The Art of Presenting and Defending your Research Proposal

Table 4.8 above depicts the main topics covered during the first and second semesters of the Research Methodology course at the Master one level. This course provided learners with the tools needed to carry out academic research. Illustratively, Learners were introduced to guidelines and systematic methods that showed the value of understanding the ins and outs of research and provided the tools to come up with urgent issues in the field of Applied Linguistics and help them compose research proposal projects.

The first part of the course focused on the fundamentals of conducting sound academic research in the field. Students explored the importance of research methods and how academic research differs from professional research, as well as the main types of academic research. They also examined what is required to carry out good research so that they could evaluate their own work as well as the findings of others. Throughout the first semester, learners covered different research methods that are mainly employed in the discipline, such as case study, experimental research, action research, ethnographic research, and introspective research. Moreover, they were also introduced to research techniques and tools, including questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and verbal protocols. Students then explored ethical considerations that inform academic research standards and conventions. This enabled students to begin designing their own research proposals and add to the conversation with the assurance that they would make a significant contribution to the field.

The second part of the course turned to the writing tools and research strategies that are needed so that they could draw on them when developing their own research proposal projects. For instance, students learned how to identify the components of primary research articles and how to find them and read them critically in order to use them for research. For each small group of students, they had the freedom to choose recent primary research papers in one area of Applied Linguistics that interests them and were assigned to analyze it in depth and present their understanding of the articles to the class through either an oral or a video presentation. With their confidence in reading peer-reviewed research, it was time to focus on the ultimate goal of the entire course: writing a research proposal. To reach this goal, the following were the titles of the workshops that were offered:

- From Topic of Interest to Research Questions
- Drafting and Refining Topics Suggested by Students
- Understanding the Framework of a Research Proposal
- How to Write a Research Proposal?
- Analyzing an Example of a Research Proposal

Regarding the third and last part of the course, the aim was to help students write better research proposals, with a focus on the revision process of writing. First,

students were given adequate time to draft their proposals. Then, they reflected on the challenges they had faced such as, limited experience with academic writing, topic selection, and identifying relevant and sources from reputable journals, to name just a few. Despite these constraints, students were introduced to self- and peer assessment practices to help them revise their own drafts and facilitate more autonomous learning. By the end of the course, students participated in a rubric co-development exercise, and then used it for self- and peer assessment in order to improve the quality of their work.

It is worth mentioning that all sessions of the first and second semester were primarily conducted in a workshop format rather than traditional lectures. In a clearer picture, the instructor employed a variety of student-centered activities wherever possible for the sake of actively involving learners in the learning and assessment process. Owing to activities such as reading jigsaw exercises, mind mapping, station-based tasks, presentations, and video presentations, students assumed responsibility for their learning, they asked questions, they participated in group discussions, they revised their work, they learned from one another, and they were generally more motivated. Another rationale underpinning the teaching of these classes in a student-centered format is, however, the establishment of a direct connection between research theory and practice, as it is the case with sessions such as ‘Why Research Methods Matter’, ‘Main Research Methods in Applied Linguistics’, ‘From Topics of Interest to Research Questions’, and the ‘Analysis of Primary Research Papers and Research Proposals’.

Furthermore, each workshop delivered was guided by the BIPPSA method, which included the workshop stages of Bridge In, Introduction, Plan, Participatory Learning, Sharing, and Adaptations, Answers, and Afterwards. In a practical fashion, this method could provide an exciting and interesting framework of learning about research skills. However, since students are required at all times to make a direct connection between research ideas and their application in real world contexts in the field of Applied Linguistics, it was the highly competent and performing student with well-developed academic and transferable skills who benefited most from this method, which can be somehow discouraging for the less competent.

Essentially, the goal here was to enlarge students' understanding of the research methodology course in general, prepare them for the complex task of writing a research proposal in particular, and equip them with the transferable skills needed for research. In fact, such skills are of value in a wide range of situations and subjects. Because many of these skills are not subject-specific, they are not always developed directly through passive or rote learning, but are instead honed through a variety of learner-centered activities. Undertaking a research project is one such activity. Also, doing research affords the students the opportunity to develop a wide range of transferable skills which will be of significant benefit in other academic pursuits or in any professional context they may step into. Some of specific skills that are considered transferable skills for students through the course of an academic research project are:

- Being able to work autonomously.
- Demonstrating competence with English as an additional language.
- Being able to communicate clearly through both spoken and written academic discourse.
- Being able to think critically and ask pertinent research questions.
- Being able to conduct research and support ideas with evidence.
- Being proficient in using and managing both AI-powered and other IT tools.
- Showing grit and commitment until the desired outcomes are achieved.
- Knowing how to respond positively to new challenges.
- Dealing with important deadlines and using time management strategies.
- Being able to lead others as well as being part of a team.
- Demonstrating effective networking and being able to introduce oneself.
- Learning how to learn.
- Having initiative, enthusiasm, flexibility, decisiveness, and a strong sense of self-awareness in the course of writing and doing research.

4.3.2. Conducting Self- and Peer Assessment

The following part describes how self- and peer assessment were implemented and the observations made by the researcher during these activities.

4.3.2.1 Self-assessment Observations:

The students' engagement with self-assessment helped the researcher gain insight into how the assessment process was used. The teacher had to remind them of an important principle in writing, namely that writing is rewriting, because, from a process-oriented L2 writing perspective, writers ought to improve their own pieces of writing through continuous revision so that their ideas become clearer and more structured over multiple drafts. Regarding their self-assessment practices, it was observed that the majority used the rubrics and completed their tasks successfully. Their effort was apparent via the notes and comments they made on the rubrics. However, though most of them were interested in this process and devoted time and effort to reviewing their research proposals, yet their lack of reflection and critical evaluation of their work and writing process was clear. In fact, when referring to each part of the rubric, most of the students did not fully justify the reasons for the scores they gave themselves. In addition to this, some of the feedback provided seemed general, and the way it was written did not show that some students had actually thought critically about their drafts. That is, only a few of them provided detailed reflections about their work.

The rubric helped the students re-read their writing section by section and attempt to find points that could be improved. However, some students displayed some difficulty in working on their own writing because they seemed already satisfied with their drafts and did not find much to say about them. The students were also asked to give feedback on their own writing. Also, when being asked to evaluate their writing using the rubric, they found it difficult to judge their own work critically because of their familiarity with it and their possible biased perspectives. This may put into question their ability to distance themselves from their own writing in order to develop a more critical view toward their work. Additionally, although the students were prepared for the use of self-assessment using a criterion-referenced rubric before starting the task, they did not have previous experience with this activity or with the concept itself.

4.3.2.2. Peer Assessment Observations

Concerning peer assessment, students exchanged their drafts with their peers and used the rubrics to provide feedback to each other. Before they started, the teacher reminded them of an important principle in peer review: separate the writing from the writer. The instructor also explained that students were not supposed to either discuss or converse with their peers about their papers or ask them any questions at this point. In addition to this, they were asked to use their drafts and the rubrics with their general knowledge of proposal writing expectations and the lessons they learned throughout the semester, as indicated in Table 4.8.

As far as the researcher's reflections are concerned, it was noticed that the participants experienced a certain level of uncertainty when reading their peers' drafts, particularly because they did not fully understand every aspect of the topics suggested by their peers. Therefore, the instructor clarified that when the meaning or purpose of a peer's writing was unclear, it meant that the draft required revision. Moreover, the participants were reminded that they did not need to have complete knowledge of the proposal topic at hand in order to provide constructive and helpful feedback. Instead, their role as readers and reviewers mirrored that of any audience, relying solely on the information presented in the text itself without any additional context. The latter explanation appeared to alleviate, at least partially, the participants' concerns regarding the appropriateness of the feedback or questions they could pose to their peers using the peer assessment criteria-referenced rubrics.

After they had completed the rubric for peer assessment, students shared and discussed both the feedback they provided and the feedback they received from their peers. The researcher observed that peer discussion was rich and it dramatically helped students understand and interpret their feedback better, improve their assessment skills, and become more flexible and open to other ideas suggested by their peers. Although students' doubts about reading and assessing topics outside their own research interests and scope had been widely acclaimed before the intervention, the researchers' observations showed that these doubts were subject to change. To enlarge one's understanding of students' engagement with both self-assessment and peer assessment practices via rubrics, and the factors that play a role

in or impede their development of learner autonomy, this study also focuses on such issues during the post-intervention phase in a more systematic manner.

4.4. Analysis of the Post-intervention Phase Results

This section deals with the analysis of data collected after the intervention to determine whether any development in learner autonomy is witnessed.

4.4.1. Learner Autonomy Scale (Post-Test)

The following subsection focuses on the results from the learner autonomy scale, which was administered at the post-test stage.

4.4.1.1. Cognitive Strategies

Table 4.9 below outlines students' responses to the cognitive strategies sub-scale after the intervention:

Table 4.9

Responses for Cognitive Strategies Items (Post-Intervention)

Response	Note-taking	Structuring	Summarizing	Resourcing
Always	16 (53.3%)	17 (56.7%)	15 (50%)	16 (53.3%)
Sometimes	13 (43.3%)	11 (36.7%)	11 (36.7%)	11 (36.7%)
Rarely	1 (3.3%)	2 (6.7%)	3 (10%)	2 (6.7%)
Never	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)

According to the data presented in the table above, more than half of the students (16, 53.3%) indicated that they consistently employed 'note-taking' techniques in writing, while 13 (43.3%) reported using them sometimes. Regarding 'structuring', more than half of the participants (17, 56.7%) affirmed that they regularly applied these skills when writing, and an addition of 11 students (36.7%) did so occasionally. When it came to 'summarizing', half of the students (15, 50%) stated that they always engaged in summarizing ideas from books, articles, and other sources before including them in their proposal, whereas 11 (36.7%) did so sometimes. A minority rarely or never practiced it. Finally, more than half of the respondents (53.3%) reported that they consistently used different resources, such as books, articles, and online materials, to find information and support their writing, and 36.7% of them said that they applied this approach intermittently. Therefore, these findings point to a noticeable increase in students' reported use of cognitive strategies after the intervention phase.

4.4.1.2. Metacognitive Strategies

Student responses regarding their use of metacognitive strategies after the intervention are provided in the following table:

Table 4.10***Responses for Metacognitive Strategies Items (Post-Intervention)***

Response	Goal-setting	Self-monitoring	Self-evaluation	Planning
Always	18 (60%)	15 (50%)	19 (63.3%)	18 (60%)
Sometimes	11 (36.7%)	13 (43.3%)	8 (26.7%)	10 (33.3%)
Rarely	1 (3.3%)	2 (6.7%)	3 (10%)	2 (6.7%)
Never	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Table 4.10 above summarizes the frequencies and percentages of the participants' answers regarding the use of metacognitive strategies. As clearly displayed in the table above, the majority of students (60%) reported they always took time to set specific goals at each stage of their writing process, and 36.7% said that they sometimes use goal-setting techniques whilst writing. For monitoring progress, half of the participants admitted they always use monitoring strategies during writing, while 43.3% said that they sometimes practiced this approach. In reference to self-evaluation, nearly two-thirds (63.3%) of students reported they always evaluated their work to improve it, and approximately one-quarter (26.7%) sometimes did so. Finally, planning the writing process seems to be frequented used by many students (60%). From the statistics displayed in the table, it appears that students' engagement with metacognitive strategies was increased after the intervention.

4.4.1.3. Teacher's Role

Table 4.11 below deals with students' responses to the teacher's role in their academic writing after the intervention:

Table 4.11***Responses for Teacher's Role Items (Post-Intervention)***

Response	Teachers' Guidance	Teachers' Feedback	Teachers' Help	Teachers' Influence
Always	16 (53.3%)	17 (56.7%)	16 (53.3%)	15 (50%)
Sometimes	10 (33.3%)	8 (26.7%)	10 (33.3%)	9 (30%)
Rarely	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	4 (13.3%)
Never	1 (3.3%)	2 (6.7%)	1 (3.3%)	2 (6.7%)

As noticed from the statistics that are clearly presented in the table above, the majority of students (53.3%) reported they always relied on their teacher for guidance throughout the writing process, and about one-third (33.3%) said they sometimes did so. When asked about depending on teachers' feedback to improve their writing, 56.7% indicated they always depended on it, and 26.7% claimed they sometimes did the same. Similarly, more than half of the students (53.3%) reported that they always depended on their teacher's help in research proposal writing. Regarding the influence of teacher feedback on their progress work, half of the participants reported they always felt this influence, while 30% answered they sometimes did. In general, these results allow us to assume that students still relied on their teachers to guide and support them in writing research after the intervention.

4.4.1.4. Social Conditions

For students' answers related to the social conditions during the post-intervention phase, Table 4.12 provides the results:

Table 4.12***Responses for Social Conditions Items (Post-Intervention)***

Response	Collaboration with Peers	Feedback from Peers	Discussion with Peers	Sharing with Peers
Always	20 (66.7%)	21 (70%)	21 (70%)	18 (60%)
Sometimes	8 (26.7%)	7 (23.3%)	7 (23.3%)	8 (26.7%)
Rarely	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	2 (6.7%)
Never	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	2 (6.7%)

As regards the social dimension of learner autonomy, the results of the social subscale in the post-intervention phase are presented in Table 4.12. 66.7% of

participants admitted they always tended to collaborate with peers in the context of writing. In the same vein, the majority of students revealed they always sought feedback from peers (70%), and the same percentage of them stated that they always took the time to discuss their writings with peers to obtain alternative perspectives. Moreover, in reference to the idea of sharing their work with peers, 60% of participants claimed they always felt comfortable doing so. Consequently, these results reveal that the participants' social dimension of learner autonomy was developed after the intervention phase.

4.4.1.5. Affective Constructs

Table 4.13 below summarizes the students' responses regarding the last section of the learner autonomy scale: affective factors related to writing after the intervention phase:

Table 4.13

Responses for Affective Constructs Items (Post-Intervention)

Response	Motivation	Emotion Management	Positive Attitude	Confidence
Always	18 (60%)	14 (46.7%)	17 (56.7%)	18 (60%)
Sometimes	10 (33.3%)	9 (30%)	11 (36.7%)	10 (33.3%)
Rarely	2 (6.7%)	5 (16.7%)	1 (3.3%)	2 (6.7%)
Never	0 (0%)	2 (6.7%)	1 (3.3%)	0 (0%)

According to the table above, eighteen participants (60%) reported they were always motivated to write and improve their skills, and 33.3% indicated they sometimes felt the same. With respect to managing emotions during writing challenges, less than half (46.7%) of students said they managed their emotions effectively, and 30% answered that they sometimes did. Regarding maintaining a positive attitude toward the writing process, the table shows that the majority (56.7%) stated they always attempted to keep positivity, and 36.7% reported they sometimes did so. Almost similar results have been noticed for confidence; 60% of students expressed they always had confidence in their research proposal writing ability, and another third (33.3%) said they sometimes experienced it. The students' answers concerning the affective dimension of learner autonomy at the post-intervention stage

demonstrate a clear development in the aforementioned affective constructs, especially motivation, positive attitude, and confidence.

4.4.1.6. Overall Post-scale Results

The table below summarizes the average scores (M) and standard deviations (SD) for each post-scale sub-component of learner autonomy. Specifically, these measures cover cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, the teacher's role, social conditions, and affective constructs.

Table 4.14

Post-scale Descriptive Statistics for Learner Autonomy

Sub-scale	M	SD
Cognitive Strategies	1.57	0.69
Metacognitive Strategies	1.48	0.62
Teacher's Role	1.68	0.86
Social Conditions	1.46	0.77
Affective Constructs	1.58	0.75
Overall	1.55	0.74

Table 4.14 displays the overall means of the five sub-scales that make up the learner autonomy scale after the intervention: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, teacher's role, social conditions, and affective constructs. As is clearly noticed, the means showed in the table vary between 1.46 to 1.68 which means that most of the students' responses to the items ranged between always and sometimes. The lowest mean scores were observed in affective constructs (M=1.58, SD=0.75) and metacognitive strategies (M=1.48, SD=0.62), which may indicate that students were involved in these components of learner autonomy. Yet, the social dimension had a slightly lower mean (M=1.46, SD=0.77), which shows that students were more engaged in the social aspect related to learner autonomy. From the overall mean score (M=1.55, SD=0.74), one can estimate that, after the intervention, the level of learner autonomy in cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social dimensions was satisfactory, but the students remained dependent on the teacher.

4.4.2. Comparison of the Pre and Post Scales

The results in both the pre-scale and the post-scale are compared in order to gauge the students' progress in employing learner autonomy strategies as a result of the intervention. This comparison aims to determine whether students have improved their use of cognitive, metacognitive, affective, social, and teacher-related strategies in academic writing. The tables below present descriptive statistics for each item within the sub-scales before and after the intervention, followed by overall means and standard deviations.

4.4.2.1. Cognitive Strategies

Table 4.15 below compares the descriptive statistics of the cognitive strategies sub-scale before and after the intervention:

Table 4.15

The Pre-post Scales Descriptive Statistics of Cognitive Strategies

Item	Pre-scale M	Pre-scale SD	Post-scale M	Post-scale SD
Note-taking	1.70	0.65	1.50	0.57
Structuring	1.73	0.74	1.50	0.63
Summarizing	2.10	0.99	1.67	0.80
Resourcing	1.80	0.85	1.60	0.77
Overall	1.83	0.82	1.57	0.69

According to the data above, the mean scores for all items show a decrease, which indicates an increase in the use of cognitive strategies after the intervention. For instance, the mean for summarizing dropped from 2.10 to 1.67, a clear sign that students used this strategy more regularly compared to the pre-intervention phase. Similarly, the overall mean decreased from 1.83 in the pre-scale to 1.57 in the post-scale, which also reflects an improvement in students' use of cognitive strategies when writing, such as note-taking, structuring, and summarizing.

4.4.2.2. Metacognitive Strategies

The comparison of metacognitive strategy use pre- and post-intervention is shown in Table 4.16:

Table 4.16***The Pre-post Scales Descriptive Statistics of Metacognitive Strategies***

Item	Pre-scale M	Pre-scale SD	Post-scale M	Post-scale SD
Goal-setting	1.73	0.59	1.47	0.57
Self-monitoring	1.77	0.67	1.57	0.63
Self-evaluation	1.83	0.69	1.53	0.68
Planning	1.60	0.56	1.47	0.57
Overall	1.64	0.73	1.48	0.62

Table 4.16 summarizes the pre- and post-scale results of the metacognitive strategies that were measured in this research and which are goal-setting, monitoring, evaluation, and planning. As the table shows, the means for the four items show noticeable decreases from the pre- to the post-test, which means that the students' answers to the items moved closer to the 'always' option after the intervention. For example, the mean score for planning decreased from 1.60 to 1.47. This clearly indicates more use of the latter strategy by the participants. Therefore, depending on the overall mean score for the sub-scale (pre: M=1.64, SD=0.73; post: M=1.48, SD=0.62), it can be estimated that the students' level of metacognitive regulation improved after the intervention, so their ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their work became more noticeable.

4.4.2.3. Teacher's Role

The table below compares the descriptive statistics of students' perceptions regarding the teacher's role before and after the intervention:

Table 4.17***The Pre-post Scales Descriptive Statistics of Teacher's Role***

Item	Pre-scale M	Pre-scale SD	Post-scale M	Post-scale SD
Teachers' Guidance	1.57	0.68	1.63	0.81
Teachers' Feedback	1.67	0.84	1.67	0.92
Teachers' Help	1.67	0.80	1.63	0.81
Teachers' Influence	2.13	1.07	1.77	0.94
Overall	1.76	0.88	1.68	0.86

Table 4.17 compares the descriptive statistics of students' perceptions regarding the teacher's role before and after the intervention. The data show inconsistent results for the four items. Although some mean scores decreased to a small extent, students still seemed to rely on teacher guidance and feedback in the post-intervention phase. As a case in point, the mean score for teachers' influence decreased from 2.13 to 1.77, which indicates that students felt somewhat less dependent on the teacher. Likewise, the mean for asking for teachers' help declined slightly from 1.67 to 1.63. However, reliance on teachers' feedback remained unchanged, as relying on teachers' guidance even increased to a small degree. These statistics may put the researcher in a position to assume that most of the students generally remained reliant on the teacher after the intervention.

4.4.2.4. Social Conditions

Table 4.18 compares students' social engagement strategy when writing before and after the intervention:

Table 4.18

The Pre-post Scales Descriptive Statistics of Social Conditions

Item	Pre-scale M	Pre-scale SD	Post-scale M	Post-scale SD
Collaboration with peers	2.47	1.14	1.43	0.73
Feedback from peers	2.47	1.14	1.40	0.72
Discussion with peers	2.40	1.10	1.40	0.72
Sharing with peers	2.33	1.12	1.60	0.89
Overall	2.42	1.11	1.46	0.77

Table 4.18 summarizes the mean score of each item of the social conditions sub-scale of the post-scale. The means of the four components of the social aspect of autonomy (collaboration with peers, feedback from peers, discussion with peers, and sharing with peers) range between 1.40 and 1.60 in the post-scale with an overall mean of 1.46 for the whole sub-scale, whereas they ranged between 2.33 and 2.47 in the pre-scale with an overall mean of 2.42. This means that the students' answers varied mostly between always and sometimes, which indicates a higher level of social engagement in the four areas: collaboration, feedback, discussion, and sharing. From

these findings, it is crystal clear that these numerical data indicate the students' significant development in the social dimension of learner autonomy.

4.4.2.5. Affective Constructs

Table 4.19 below compares descriptive statistics for students' affective constructs before and after the intervention:

Table 4.19

The Pre-post Scales Descriptive Statistics of Affective Constructs

Item	Pre-scale M	Pre-scale SD	Post-scale M	Post-scale SD
Motivation	1.73	0.69	1.47	0.63
Emotion Management	1.90	0.84	1.83	0.95
Positive Attitude	1.77	0.82	1.53	0.73
Confidence	1.63	0.67	1.47	0.63
Overall	1.76	0.76	1.58	0.75

Table 4.19 shows the means and standard deviations of the affective constructs sub-scale before and after the intervention. A comparison of the means shows an increase in the level of affective involvement after the intervention. The means for the four items before the intervention vary between 1.63 and 1.90, whereas after the intervention they range between 1.47 and 1.83. Such results mean that the students developed, to some extent, more motivation, confidence, and positive attitudes toward writing after the intervention.

3.4.2.6. Comparison of Descriptive Statistics for Learner Autonomy Sub-scales (Pre- and Post-Intervention)

Table 4.20 summarizes the descriptive statistics for all the five learner autonomy sub-scales measured at both pre- and post-intervention phases:

Table 4.20***Comparison of Descriptive Statistics for Learner Autonomy Sub-scales (Pre- and Post-Intervention)***

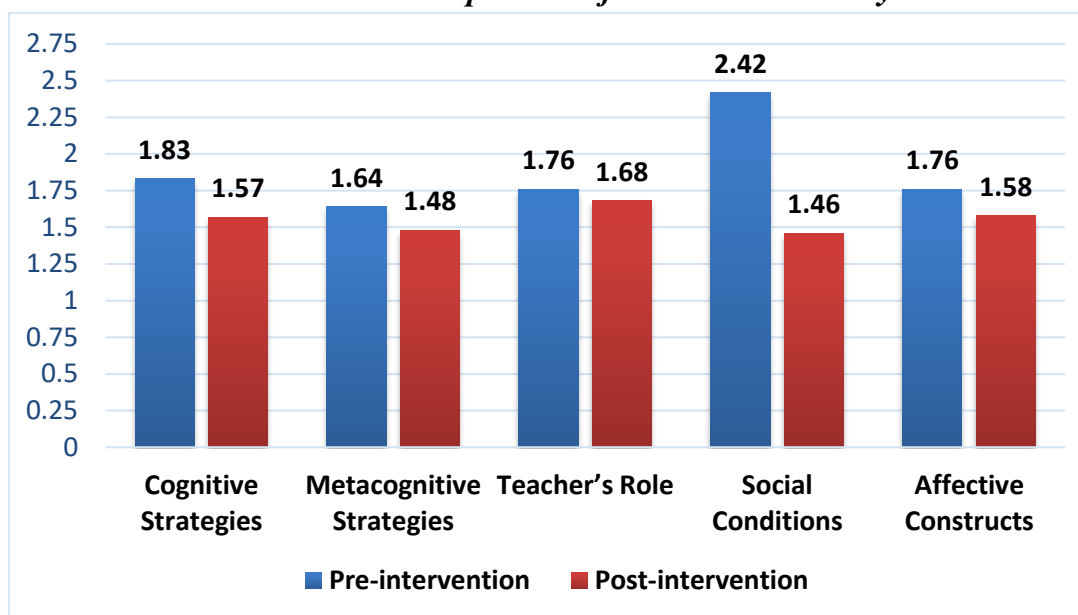
Sub-scale	Pre-scale	Pre-scale	Post-scale	Post-scale
	M	SD	M	SD
Cognitive Strategies	1.83	0.82	1.57	0.69
Metacognitive Strategies	1.64	0.73	1.48	0.62
Teacher's Role	1.76	0.88	1.68	0.86
Social Conditions	2.42	1.11	1.46	0.77
Affective Constructs	1.76	0.76	1.58	0.75
Overall	1.88	0.91	1.55	0.74

Table 4.20 shows the means and standard deviations of the five learner autonomy sub-scales in the pre- and post-intervention scales. It can be easily noticeable from the table that the means of all the sub-scales of the post-scale are lower than those of the pre-scale. In the pre-scale, the lowest mean is 1.64 and the highest mean is 2.42, so it means that the frequency of the use of learner autonomy strategies in these areas ranges mostly between sometimes and rarely. In fact, this demonstrates a moderate level of autonomy before the intervention. On the other hand, the means in the post-scale vary between 1.46 and 1.68, which reveals a frequency of use between always and sometimes. In a nutshell, the comparison of these means confirms the assumption made earlier about the development of the students' level of autonomy after the intervention.

To further illustrate the impact of the intervention, a visual comparison is useful. Figure 4.9 below presents the pre- and post-intervention mean scores for the learner autonomy sub-scales:

Figure 4.9

Pre- and Post-Intervention Comparison of Learner Autonomy Sub-scales



This figure illustrates the comparison of mean scores for each learner autonomy sub-scale before and after the intervention. Lower mean scores indicate more frequent use of the strategies (1=Always, 4=Never). As clearly shown, a comparison of the means yields approximately similar results in both scales except for the fourth sub-scale, social conditions. That is, students in the post-intervention phase were much more collaborative with their peers. Regarding the other dimensions of autonomy, they also improved, but to a lesser extent, particularly in terms of students' perceptions of the teacher's role in students' writing experience. To validate the latter assumption, another research tool was used in the post-intervention phase: students' questionnaire (part 02).

4.4.3. Students' Questionnaire (Part 02)

The data from the Students' Questionnaire (Part 02) were handled quantitatively and qualitatively. The numerical data obtained from the questionnaire were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for consolidation. This process enabled the calculation of mean scores for participants' responses. The computed averages were used to assess overall trends in perceptions and experiences related to self- and peer assessment within the sample of the present study. On the other hand, the qualitative analysis of the data facilitated the interpretation of the considerable volume of unstructured responses generated by the questionnaire's open-ended items. The initial

phase involved a thorough reading of participants' answers to these questions, during which preliminary observations were recorded. This was followed by a more detailed examination of the data. The second phase consisted of coding or assigning labels to segments of the text. These codes corresponded to different constructs underpinning learner autonomy, such as 'self-assessment skills,' 'peer collaboration,' and 'motivation for independent learning.' In the third phase, the codes were organized and broader themes were identified that encompassed multiple related codes from the previous stage. For instance, these themes include 'students' perceptions of self- and peer assessment,' and 'perceived impact of self- and peer assessment on learner autonomy.'

It is important to add that the number of participants varied between sections of the questionnaire. While the first part included responses from thirty (30) participants, four students withdrew before completing the second part. Consequently, the analysis of Part Two is based on the remaining twenty-six (26) respondents.

Section Four: Self- and Peer Assessment

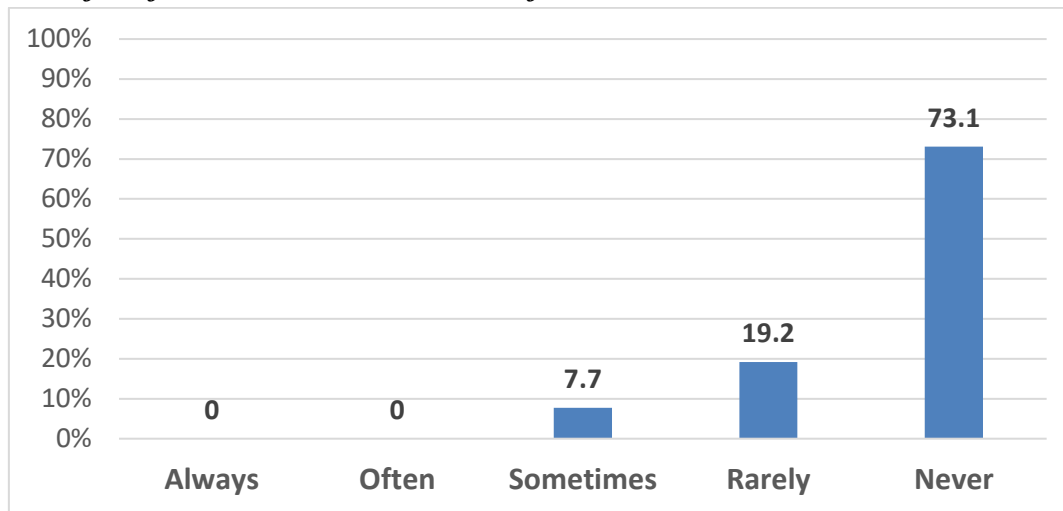
This section investigates participants' engagement with self- and peer assessment practices before the intervention phase, their perceptions of the effectiveness of assessment rubrics during the intervention, and the challenges that they encountered in using these strategies as part of their research proposal writing process.

Question 17: Students' Use of Self- and Peer Assessment Before the Intervention

Figure 4.10 below provides information about the extent to which students reported using self- and peer assessment activities in the classroom before participating in this study:

Figure 4.10

Use of Self- and Peer Assessment Before the Intervention



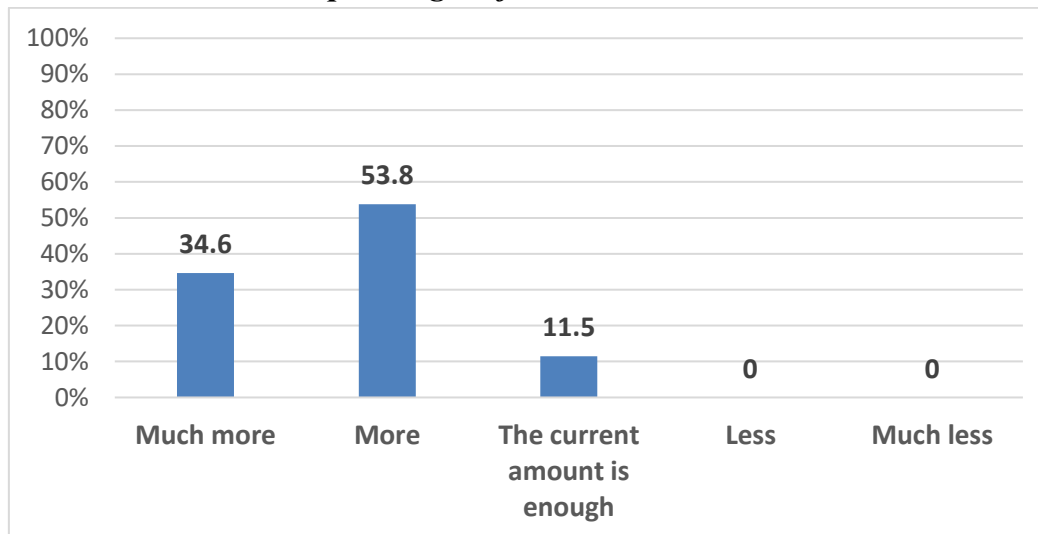
As far as students' previous exposure to self- and peer assessment is concerned, the figure above summarizes their answers. As indicated in the figure, the overwhelming majority of students (73.1%) reported that they had never engaged in self- and/or peer assessment before the study. Besides, 19.2% of the students admitted that they rarely used these practices, and only 7.7% said they sometimes used them. Nevertheless, the remaining students had never been involved in such assessment activities before the study's intervention. This may imply that the use of self- and peer assessment was actually ignored because neither self-assessment nor peer assessment was a common practice in their EFL classrooms.

Question 18: Students' Views on Expanding Self- and Peer Assessment Practices

The following table summarizes students' views regarding the extent to which self- and peer assessment activities should be implemented in the classroom:

Figure 4.11

Students' Views on Expanding Self- and Peer Assessment Practices



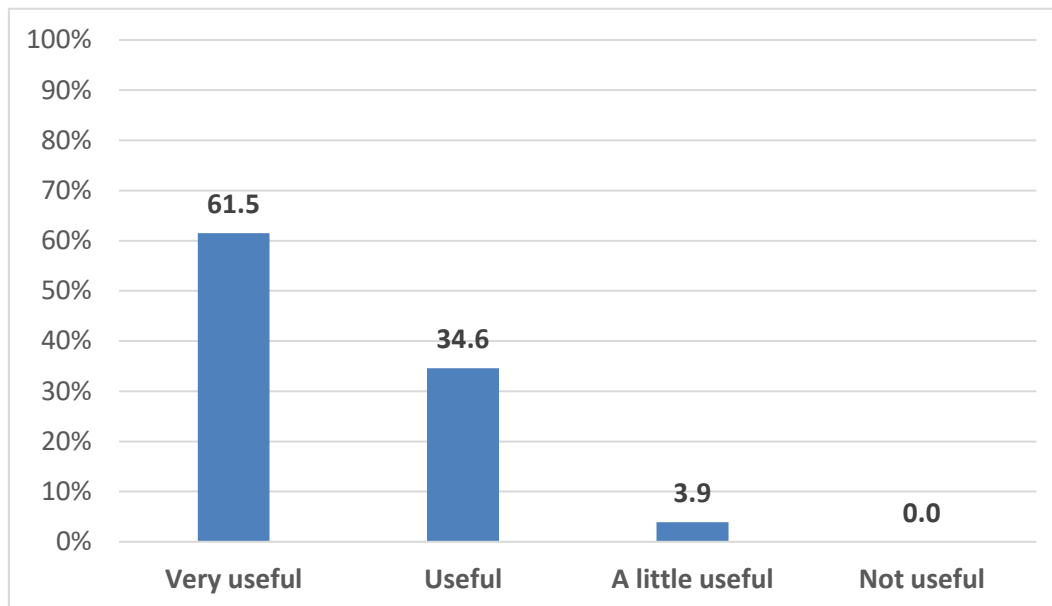
As clearly illustrated in Figure 4.11, most of the participants (88.4%) agreed that self- and peer assessment ought to be used more (53.8% chose more, and 34.6% said much more). Meanwhile, only 11.5% of the participants felt that the current amount was adequate, and none of them indicated that these assessment practices needed to be used less. Thus, it can be estimated from the figure that the students had a significantly positive attitude toward expanding self-and peer assessment activities.

Question 19: Perceived Usefulness of Developing the Rubric by Students

The next figure summarizes participants' perceptions of the usefulness of engaging in the development of self- and peer assessment rubric criteria during the intervention phase:

Figure 4.12

Perceived Usefulness of Co-constructing Assessment Criteria by Students



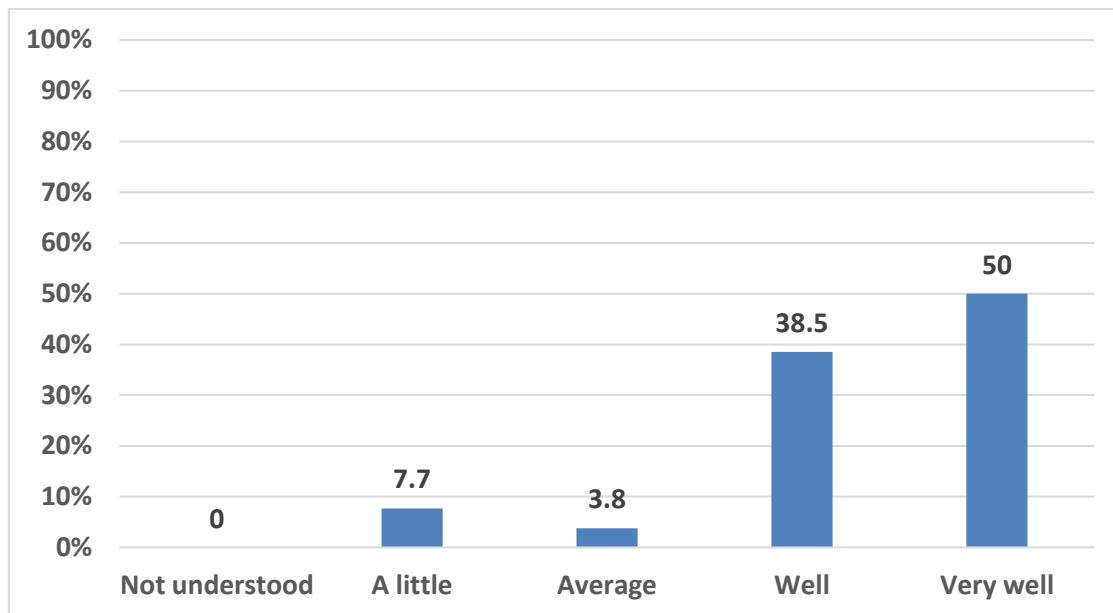
Question 19 intended to know students' opinions about taking part in developing the rubric criteria and whether this activity was useful or not. As shown in Figure 4.12, while one student (3.9%) said it was 'A little useful', most of the participants (96.1%) praised the activity and concurred that it was 'Very useful' (61.5%) or simply 'Useful' (34.6%). Besides, no student reported that it was 'Not useful'. Clearly, the participants seemed to agree that taking part in building the criteria was rewarding in terms of their assessment process, because this benefit was mentioned by the vast majority of learners.

Question 20: Students' Understanding of the Assessment Criteria

The following figure describes students' level of understanding regarding the criteria that were used to assess their research proposals:

Figure 4.13

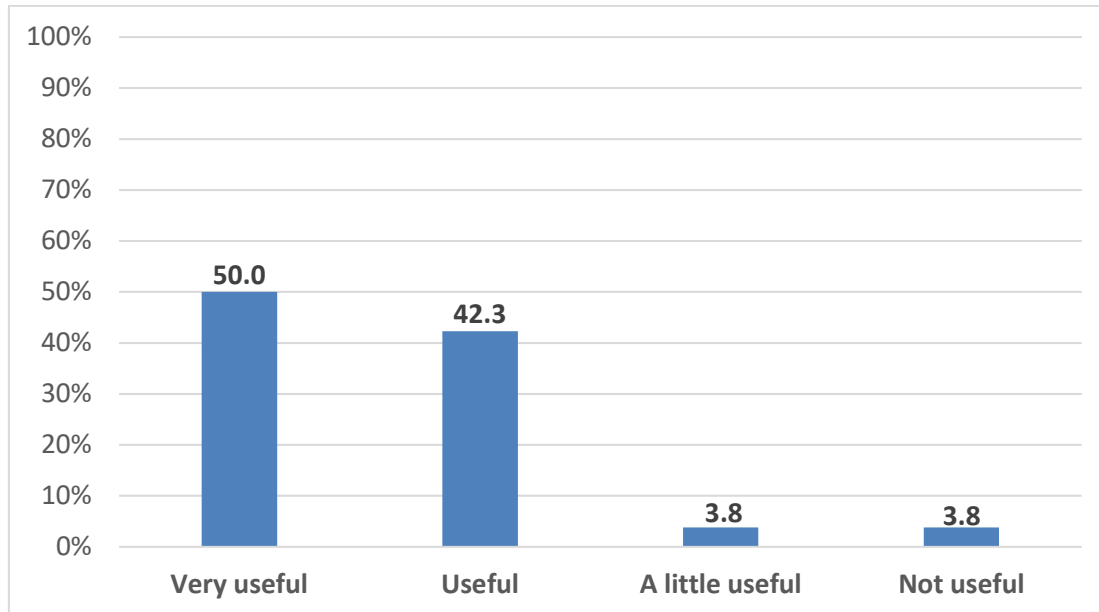
Students' Understanding of the Assessment Criteria



In a similar question, students were asked about their understanding of the assessment criteria that were used to evaluate their research proposals. As illustrated in the above figure, none of the students reported that they did not understand the criteria, while only 7.7% said that they understood them to a small extent. In the meantime, 3.8% of students described their understanding as average. However, the majority of students (88.5%) stated that the assessment criteria used were clear to a larger extent for them. These findings show that the participants have successfully managed to grasp the rubric's criteria employed.

Question 21: Perceived Usefulness of Self- and Peer Assessment by Students

The figure below presents participants' perceptions of how useful they consider self- and peer assessment during the writing process of their research proposals:

Figure 4.14***Perceived Usefulness of Self- and Peer Assessment in Writing Research Proposals***

According to the data presented in Figure 4.14, the majority of participants (92.3%) stated that self- and peer assessment was either very useful (50%) or useful (42.3%) in improving their research proposal writing. On the contrary, a small number of students (7.7%) expressed that it was of limited or no usefulness. Such outcomes show that participants generally held significantly positive attitudes toward the role of self- and peer assessment in supporting their research proposal writing.

Question 22: Challenges Faced by Students in Using Self- and Peer Assessment

Answers to Question 22 are presented in Table 4.21 below. The table presents the number of students who faced challenges in using the self- and peer assessment criteria-referenced rubrics in the process of drafting their research proposals. The participants were invited to select all the different responses that applied to them.

Table 4.21**Challenges Faced in Using Self- and Peer Assessment Rubrics**

Challenges	N	P (%)
Worried that the assessment might be unreliable and unfair	14	53.8
Felt that giving peer feedback took too much time or effort	7	26.9
Did not feel confident assessing own or others' proposals	6	23.1
Found it difficult to stay objective when assessing peers	5	19.2
Felt anxious or uncomfortable giving or receiving critical feedback	2	7.7
Worried that giving feedback could negatively impact relationships	2	7.7
Not sure how to use the rubric or understand the assessment criteria	2	7.7
Feedback received from peers was unclear, harsh, or not useful	1	3.8
Felt like I had to focus more on language and grammar than ideas	4	15.4
Other	2	7.7
Total	26	100

From Table 4.21, it seems that there is a consensus among a considerable number of students that concerns about possible unreliability and unfairness in assessment are the most perceived disadvantages of self- and peer assessment. This issue was cited by more than half of the participants (53.8%). Following this are the time and effort required to provide peer feedback (mentioned seven times (26.9%)), the lack of confidence in assessing peers' proposals (mentioned six times (23.1%)), and the difficulty in keeping an objective stance (mentioned five times (19.2%)). Few students (15.4%) also pointed out that they tended to focus too much on language and grammar rather than content during feedback. The 'Other' option (mentioned twice) refers to a concern related to not having enough knowledge about peers' research topics so as to provide them with constructive comments.

Section Five: Self- and Peer Assessment and Learner Autonomy

This section presents findings from both quantitative and qualitative methods on the perceived impact of self-assessment and peer assessment on learner autonomy among students after the implementation of the teacher's action plan. In the tables below, S1, S2, and so on refer to specific self-assessment items, while P1, P2, and others correspond to peer assessment items.

Question 23: Students' Perceptions of Self-assessment and Peer Assessment

For self-assessment, the following table provides a detailed overview of learners' perceptions. The table presents the mean (M) for each statement related to autonomous learning using the following coding scheme: Strongly agree=1, Agree=2, Neutral=3, Disagree=4, where a lower mean value basically means more consensus among the participants.

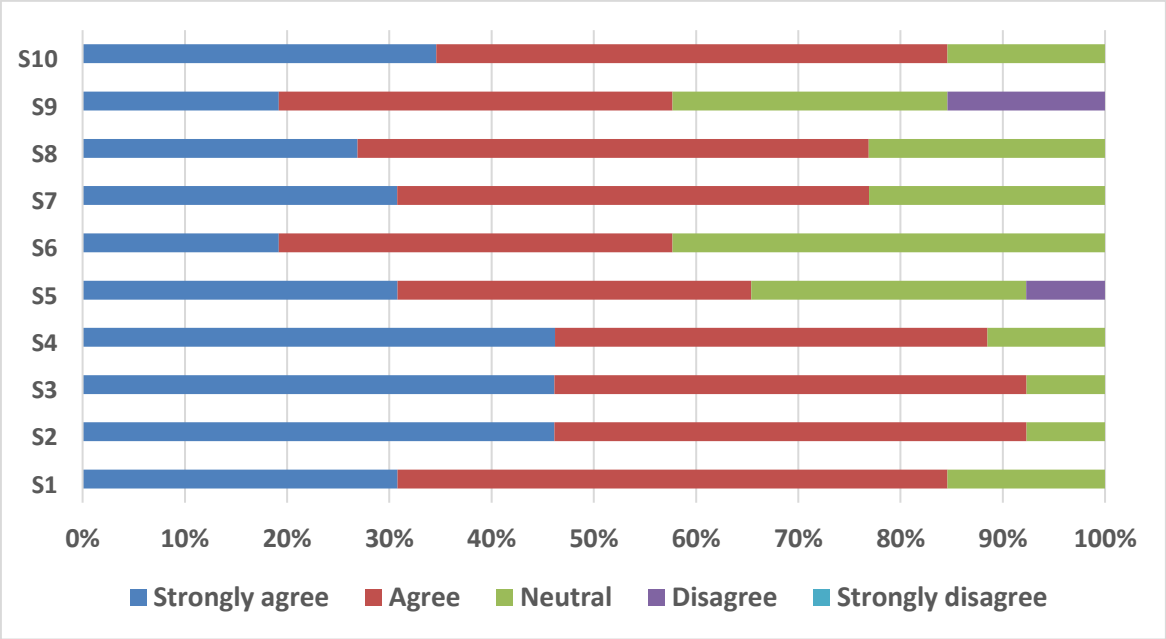
Table 4.22***Students' Perceptions of Self-assessment***

Item	Statement	N	Mean
S1	I believe that I can assess my own research proposal writing	26	2.38
S2	Assessing my own research proposal writing helped me improve it	26	1.77
S3	Self-assessment made me more aware of my strong and weak points during research proposal writing	26	1.65
S4	Self-assessment helped me take more responsibility to improve my own research proposal writing	26	1.69
S5	Self-assessment encouraged me to set specific goals to guide my progress while writing my research proposal	26	2.08
S6	Self-assessment made me feel more capable to independently find resources and strategies that improve my research proposal writing	26	2.31
S7	Using self-assessment helped me improve my critical thinking skills	26	1.77
S8	Self-assessment helped me become more aware of the various techniques I could understand and organize information	26	2.08
S9	Self-assessment made me feel more confident in identifying the weaknesses in my proposal writing without teacher guidance	26	2.23
S10	Self-assessment made me feel more motivated to improve the quality of my research proposal writing	26	1.81

At first glance, the displayed results in Table 4.22 reveal that the students' perceptions of self-assessment were generally positive, as most of the mean scores fell close to the agreement end of the scale. In other words, the students seemed to hold favorable views about using self-assessment in their research proposal writing. Most of the statements show relatively low mean values (ranging between 1.65 and 2.38), which suggests that the majority of participants tended to agree or strongly agree with the benefits of self-assessment. For example, several items such as becoming more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, taking responsibility for improving their work, and developing critical thinking recorded some of the lowest means (around 1.65–1.77), which indicates that these aspects were strongly acknowledged by many students. Even though some statements displayed slightly higher means, such as feeling capable of independently finding resources or setting specific goals (with values above 2.00), this does not seem to reduce the general tendency towards agreement, as the overall pattern remains consistent across the items. Likewise, the students' confidence in identifying weaknesses without teacher guidance, as well as their motivation to enhance the quality of their writing, appeared to be strong, with means around 2.23 and 1.81, respectively. As regards their awareness of various techniques to organize and understand information, the mean score (2.08) suggests that the students somehow agreed with such a benefit, although the level of agreement was not as pronounced as in other areas. On the whole, the table seems to indicate that the students viewed self-assessment as a central element in the cultivation of learner autonomy throughout the research proposal writing process, and thus, the effectiveness of this adopted approach in supporting learners is confirmed.

These results are visually presented in the following figure:

Figure 4.15
Student Responses to Self-assessment Statements



As shown in the above figure, the overwhelming majority of students tended to agree or strongly agree with most of the statements related to self-assessment. What remains to be examined is students' views regarding peer assessment.

The table below is a summary of students' perceptions of the impact of peer assessment on learner autonomy in the context of research proposal writing:

Table 4.23***Students' Perceptions of Peer Assessment***

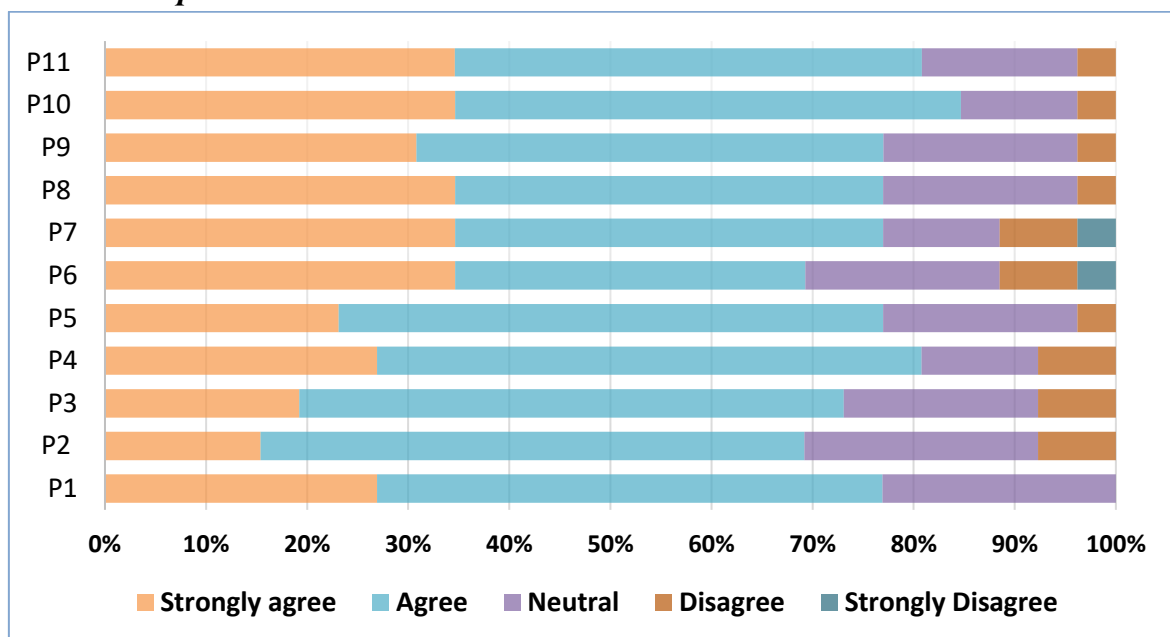
Item	Statement	N	Mean
P1	I believe that I can assess my classmate's research proposal writing	26	2.27
P2	Receiving feedback from my classmates helped me improve the quality of my research proposal writing	26	1.81
P3	Assessing my classmates' research proposal helped me improve the quality of my own research proposal writing	26	1.85
P4	Peer assessment made me more aware of the strong and weak points in my research proposal writing	26	1.73
P5	Peer assessment encouraged me to take more responsibility in improving my research proposal writing	26	1.92
P6	Peer assessment encouraged me to set specific goals to guide my progress while writing my research proposal	26	2.19
P7	Peer assessment made me feel more capable of collaborating with others to find resources and strategies to improve my research proposal writing	26	1.85
P8	Using peer assessment helped me improve my critical thinking skills	26	2.00
P9	The collaboration aspect of peer assessment made me feel more confident in identifying the weaknesses in my proposal writing	26	1.85
P10	Peer assessment made me feel more comfortable discussing and sharing feedback with my classmates	26	1.46
P11	Peer assessment made me feel more motivated to improve the quality of my research proposal writing	26	1.85

The results presented in Table 4.23 demonstrate that the means of the learners' scores in the peer assessment, like self-assessment, reveal that almost all students consider peer assessment as an advantageous practice in research proposal writing environments that is supposed to support learners' abilities to take responsibility and direct their own learning. By way of explanation, the lowest mean ($M=1.46$) concerns students' comfort in discussing and sharing feedback. Moreover, other items with low

means, such as becoming more aware of strong and weak points ($M=1.73$), benefiting from classmates' feedback ($M=1.81$), and improving their own proposals through assessing others ($M=1.85$), express the extent to which these aspects were strongly favored by the participants. Although students agreed to a lesser extent with assessing a classmate's work ($M=2.27$) and setting goals ($M=2.19$), they still viewed both practices and others as positive. Accordingly, the exposed scores approve the usefulness of integrating peer assessment practices in developing learner autonomy among students during the writing of their research proposals, even if some aspects were perceived to have more impact than others.

Figure 4.16 visually highlights the percentage of student responses to the peer assessment items:

Figure 4.16
Student Responses to Peer Assessment Statements



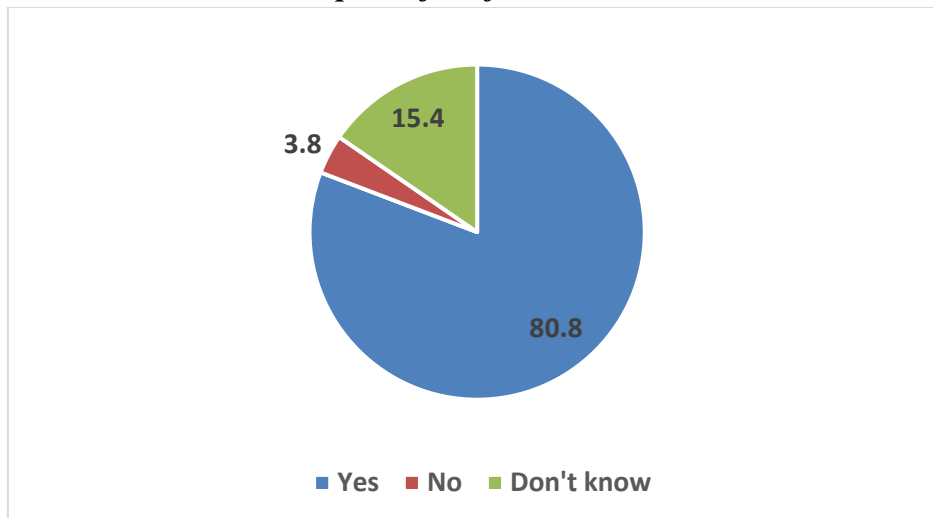
According to the data presented in Figure 4.16, many students strongly agree or agree with the statements related to peer assessment. It is worth mentioning here that the impact of peer assessment, as shown in this figure and in Figure 4.15, slightly exceeded that of self-assessment, but the difference was not statistically significant at all because both types of assessment contributed to the development of dissimilar aspects of learner autonomy.

Question 24: Students' Perceived Impact of Self-Assessment on Learner Autonomy

The table below summarizes students' responses to whether self-assessment helped them become more autonomous learners in writing their research proposals:

Figure 4.17

Students' Perceived Impact of Self-assessment on Learner Autonomy



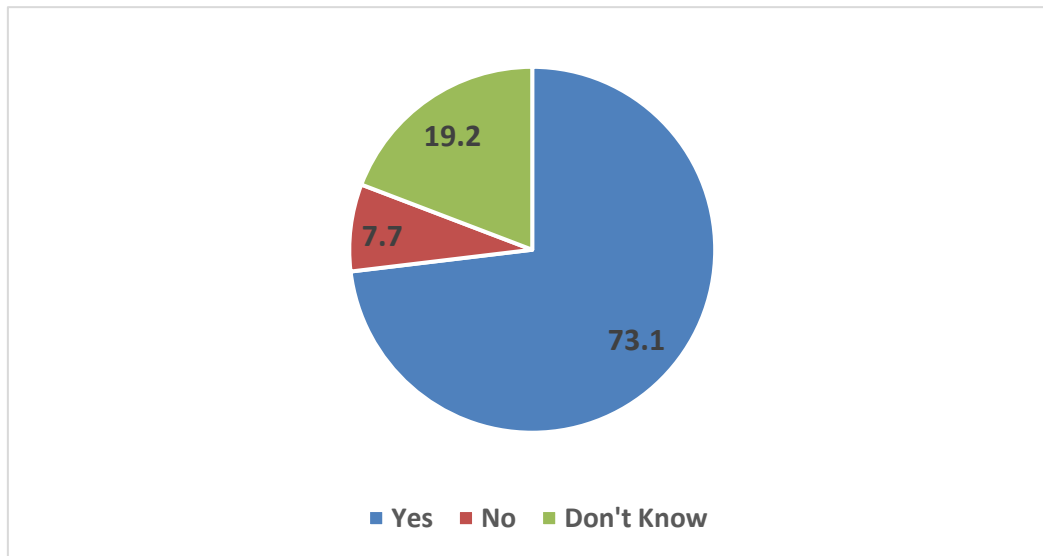
As clearly displayed in Figure 4.17, most students (80.8%) reported that self-assessment helped them become more autonomous learners in writing their research proposals. A small number (3.8%) disagreed, and 15.4% frankly admitted that they had no idea about its impact on learner autonomy. In a nutshell, it is now clear that students claimed they benefited from autonomous learning through their involvement in self-assessment.

Question 25: Students' Perceived Impact of Peer Assessment on Learner Autonomy

Figure 4.18 below shares students' views on whether peer assessment contributed to their development as autonomous learners/researchers in the course of drafting research proposals:

Figure 4.18

Students' Perceived Impact of Peer Assessment on Learner Autonomy



According to the presented scores in the above figure, the majority of students (73.1%) believed that peer assessment helped them become more autonomous learners while drafting their research proposals. A small percentage (7.7%) disagreed, while 19.2% were not certain about the potential impact of this kind of assessment on their autonomous learning. Thus, one may deduce that peer assessment was generally rated as positive in terms of its impact on learner autonomy, be it in cognitive, metacognitive, affective, or social factors. Moreover, the results from Figure 4.17 and Figure 4.18 indicate that self-assessment showed slightly better outcomes than peer assessment.

To add more depth to the previous findings, the researcher invited students to share their experiences regarding self- and peer assessment using focus group discussions.

4.4.4. Focus Groups

This section is concerned with the analysis of the focus groups conducted with EFL learners. As previously stated, focus groups were employed within this study to probe as much data as possible regarding how the students were proceeding with their criteria-referenced self- and peer assessment rubric for research proposals. In fact, they were also used to build a sense of sharing their similar or divergent views about their experience with the intervention. It is worth noting that the sample encompassed

three separate focus groups with a size of six to eight participants per group. As for the organization of the focus groups, they were conducted after the second part of the questionnaire, which itself took place one week after students had used the criteria-referenced self- and peer assessment rubric for research proposals. All focus groups were transcribed manually. Because the participants were considered EFL language users, it was important to maintain the language they used naturally to clarify the students' viewpoints and emphasize their voices regarding their involvement in the process of doing self- and peer assessment via rubrics. As stated in Chapter Three, privacy in this study was connected to making sure that information gathered remained both confidential and anonymous. To reach this objective, the researcher replaced the participants' real names with pseudonyms (alternative names) so that they would not be identifiable. The table below displays the list of categories and themes that were identified through thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts.

Table 4.24

Focus Group Categories and Themes

Categories	Themes
Factors Motivating Students to Pursue a Master's Degree	Licence is not enough, pursuing a PhD, interest in Linguistics and research, better job opportunities, and a lack of alternatives
Main Challenges in Research Proposal Writing	Lack of research and academic writing skills, limited access to research sources, time and research project management issues, and problems in research collaboration.
Constraints to Developing Learner Autonomy in Writing Research	Social and teamwork constraints, institutional constraints, and psychological constraints.
Students' Personal Strategies for Developing Learner Autonomy	Collective decision making, peer support and scaffolding, and collaborative task management.
Co-construction of Criteria-referenced Rubrics	Lack of using rubrics, turning learners into assessors, and transparency of the assessment criteria.
Implementing Self-assessment	Improving self-assessment skills, bias in self-assessment, a time- and effort-consuming process, and self-assessment entails teacher and/or peer assessment.
Implementing Peer Assessment	Exposure to diverse perspectives, difficulty of peer assessment, psychological challenges, and a collaborative and collegial learning culture.
The Role of Self- and Peer Assessment in Cultivating Learner Autonomy	Responsibility, metacognitive awareness, motivation and engagement, independent learning, and learner autonomy.
Expanding Self- and Peer Assessment Skills Beyond the Classroom	Adoption and use of self- and peer assessment in higher education, and Self- and peer assessment as a means to develop lifelong learning.

- **Factors Motivating Students to Pursue a Master's Degree**

To start the focus groups, participants discussed their motivation(s) to pursue a Master's degree. Five themes can be identified in this category as can be found in the table below: Licence is not enough, pursuing a PhD, interest in Linguistics and research, better job opportunities, and a lack of study options.

Table 4.25

Factors Motivating Students to Pursue a Master's Degree

Themes	Definitions
Licence is not enough	The bachelor's degree is considered limited in terms of academic development.
Pursuing a PhD	The Master's is viewed as a step toward earning the PhD (doctorate).
Interest in Linguistics and research	Students' motivation comes from interest in the specialty itself or a desire to explore language more deeply through research.
Better job opportunities	This theme reflects the belief that a Master's degree might increase students' value in the job market.
Lack of alternatives	Students' decision to enroll in the Master's program was forced by external circumstances such as family expectations and admission difficulties.

When addressing the first question to all groups regarding their motivation to pursue a Master's in Applied Linguistics, the participants mentioned different reasons as explained in the table above. For instance, many students said that pursuing a Master's degree is one way to overcome the limitations of a Licence degree. That is, these students have expressed their dissatisfaction with stopping their studies at the bachelor level because the Licence degree did not meet their personal or professional expectations. Some respondents clearly described their experience of the matter: "So I thought that, um, a bachelor degree was not enough"; "academically it is more valuable than a bachelor, and that was my goal and my intention"; "but still I felt like the Licence degree is not enough for me"; and "Though I would like to stay with just three years of studying, it's not enough to work or to... to be."

On a similar train of thought, some students viewed the Master's degree as a stepping stone toward earning a PhD rather than a final academic goal. Imane explicitly expressed this: "yeah, for me, my goal is to complete, uh, PhD studies". Another participant, Hind, shared a similar ambition, who admitted: "Well, for me, I pursued my master's degree for PhD, to be honest". However, Youssef also revealed uncertainty regarding the value of the Master's degree if it does not lead to doctoral

studies. He explains: “I think if that, if I don't have the opportunity to have my PhD, I, I am not really that convinced with my Master's...I mean, I mean, like nowadays I, I start feeling that I'm wasting my time”.

Unlike these external motivations, some students' main reason for enrolling in the Master's program is more intrinsic, as they are motivated by deep learning about language-related subjects. Nada explained her motivation in terms of expanding knowledge and developing more academic skills: “So for me it's to, uh, broaden my knowledge in the linguistic field and to develop my writing skills.” Similarly, another participant, Zaineb said: “I always fantasize about, like, uh, how language is so powerful. It's such a powerful tool.” In brief, Serine emphasized learning for its own sake: “I just wanted to learn. Not because of getting a certificate or, or specifically gaining work. No. Just to learn.”

Apart from academic-oriented motivations, professional considerations were also mentioned. According to many students, obtaining a Master's degree would in one way or another lead to better employment opportunities in particular and increase their value in the job market in general. For example, Amine believed that: “If I had to think about a real reason, it would be that it would make me more valuable as a person...As a recruit for jobs in general.” Another participant, Safa agreed with this view: “And to have more chance to get a job.” Thus, many students consider the Master's degree as an investment that can aid their professional prospects in the future.

Finally, the qualitative data revealed that one of the thorny issues in choosing to apply for the Master's program, as claimed by some students, is related to the lack of alternatives or options to choose from. For these students, enrolling in the Master's program in the field of Applied Linguistics was described as the only available option. Aya, for instance, revealed that: “Uh, for me it was the only chance because I had another business to do, so I failed at that and I pursued my Master's.” Another issue that was highlighted by a few students was related to family pressure. Salsabil indicated that the reason behind choosing to study is “because of... yeah... Father... Father.” In addition to this, some students complained that they did not have the freedom to apply to other universities and pursue other specialties because, as Sarah

argued, “I wasn’t allowed to go to another university, and at this university we have linguistics only, so it wasn’t possible at all.” The participants argued that it was these difficult circumstances that left them with little room to decide on their own.

- **Main Challenges in Research Proposal Writing**

When asked about the difficulties that students faced in composing their research proposals, they identified four main challenges: lack of research and academic writing skills, limited access to research sources, time and research project management issues, and problems in research collaboration.

Table 4.26

Challenges in Research Proposal Writing

Themes	Definitions
Lack of Research and Academic Writing Skills	Students struggle with a lack of writing and research skills and knowledge about research.
Limited Access to Research Sources	Learners’ difficulty to find relevant and appropriate sources for their research and be able to read them and use them.
Time and Research Project Management Issues	Problems managing time and the process of drafting a research proposal.
Problems in Research Collaboration	The challenge for students working together on research is to manage the group work processes that happen in all teamwork while at the same time managing their individual academic roles.

A considerable number of students concurred that their insufficient mastery of basic research and academic writing skills was one of the main reasons behind the difficulties they experienced when drafting their research proposals. According to them, although they had previously studied research methodology, they still did not feel prepared to write a research proposal, because it was not easy for them to meet the academic research and writing conventions of such an assignment. This can be illustrated by the following claims by the participants:

- “For me, the main problem was... I don’t know even how to write a research proposal. I don’t know the steps.”
- “Last year we had research methodology, but we didn’t really grasp much.”

- “We weren’t introduced to how to start, what the steps are, what we should write and what we should not write.”

In addition, some students indicated that this was their first experience with proposal writing, which made the initial stages even more challenging. As Yara put it: “This was our very first experience... we didn’t know how we should take the first step.”

Another major reason behind the difficulties students faced was related to the challenges in finding and understanding academic sources. Some participants stated that locating relevant studies, especially previous and pertinent research works, was one of the most difficult tasks. Illustratively, the sources that students needed were either unavailable, difficult to access, or too complex to digest. Here are some of the participants’ replies:

- “There was a lack of sources... we didn’t find similar studies made before”.
- “Reading was the hardest one... I reread articles many times to grasp the idea”.
- “How can we find authentic sources? How can we choose the giants”?

Amani went even deeper, expressing her emotional reaction to reading a scientific article for the first time: “I am more of a literature reader... when I started reading research, I felt like what am I doing? It wasn’t fun.”

Similarly, it was not surprising to find out that time management and research proposal writing were among the main issues cited by the participants. Some students reported that it was difficult to manage their time effectively while drafting their projects. Thus, they failed to write an accurate proposal and be able to meet deadlines. Commenting on this issue, Imane said: “We didn’t manage our time very carefully... we started with the methodology and then moved back to the literature review. It was a catastrophe.” Other students added that it was not easy for the writers to maintain a high level of coherence throughout the research proposal.

Another main challenge pinpointed by students concerned working collaboratively on the research proposal. These students declared that being assigned to collaborative research writing, like any other type of collaboration, was problematic due to personal differences among participants, ineffective communication, or a lack of commitment of participants. In other words, they seemed less aware of effective strategies to foster rapport through good personal relationships

and build cognitive common ground between participants as they write their research. In this regard, Noor noted: “For me, the biggest challenge was not the research itself, but how we were made to do it... getting three different people to be passionate about one topic is very difficult.”

- **Constraints to Developing Learner Autonomy in Writing Research:**

According to the participants, the most likely barriers to promoting learner autonomy in the course of drafting a research proposal are: social and teamwork constraints, institutional constraints, and psychological constraints.

Table 4.27

Constraints to Developing Learner Autonomy in Writing Research:

Themes	Definitions
Social and Teamwork Constraints	Students had less autonomy in group work because learner autonomy was new to them in such a context; they had to consult with peers on a regular basis; they could not make independent decisions about their work; and they experienced delays when other members did not participate much.
Institutional Constraints	Learners’ autonomy was hindered by a lack of resources, conflicting feedback from teachers, and the difficulty of meeting the requirements to select a research topic.
Psychological Constraints	The major psychological barriers perceived by participants were feeling stressed, pressured by deadlines, or ‘stuck’ due to uncertainty and confusion.

As clearly described in the table above, students’ responses led to three main themes: social and teamwork constraints, institutional constraints, and psychological constraints. There appears to be an overlap between these constraints, and it is a truism to assert that certain social and collaborative barriers, as well as requirements and institutional expectations, lead to certain negative psychological reactions among students.

Surprisingly enough, the social and teamwork constraints comprised of several subthemes: lack of awareness about learner autonomy, peer consultation issues, lack of independent decision-making, and low participation or commitment of some group members. As for students’ awareness of the concept of learner autonomy before the intervention of the current study, Amina admitted that, “Actually, the term autonomy,

the, the meaning of the term autonomy, we didn't know it until you showed us, like when we did peer and self-assessment.” In the group-based structure that students were required to follow, autonomy became difficult to exercise, even when they were willing to do so, since every decision needed to be negotiated by all members of the same group. As Sarah said, “When we're talking about three people, I don't have the freedom to do whatever I want. I have to consult with them first, which means I can't be as autonomous as I want to be.” Similarly, Nada commented on the issue of less contribution to the project among peers: “Like we are working in three, uh, students in the research. So sometimes I have ideas and then when I share them with them, they couldn't respond or just answer my question.”

Furthermore, the most articulated institutional constraints among participants included a lack of research resources, conflicting feedback from teachers, restrictions related to the selection of research topics, and time pressure during the proposal writing process. Some participants found themselves restricted in maintaining or developing autonomy in the research proposal writing process due to the institutional conditions under which they were required to work. For example, Youssef claimed that accessing necessary research materials was difficult, since “finding, uh, the, you know, manuals and the materials that I need was a bit of a challenge because it's not very organized, uh, whether concerning the university side or from the teachers themselves.” Maissa interrupted him and asked, “Where are the research sources? And how can we find sources of high quality?” Besides, divergent views and feedback from different teachers were also reported as another major constraint that hindered students' autonomy and made them feel confused. For instance, as Zaineb put it, “every teacher like give you different feedbacks, so it's more confusing.” Last but not least, another institutional barrier that was referred to by participants was the difficulty of selecting a research topic that interested them the most. In this respect, Zaineb added that, “the topics that we were, uh, more interested in... the teachers are not interested,” describing this as “a huge problem for the topic selection.”

When it comes to the major psychological barriers to autonomy perceived by participants, they were feeling stressed in collaborative situations, pressure caused by strict deadlines, and sometimes being ‘stuck’ due to uncertainty and confusion about

how to carry out research. Supporting these views, Salsabil remarked, “sometimes you have your own opinions, but kind of really, uh, you know, put that on others... so, uh, you think kind of stressed out,” Along similar line of thought, Noor mentioned that “we felt the pressure, uh, when we had like a specific time to deliver the... the proposal,” Interestingly, according to the same student, “when the time was, uh, like when we had an extra time, we managed to do extra things.” showing that there is a correlation between time management skills and academic achievement. Concerning the difficulties of conducting research, Rayane declared that:

“You... you needed help. You needed, it's not that you needed help, but you felt like yeah... stuck in a way. You know, little autonomy. You didn't really know how to move forward sometimes, and you felt like you needed a push, so it was kind of confusing process.”

All in all, students are among the main stakeholders of the learning practice. Thus, it is of utmost importance to listen to their voices and address the aforementioned social, institutional, and psychological constraints that may impede their own efforts to be autonomous.

- **Students' Personal Strategies for Developing Learner Autonomy**

Different strategies were used by the participants to address the constraints discussed earlier. More precisely, three salient themes emerged as can be seen from Table 4.28 below: Collective decision making, peer support and scaffolding, and collaborative task management.

Table 4.28

Students' Personal Strategies for Developing Learner Autonomy

Themes	Definitions
Collective Decision Making	Learners' dialogue to share opinions, resolve differences/conflicts, and solve problems related to the research process.
Peer Support and Scaffolding	This refers to learners providing assistance and support to each other during the research proposal writing task.
Collaborative Task Management	Students' management of the proposal by assigning sections of the assignment and sharing responsibility among group members.

When the researcher asked participants about the most important strategies that can be employed to develop learner autonomy during the process of drafting a research proposal, the participants pointed out to three main strategies: Collective decision making, peer support and scaffolding, and collaborative task management. Indeed, many students believed that discussion with peers and students making collective decisions during the writing process are helpful to address low autonomy levels among them. For instance, Amani declared “the first thing maybe we, yeah, discussion. Discussion, communication.... whenever we step into anything that is, that we see different, we try to talk about it... we try to search together.” As for the second learning strategy, some participants proposed that it was very useful for students to work collaboratively by scaffolding their own development as novice researchers. According to Houria, “every member in our team is needed... whatever it is, it is, it’s going to be beneficial in any way or another.” Another strategy that the majority of students relied on was sharing responsibility for the project. In this sense, Aya remarked, “maybe we try to like divide the work... the members of the proposal,” while another added that “each one takes apart.”

- **Co-construction of Criteria-referenced Self- and Peer Assessment Rubrics**

The findings concerning students’ experiences with developing the rubrics and their criteria with the teacher are organized around three themes: Limited use of rubrics, from learners to assessors, and transparency of the assessment criteria. These findings are presented in the following table:

Table 4.29

Co-construction of Criteria-referenced Rubrics

Themes	Definitions
Lack of Using Rubrics	Using rubrics for formative assessment was neglected.
Turning Learners into Assessors	Students’ involvement in assessment has turned them into the main decision-makers in learning.
Transparency of the Assessment Criteria	The opportunity to take part in the development of assessment criteria allowed students to better understand each criterion used.

According to many students, the use of rubrics played a critical role in supporting and guiding students' self- and peer assessment techniques of learning. Further, the majority of them observed that the lack of using rubrics for formative and learning assessment purposes in academic writing and research skills classes was the first factor known to be responsible for the challenges they experienced in writing their research proposals. The students pointed out that some of their teachers insisted on self- and peer assessment, but not in a structured manner, as is the case with rubrics. As Basma expressed, "No teacher use this method with us... Exchange our, exchange, our work. And then each one, like correct the test without following the rubric." Supporting this, Imane added, "It was never introduced to us formally in our previous years. Informally, I think everyone does self-assessment to an extent." As a result, most of the students expressed their satisfaction with their engagement in the assessment process of their projects because it allowed them to assume a role that they did not use to in the traditional teacher-centered classrooms. Commenting on this point, Safa said, "I think it was, uh, it was engaging. Everyone had had a vote in it." One of the main reasons why most students were in favor of the practice of developing assessment rubrics and their criteria was that these criteria were transparent to students, so they knew deeply how their work would be assessed. Youssef described their experience with this new approach to assessment:

"Uh, I think it was a very good experience because when we are co-creating the, uh, rubric with our teacher, it allows us to understand it on a deeper level. We're not just seeing criteria and we're blindly applying it. We're actually understanding why we apply it and why some things are not necessary and why some things are necessary."

Hence, some students believed that they felt more confident when they were performing self- and peer assessment, as the criteria were not imposed by the instructor or the department.

- **Implementing Self-assessment**

Another discussion within the focus groups centered on students' reflections and perceptions regarding their involvement in doing self-assessment during the intervention phase. Four interrelated themes emerged: Improving self-assessment

skills, bias in self-assessment, a time- and effort-consuming process, and self-assessment entails teacher and/or peer assessment.

Table 4.30

Implementing Self-assessment

Themes	Definitions
Improving Self-assessment Skills	Self-assessment helped students assume more responsibility for their work and become better assessors.
Bias in Self-assessment	The tendency of students to be too critical or overconfident when making judgments about their own work.
A Time- and Effort-consuming process.	Performing self-assessment necessitated a considerable amount of time and effort on the part of learners.
Self-assessment entails teacher and/or peer assessment	To increase the fairness and objectivity of student self-assessment, there is a need to support it with other types of assessment, such as teacher assessment and peer assessment.

According to the table above, the analysis of the students' views regarding the implementation of self-assessment revealed four main general themes: Improving self-assessment skills, bias in self-assessment, a time- and effort-consuming process, and self-assessment entails teacher and/or peer assessment.

To begin with, taking part in the student self-assessment process was seen by many students as a way to follow in the footsteps of their supervisor or instructor and share some power. In other words, self-assessment raised their awareness of the importance of assessment for learning, as well as improved students' assessment skills. For one thing, this process led them to assume proactive responsibility toward their research proposals, and for the other, it has turned them into being more reflective and critical about their work and thus better informed of their weaknesses on their own. Warda expressed their satisfaction with their engagement in the assessment process saying: "I think an advantage would be because it's your own proposal, so you would be more responsible about it. So, you would take care of it...evaluate it as good as possible. Make it better." Similarly, Nada emphasized that: "Doing something, resting a bit, and self-assessing yourself like at a later date, it allows you to see things you've not been able to see before."

Nevertheless, having the opportunity to self-assess their work was not without its challenges. For instance, this approach to assessment was criticized by the students for being biased and time-consuming. Many students found it difficult to confidently assert that their self-assessment was free from the assessor's bias. This bias appeared in different forms, including inflated or self-flattering judgments, or based on harsh criticism. Sarah, for instance, admitted that: "Like we just read our work as if it's perfect... the other one is, uh, awesome. So, we didn't give ourselves feedback. We were glorifying. Glorifying ourselves," and Salsabil revealed that: "Sometimes you think that it's too bad, so you're going to give bad feedback." Apart from bias in self-assessment, another issue that was raised by students in the focus groups is that some students complained that this type of assessment was time-consuming and difficult to manage. As Basma rightly observed, "Self-assessment requires time, and sometimes you don't have enough time to have self-assessment. So, it's, uh, it's time consuming."

To address the aforementioned shortcomings of self-assessment, students believed that it is better to reinforce the process with other forms of assessment, such as teacher assessment or peer assessment. According to them, one of the benefits of doing so is that peer assessment could aid students to be fairer and more objective. In the same vein, Amani reported that: "Uh, yes, when doing self-assessment, you will need an outside point of view no matter what... or compare it to a rubric or another research, that's what I will discover some problems."

- **Implementing Peer Assessment**

As far as the results regarding the implementation of peer assessment are concerned, four themes were identified in this category as can be found in the table below: Exposure to diverse perspectives, difficulty of peer assessment, psychological challenges, and a collaborative and collegial learning culture.

Table 4.31

Implementing Peer Assessment

Themes	Definitions
Exposure to Diverse Perspective	Peer assessment equipped learners with alternative and diverse perspectives on their research proposals.
Difficulty of Peer Assessment	Many students found it difficult to assess their peer's research proposal.
Psychological Challenges	Students experienced some emotional difficulties during peer assessment, such as defensiveness and self-doubtfulness.
Collaborative and Collegial Learning Culture	Students did not only learn from the teacher, but also have the opportunity to learn from each other and support one another.

Based on the table above, the analysis of students' perceptions of peer assessment highlighted four main themes: Exposure to diverse perspectives, difficulty of peer assessment, psychological challenges, and collaborative and collegial learning culture.

First, most of the students found peer assessment extremely rewarding to their learning experience because it provided them with the opportunity to see other perspectives regarding their research proposals. Bilal explained that "when we, uh, when we received feedback from others, we were like shocked because, uh, as I said, so many things we were not aware of Uh, were in the, in the proposal." Likewise, other students believed that receiving feedback from peers made them change the way they looked at their proposals. For instance, Nawal admitted that: "there were some things that they told me about that I literally just could not see." Moreover, being engaged with peer assessment equipped students with the opportunity to look at a different version of the same research project they have achieved. In fact, some of these proposals were more clearly developed or better structured than their own, which allowed students to learn from their peers' work.

Second, one of the main issues in implementing peer assessment is the difficulty related to the former. Some students acknowledged that the process of providing and receiving feedback was not an easy task, and they expressed their lack of confidence when assessing their peers' work. Zaineab, for example, admitted that:

“Oh, Give them feedback wasn't easy. I just, I was like, I'm not, I don't, you know, I don't have the, uh, enough knowledge to criticize others People work people's work. So I was, I was like giving them my feedback and thinking, am I, am I really in the position to give them this and say that? But, well, I, I was doubting myself”

Some students were sometimes unable to understand and make sense of the information and use it to improve their work. Reem revealed that: “I was afraid of not getting their point of view or their purpose. But it was very good” However, the majority of students agreed that receiving feedback based on a criteria-referenced rubric was as helpful as teacher’s feedback and helped them enhance their research proposals because, as Mustapha put it, “But some of them were just like, yeah, were valuable For example, they gave me the same, uh, the same advice of the research rationale you told me to add.”

Third, the data also reveal that engaging in peer assessment led students to undergo a change in their psychological state, and this change was sudden and unpleasant. For instance, students reported that, during the feedback exchange stage of peer assessment, they felt defensive and even upset. Some students admitted that they became somewhat defensive after receiving feedback: “They gave everything they wanted and somehow I, I just, I was like somehow angry at the end of the, uh, discussion. 'cause I was like, why are I, yeah. Yeah. It was, it was good and bad at the same time.” Sarah explained how giving peer feedback might negatively affect her classmates: “When I, when I was like going to criticize the other group, but I saw that if you are a person who doesn't take, uh, critics, you will be furious. You will be angry, and you may even hate the other person.” It is also worth noting that some students initially resisted sharing their work. For example, Imane stated: “At the first time, I was, uh, disagree with sharing my, uh, work with, uh, peers, others, with others.”

Finally, a collaborative and collegial classroom culture is one of the most important principles of learner-centered learning that student researchers must be part of so they can excel and succeed in a research methodology course. Teachers who work toward the development of such a collaborative learning environment aspire to

equip their students with teamwork skills that may, in the long term, enhance their employability skills after graduation. Indeed, some participants argued that their involvement in assessing their peers' proposals (peer assessment) built these skills and fostered a very collaborative and collegial classroom. For instance, Nada revealed her satisfaction with the peer assessment: "When we were receiving feedback, I was so happy because... they are helping you. They are not criticizing you, not judging you, but they are helping you and giving you the help to improve your work." Another student, Yara, comments on how peer assessment nurtured the spirit of collegiality among them: "I didn't feel like I'm the teacher or I'm the judge... I was taking it as if it's my work... just giving observations, trying to make it better."

- **The Role of Self- and Peer Assessment in Cultivating Learner Autonomy**

In the examination of the effects of using self- and peer assessment on their learner autonomy development, five central themes were found based on the participants' focus group conversations: responsibility and ownership, metacognitive awareness, motivation and engagement, independent learning, learner autonomy through collaboration.

Table 4.32

The Role of Self- and Peer Assessment in Cultivating Learner Autonomy

Themes	Definitions
Responsibility and Ownership	Practicing self- and peer assessment improved learners' sense of control and responsibility in the learning process.
Group Metacognitive Awareness	Self- and peer assessment increased learners' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning in a group-work format.
Motivation and Engagement	Learners reported that they became motivated to revise their work.
Independent Learning	Giving and receiving feedback allowed students to become more independent.
Learner Autonomy through Collaboration	Through peer assessment, students were able to work as a team, share their strengths and work more collaboratively.

There was a consensus among many students that self-assessment and peer-assessment practices enhanced different aspects of learner autonomy, such as responsibility and ownership, metacognitive awareness, motivation and engagement, independent learning, and collaboration.

Many of the students reported that their involvement with self- and peer assessment via rubrics helped them to act more responsibly for their learning. However, they also emphasized that such forms of assessment require teachers to set clear instructions and make all expected outcomes explicit. In this regard, Youssef pointed out that self-assessment could play a critical role in developing their autonomy: “It gave a clear way of how to be autonomous in terms of learning or assessing yourself. Or with peers or writing or making or collaborating in writing something, a research proposal. So, it made the image clear.” As for peer assessment, Salsabil declared that: “Yeah. But peer assessment made you feel more autonomous. Yeah. And, and, being more responsible for your work.”

The second theme that emerged from the data of the present research revealed that self- and peer assessment increased learners’ ability to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning independently and in a more collaborative scenario. Having the assessment criteria of the rubrics transparent to students helped them to play the role of reflective assessors: In Amani’s terms:

“So, assessment was good. Like when I re-reread my paragraphs, I said, am I the one who wrote that? Why it was in this way and not this way? The rubric was of immense value to me. It gave me measurable ways to see if my research is good on my proposal. So, it helps a lot.”

Rayane believed that peer assessment enabled them to monitor and re-evaluate their ideas in light of their peers’ comments: “Also, like our idea, it's going to be stick, like our idea would be the same, but if others are, uh, like, commenting us, we'll gain new knowledge, new ideas, new information.”

Through self- and peer assessment, students also had the opportunity to become more proactively involved in acting upon their work. Malak, for example, contended that: “So, we took their comments into consideration, and we changed them into...

Yeah, more motivated.” Being able to peer assess their classmates’ work has also given students the ability to refine their research proposals: “I think course we, yes... Revision, especially peer assessment, 'cause it gave me an outside point of view on what things I haven't seen before”, Mustapha reported. Likewise, Aya declared that: “I rewrote the whole background of study section... added some titles I was missing,” while Nada stated that, “We tried to reduce the number of citations... corrected our references...there were entire sections which were missing that I had to add.” Therefore, motivation and engagement have the potential in the development of learner autonomy.

Surprisingly, the data also showed that self- and peer assessment implicitly advised students toward independent learning and to ‘stop’ relying on AI-powered instruments. In this sense, Basma declared that:

“One of the things that were, uh, like a given thing when doing my self-assessment is that I should really stop using AI. And talking about peer assessments, is that I should actually reduce the use of my own style in writing and be a little bit more academic. So, yeah, both of them were good.”

Along the same lines, students have agreed on the usefulness of formative peer assessment in cultivating the social side of learner autonomy. For example, according to Serine, “Well, for the details or weaknesses that my peers could acknowledge... we made such improvements after their feedback.” In this matter, students were able to work as a team and develop areas of weakness in their research proposals. Amira commented on this: “When they comment on our work, we understand things better and we can improve together.”

In conclusion, implementing self- and peer assessment, relying on students’ perspectives, could facilitate learner autonomy through the development of a wide range of indispensable abilities. Illustratively, engaging students in the whole process of assessment could enhance different transferable skills, such as critical evaluation, problem solving, conflict resolution, negotiation, and teamwork.

- **Expanding Self- and Peer Assessment Skills Beyond the Classroom**

At the end of the focus group conversation, students reflected on practicing the skills they acquired from their self- and peer assessment experience in future learning

situations. In effect, two main themes emerged: Adoption and use of self- and peer assessment in higher education, and self- and peer assessment as a means to develop lifelong learning. These themes are explained in the table below:

Table 4.33

Expanding Self- and Peer Assessment Skills Beyond the Classroom

Themes	Definitions
Adoption and Use of Self- and Peer Assessment in Higher Education	For students, it is highly recommended that more teachers and supervisors involve learners in assessment for learning in other modules in Algerian institutions of higher education.
Self- and Peer Assessment as a Means to Develop Lifelong Learning	Being able to perform self- and peer assessment is one of the pillars of lifelong learning.

To start with, the results revealed that the majority of students called for a rethinking of assessment to develop a more autonomous learning environment, particularly at the tertiary level. For example, Warda argued that “Yes, for me also. We have, like, to implement self and peer assessments in universities. I think this is not something that we will use only in this module. Like, it’s good for students to improve themselves or their work.” Further, one of the participants pointed out that these new forms of assessment need to be introduced and incorporated into students’ learning in the early stages of one’s education:

“I think that self and peer assessment should be implemented in our schooling system way earlier than university level. This is something that should be taught at a very young age. If we used this type of assessments in the past, it would make us more competent,” as reported by Youssef.

Additionally, some participants also agreed that active and ongoing participation in self- and peer assessment practices can enable students to trigger their competence as lifelong learners. In this respect, Imane observed that: “I think it would affect the long run. Like you would be always thinking critically about, ah, it’s not like about the proposals or like, it’s for everything. It gives the person the opportunity to have a critical mind.” In support of this view, Houria maintained that: “For me,

yes. It's a good strategy. It's good for students to use self and peer assessment like a habit but like in any other everyday life to improve themselves or their work... it stays with you."

4.4.5. Document Analysis

As already discussed in the second chapter, document analysis was used to cross-check the findings obtained from the questionnaires and focus groups regarding students' assessment strategies. This analysis aims to identify learner autonomy through specific learning strategies, which can be systematically observed in students' written feedback on the rubrics and allows the researcher to determine whether students are adopting practices that promote autonomous learning or, instead, indicate a withdrawal from it. To this end, content analysis was applied to the corpus of students' criteria-referenced rubrics used in self-assessment (See Appendix I) and peer assessment (See Appendix J) of research proposals. The first phase of the qualitative analysis consisted of closely examining the language and feedback presented in the rubrics, which appeared to reveal several themes connected to learner autonomy. The analysis focused on coding content that seemed relevant to the study, especially evidence of learner autonomy in students' written assessments. Once coding was complete, the number of times each theme appeared was recorded. This process aimed to highlight which themes stood out most prominently. The corpus consisted of a random sample of fourteen rubrics, each three (03) pages in length, written by the participants; seven (7) rubrics were designated for self-assessment, and the remaining seven (7) for peer assessment, resulting in the examination of a total of forty-two pages. The results of this analysis are shown in the tables below. First, the findings from the self-assessment rubrics are presented, followed by the results from the peer assessment rubrics.

Table 4.34 below describes five main themes found in the students' self-assessment rubrics. Each theme is briefly described as follows:

Table 4.34

Content Analysis of the Students' Self-assessment Rubrics

Themes	Description	Excerpts	Instances
Critical Thinking	Students demonstrate their ability to analyze their writing and research process.	“It needs further explanation.” “The lit review should be modified and rewritten again.” “knowledge gap is NOT clearly defined.”	21
Self-awareness: Recognition of Learning Needs	The learner's ability to identify areas that need improvement and find missing information.	“The lit review lacks many information and citations.” “Theoretical framework is not well explained.” “Previous studies are not well stated.”	17
Learner Responsibility	Indications that students are taking charge of revisions and managing their writing/research process.	“It needs to be rewritten again.” “Conclusion was short, we need to improve it.” “It needs formatting adjustments and sections need to be added.”	7
Using Feedback to Independently Improve Learning	Students indicate that they have incorporated or plan to incorporate feedback to revise their work independently.	“Not the worst for a first draft and the improvements to be added are clear.” “Re-organize the steps, add what is missing, re paraphrase some sections.”	6
Positive Self-Evaluation	Expressions of self-positive judgments regarding the their academic project.	“All clear.” “I believe the format is appropriate.” “All good I guess!”	5

According to the data presented in the above table, many students seem to carefully evaluate their work, pointing out what needs more explanation or improvement. This kind of reflection occurs in most of the rubrics. Moreover, there is more self-awareness and a clear understanding of learning needs and weaknesses. It is clear that several learners are aware of these weaknesses and, presumably, the need to address them. Likewise, a number of rubrics show that students take ownership of academic conventions, such as making sure all parts are included and

formatted properly. It is worth noting that although some students mention revising their work based on comments, this is not as widespread. Finally, some students expressed satisfaction with their own work since they provided positive self-evaluation. In overall terms, the data reveal different dimensions of learner autonomy in students' self-assessment practices.

Four themes emerged from the peer assessment content analysis data: critical thinking, peer feedback literacy, constructive peer feedback, and positive social feedback. They are described in the table below:

Table 4.35

Content Analysis of the Students' Peer Assessment Rubrics

Themes	Description	Excerpts	Instances
Critical Thinking	Evidence of students' capacity to evaluate their peers' research proposals.	"The synthesise in my opinion could have used more arguments, theories, and methodologies."	18
Peer Feedback Literacy	Ability of peers to provide feedback on each other's research proposals.	"The sample is not clear. it needs justification" "Knowledge gap is not clear." "Some references are not well formulated."	20
Constructive Peer Feedback	Feedback from peers that is constructive.	"The best way to improve it is to not hesitate asking people in the field or just follow their works if they're not available." "The table of contents page should be Roman numerated according to the manual handed by Miss"	18
Positive Social Feedback	Expressions of positive feedback and praise from peers that support motivation and collaboration.	"This work was well done, you can see the hard work this group put..." "A very informative proposal." "The overall format is really well done"	15

The examination of the seven peer assessment rubrics suggests multiple facets related to learner autonomy. It was clear that students questioned the clarity and depth of conceptual frameworks, methodological choices, layout, etc. The content analysis also showed students' development of peer feedback literacy. This means students showed some degree of ability to provide feedback based on their understanding of

research standards and scholarly conventions. Hence, the social and affective dimensions of peer assessment were emphasized.

Conclusion:

Chapter Four has explained how the data were processed and presented based on four research instruments: Learner Autonomy Scale (Pre-Test and Post-Test), Students' Questionnaire (Part 01 and Part 02), Focus Groups, and Document Analysis. The analysis combined quantitative and qualitative procedures. The qualitative analysis provided a closer and more detailed understanding of the data, whereas the quantitative analysis helped organize the large volume of responses by calculating mean scores. Regarding the qualitative data, the analysis involved coding, grouping the codes, and identifying broader categories or themes that brought related codes together in order to further interpret and discuss the data. The following chapter is devoted to discussing the data and proposing relevant implications and recommendations.

**CHAPTER FIVE:
MOVING FORWARD:
DISCUSSION OF
FINDINGS AND
IMPLICATIONS**

CHAPTER FIVE: MOVING FORWARD: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

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Introduction

As stated in the General Introduction, the purpose of this study was to explore how learner autonomy might be cultivated through self- and peer assessment in writing research proposals. To achieve the stated objectives, the researcher adopted an action research design, and primary data for this study were collected through the use of a learner autonomy scale, administering questionnaires, and conducting focus groups, while secondary supportive data were collected through the document analysis of fourteen (14) students' rubrics used for self- and peer assessment. The implementation of self- and peer assessment activities (namely, the intervention of the study) served as a critical tool to engage participants in their learning and writing process. The findings indicate that self- and peer assessment improved learner autonomy to varying degrees. This chapter (Chapter Five), entitled 'Moving Forward: Discussion of Findings and Implications', is organized into three main sections: the first section deals with the discussion and interpretation of the main findings; the second section discusses the pedagogical implications of this study; finally, the third section states the limitations of this study and recommendations for further research. To elaborate further, the researcher, in the first section, attempts to use the data analyzed in the previous chapter (Chapter Four) in formulating plausible answers to the research questions and discuss the results in relation to previous related studies and findings that were explored in the literature review chapters (Chapter One and Two). In light of the insights gained from the review of the literature and the research findings of the present study, section two considers a number of pedagogical implications to help student researchers, teachers, supervisors, and institutions of higher education make more effective use of self- and peer assessment practices for the sake of alleviating the identified challenges, writing a high-quality research proposal, and building a more autonomy-friendly research learning climate. In the final section, this chapter spells out the limitations of the study and identifies areas where some of the findings can be improved or extended further.

5.1. Discussion of the Main Results

This section interprets and discusses the main findings arising from the study, which address the research questions and objectives of the current research.

The analysis draws upon multiple data sources, including quantitative measures from pre- and post-intervention learner autonomy scales, quantitative and qualitative data from students' questionnaires administered before and after the intervention, qualitative insights from focus group discussions and document analyses of students' criteria-referenced self- and peer assessment rubrics. The discussion section is structured around the following three research questions:

RQ1: To what extent are first-year Master's ELSUM students ready to assume responsibility for drafting a research proposal?

RQ2: In what ways does the implementation of self- and peer assessment impact learner autonomy among first-year Master's ELSUM students in research proposal writing?

RQ3: How do first-year Master's ELSUM students perceive the process of assessing their research proposals through self- and peer assessment?

The researcher presents the major themes and patterns that resulted from data triangulation as the analysis focused on the most salient and recurring issues identified in the questionnaires, focus groups, and document analysis. Moreover, the author looks at the similarities and differences in the results from each research tool and then attempts to explain and discuss these findings in relation to the research questions, as well as in comparison with the studies reviewed in the theoretical chapters (Chapters One and Two). Accordingly, the discussion is divided into three parts that correspond with the study's research questions. First, the researcher attempts to evaluate the level of learner autonomy among ELSUM students during their research proposal writing process. Next, the study considers the extent to which implementing self- and peer assessment might contribute to promoting learner autonomy among these student researchers. Finally, it examines students' perceptions regarding the effects of these assessment practices on their learning/writing in general and on autonomous learning behaviors in particular.

5.1.1. Learner Autonomy in Writing Research Proposals

Efforts to cultivate learner autonomy are a prerequisite for effective preparedness for research writing. That is, writing a successful research proposal that adheres to the academic research writing conventions makes it imperative for students to, as much as

possible, assume more proactive responsibility for their learning through critical reflection and evaluation, constructive collaboration, and emotional engagement. This high level of learner autonomy inculcates, at an early stage, a sense of shared responsibility among learners, their teachers, peers, and institutions. To this end, the current study aimed to evaluate the level of autonomy of Algerian first-year Master's students who are trusted to write academic research proposals in the field of Applied Linguistics. The study also intended to assess learners' familiarity and awareness of learner autonomy in learning in general and in writing research projects in particular, as well as their readiness, as novice researchers, for learner autonomy in writing research proposals.

5.1.1.1. Students' Conceptualization of Learner Autonomy

To begin with, one of the crucial findings of the present study deals with how Master's ELSUM students understand and define the concept of learner autonomy. The analysis of students' responses revealed that most participants demonstrated a general awareness of the term, but their definitions were based on an oversimplified understanding of the concept. It was shown that the vast majority of students thought of learner autonomy as individual responsibility and independence from the teacher and peers, i.e., a view of autonomy as self-reliance in its most literal sense. In effect, Little (1991) maintains that initiating responsibility is congruent with the development of learner autonomy. Thus, the concept was defined in terms of responsibility, self-motivation, and was tied to higher-order cognitive and metacognitive skills by a small number of students.

This result partially confirms previous research findings by Hadi (2018), who maintains that both EFL students and teachers at two Algerian universities appeared to be unfamiliar with learner autonomy, which she describes in the following terms:

Most EFL students questioned are incapable to give a definition to the concept of learner autonomy, and even incapable to provide equivalence to the concept in Arabic. They are in general unfamiliar with the concept. Most of them considered the concept as learning outside school without a teacher (Hadi, 2018, p. 5).

In the same vein, Chetouane (2022) found that Algerian students commonly defined autonomy in terms of independence and personal responsibility. And this is a shared belief that the deeper complexities of the construct, as discussed in Chapter One, start to fade away at the crossroads where independent learning is being privileged among learners and teachers alike. The participants of the current study seem to be aware of only one or two of the thirteen facets that Sinclair (2000) identified, which are related to willingness to take responsibility and individual capacity. In fact, the social, political, affective, and metacognitive dimensions of autonomy were almost absent from most students' definitions.

The students' limited or inaccurate beliefs about learner autonomy are not without some challenges and/or consequences. As emphasized by Little (2007), autonomy is not simply about learners being independent; it is not a matter of rejecting the teacher's guidance or working in isolation. However, for many of the participants in this study, autonomy seemed to carry precisely those false connotations. For instance, one student (S18) described autonomous learning as "the rebellion of the student upon himself... to seek knowledge individually". As previously discussed in the theoretical chapters of this study (see Chapter One), self-instruction refers to a deliberate learning project carried out entirely without teacher intervention, and it is by no means synonymous with learner autonomy. It seems more than necessary to clear up such confusion among learners that will most likely influence their learning in general.

Furthermore, from a similar angle, the four pillars of learner autonomy by Quoc Lap's (2005) framework (cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and social dimensions) did not appear adequately in the students' definitions of the concept. Illustratively, cognitive and affective dimensions were highlighted by some learners, when students referred to motivation, commitment, and goal-setting. However, the metacognitive and social dimensions were overlooked. The metacognitive dimension, which involves planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own learning process, was cited by only a small number of participants, while the social dimension was addressed by even fewer, despite its unavoidable role in the broader definition of autonomy adopted in the present study. It is worth noting here that the difficulties students encounter during the research proposal writing process may, to a lesser or greater degree, be justified by their lack of

awareness of what learner autonomy actually entails. Above and beyond, it should be mentioned that it may still be a question worthy of further attention as to whether these converging findings that point to a shallow understanding of the concept are a consistent issue in different Algerian university settings.

More importantly, the objective of this research was also to explore the specific behaviors, strategies, and dispositions that students themselves identified as indicators of learner autonomy in the context of writing a research proposal. In this sense, Reinders, (2011) rightly argues that, “it is not possible, or at least not helpful, to speak of a learner as autonomous or not autonomous but that it is far more helpful to look at the actions a learner is engaged in and classify this as more or less autonomous learning” (p. 48). The findings revealed that the majority of participants (22 out of 30) described autonomy in terms of skill-based and proactive behaviors, such as developing an independent work plan, managing time effectively, and meeting deadlines.

Further, the results showed that approximately half of the students identified some affective and psychological dimensions of learner autonomy in writing research projects, including confidence, curiosity, persistence, and the ability to manage stress and anxiety. As a case in point, one student (S25) defines autonomy as having a “passion towards the topic and being unstoppable by the fear of making mistakes.” According to Quoc Lap (2005), attitudes, willingness, readiness, and self-confidence are necessary to maintain motivation and perseverance throughout the learning process. It is also interesting that a smaller group of students (around nine) also mentioned a few cognitive and metacognitive dimensions, such as the ability to critically review and revise one’s own writing.

Nevertheless, the findings also demonstrate that the social and collaborative dimension of autonomous learning was reported only by a minority of participants. About five students explicitly mentioned peer collaboration and seeking feedback from others as indicators of learner autonomy in research proposal writing. For instance, one student admitted that it was challenging to be part of a team “while keeping individual responsibility.” However, most researchers agree that peer collaboration should be placed within autonomy-supportive pedagogy because “group activities help students harness that power” Jacobs and Farrell (2001, p. 6). Put differently, Missoum (2001)

rightly observed that “autonomous learners make use of every possible resource including other people (experts or peer learners)” (p. 36). The fact that the surveyed students did not often cite collaboration-related factors as drivers of learner autonomy may be explained by pedagogical orientation toward teacher-centeredness and the heavy emphasis on summative assessment that, for many years, has dominated the Algerian educational context of middle and secondary schools and even universities (Lakehal, 2021; Hadi, 2018).

All in all, based on the study’s findings, one cannot conclude that students are entirely unfamiliar with what autonomous learning in specific research projects entails in practice, even if their broader understanding of the term in wider contexts seems limited to some extent.

5.1.1.2. Students’ Perceived Importance and Level of Autonomy

Notwithstanding the conceptual limitations discussed above, there is a general consensus among all participants that learner autonomy is a crucial element of higher education. As reported in the findings in the previous chapter, all students rated autonomy as either important or very important, and no respondent considered it unimportant. The latter reality implies, in one way or another, that students possess a seemingly strong desire to assume more responsibility for their learning at university. In parallel, the literature abounds with research that substantiates the importance of learner autonomy in higher education. For instance, Boukhelkhal’s (2024) study found that both graduate students and teachers throughout six Algerian universities strongly emphasized the significance of developing learner autonomy.

However, the findings of this research show a perceptible gap between the perceived importance and self-assessed levels of learner autonomy among graduates, especially in the process of writing a research proposal. In the analysis of the questionnaire, the findings indicate that although 60% of the participants claim to possess a degree of autonomy, the remaining 40% seem to lack the necessary preparation to handle the complexities of research proposal writing in an autonomous fashion. In similar contexts, this issue of the belief-practice gap was also identified in other recent studies (e.g., Ghout-Khenoun, 2015; Missoum, 2021). Indeed, the study by Ghout-Khenoun (2015) has also shown that Algerian EFL students tend to display

hesitation and resistance toward activities that require autonomous behaviors, such as undertaking a research project. Therefore, some serious work needs to be done, especially at the level of the research methodology course, to help student researchers translate their positive attitudes toward autonomy into practice, as will be further discussed in the following subsection.

5.1.1.3. Students' Readiness for Learner Autonomy in Writing Research

The findings from the learner autonomy scale administered before the intervention may have provided a better picture of students' readiness for learner autonomy with regard to the five sub-scales: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, teacher's role, social conditions, and affective constructs. The results of the pre-scale revealed the students' moderate level of learner autonomy before the intervention. The overall mean score of ($M=1.88$, $SD=0.91$) computed for the sample showed that students' involvement with autonomous learning strategies was close to the 'sometimes' range in the five sub-scales. This means that autonomous learning behaviors were present to some extent but not sufficiently exercised. In other words, based on the findings, it is not possible to say that participants could be described as highly autonomous learners at this stage since their practice of autonomous writing strategies was not very consistent along all the areas covered in the scale.

These findings provided a direct answer to our first research question regarding the participants' level of learner autonomy in the course of drafting research proposals before the intervention. Our findings partially substantiate most available studies that were achieved in the Algerian EFL university setting (Arib & Schug, 2025; Boukhelkhal, 2024; Ghout-Khenoun, 2015; Hadi, 2018; Idri, 2012; Lakehal, 2021; Missoum, 2021; Selama, 2021). For instance, the results partially support other findings reported by Boukhelkhal (2024) and Ghout-Khenoun (2015), who found that graduate and undergraduate students, respectively, expressed a lack of readiness for learner autonomy in research-based writing contexts.

The principal findings that emerged from the analysis indicate that students' engagement with social conditions was the weakest dimension in the entire scale ($M=2.42$, $SD=1.11$). Also, their major challenges in autonomous learning were related to peer collaboration, as well as a high degree of dependence on the class teacher. In

fact, the social aspect forms, so to speak, the cornerstone of any language learning environment for promoting autonomous learning skills and attitudes among learners. The students appeared uncertain about their capacity to work together without teacher/supervisor involvement; they considered the teacher as the main authority who is responsible for directing and orienting their writing process and expressed low confidence in their ability to make productive use of peer support/feedback. According to Jacobs and Farrell (2001), learners who over-rely on the teacher may fail to benefit from several learning opportunities that peer interaction can provide, such as exposure to diverse perspectives, collaborative problem-solving, the co-construction of knowledge, and others.

A positive attitude toward one's peers is necessary to maximize learners' capacity to transfer the complex tasks involved in autonomous learning. Indeed, Little (1991) explained that "the capacity of autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts" (pp. 3-4). However, the specific social challenges observed among most of the surveyed students in this study were hesitation to collaborate with peers, limited attempts to seek or offer feedback, lack of participation in peer discussions that aimed at obtaining alternative perspectives, and, perhaps more puzzling, not feeling comfortable sharing their research projects with their classmates.

These social strategies, apart from the scale statistics, were the least reported in the students' questionnaire responses, as stated earlier. 46.7% of students described themselves as autonomous, but 26.7% said that they never collaborated with others, and another 26.7% never sought peer feedback. A plausible explanation for the discrepancy between students' beliefs and their actual learning practices is that they perceived peer collaboration and learner autonomy as opposite extremes. Autonomy, in fact, is a multifaceted concept and is subject to a variety of interpretations (Smith, 2003).

Perhaps another noteworthy finding of the pre-test indicates possible challenges concerning students' reliance on their class teacher ($M=1.76$, $SD=0.88$). The teacher's role sub-scale revealed a high degree of dependence; more than half of the students (53.3%) indicated that they always relied on their teacher during the writing process. This finding is consistent with Hadi's (2018) study. The researcher found that students

at a given university in Algeria found it difficult to be self-reliant and relied heavily on their teachers throughout the learning process. Little (2007) stressed that pedagogy for autonomy does not require the teacher to relinquish all control, but it does necessitate a gradual shift in the teacher's role from a teacher-centered role toward a more scaffolding one. The students' heavy reliance on their teacher may be connected to many factors, such as the difficulty and complexity of the research proposal writing task itself, limited experience with writing for research and academic purposes, lack of training using learner-centered approaches and activities, students' own educational background, in addition to other factors. Thus, the over-dependence on the teacher negatively influenced students' readiness and preparedness to take proactive responsibility for their writing and learning at the outset of the study.

The present findings are also in agreement with Arib and Schug's (2025) recent study, which confirmed that the majority of students at a given Algerian university were likely to rely on their teachers. In a similar vein, Ghout-Khenoun (2015, p. 185) observed that Algerian EFL students "have been shown to exhibit resistance and reluctance to be involved in activities that require autonomy, as for instance undertaking a research project." However, according to Sinclair (2000), developing autonomy requires awareness of the learning process and deliberate decision-making on the part of the learner. Nguyen and Habók (2020) argue that the learning environment (peers, teachers, and curricula) constitutes a major tool that can either foster or thwart learners' development and practice of autonomous learning. Broadly speaking, the results indicate that there is ample room for cultivating a higher level of autonomy among learners in their own learning in general and in writing research projects in particular, especially with regard to the social and collaborative facets.

Regarding other aspects of learner autonomy, cognitive and metacognitive strategies were used to a larger extent by the participants compared to social strategies. The cognitive strategies sub-scale yielded a mean of 1.83 (SD=0.82). That is, students' responses were in the always-to-sometimes range, which means that their practice of cognitive strategies before the intervention was acceptable to some extent. Illustratively, the participants' reported answers indicate that the majority of them used note-taking, structuring, and resourcing strategies to slightly different but satisfactory degrees. With

respect to metacognitive strategies, the sub-scale produced the lowest mean score of all ($M=1.64$, $SD=0.73$), which implies that students reported relatively more use of metacognitive strategies (planning, goal-setting, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation) before the intervention, at least as self-reported.

It is widely accepted that cognitive and metacognitive strategies are of crucial importance to learner autonomy and academic writing performance in second and foreign language contexts (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1998). Researchers believe that without these writing strategies, there is no autonomy, because they help learners take control over their writing process to achieve optimal learning outcomes. For instance, metacognitively oriented learners are aware of both their own learner characteristics and the writing task, and are able to select, employ, monitor, and evaluate their use of strategies in a self-directed manner. The results of the present study seem to be consistent with this consensus in that the participants made use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies to some degree before the intervention.

However, one would argue that the relationship between what learners report doing and what they actually do in practice can be problematic or misaligned. Claims have been made that the use of surveys and scales may not accurately measure learners' metacognitive awareness and behaviors, since responses are, in one way or another, influenced by many aspects, such as limited self-awareness and unfamiliarity with the precise meaning of the strategies being measured. In this regard, Teng and Yue (2023) maintain that "assessing metacognition using a self-report questionnaire may not fully reveal learners' metacognition. The use of questionnaires may only assess what students subjectively perceive their knowledge and actions to be" (p. 256). Further, it has been observed that students may still know very little about themselves as writers, and thus tend to make inflated or self-flattering judgments about their abilities.

As for the affective constructs, students' responses were positive to some extent before the intervention. Of the four affective items measured, motivation yielded the most positive responses. 40% of students said that they 'always' felt motivated to write and improve, and 46.7% said they 'sometimes' did so. No student reported a complete absence of motivation. As stated in the previous chapter, motivation is an critical

determinant of the extent to which learners are ready for autonomy. Dickinson (1995) observed that:

there is substantial evidence from cognitive motivational studies that... enhanced motivation is conditional on learners taking responsibility for their own learning, being able to control their own learning and perceiving that their learning successes or failures are to be attributed to their own efforts and strategies rather than to factors outside their control (pp. 173-174).

The results of the present study seem to support the idea that students' reported levels of motivation may, to a lesser or greater degree, reflect a readiness for autonomy, so that teachers in the Algerian context should also make efforts to promote their students' motivation.

Moreover, a considerable number of students also indicated that they 'always' felt confident in their writing (46.7%), 'always' maintained a positive attitude toward writing their proposals (43.3%), and 'always' felt capable of managing their emotions during the writing process (36.7%). One reason why students reported a positive affective profile could be due to the novelty of the Master's experience itself; as first-year graduate students, they may have entered the research proposal writing context with dramatic enthusiasm that had yet to be tested in practice. It is also worth noting here that a good percentage of students reported that they found it difficult to manage their emotions during challenging phases of the writing process. These results corroborate the results obtained by Nguyen and Habók (2020), who argued that affective factors such as persistence and motivation have a central place in triggering autonomous learning behaviors.

Another possible explanation for the students' lack of autonomy lies in their attitudes toward the task of writing a research proposal. Evidence drawn from the questionnaire indicated that none of the participants rated writing a research proposal as easy, and half of them described the process of selecting a research topic as very difficult. These perceptions are likely to undermine students' readiness for the task, particularly when it comes to writing the literature review, which was identified as the most challenging component by many participants (70%). To put it another way, when students express strong doubts about their ability to develop a decent research proposal,

their motivation to employ autonomous writing strategies may decrease. In parallel, data obtained from the students' questionnaire further suggested that teacher assessment, unlike self- and peer assessment, is their main and more favored approach to judging the quality of their research proposals. The most likely explanation is that students had not been exposed to alternative and autonomy-supportive assessment activities.

All in all, considering the overall mean score for the pre-scale 1.88 (SD=0.91) and students' questionnaire answers before the intervention, one can estimate that the students' level of learner autonomy among ELSUM students was not highly satisfactory, and their learner autonomy skills were not sufficiently developed. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that these students held the view that they possessed certain positive autonomy attitudes and skills in the context of academic research writing, particularly in areas that are more individually oriented; however, other dimensions of learner autonomy, especially social ones, seem to be underdeveloped. Thus, the latter findings partially corroborate the first research hypothesis stating that Master's ELSUM students' awareness and level of learner autonomy are limited in terms of different dimensions of the concept. Likewise, the results of the present study are concordant with those of earlier studies conducted in similar Algerian contexts.

5.1.2. The Impact of Self- and Peer Assessment on Learner Autonomy

The present research is one study that explored the possible impact of both formative self-assessment and peer assessment rubrics on learner autonomy in research-based writing contexts in Algeria. In response to the second research question of the current action research, this study examined the impact of implementing self- and peer assessment on learner autonomy in research proposal writing among Master's students at the University of Medea. The study's findings suggest that the implementation of self- and peer assessment positively influenced learner autonomy among the participants. Quantitative data from the Learner Autonomy Scale clearly showed an improvement in autonomous behaviors after the intervention, especially in social, metacognitive, and cognitive dimensions. For instance, the overall mean score of the learner autonomy scale decreased from 1.88 in the pre-intervention phase to 1.55 in the post-intervention phase.

Regarding the cognitive strategies, the mean score decreased from 1.83 in the pre-scale to 1.57 in the post-scale. Hence, it is noticeable that students' use of cognitive

strategies, such as summarizing, note-taking, structuring, and resourcing were improved after the intervention. Of the items measured, summarizing was the most employed. These findings are not surprising due to the fact that performing self- and peer assessment in research-based writing scenarios may allow learners to make more use of the aforementioned cognitive strategies. As for the metacognitive strategies, the mean score decreased from 1.64 to 1.48. This means that students directed their efforts to improving the metacognitive aspects of learner autonomy, namely goal-setting, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and planning. These findings reveal that involving students in criteria-referenced self- and peer assessment activities helped them become more conscious about planning, monitoring, and evaluating their research writing process.

In this sense, Little (1991) argued that self-assessment is key to learners' ability "to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning," (p. 2) and with Little's (2003) remark that self-assessment is "fundamental to the practice and development of learner autonomy at every stage and in every phase" (p. 223). Along similar lines, our results corroborate the results obtained by Liao (2023), whose experimental study in Taiwan showed that students who practiced both self- and peer assessment outperformed the control group in learner autonomy, and those of Ebrahimi et al. (2021), who concluded that when both self-assessment and peer assessment were applied during the writing process, EFL learners were much more likely to develop autonomy and metacognitive awareness.

Moreover, Sierra and Frodden (2003) reported that self-assessment had a positive impact on students' use of metacognitive and self-regulation strategies, and Ngo (2019) found that involving students in structured self-assessment and reflection activities was of paramount importance in helping them monitor their own learning and make progress. However, it should be mentioned that the development in both cognitive and metacognitive strategies was not significant, which may be explained by the fact that students already reported a satisfactory level of engagement with both practices before the intervention. Thus, there is a need for a more systematic approach toward autonomy in which teachers adopt pedagogical goals informed by a variety of solid research perspectives on learner autonomy.

Interestingly, perhaps the major findings in the context of this study revolve around the most significant development of the social conditions of autonomy compared to the

other four dimensions. In fact, the overall mean for the social aspect of learner autonomy dropped from 2.42 in the pre-scale to 1.46 in the post-scale, which is by far the most noticeable improvement observed in all sub-scales. That is, the means for the four items (collaboration with peers, feedback from peers, discussion with peers, and sharing with peers) decreased dramatically. It is a truism to assert that the reason behind this improvement is that peer assessment, by its very nature, puts students in situations where they need to exercise these social strategies and thus enables them to assume responsibility for their learning. These results substantiate the results obtained by some studies discussed earlier in Chapter Two. For example, Shen et al. (2020) also found that peer assessment increased students' confidence in their learning ability and decreased their dependence on the teacher.

Similarly, it was reported in Suludere's study (2012) that using peer assessment in EFL writing contexts helped improve autonomous abilities, such as learners' awareness of their own learning, taking responsibility for their learning, and active engagement in the learning process. In this respect, Dam (1995) emphasized that an autonomous learner, in the process of classroom learning, is "a socially responsible person" (p. 102). Although it yields positive results, "peer assessment can be successful in fostering autonomy only when it constitutes a part of a comprehensive and wide-ranging scheme that would incorporate various aspects of language learning" (Czura, 2013, p. 30). Indeed, the present study's intervention, which combined both criteria-referenced self- and peer assessment, seems to have provided, to a lesser or greater degree, this kind of comprehensive scheme.

Contrary to the above positive picture that students gave in the social dimension sub-scale, the teacher's role sub-scale showed the most unsatisfactory results in comparison with the other four sub-scales. The overall mean for this sub-scale decreased slightly, from 1.76 in the pre-scale to 1.68 in the post-scale. The mean for teachers' influence decreased from 2.13 to 1.77, suggesting that students felt somewhat less dependent on the teacher after the intervention. However, reliance on teachers' feedback did not change (1.67 to 1.67), and reliance on teachers' guidance increased to a small extent from 1.57 to 1.63. These statistics may put the researcher in a position to assume

that most learners continued to see the teacher in a dependent role, despite the improvements observed in other dimensions.

These findings of the current investigation are also consistent with Shen et al.'s (2020) findings that peer assessment failed to improve some aspects of autonomy, including learners' independence and their metacognitive abilities. In addition, our results are similar to those of Djoub (2016), who found that using self-assessment through portfolios among Algerian EFL students did not significantly improve learner autonomy because students' dependence on the teacher persisted even after the intervention. Why do some learners tend to rely heavily on their teachers in Algerian universities? How can such an attitude be challenged? The classroom, as Bowers (1987) observed, "is a microcosm which, for all its universal magisterial conventions, reflects in fundamental social terms the world that lies outside the window" (pp. 8-9). As a logical consequence, reducing teacher dependence may necessitate not only a change in classroom teaching and assessment practices but a general cultural and institutional shift that is almost impossible to achieve through an intervention of limited duration in certain specific settings.

Regarding the last sub-scale, affective constructs, the mean scores computed before ($M=1.76$) and after ($M=1.58$) the implementation of self- and peer assessment suggested a clear improvement in students' motivational engagement and attitudes toward writing. Of the four affective items, motivation (1.73 to 1.47) and confidence (1.63 to 1.47) improved to a satisfactory degree, but emotion management remained the least improved affective item (from 1.90 to 1.83). These results go hand in hand with Sierra and Frodden's (2003) research findings, which showed that self-assessment had a positive impact on students' motivation and attitudes toward learning, and with Gholami's (2016) study in which students developed more confidence and came to the conclusion that self-assessment plays a central role in motivation. However, researchers acknowledge that the affective component of autonomy can be more resistant to change than the cognitive or behavioral dimensions (Quoc Lap, 2005; Nguyen & Habók, 2020). Arguably, motivation and confidence do not necessarily increase in parallel with other autonomous behaviors; they may increase or decrease depending on learners' well-being, task difficulty, language proficiency level, academic readiness, feedback literacy,

individual differences, social contexts, and other related factors. It seems, therefore, that the latter outcome is not easily achieved through one academic year intervention alone, especially during the demanding process of research proposal writing.

In conclusion to the present section, it can be concluded that self- and peer assessment, if managed in a proper and systematic manner, can contribute much to creating an environment conducive to autonomous learning in research-based writing contexts. Some studies are consistent with this research in terms of the positive effects of self- and peer assessment on learner autonomy (Ashraf & Mahdinezhad, 2015; Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Liao, 2023; Phan, 2025). One possible reason why the implementation of self- and peer assessment contributed to furthering the development of certain aspects of learner autonomy, could be due to the intervention itself, in which students were part of all stages of assessment, from co-constructing the criteria by which their work would be judged to applying these criteria in assessing both their own research proposals and those of their classmates. Such a conclusion provides an answer to the second research question and evidence to confirm the second research hypothesis claiming that if the study participants performed the self- and peer assessment procedures accurately in writing research proposals, their learner autonomy would be cultivated. Consequently, efforts made in the current research are but one example that supports the view that using “strategies may be the strongest tool to foster a positive proactive teacher agenda for learner autonomy” (Missoum, 2021, p. 256).

5.1.3. Students’ Perceptions of Self- and Peer Assessment Practices

Regarding students’ perceptions, it was clear that the majority of the participants, if not all, were very positive about the use of self- and peer assessment. Evidence from the questionnaire and focus group data showed, relying on students’ viewpoints, how necessary and beneficial these practices are in a multiplicity of ways. These positive attitudes did not develop on their own, however. Before the intervention, most students had little to no formal experience with either practice. The overwhelming majority reported that they had never been involved in such activities. The focus group discussions also revealed that students were occasionally asked to assess their own work or that of their peers, but this task was not guided by clear criteria. In consequence, this was the first time students had been involved in developing and applying a more

structured approach to assessment: criteria-referenced rubrics. This may explain the dominant use of teacher-based assessment. The intervention, therefore, responded to calls within the field for more intentional cultivation of learner autonomy through creative and innovative assessment methods.

Indeed, students pointed out that their participation and collaboration with the teacher in developing the rubric was rewarding. They reported that their involvement deepened their understanding of assessment standards and improved their motivation and autonomy. Likewise, Andrade (2010) reported similar findings. Evidence from the focus groups confirmed students' positive attitudes. As Youssef explained, "when we are co-creating the rubric with our teacher, it allows us to understand it on a deeper level." In the same line, Topping (2023) has recently lent more weight to the claim that "co-designing explicit criteria with students (yielding rubrics) and managing self-efficacy are major factors, leading to self-regulation of learning" (p. 79). Put simply, learners are most likely to become active agents in their learning and assessment only when the criteria are transparent, and students' full say is not marginalized or denied during the design and planning of those criteria.

Furthermore, the results from the questionnaire unveiled that the students strongly agreed with expanding self- and peer assessment techniques. That is to say, the vast majority agreed that these forms of assessment should be used more frequently. In parallel, evidence drawn from the focus group discussions goes hand in hand with that obtained from the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire. According to the participants' perspectives, the implementation of self- and peer assessment is a requisite to trigger their lifelong learning skills which they can use throughout their careers. In this sense, Imane remarked that: "I think it would affect the long run. Like you would be always thinking critically about, ah, it's not like about the proposals or like, it's for everything. It gives the person the opportunity to have a critical mind." Clearly, the integration of self- and peer assessment tools in higher education "will undoubtedly raise the quality and relevance of the teaching-learning-assessment experience and thus of education at large, in line with the main student-centred approach that lies at the core of lifelong learning." (Alt & Raichel, 2022, p. 389).

In light of the valuable place of assessment in lifelong learning, some participants also explicitly called for the early introduction of assessment practices in different courses; they recognized how important these forms of assessment are in developing transferable skills, such as critical thinking and teamwork. Supporting this view, Perkins and Salomon (1992) argue that “any learning requires a modicum of transfer. To say that learning has occurred means that the person can display that learning later” (p. 47). Thus, in order to keep a positive attitude toward learning for both personal and academic development, introducing self- and peer assessment as early as possible must be at the forefront of every educator’s mind.

5.1.2.1 Students’ Perceptions of Self-assessment

In general, the findings of this study reveal that students held positive perceptions of formative self-assessment. For example, the quantitative data from the post-intervention questionnaire revealed that the overwhelming majority of participants reported that self-assessment helped them become more autonomous learners in the course of writing their research proposals. These results were not totally surprising considering the nature of the self-assessment practice, as aforementioned, is very student-centered. Self-assessment, if appropriately exercised, has a wide range of benefits for language learners. Little (2005) contends that “learner-centred approaches to language teaching, especially those that seek to develop learner autonomy...assign a central role to self-assessment” (p. 321). Hence, the present findings seem to support the latter claim because, based on the results, students clearly took advantage of this form of assessment, and they became more responsible and reflective learners.

A more detailed examination of the self-assessment perception items reveals that the most significant benefits of self-assessment, relying on students’ own perspectives, were those related to metacognitive awareness, learner responsibility, and critical reflection. Accordingly, these results are consistent with previous research that emphasized the role of self-assessment in fostering language awareness and self-efficacy (Kissling & O’Donnell, 2015), and learner autonomy and self-regulated learning (Panadero et al., 2017). Self-assessment was reported by 80.8% of participants as a useful tool to enhance both their autonomous learning and metacognitive engagement, which concurs with research by Andrade & Du (2007). Moreover, Yan

et al. (2023) also found that students perceive self-assessment as a useful tool that can cultivate autonomy, particularly when it is supported by clear criteria and structured training.

The focus group data further confirmed these quantitative findings. Many students reported that doing self-assessment made them more proactively responsible for the quality of their proposals. As Warda put it, “because it’s your own proposal, so you would be more responsible about it. So, you would take care of it... evaluate it as good as possible. Make it better.” Similarly, Nada emphasized that self-assessment “allows you to see things you’ve not been able to see before.” Such results corroborate the results obtained by Kharfi (2018), whose study at Guelma University found that Algerian EFL students considered self-assessment a very useful tool for autonomous learning, and those of Ngo (2019), who reported that students were able to monitor their own learning as a result of structured self-assessment activities.

Furthermore, the document analysis of students’ self-assessment rubrics presented more evidence to support the results from the questionnaire and focus groups. In fact, five main themes were raised from the content analysis of seven self-assessment rubrics written by the participants: critical thinking, self-awareness and recognition of learning needs, learner responsibility, use of feedback to independently improve learning, and positive self-evaluation. The dominant themes in students’ written self-assessments were critical thinking and self-awareness. This means that self-assessment provides the majority of students with a useful opportunity to make reflective judgments and thoughtful reactions about their own work. The students’ comments illustrate this claim: “the lit review should be modified and rewritten again,” “knowledge gap is NOT clearly defined,” and “Theoretical framework is not well explained.” In such situations, it is evident that reflection and recognition of learning needs, which are both considered pillars of feedback literacy and self-assessment, were not missing. In accordance with these findings, Andrade and Valtcheva (2009) argue that students should take charge of their own assessment by constantly reflecting and revising their work.

Another point we believe worth mentioning here is that students’ comments that denote learner responsibility and use of feedback for self-regulation were much less frequent than critical thinking and self-awareness in the rubric data. Put simply, the latter

reality may imply that although, to some extent, it is true that students were willing and able to spot what was problematic with their work, they were not necessarily willing to act accordingly or translate this awareness into actionable plans for revision. This scenario was also identified in Djoub's (2016) study in a similar Algerian context. Her findings also made it clear that students, or at least some of them, developed positive attitudes toward portfolio-based self-assessment, but this did not lead them to show a genuine willingness to become more autonomous. The results of the present study seem to suggest that students had made good progress toward the former, but had not achieved the latter to a larger extent.

Despite the apparent advantages, a considerable number of students also reported certain challenges in carrying out self-assessment. One of the most cited challenges in the questionnaire was related to the reliability and fairness of self-assessment, mentioned by more than half of the participants (53.8%). This is followed by the time and effort required (26.9%), and a lack of confidence in assessing one's own work (23.1%). It may be reasonable to assert that students were not confident enough to assess themselves, given that self-assessment was an unfamiliar practice for many of them before the intervention. According to Boud (1995), the task of self-assessment is not easy, because learners need to make sense of the assessment criteria taking into account their former experience with the tool and their working context. Some students, in the present study, also described feelings of frustration, self-doubt, and time pressure. Such findings support the results of a recent study on self-assessment in a blended English reading course by Zhang (2025). Students in that study also reported some motivational challenges and cognitive challenges when doing self-assessment. Learners need to believe that they can assess their own work and that the latter do not need to be perfect, especially at the early stages of the process.

Regarding the focus group data, several students said that their self-assessments were not always free from bias. Sarah, for instance, remarked that "we just read our work as if it's perfect.... We were glorifying ourselves." These findings are consistent with another conclusion by Ross (2006), who observed that among the common problems related to self-assessment is when students tend to inflate grades or be too self-critical. In addition, an extensive analysis conducted by Falchikov and Boud (1989) that

focused on comparing students' self-assessment with those of their teachers, indicated that students in more advanced courses demonstrated more accuracy in self-assessment than their peers in introductory-level classes. The use of "self-assessment without tutor feedback cannot help students to be aware of all their errors" and that "student self-assessment with integrated tutor feedback is one efficient means of helping students overcome unrealistic expectations" (Taras, 2003, pp. 561-562). It is evident that integrating peer assessment, which is more or less similar to teacher assessment, may also serve the needs of learners who receive little or no feedback from tutors.

5.1.2.2. Students' Perceptions of Peer Assessment

Just like self-assessment, the majority of the participants held positive attitudes toward practicing peer assessment after the intervention. However, students' perceptions of peer assessment were more complex. The quantitative data from the questionnaire revealed that the majority of students (73.1%) believed that peer assessment helped them become more autonomous learners while drafting their research proposals. Although consensus on the role of peer assessment is slightly lower than that for self-assessment (80.8%), peer assessment led to more behavioral and affective changes in the present study, as is discussed below. These results do not differ from the results obtained by Liao (2023) and Ashraf and Mahdinezhad (2015), both of whom reported that students who performed peer assessment had more control over their learning process and learner autonomy.

To illustrate, according to students' perspectives, peer assessment was found helpful in allowing them to feel more comfortable discussing and sharing feedback ($M=1.46$), raising awareness of their strengths and weaknesses ($M=1.73$), developing their writing and research skills ($M=1.81$), and boosting their motivation to improve the quality of their research proposals ($M=1.85$). These findings are important because students felt that peer assessment supported the social and affective dimensions of autonomous learning. The students' responses confirm Van Gennip et al.'s (2009) view that "peer assessment involves collaboration in the appraisal of learning outcomes by those involved in the learning process, i.e., students" (p. 41).

Furthermore, the analysis of focus group transcripts identified four main themes: exposure to diverse perspectives, difficulty of peer assessment, psychological

challenges, and a collaborative and collegial learning culture. Many students reported that receiving feedback from their peers was both rewarding and illuminating because it revealed weaknesses in their proposals that they had failed to see on their own. For instance, Bilal said, “when we received feedback from others, we were like shocked because... so many things we were not aware of were in the proposal.” Similarly, Nawal admitted that “there were some things that they told me about that I literally just could not see.” In this context, Sadler and Good (2006) firmly believe that the main status and function of peer assessment is, so to speak, to direct learners’ attention toward their strengths, weaknesses, and progress. It is considered, so to speak, a dialogue through which students are able to provide instrumental feedback to one another (Nicol, 2010).

Nevertheless, a considerable number of students reported some challenges when practicing peer assessment. One of the most cited hurdles to assessing their peers is the lack of reliability and fairness, which was mentioned by more than half of the participants (53.8%). Similar issues were observed in Kennedy’s (2005) study, who pointed out that concerns about the reliability and fairness of this form of assessment can indeed impede the validity of the tool. Because many students were not used to assessing each other’s work using rubrics before the intervention, it was very difficult to facilitate learning conditions in which students’ confidence and capacity for peer assessment were easily built. The development of peer-assessment skills does not occur overnight. The psychometric qualities of peer assessment improve when peer assessors receive sufficient training and practical experience (Van Zundert et al., 2010). To what extent could we expect Algerian teachers to invest more time and effort in promoting peer assessment skills for learner autonomy?

In addition to the forecited challenges of doing peer assessment, the focus group data revealed other psychological challenges of the instrument, such as defensiveness, surprise, self-doubt, and even anger. In fact, some students admitted that they became upset after receiving feedback: “I was somehow angry at the end of the discussion, because I was like, why? Yeah. It was good and bad at the same time.” Sarah also explained how the process of giving peer feedback might have negatively affect their classmates: “When I was going to criticize the other group, but I saw that if you are a person who doesn't take critics, you will be furious. You will be angry, and you may

even hate the other person.” It is no surprise that the process peer assessment, especially when it comes to the last stage of the process where students discuss and share their feedback with peers, may turn out to lead to “feelings of hurt or betrayal from comments or unexpected marks” (Vu and Dall’Alba, 2007, p. 542). Such feelings are, by all means, not very problematic for the sake of personal and academic development. It is high time that educators were provided with adequate training and institutional resources to raise awareness of emotional and cognitive peer feedback and to strive to increase feedback literacy among their learners.

Despite these psychological difficulties, the majority of students described their peer assessment experience in positive terms. As Nada revealed, “when we were receiving feedback, I was so happy because they are helping you. They are not criticizing you, not judging you, but they are helping you and giving you the help to improve your work.” Similarly, Yara commented that “I didn’t feel like I’m the teacher or I’m the judge... I was taking it as if it’s my work... just giving observations, trying to make it better.” In effect, these responses suggest that peer assessment played a determining role in the development of a more collegial and supportive classroom culture. The latter is considered one of the most important social benefits of peer assessment (Gipps, 1994), which involves the development of stronger cooperative learning habits among students (Van Gennip et al., 2009).

The document analysis of students’ peer-assessment rubrics provided more evidence that supports the findings from the focus groups and questionnaires. The content analysis identified four main themes: peer feedback literacy (20 instances), critical thinking (18 instances), constructive peer feedback (18 instances), and positive social feedback (15 instances). This clearly shows that students were not only willing to assess their peers’ work but also capable of doing so in an efficient, clear, and constructive manner. The students’ comments illustrate this claim: “The sample is not clear; it needs justification,” “Knowledge gap is not clear,” and “Methodology part needs explanation and strengthen.” Many other peer comments were even more constructive and actionable, such as “The best way to improve it is to not hesitate asking people in the field or just follow their works if they’re not available.” According to Lutze-Mann’s (2015), peer assessment equips students with interpersonal in an

autonomous way. Race (1998) also adds that such practices can promote a learning environment in which errors are viewed as an integral part of learning.

In addition to the peer feedback literacy exhibited by the study participants, they were also capable of providing positive feedback to their classmates. For example, students wrote: “This work was well done, you can see the hard work this group put in,” and “A very informative proposal.” This shows how sensitive and considerate students were in their approach to the peer assessment process. These results, in effect, go hand in hand with the focus group data, where students described their peers’ feedback as an act of support rather than judgment. It is a truism to assert that this kind of positive and collaborative assessment culture is an important part of the move toward a pro-learner autonomy pedagogy.

A comparison of self- and peer assessment in this study revealed that each offers distinct yet complementary benefits. While self-assessment encourages sustained personal reflection and helps students monitor their own progress, peer assessment introduces alternative perspectives that can reveal aspects of their work they may have overlooked. If performed together, these practices can lead to better learning outcomes. This interpretation goes hand in hand with Falchikov’s (2003) work, which underscores the value of engaging students in assessment not merely for the sake of replicating teacher judgments, but for the broader educational gains it offers. She argues that such involvement cultivates critical thinking, responsibility, and collaborative awareness, which are all important skills for autonomous academic development.

To sum up, the triangulated findings from the questionnaire, focus groups, and document analysis show that students held significantly positive perceptions of both self- and peer assessment, and that both practices contributed, to different degrees and in different ways, to the development of learner autonomy in the context of research proposal writing. This result firmly confirms the last proposed hypothesis. It was crystal clear that doing self-assessment, as far as students’ perceptions are concerned, had more impact on metacognitive awareness and learner responsibility, whereas peer assessment proved more influential in the social and affective dimensions of autonomy. As such, the findings of the present study are concordant with Ebrahimi et al.’s (2021) and Phan’s (2025) studies, which show that EFL learners are much more likely to develop more

aspects of autonomy when both self-assessment and peer assessment are employed during the writing process. They should, then, occur as part of regular university courses. To achieve this aim, investing a vast amount of time and energy in shifting from a summative-based assessment paradigm to a learner-oriented assessment paradigm is more than necessary if “the first mission of university is to forge conscience, improve aptitudes as much as possible, and uphold what is reliable and just” (MHESR, 2012, p. 5).

5.2. Educational Implications

Learner autonomy is a driving force of sustainable development. Therefore, with the findings of the present study and those of previous research in mind, a number of suggestions can be made for the development of learner autonomy through self- and peer assessment practices in research-based EFL writing classes at the Algerian university level.

5.2.1. Shifting to a Learner-autonomy Paradigm

The first and perhaps most urgent condition for a learner-autonomy paradigm is changing the way stakeholders, especially teachers and students, understand and deal with the notion of autonomy itself. In effect, the EFL classroom in general and the research-based writing classroom in particular should shift their focus and practice so as to become learning environments where autonomy is not deemed a luxury but a major, if not the ultimate, goal of education. What the findings of the present study reveals is that students enroll in their first year of Master’s studies with a partial understanding of the concept. The responsibility to address this issue in an explicit fashion and thus pave the way for an atmosphere conducive to autonomous learning from the very beginning of the course lies firmly in the hands of the teacher. For example, Missoum’s (2021) findings suggest that “teachers need conceptual change to be able to manage pedagogical change to promote learner autonomy” (p. 207). However, it should be stated that developing students’ perceptions and practices of autonomy is a task that is far from easy. Their exposure to teacher-centered pedagogies and passive learning and assessment cultures, for many years, may have negative consequences. Rebuilding students’ awareness of autonomy, therefore, will depend crucially on gradual processes of sociocultural mediation and co-constructed support. In this regard,

Little (2007) argues that “learner autonomy is the product of an interactive process in which the teacher gradually enlarges the scope of her learners’ autonomy by gradually allowing them more control of the process and content of their learning” (p. 26).

Accordingly, one strategy toward this paradigm shift is investing more time and energy in transforming students’ views and exercise of learner autonomy using explicit, accessible, and contextualized examples that are also related to the research-based writing setting. Teachers should not expect learners to construct a solid understanding of autonomy spontaneously or by themselves. Instead, they should introduce them to what autonomy means in theory and practice (e.g., cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective dimensions), and how it is manifested in different stages of the research writing process. For instance, tasks that require students to find and engage with scholarly resources, select their research topics, conduct their literature review, monitor their writing progress, seek and incorporate peer feedback, and reflect on their emotional responses to challenging phases of the writing process can support learners’ conceptual change toward autonomy and the practice of it. On the one hand, students must develop control over their learning and research writing; on the other, teachers must embrace their role as facilitators/trainers of learner autonomy. The task of shaping these beliefs and roles should not be underestimated if learner autonomy in Algerian higher education is to transition from a policy statement to a classroom reality.

Along similar lines, the social learning environment, in particular, plays a central role in supporting students’ right attitudes and readiness for autonomy. Drawing on the findings of the present study, where the social dimension of learner autonomy increased dramatically after the intervention, it seems evident to say that structured opportunities for collaborative learning and reflection, such as using criteria-referenced self- and peer assessment rubrics, become a necessity in research writing classrooms that aspire to develop autonomous attitudes and skills. Another more explicit strategy to support this goal is using reflective questions or guidelines that challenge the confusion between autonomy and collaboration that many students in the present study seemed to possess. As a case in point, these questions might include: “In what ways did working with my peers today support my learner autonomy?” or “Which aspects of my writing process can I manage more independently, and which still require my peer’s support? The

implementation of such practices may be one of the most possible directions toward a learner-autonomy paradigm within the context of research writing instruction in Algerian higher education.

In overall terms, the development of autonomy should be considered as a major pedagogical goal, because it is no longer an option to postpone for the future, but it has become more than necessary, particularly in Algerian higher education institutions and other similar contexts.

5.2.2. Integrating Criteria-referenced Self- and Peer Assessment

The findings of the present study may have some implications for researchers, instructors, curriculum designers, and language learners alike. According to the results, integrating criteria-referenced self- and peer assessment into research-based writing courses is a necessity for a more autonomy-supportive and collaborative learning culture. Moreover, other major findings from the study are the participants' significant positive attitudes toward these forms of assessment. As a logical consequence, self- and peer assessment ought to be one of the major instructional components in the classroom. In this sense, Boud (2000) proposed the notion of sustainable assessment, which underscores that assessors should pay more attention to students' future academic and professional contexts beyond the scope of learners' present learning needs. Sustainable assessment can be achieved by the integration of self- and peer assessment. This leads the researcher to insist that key stakeholders, including policy-makers, course designers, and teachers, reconsider the assessment classroom realities at the tertiary level. It is now clear that the stark reality of putting emphasis on summative assessment procedures rather than formative ones will not bring about the expected learning/assessment outcomes.

In addition, the findings may aid syllabus designers and teachers to reconsider how research methodology courses in general, and academic research proposal writing project assignments, such as research proposals, in particular, are taught and assessed. Because this study found evidence that combining self- and peer assessment promoted cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective dimensions of learner autonomy, it would be worthwhile to redesign course syllabi so as to incorporate these practices on a regular and continuous basis, to help learners become more autonomous and thereby more adept

researchers/writers. Needless to recall, the social writing strategies, which seemed to be the most prominent aspects of learner autonomy used by the participants, suggest that peer assessment in particular deserves its fair share of attention in academic writing and research methodology classes. Teachers must decide to give it a special status due to the pedagogical benefits, i.e. more autonomy, peer feedback opportunities, and collaborative learning.

Finally, students' unfamiliarity with both self- and peer assessment, and reported challenges related to bias, reliability, and emotional challenges to peer feedback, underlines the urgent need for teachers to build students' feedback literacy before and throughout the implementation process. Indeed, Van Zundert et al. (2010) have observed that the reliability and validity of students' peer assessment processes and outcomes improve dramatically, provided that they receive sufficient preparation and training. Moreover, since some dimensions of autonomy, such as those related to minimizing teacher dependence, were resistant to change after the self- and peer-assessment intervention, challenging such attitudes may require change in institutional management and cultural readiness to promote autonomy, and by involving teachers fully in the project. Supporting this view, Benson (2008) rightly stated that "the theory of autonomy in language learning has tended to be rather inward-looking (...) we should perhaps pay more attention to the literature on autonomy beyond our field" (p. 31).

5.2.3. Co-constructing Rubrics by Teachers and Students

Another implication from the findings of this study revolves around the practice of co-constructing rubrics as a collaborative endeavor between teachers and students. To put it another way, it seems more efficient and productive to depart from transmitting assessment criteria towards a more collaborative strategy where students are invited to contribute what they can to negotiate the assessment criteria and design the rubrics. For example, teachers can first present a draft rubric criteria to students, then open the floor for discussion, revision, and refinement based on students' ideas, learning needs, and interests. Clearly, this kind of participatory design does more than produce a clearer rubric; it cultivates ownership of the assessment process itself. Indeed, students in the present study reported that their involvement in co-creating the rubric deepened their understanding of assessment standards and increased their motivation and autonomy.

Another study by Andrade (2010) supports these claims. Thus, it is through collaboration with teachers that learners can, as opposed to being imposed on, feel more empowered in the assessment process. In a similar fashion, Topping (2023) has recently argued that co-designing criteria with students and nurturing their self-efficacy are among the most decisive factors in fostering self-regulated learning. Hence, learners should become active agents in their own learning and assessment by making their voices unmuted during the planning and design stages of assessment.

5.2.4. Training Teachers for Learner Autonomy

Research supports the claim that cultivating language learner autonomy involves changes in teachers' attitudes toward their own professional role and classroom routine. Conceptual and practical changes are particularly important in contexts where authoritative teachers control all aspects of the classroom, including instruction, interaction, and assessment, while learners are expected to merely color inside the lines. This may also be the case in the Algerian context. In such situations, the use of formative assessment, for example, necessitates teachers to reconsider their role in the learning and assessment process. Teachers, therefore, need to prioritize learning over teaching and to train and involve learners in the whole stages of the assessment process.

As stated earlier in the literature review (Chapter One), learner autonomy and teacher autonomy are two sides of the same coin. Put differently, teachers cannot be expected to promote autonomy in their learners unless they themselves exercise a degree of autonomy in their professional practice. This assumption was also confirmed through the present action research. Classroom decisions related to self- and peer assessment depended mostly on the teacher's ability to reflect, adjust procedures, and encourage learner involvement in assessment. Little (2007) insists that teachers need to draw on the same reflective and self-managing processes in their teaching that they apply to their own learning.

As such, training teachers for learner autonomy implies preparing them for roles that differ from traditional instructional ones. Illustratively, teachers may need to act as facilitators of reflection, guides in designing and interpreting assessment criteria, or supporters of learner feedback. Consequently, teachers with limited experience in formative assessment may require structured support to develop the knowledge and

skills needed for these practices. To this end, it is urgently needed to raise teachers' awareness and update their professional competencies either via self-instruction or taking targeted professional development programs.

In Algerian higher education institutions, particularly within EFL/EMI teacher education programs, learner autonomy and formative assessment should be addressed during pre-service training workshops. However, trainee teachers not only need to understand the theoretical underpinnings of learner-centered teaching approaches, but more importantly, how these practices are best implemented in, or outside the borders of, the classroom. For example, teachers can participate in workshops on designing task-based activities, implementing peer and self-assessment strategies, and integrating project-based learning. If future teachers are expected to promote autonomy, training courses should model learner-centered and reflective approaches. According to Little (1995), teacher education itself should reflect the principles of autonomy, where aims, content, learning tasks, and assessment practices are open to negotiation. Only when trainee teachers themselves experience these processes can they better inculcate in their learners a disposition toward autonomy-supportive learning strategies.

An effective mindset to continuing professional development is not the result of taking part in one or two training events. Teachers, particularly at the university level, should rather adopt a mentality of a lifelong learner because there is always room for further professional development. In many university contexts, teachers face a wide range of challenges such as large classes, lack of time, heavy workload, and pressure to grade and assess. In addition to this, they are expected to develop learner autonomy. Teacher training programs might be insufficient to prepare teachers for all these expectations. Therefore, teachers in service should reflect on their practices, develop their assessment approaches, and act autonomously, regardless of the level of institutional support available. In a nutshell, if EFL/EMI teachers aim to foster learner autonomy through formative assessment and other methods, they must take their own professional development into careful consideration for the sake of supporting both their autonomy and that of their learners and colleagues.

5.2.5. Implementing Self- and Peer Assessment in Writing Centers

Because self- and peer assessment activities proved to be workable in the classroom context of the present study, it seems appropriate to extend these practices to writing centers. When it comes to writing centers, student writers are viewed as independent writers who are responsible for their learning progress. For this reason, using self- and peer-assessment techniques does not require a shift in philosophy because the already existing theories and practices of writing centers go hand in hand with autonomy-supportive approaches.

In view of the participants' involvement with referenced-criteria self- and peer assessment rubrics during the research proposal writing task, writing centers offer increased opportunities for the further development of these practices. During consultations, tutors usually identify major and minor concerns in the student's manuscript and help him/her set goals for revision. Alternatively, consultants can ask students to use a self-assessment rubric, for example, for a more efficient revision experience. Likewise, introducing peer assessment, if appropriately scaffolded, can also deepen the writers' understanding of writing conventions and needs and thus support their autonomy. Indeed, the social learning dimension is central to writing center pedagogy and is consistent with practices of peer assessment. These practices may help clients become more autonomous writers who are capable of monitoring their own learning and progress.

5.2.6. Enhancing Self- and Peer Assessment with Artificial Intelligence

Due to its widespread use in higher education, the role of artificial intelligence in assessment has received increasing attention. Recent scholarship suggests that AI-based tools, particularly in writing contexts, may offer new forms of support for learners who are engaged in assessment for learning. For example, AI-generated feedback may help scaffold self-assessment and guide revision, especially for learners with lower initial assessment accuracy (Ng et al., 2024; Tang et al., 2024). This kind of support is particularly important for learners whose assessment work tends to lack accuracy. Regarding peer assessment, AI may help address challenges related to bias and inconsistency. As highlighted earlier in the literature review chapter (Chapter Two), new frameworks propose that AI can assist in assigning reviewers, monitoring review

quality, and synthesizing feedback (Topping et al., 2025). In this sense, AI-based instruments have turned out to be one of the most important mediating tools in the students' formative assessment process.

Nevertheless, students ought to adopt a critical attitude toward generative AI for self- and peer assessment and well-developed awareness of its flaws, as opposed to being passive consumers of it. Some researchers (Yu & Guo, 2023; Hagendorff, 2024) agree that AI-generated feedback is not totally reliable and may raise serious issues related to transparency, data security, and overreliance on automated judgments. Therefore, teachers need to train learners to facilitate a more discerning and reflective use of AI-generated feedback. Moreover, AI-supported assessment practices should remain explicitly formative and be guided by clear instructional and institutional policies and guidelines. If used responsibly and ethically, AI may, to a lesser or greater degree, enhance learners' capacity to assess themselves or their peers, which in turn leads to more autonomous assessment practices, especially for learners who are most in need of support.

5.3. Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research

Despite the researcher's efforts to conduct the study carefully and achieve a faultless academic research project, there are, as expected, several inevitable limitations (conceptual and methodological) that must be acknowledged.

One of the main limitations of this study is related to how the variables under investigation are defined and what they are understood to represent. On the one hand, learner autonomy, as discussed in Chapter One, is such a complex and loose term that the data gathered around it could not provide a clear picture of it. Indeed, it was not easy for the researcher to examine and assess the concept precisely due to the research instruments used, which could yield only certain components of it. On the other hand, self- and peer assessment are difficult skills to perform and master, mainly because they are both processes involving the self (self-assessment) and others (peer assessment), and thus require students' cognitive and affective development. Moreover, in this study, the researcher relied on rubrics only due to time constraints. As a result, the findings show how students used rubrics for self- and peer assessment, but not how other types of

formative assessment, such as reflective journals, portfolios, checklists, etc., unfold in practice in relation to learner autonomy.

The second limitation is that, in the present study, the participants consisted of thirty (30) Algerian graduate (Master 01) students majoring in Applied Linguistics from only one Algerian University because of the time constraints. Therefore, the findings reflect the responses of the participants only and might not be a valid representation of the population as a whole. That is, the sample size was small, as is common in an action research study. It can be argued that replicating this study with a larger sample from several Algerian universities would improve generalizability. In this regard, Dewi (2015) asserts that “the bigger the sample size, the more chance there is to obtain more significant results as increased numbers will more reliably reflect the population mean” (p. 138). It is also possible for future studies to recruit undergraduate students, or even doctoral-level students.

Further, the sample lacked gender diversity because the vast majority of participants were female. All participants also shared similar cultural and academic backgrounds and had been exposed to the same learning environment to a large extent. This homogeneity may have further limited the diversity and representativeness of the sample, which is important when attempting to draw broader inferences from the data. As much as one can attempt to gather a more diverse participant pool, the sample would likely remain mostly female because the gender imbalance is the situation in English departments in Algeria.

Another methodological caveat is the fact that, although evidence has been gathered qualitatively and quantitatively from different research tools, it is still questionable to claim that the research instruments effectively measured what they were intended to measure. For example, using the learner autonomy scale and questionnaire to assess students’ levels of autonomy might not, by any means, reflect how students actually exercise autonomy in their learning. Besides, the qualitative data of the present study were collected through student reporting, especially questionnaires and focus groups, which is considered another limitation. In order to lend more credibility to the findings (the development of learner autonomy through self- and peer assessment), teachers’ perceptions and practices should be included in future studies.

Finally, another constraint of the study lies in the limited timeframe. The intervention was implemented over the course of a single academic year (two semesters). As noted earlier, the integration of students into the assessment component of their learning process requires careful planning, adequate training, and an extended time period. However, in this study, students were provided with only one lecture to collaboratively brainstorm and formulate the assessment criteria, for example. The latter limited exposure may have hindered some students' understanding and application of the criteria. It would be more beneficial to devote an entire semester to assessment instead, so as to equip students with the necessary training to apply it effectively, to model the assessment process through practical examples from previous cohorts, and to build the assessment rubric in particular and increase students' assessment and feedback literacy skills in general.

There are a variety of possibilities to advance this line of research. In effect, more research is needed because understanding learner autonomy and self- and peer assessment practices has a two-fold aim: it helps teachers identify more effective ways to assess learners, and it helps learners assume more responsibility for their own learning. As discussed in previous sections, peer assessment holds promise for cultivating the social dimension of learner autonomy. However, further research is needed to extend our understanding of learner autonomy in collaborative environments and how group dynamics contribute to or impede its development. The findings also indicated that self-assessment and peer assessment do not impact learner autonomy the same way. Consequently, future research could explore the distinct impact of each type of assessment individually. A comparative study involving three groups, one using self-assessment, another using peer assessment, and a third relying on teacher assessment, may yield novel perspectives into the strengths and limitations of each approach.

Another promising avenue for future research would be the implementation of a longitudinal study that extends over two or three academic years. As highlighted earlier, one of the major limitations of the current study was the restricted timeframe. The implementation of self- and peer assessment practices succeeds not only through planning but also through ample time for training and practice. A future study might dedicate one full semester solely to the development of an assessment rubric, the training

of students in its application, and the use of examples drawn from other courses or disciplines.

Furthermore, more research needs to explore the effects of rubric co-construction process and its implications. The results of the present research highlighted the role of student involvement in designing rubrics in triggering learner autonomy, motivation, and assessment literacy. Therefore, it would be valuable to examine the process itself in more detail, and over a longer intervention, in order to obtain a more accurate understanding of how negotiation of assessment criteria takes place and how power dynamics between teachers and students impact the effectiveness of this practice. Finally, further research is needed in different educational contexts and disciplines to see whether the positive effects observed in writing research proposal projects are also true with respect to other academic writing genres and assessment settings.

Given the recent focus on distance education in higher education in Algeria, it is recommended that future research be carried out to investigate self- and peer-assessment practices and/or tools in online learning environments in order to evaluate the feasibility of the systematic integration of such assessment approaches and the possible effectiveness of their use. The incorporation of self- and peer-assessment practices into online synchronous or asynchronous learning may offer valuable opportunities to promote digital learner autonomy among learners and their academic/research writing skills.

Future investigations may extend their focus to include younger learners, such as those in primary, middle, and secondary education, in order to obtain better understanding of their learner autonomy and how they react to self- and peer-assessment. More evidence in this area could inform programs that aim to promote learner autonomy through formative assessment activities and strategies at an early stage.

To cast more light on the reliability and pedagogical value of self- and peer assessment, it is imperative for researchers to broaden the scope and explore language skills beyond writing in their studies. In present-day educational assessment scholarship, less attention has been paid toward the role of self- and peer assessment in speaking, reading, and listening skills than in writing-focused research.

Finally, future researchers can also consider gender-based differences in learner autonomy through peer and self-assessment. It remains an unanswered question whether female and male learners respond to these forms of assessment in the same way. This issue warrants further investigation in future research.

Conclusion

With the main aim of examining the impact of integrating self- and peer assessment practices as a means to promote learner autonomy in research proposal writing among first-year Master's students at the University of Medea, this study sought to address three main questions: first, to what extent are students ready to assume responsibility for drafting a research proposal?; second, in what ways does the implementation of self- and peer assessment impact learner autonomy among students in research proposal writing?; and third, how do students perceive the process of assessing their research proposals through self- and peer assessment? As the data presented in Chapter Four revealed, students who participated in the self- and peer assessment process showed noticeable but inconsistent improvements in their autonomous research proposal writing, particularly in social, metacognitive, and cognitive dimensions of autonomy. The most positive progress was observed in the social dimension, where peer assessment significantly improved collaboration, feedback exchange, and shared responsibility for learning.

The findings also demonstrated that self- and peer assessment can partially reduce the teacher's workload and allow students to take more responsibility for their learning; however, some aspects of teacher dependence remained resistant to change. In terms of student perceptions, self- and peer assessment were also considered significantly positive. The process of rubric co-construction, in particular, increased students' understanding of assessment criteria. Moreover, the results showed that the integration of both self-assessment and peer assessment processes into research proposal writing instruction, when carefully scaffolded and implemented, can be a rewarding pedagogical tool that promotes lifelong learning in higher education. In his words, Little (1991) goes so far as to argue that learner autonomy is about "the desire to remove the barriers between learning and living" (p.7).

GENERAL CONCLUSION

General Conclusion

The continuous and main inquiry, throughout the course of this doctoral research, has revolved around one burning question: to what extent can the implementation of formative self- and peer assessment cultivate learner autonomy among Algerian Master's students in the context of research proposal writing? Drawing on Assessment for Learning (AfL) principles, the present study was motivated by the belief that it is high time to depart from the dominant summative assessment paradigm that has, for many years, impeded the development of autonomous learning in Algerian higher education. In a real pursuit of learner autonomy, a radical shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered pedagogy, and from traditional testing of knowledge to formative assessment practices, is not only desirable but urgently necessary. The responsibility to foster a learning environment conducive to autonomous learning is put on the teacher's shoulders. The present research was, in this sense, an attempt to translate that firm belief into a feasible classroom reality.

The present research work has explored the effectiveness of student self- and peer assessment in promoting learner autonomy among first-year Master's Algerian students enrolled in the English Language Section, University of Medea (ELSUM). The major aim of the current study was to cultivate learner autonomy through self- and peer assessment procedures, namely criteria-referenced rubrics in research proposal writing. Accordingly, the study attempted to demonstrate to what extent the following three hypotheses can empirically be validated: (a) Master's students' awareness and level of learner autonomy are limited to a large extent; (b) the implementation of self- and peer assessment may further the development of learner autonomy in the research-based writing context; and (c) students' perceptions of the use of self- and peer assessment would be significantly positive.

To provide satisfactory answers to the above question and arguments for these hypotheses, this dissertation was composed of two main parts. Part One included two chapters that were based on a review of the literature, whereas Part Two focused on the empirical aspect of the study, and it comprised three chapters. The first chapter,

prior to data collection, provided a survey of the theoretical insights surrounding learner autonomy and research-based writing. The second chapter was devoted to an exploration of the role of self- and peer assessment in developing learner autonomy in writing research proposals. It also revisited traditional assessment practices in higher education, introduced alternative approaches including the use of criteria-referenced rubrics, and shed light on recent debates regarding the use of artificial intelligence to enhance self- and peer assessment practices. In overall terms, the literature abounds with research that substantiates the affordances of self- and peer assessment for autonomous learning on the condition that they must be managed appropriately.

The study was carried out through an action research design that involved thirty first-year Master's students majoring in Applied Linguistics at the University of Medea. Students were actively engaged in the whole assessment process, from co-constructing the criteria by which their work would be judged to applying those criteria in assessing both their own research proposals and those of their classmates (student self- and peer assessment). Evidence was gathered from four main instruments: a learner autonomy scale to measure students' autonomy before and after the intervention, pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, focus group discussions, and document analysis of fourteen criteria-referenced rubrics written by students (seven rubrics for self-assessment, and the remaining seven for peer assessment). To collect data, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. Finally, the discussion of findings was structured around three research questions and three corresponding hypotheses.

The pre-intervention data revealed that Master's ELSUM students showed a moderate level of use of autonomy-related strategies among the participants. In addition to this, there was a lack of understanding of learner autonomy among the majority of the respondents. In fact, they commonly defined autonomy in terms of independence in learning and responsibility; other aspects of the term (e.g., the social, affective, and metacognitive) were almost absent from most students' definitions. What was clearly noticeable was a seemingly wide gap between students' positive attitudes toward the concept and their lack of readiness to promote it. This belief-

practice gap had led the researcher to raise worries about their readiness to assume responsibility for drafting a research proposal. These preliminary findings partially confirmed the first hypothesis, which stated that learner autonomy among Master's ELSUM students seemed to be very limited in both awareness and practice, and they also go hand in hand with those of earlier studies in similar Algerian EFL contexts. Based on these preliminary findings, there is a need to find ways to prepare students to write research projects more autonomously.

In line with the second hypothesis, the post-intervention data from the learner autonomy scale provided evidence to support the assumption that criteria-referenced self- and peer assessment can help in scaffolding learner autonomy in writing research proposals. The overall mean score of the learner autonomy scale decreased from 1.88 in the pre-intervention phase to 1.55 in the post-intervention phase. These forms of assessment could moderately further the development of different degrees of learner autonomy, such as social, cognitive, metacognitive, and affective writing strategies. The most noticeable development was observed in the social dimension of learner autonomy. However, the one dimension that remained most resistant to change was teacher dependence. These results partially confirm the second hypothesis and underline the need for a broader cultural and institutional shift if learner autonomy is to become a sustained classroom reality.

Regarding the third hypothesis, it was firmly confirmed since the triangulated findings from the questionnaire, focus groups, and document analysis revealed that the overwhelming majority of students held significantly positive perceptions of both self- and peer assessment. Specifically, students perceived the benefits of self-assessment were raising metacognitive awareness and critical self-reflection, while peer assessment was seen as more influential in triggering social learning behaviors and fostering a collegial classroom culture. Likewise, the participants expressed a willingness to transfer these skills to other learning experiences, which is, in itself, one of the most important indicators of autonomous development. The document analysis of students' rubrics further corroborated these perceptions; students displayed not only a willingness to assess their own and their peers' work but a capacity to do so in a constructive and considerate manner.

Although the study yielded positive outcomes, integrating criteria-referenced self- and peer assessment into research writing instruction necessitates a lot of preparation and training to be effective, but if co-constructed and managed properly, they can save staff time and improve students' understanding of assessment criteria. The main constraints the learners encountered were related to students' lack of exposure and experience with both practices, challenges of bias and reliability in self-assessment, psychological issues in giving and receiving peer feedback, and the limited duration of the intervention. These constraints do not diminish the value of the findings, but they do underscore the importance of adequate preparation, explicit training, and sustained institutional support.

Some pedagogical applications can be drawn based on the findings of the study. They are as follows:

1. In Algerian higher education, the pursuit of learner autonomy should translate into learning and assessment practices that reflect its intended outcomes. One way to shift toward a learner-autonomy paradigm is to revise current assessment practices and make sure that formative assessment, as opposed to summative assessment, receives the lion's share of classroom assessment.
2. If the overarching goal of Algerian university education is to cultivate learner autonomy, it is imperative that the Ministry of Higher Education invest sufficient time and effort to prepare institutions, teachers, and students for developing a formative-based assessment culture that is very likely to lead to the target objective.
3. Teachers should be aware of the importance of self- and peer assessment practices in research-based writing contexts, especially the use of criteria-referenced rubrics. They should implement these forms of assessment not only to improve students' performance, but also to empower learners to develop their capacity for autonomy and lifelong learning.
4. It is recommended that teachers and students alike adopt co-constructed approaches in the design of assessment tasks. Teachers must work out favorable conditions under which students feel their voices are heard and valued, and can also contribute what they can to negotiate assessment criteria

and develop them. There is a need to shift from assessment being teacher-led to assessment becoming the responsibility of all parties involved.

5. Actually, educators are summoned to implement autonomy-friendly assessment approaches without adequate guidance, training, or institutional support. As a logical consequence, teachers are unprepared to support autonomous learning and to adapt to formative assessment strategies. This calls for the need for both pre-service and in-service training for teachers to equip them with new learning-oriented assessment methods that meet the demands of a pedagogy for autonomy.

In overall terms, it is hoped that the present study serves as a springboard for future studies, practice, and policy that places learner autonomy at the center of EFL/EMI education in Algeria and beyond. However, several questions still need answers and that future research ought to explore. For example, the study did not focus on the distinct effects of self-assessment and peer assessment on learner autonomy; future research could examine each practice separately to determine which dimensions of autonomy each one is more likely to cultivate. In addition to this, more research is needed to investigate the relationship between formative self- and peer assessment and summative assessment results. Other questions can also be of interest for researchers and practitioners alike: How can teachers' assessment literacy be developed so as to make the shift from summative to formative assessment practices more feasible and sustainable in the Algerian EFL/EMI context? What role does teacher feedback play in supporting and correcting students' self- and peer assessment judgments? And finally, to what extent can AI-assisted feedback tools improve and not harm students' self- and peer assessment skills and/or learner autonomy?

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APPENDICES

Appendices

Appendix A: Criteria-Reference Self-assessment Rubric for Research Proposals

Appendix B: Criteria-Reference Peer Assessment Rubric for Research Proposals

Appendix C: Learner Autonomy Scale

Appendix D: Students' Questionnaire (Part 01)

Appendix E: Students' Questionnaire (Part 02)

Appendix F: Focus Group Questions

Appendix G: Participant Consent Form

Appendix H: Research Methodology Syllabus for Master's Level (Semester 1 &2)

Appendix I: Samples of Criteria-Referenced Rubrics Used by Students for Self-assessment

Appendix J: Samples of Criteria-Referenced Rubrics Used by Students for Peer Assessment

Appendix A:

Criteria-Referenced Self- assessment Rubric for Research Proposals



Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
University of Tlemcen
Faculty of Foreign Languages
Department of English



Criteria-Referenced Self-Assessment Rubric for Research Proposals

Guiding Procedure for Self-Assessment:

- Please carefully read each criterion in the rubric to understand what is expected in your research proposal.
- Compare your research proposal against each criterion. Be honest, objective, and critical in your evaluation.
- For each criterion, rate your work on a scale from 1 to 4 based on how well you think you have met the expectations. (1=Needs Improvement, 4=Excellent). When answering, please put a tick in the corresponding box for your rating.
- Use the comments section to write reflections on areas where you have performed well and areas that need improvement. Be specific and provide examples from your proposal to justify your comments.
- Based on your reflections, set specific and achievable goals for improving your research proposal.

Proposal Title	
Name of Assessor	1.

Feedback Criteria	Rating				Comments
1. Cover Page:	1	2	3	4	
1.1 The necessary information is provided in the required format.					
2. Title of the Proposal:	1	2	3	4	
2.1 The title is presented in a clear and concise manner.					
2.2. The key variables being investigated are evident in the title.					
2.3. The title suggests the sample (who), the context (where), and a potential methodology (how).					
3. Table of Contents:	1	2	3	4	
The table of contents outlines all the different parts of the proposal.					
4. Introduction:	1	2	3	4	
4.1 The background of the study is well described.					
4.2 The research problem is clearly defined.					
4.3 The study's significance is strongly justified.					
4.4 The research objectives are clearly stated.					
4.5 The research questions are clearly formulated.					
4.6 The hypotheses are well articulated.					
5. Literature Review:	1	2	3	4	
5.1 The knowledge gap is defined.					
5.2 The conceptual framework is explained.					
5.3 The theoretical framework is identified.					
5.4 The review synthesizes various arguments, theories, and methodologies					
5.5 The review is presented like a coherent/logical essay .					

6. Proposed Methodology:	1	2	3	4	
6.1 The research design is clearly outlined.					
6.2 The instruments for data collection are described in detail.					
6.3 The research sample is specified.					
6.4 The approach to data analysis is described.					
6.5 Expected findings are mentioned.					
6.6 Potential limitations are acknowledged.					
7. References:	1	2	3	4	
A minimum of 7 sources are included.					
Relevant, high-quality sources are listed. The references consistently follow APA style (6th or 7th edition).					
8. Language:	1	2	3	4	
The proposal demonstrates correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, cohesion, and coherence , and maintains an academic tone .					
9. Further Questions:					
9.1 What is your overall feedback and recommendation regarding the research proposal? 9.2 What steps will you take to improve the quality of your research proposal?					

Use this rubric to revise your research proposal, keeping in mind that ‘writing is rewriting’ Betwafique!

Appendix B:

Criteria-Referenced Peer Assessment Rubric for Research Proposals



Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
University of Tlemcen
Faculty of Foreign Languages
Department of English



Criteria-Referenced Peer Assessment Rubric for Research Proposals

Guiding Procedure for Peer Assessment:

- Please carefully read each criterion in the rubric to understand what is expected in your peer's research proposal.
- Compare your peer's research proposal against each criterion. Be honest, objective, and critical in your evaluation.
- For each criterion, rate your work on a scale from 1 to 4 based on how well you think the work has met the expectations. (1=Needs Improvement, 4=Excellent). When answering, please put a tick in the corresponding box of your rating.
- Use the comments section to write reflections on areas where the proposal performed well and areas that need improvement. Be specific and provide examples from the proposal to justify your comments.
- Make sure your feedback is respectful and focuses on the work, not the person.
- Please do not discuss or share your comments with your peers while you're assessing their work.

Research Title	
Name of Assessor	1.

Feedback Criteria	Rating				Comments
1. Cover Page:	1	2	3	4	
1.1 The necessary information is provided in the required format.					
2. Title of the Proposal:	1	2	3	4	
2.1 The title is presented in a clear and concise manner.					
2.2. The key variables being investigated are evident in the title.					
2.3. The title suggests the sample (who), the context (where), and a potential methodology (how).					
3. Table of contents:	1	2	3	4	
The table of contents outlines all the different parts of the proposal.					
4. Introduction:	1	2	3	4	
4.1 The background of the study is well described.					
4.2 The research problem is clearly defined.					
4.3 The study's significance is strongly justified.					
4.4 The research objectives are clearly stated.					
4.5 The research questions are clearly formulated.					
4.6 The hypotheses are well articulated.					
5. Literature Review:	1	2	3	4	
5.1 The knowledge gap is defined.					
5.2 The conceptual framework is explained.					
5.3 The theoretical framework is identified.					
5.4 The review synthesizes various arguments, theories, and methodologies					
5.5 The review is presented like a coherent/logical essay .					

6. Proposed Methodology:	1	2	3	4	
6.1 The research design is clearly outlined.					
6.2 The instruments for data collection are described in detail.					
6.3 The research sample is specified.					
6.4 The approach to data analysis is described.					
6.5 Expected findings are mentioned.					
6.6 Potential limitations are acknowledged.					
7. References:	1	2	3	4	
A minimum of 7 sources are included.					
Relevant, high-quality sources are listed. The references consistently follow APA style (6th or 7th edition).					
8. Language:	1	2	3	4	
The proposal demonstrates correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, cohesion, and coherence , and maintains an academic tone .					
9. Further Questions:					
9.1 What is your overall feedback and recommendation regarding the research proposal? 9.2 What steps should your peer take to improve the quality of their research proposal?					

Once done, use this rubric to discuss your peers' research proposal, keeping in mind that 'writing is a social act' Betwafique!

Appendix C:

Learner Autonomy Scale

Appendix C: Learner Autonomy Scale

Dear student,

For each statement below, please select the option that best describes how often you generally do or think this way during the writing process of your academic research projects. Your answers will be used for research purposes only.

Cognitive Strategies	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. I take notes before I start drafting.				
2. I structure my writing in a clear and logical way so my ideas make sense.				
3. I summarize ideas from books, articles, and other sources before including them in my writing.				
4. I use different resources, such as books, articles, and online materials, to find information and support my writing.				

Metacognitive Strategies	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
5. I set specific goals for each stage of the writing process.				
6. I monitor my progress and change my strategies while writing if needed.				
7. I evaluate my own work to find areas where I can improve.				
8. I plan my writing steps before starting a task				

Teacher's Role	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
9. I rely on my teacher for guidance and support throughout the process of writing.				
10. I depend on my teacher's feedback to improve my writing.				
11. I often seek my teacher's help to understand the requirements of my written assignment.				
12. I feel that my progress in writing is heavily influenced by my teacher's feedback.				

Social Conditions	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
13. I collaborate with my peers to enhance my writing.				
14. I seek feedback from my peers to improve my writing.				
15. I discuss my writing with my peers to gain different perspectives.				
16. I feel comfortable sharing my writing with peers for feedback.				

Affective Constructs	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
17. I feel motivated to write and improve my writing.				
18. I manage my emotions effectively when faced with challenges during the writing process.				
19. I maintain a positive attitude toward the process of writing.				
20. I feel confident in my ability to write for academic and research purposes.				

Thank you for your cooperation!

Appendix D:

Students' Questionnaire

(Part 01)

Appendix D: Students' Questionnaire (Part 01)

Thank you for accepting to contribute to this research. This questionnaire explores learner autonomy and self- and peer assessment in writing research proposals. Please answer all questions carefully and honestly. Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential. There are no right or wrong answers, so please provide your perspectives freely. Please put a check mark (✓) next to the appropriate response, or write your response in the space provided.

Section One: Background Information

1. Gender: Male..... Female.....
2. Age: Under 20..... 20-25..... 26-30..... Over 30.....
3. How long have you been studying English formally? years.
4. How long have you been studying academic writing at the university? years.
5. How long have you been studying research skills at the university? years.

Section Two: Learner Autonomy

6. What does learner autonomy mean to you? (Please answer in your own words)

.....

.....

.....

.....

7. How important do you think learner autonomy is for university students? (Please circle one adjective)

Not important- Somewhat important- Important- Very important

8. In the process of writing a research proposal, what specific actions, behaviors, feelings, or characteristics show that a student is highly autonomous? (Please write as many as you can.)

8.1.....

8.2.....

8.3.....

8.4.....

8.5.....

8.6.....

8.7.....

9. In your opinion, to what extent do you consider yourself autonomous in writing a research proposal? (Please circle one adjective)

Not autonomous - A little autonomous - Autonomous - Very autonomous

Section Three: Students' Experience with Research Proposal Writing

10. Did the following modules help prepare you for writing a research proposal during your master's program? (Please select all that apply)

- Ethics and Deontology.....
- Research Methodology.....
- Text Linguistics.....
- Cognitive Psychology.....
- Sociolinguistics.....
- Applied Linguistics.....
- Academic Writing.....
- Linguistics Theories.....
- Philosophy of Education.....
- Discourse Analysis.....
- Psycholinguistics.....
- Writing Styles.....
- Translation.....

11. How did you find the process of writing your research proposal? (Please circle one adjective)

Very difficult – Difficult - Somewhat difficult – Easy - Very easy

12. How did you find the process of selecting a topic/title for your research proposal? (Please circle one adjective)

Very difficult – Difficult - Somewhat difficult – Easy - Very Easy

13. In the drafting of your research proposal, what were the most difficult sections to write? (You may tick more than one answer)

- General introduction (title, background, problem, significance, questions, etc.)
- Literature review
- Proposed methodology
- List of references

14. Who do you think should assess the research proposal? (You may tick more than one answer)

- The Teacher.....
- The Student (self-assessment).....
- A Peer (Classmate/ peer assessment).....

15. How ready and confident do you consider yourself in assessing the quality of your own research proposal draft? (Please circle one adjective)

Not confident - A little confident - Confident - Very confident

16. How ready and confident do you consider yourself in assessing the quality of your classmate/peer's research proposal draft? (Please circle one adjective)

Not confident - A little confident - Confident - Very confident

End of part 01

Appendix E:

Students' Questionnaire

(Part 02)

Appendix E: Students' Questionnaire (Part 02)

Section Four: Self- and Peer Assessment

17. Before participating in this research, how often did you use self- and peer assessment activities in the classroom? (Please tick (✓) the appropriate response)

Never..... Rarely..... Sometimes..... Often..... Always.....

18. In your opinion, should self- and peer assessment activities be used more or less in the classroom?

Much more..... More..... The current amount is enough..... Less..... Much less.....

19. How useful was participating in the development of the criterion-referenced rubric used for self- and peer assessment in helping you assess your research proposal?

Very useful..... Useful..... A little useful..... Not useful.....

20. To what extent did you understand the criteria used to assess the research proposal?

Not understood..... – A little..... – Average..... – Well..... – Very well.....

21. How useful do you consider self- and peer assessment as a tool for improving your research proposal writing?

Very useful..... Useful..... A little useful..... Not useful.....

22. What challenges did you face when using self- and peer assessment (via the criterion-referenced rubric) while drafting your research proposal? (You may tick more than one option)

- I did not feel confident assessing my own or others' research proposals.....
- I was worried that the assessment might be unfair and unreliable.....
- I found it difficult to stay objective when assessing my classmate's proposal.....
- I felt anxious or uncomfortable giving or receiving critical or constructive feedback.....
- I was worried that giving feedback could negatively impact my relationship with classmates.....
- I was not sure how to use the rubric or understand the assessment criteria.....
- The feedback I received from peers was unclear, harsh, or not useful.....
- When giving feedback, I felt like I had to focus more on language and grammar than on ideas or structure.....
- I felt that giving peer feedback took too much time or effort.....
- Other (please specify)

Section Five: Self- and Peer Assessment and Learner Autonomy

23. Please indicate the level to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please put a check mark (✓) in the corresponding box that matches your answer.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5

Self-assessment	1	2	3	4	5
I believe that I can assess my own research proposal writing					
Assessing my own research proposal writing helped me improve it					
Self-assessment made me more aware of my strong and weak points during research proposal writing					
Self-assessment helped me take more responsibility to improve my own research proposal writing					
Self-assessment encouraged me to set specific goals to guide my progress while writing my research proposal					
Self-assessment made me feel more capable to independently find resources and strategies that improve my research proposal writing					
Using self-assessment helped me improve my critical thinking skills					
Self-assessment helped me become more aware of the various techniques I could use to understand and organize information					
Self-assessment made me feel more confident in identifying the weaknesses in my proposal writing without teacher guidance					
Self-assessment made me feel more motivated to improve the quality of my research proposal writing					

Peer Assessment	1	2	3	4	5
I believe that I can assess my classmate's research proposal writing					
Receiving feedback from my classmates helped me improve the quality of my research proposal writing					
Assessing my classmates' research proposal helped me improve the quality of my own research proposal writing					
Peer assessment made me more aware of the strong and weak points in my research proposal writing					
Peer assessment helped me take more responsibility to improve my own research proposal writing					
Peer assessment encouraged me to set specific goals to guide my progress while writing my research proposal					
Peer assessment made me feel more capable of collaborating with others to find resources and strategies to improve my research proposal writing					
Using peer assessment helped me improve my critical thinking skills					
The collaboration aspect of peer assessment made me feel more confident in identifying the weaknesses in my proposal writing					
Peer assessment made me feel more comfortable discussing and sharing feedback with my classmates					
Peer assessment made me feel more motivated to improve the quality of my research proposal writing					

24. Do you think that self-assessment helped you become a more autonomous learner in writing your research proposal? Yes..... No..... Don't know.....

25. Do you think that peer assessment helped you become a more autonomous learner in writing your research proposal? Yes..... No..... Don't know.....

Thank you for sharing your ideas with me!

Mr. Boukhelkhal Oussama

End of part 02

Appendix F:

Focus Group Questions

Appendix F: Focus Group Questions

Ideas to be explored through the discussion:

1. Why did you choose to pursue a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics?
2. What do you hope to achieve through your Master's studies?
3. Have you faced any challenges when writing your research proposal? Please elaborate.
4. Have you encountered challenges related to a lack of autonomy in the process of writing your research proposal? Please elaborate.
5. Did you use any strategies to overcome the problem of low learner autonomy in the process of writing your research proposal? Please explain more.
6. Before practicing self- and peer assessment, you collaborated with the teacher in developing the rubric and its criteria to assess your research proposal. How would you describe that experience?
7. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of practicing self-assessment?
8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of practicing peer assessment?
9. What was the impact of self- and peer assessment on your learner autonomy in research proposal writing?
10. Moving forward, will you apply the skills you acquired from self- and peer assessment in future learning situations?

Appendix G: Participant Consent Form

Appendix G: Participant Consent Form

Dear Student, you are kindly invited to take part in a study by Mr. Oussama Boukhelkhal, which explores the impact of using self- and peer assessment on learner autonomy in writing research proposals among first-year Master's students at Medea University. Your participation involves filling out questionnaires, taking part in focus groups, and giving and receiving feedback through self- and peer assessment. Your participation will also allow you to gain valuable skills in the process of doing self- and peer assessment.

By signing below, I acknowledge and agree to the following statements:

1. I agree to participate in this study.
2. I have been fully informed about the purpose of the study.
3. I give the researcher permission to use my data for research purposes only.
4. My name will remain confidential.
5. I am aware that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time.
6. I can contact the researcher whenever I need to.

The researcher certifies that he will strictly adhere to the following details:

1. Be respectful of the participants.
2. Make sure that no information about the participant will be published without their permission.
3. Keep all participant information confidential.

Thank you for your cooperation.

This informed consent form has been approved by the Head of the Foreign Languages Department.

I agree to the statements above.

Date: 22 SEP. 2024

The Head of the Foreign Languages Department:

Participant:

Researcher: Mr. Oussama Boukhelkhal

Chef de Département des
Langues Étrangères par intérim

M. ZINAI Samir



Appendix H:
Research Methodology
Syllabus for Master's Level
(Semester 1 & 2)

Appendix H: Research Methodology Syllabus for Master's Level (Semester 1)

Intitulé du Master : Linguistics
Semestre : 1,
Intitulé de l'UE : Méthodologique
Intitulé de la Matière : Research Methodology
Crédits : 5
Coefficients : 2

Objectifs de l'enseignement

- To develop understanding of the basic framework of the research process.
- To develop an understanding of various research designs and techniques.
- To identify various sources of information for literature review and data collection.
- To help students propose a research study and justify the theory as well as the methodological decisions, including sampling and measurement.

Connaissances préalables recommandées :

Proficiency in English language, basic research and study techniques.

Contenu de la Matière : the course will cover the following topics:

1. Introduction to research methodology course
2. Philosophies and research theory: Scientific approach to research, empiricism, deductive and inductive methods.
3. Research approaches; Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.
3. Problem identification and hypotheses: Defining the research problem, Formulation of the research hypotheses, research question(s).
4. Research design: Experimental research design, exploratory research design, interpretive research, descriptive research design, field research, and survey research.
5. Finding quality literature: reading and writing the literature review.
6. Methods of data collection: Data collection methods, qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection.
7. Measurement and sampling: Types of measurement, questionnaire designing, reliability and validity, sampling (the nature of sampling, sample size).
8. Processing and analysis of data.
9. Research proposal generation, referencing styles, and oral presentation (thesis defense).

Mode d'évaluation : Contrôle continu.

Références:

- Kothari C. R. (2004). *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*. New Age International Ltd.
- Creswell, J. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage Publications, Inc.
3. Tavakoli, H. (2012). *A Dictionary of Research Methodology and Statistics in Applied Linguistics*. Rahnama Press.

Appendix H: Research Methodology Syllabus for Master's Level (Semester 2)

Intitulé du Master : Linguistics

Semestre: 2,

Intitulé de l'UE : Méthodologique

Intitulé de la Matière : Research Methodology

Crédits: 5

Coefficients: 2

Objectifs de l'enseignement

- To develop understanding of the basic framework of the research process.
- To develop an understanding of various research designs and techniques.
- To identify various sources of information for literature review and data collection.
- To help students propose a research study and justify the theory as well as the methodological decisions, including sampling and measurement.

Connaissances préalables recommandées : Proficiency in English language, basic research and study techniques.

Contenu de la Matière : the course will cover the following topics:

1. Introduction to research methodology course
2. Philosophies and research theory: Scientific approach to research, empiricism, deductive and inductive methods.
3. Research approaches: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.
3. Problem identification and hypotheses: Defining the research problem, Formulation of the research hypotheses, research question(s).
4. Research design: Experimental research design, exploratory research design, interpretive research, descriptive research design, field research, and survey research.
5. Finding quality literature: reading and writing the literature review.
6. Methods of data collection: Data collection methods, qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection.
7. Measurement and sampling: Types of measurement, questionnaire designing, reliability and validity, sampling (the nature of sampling, sample size).
8. Processing and analysis of data.
9. Research proposal generation, referencing styles, and oral presentation (thesis defense).

Mode d'évaluation : Contrôle continu.

Références:

- Kothari C. R. (2004). *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*. New Age International Ltd.
- Creswell, J. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage Publications, Inc.
3. Tavakoli, H. (2012). *A Dictionary of Research Methodology and Statistics in Applied Linguistics*. Rahnama Press.

Appendix I:

Samples of Criteria- Referenced Rubrics Used by Students for Self-assessment



Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research
University of Yahia Fares, Medea
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of Foreign Languages (English Section)



A Suggested Research Proposal Self-Assessment Rubric

Guiding Procedure for Self-Assessment:

- Please carefully read each criterion in the rubric to understand what is expected in your research proposal.
- Compare your research proposal against each criterion. Be honest, objective, and critical in your evaluation.
- For each criterion, rate your work on a scale from 1 to 4 based on how well you think you have met the expectations. (1 = Needs Improvement, 4 = Excellent). When answering, please put a tick in the corresponding box for your rating.
- Use the comments section to write reflections on areas where you have performed well and areas that need improvement. Be specific and provide examples from your proposal to justify your comments.
- Based on your reflections, set specific and achievable goals for improving your research proposal.

Proposal Title	Investigating the Impact of Teachers' Evaluative Feedback on EFL Students' Self-Efficacy	
Name of Assessor	1	

Feedback Criteria	Rating				Comments
1. Cover Page:	1	2	3	4	
1.1 The necessary information is provided in the required format.				✓	
2. Title of the Proposal:	1	2	3	4	
2.1 The title is presented in a clear and concise manner.				✓	
2.2. The key variables being investigated are evident in the title.				✓	
2.3. The title suggests the sample (who), the context (where), and a potential methodology (how).				✓	
3. Table of Contents:	1	2	3	4	
The table of contents outlines all the different parts of the proposal.				✓	
4. Introduction:	1	2	3	4	
4.1 The background of the study is well described.				✓	
4.2 The research problem is clearly defined.				✓	
4.3 The study's significance is strongly justified.				✓	
4.4 The research objectives are clearly stated.			✓		
4.5 The research questions are clearly formulated.			✓		
4.6 The hypotheses are well articulated.			✓		one extra question will be added + hypothesis
5. Literature Review:	1	2	3	4	
5.1 The knowledge gap is defined.					It needs further explanation There is no link between the definitions It lacks topic sentence. The lit review should be modified and rewritten again.
5.2 The conceptual framework is explained.	✓				
5.3 The theoretical framework is identified.		✓			
5.4 The review synthesizes various arguments, theories, and methodologies		✓			
5.5 The review is presented like a coherent/logical essay .	✓				

6. Proposed Methodology:	1	2	3	4	
6.1 The research design is clearly outlined.				✓	
6.2 The instruments for data collection are described in detail.				✓	
6.3 The research sample is specified.				✓	
6.4 The approach to data analysis is described.			✓		
6.5 Expected findings are mentioned.		✓			
6.6 Potential limitations are acknowledged.			✓		
7. References:	1	2	3	4	
A minimum of 7 sources are included.	✓				
Relevant, high-quality sources are listed.		✓			
The references consistently follow APA style (6th or 7th edition).					
8. Language:	1	2	3	4	
The proposal demonstrates correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, cohesion, and coherence, and maintains an academic tone.			✓		
9. Further Questions:	concerning the introduction and the research methodology are well-written, they need only few modifications. However, the lit review lacks many information^{and} citations. It needs to be rewritten again.				
9.1 What is your overall feedback and recommendation regarding the research proposal? 9.2 What steps will you take to improve the quality of your research proposal? - Time management. - Reading more articles					

Use this rubric to revise your research proposal, keeping in mind that "writing is rewriting." Betwafique!



Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research
University of Yahia Fares, Medea
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of Foreign Languages (English Section)



A Suggested Research Proposal Self-Assessment Rubric

Guiding Procedure for Self-Assessment:

- Please carefully read each criterion in the rubric to understand what is expected in your research proposal.
- Compare your research proposal against each criterion. Be honest, objective, and critical in your evaluation.
- For each criterion, rate your work on a scale from 1 to 4 based on how well you think you have met the expectations. (1 = Needs Improvement, 4 = Excellent). When answering, please put a tick in the corresponding box for your rating.
- Use the comments section to write reflections on areas where you have performed well and areas that need improvement. Be specific and provide examples from your proposal to justify your comments.
- Based on your reflections, set specific and achievable goals for improving your research proposal.

Name: [REDACTED]

Title: Exploring the Impact of AI-based Tools on EFL Students' Critical Thinking Skills: Case study of Master's Students at Medea University

Feedback Criteria	Rating				Comments
1. Cover Page:	1	2	3	4	No school year, no page numbers.
1.1 The necessary information is provided in the required format.		X			
2. Title of the Proposal:	1	2	3	4	All clear -
2.1 The title is presented in a clear and concise manner.			X		
2.2 The key variables being investigated are evident in the title.				X	
2.3 The title suggests the sample (who), the context (where), and a potential methodology (how).				X	
3. Table of Contents:	1	2	3	4	The formatting might need help but all clear otherwise.
The table of contents outlines all the different parts of the proposal.				X	
4. Introduction:	1	2	3	4	All clear aside from objectives and questions ordering.
4.1 The background of the study is well described.			X		
4.2 The research problem is clearly defined.			X		
4.3 The study's significance is strongly justified.			X		
4.4 The research objectives are clearly stated.		X			
4.5 The research questions are clearly formulated.			X		
4.6 The hypotheses are well articulated.			X		
5. Literature Review:	1	2	3	4	Knowledge gap is NOT clearly defined, and greater synthesis of arguments may be necessary.
5.1 The knowledge gap is defined.	X				
5.2 The conceptual framework is explained.			X		
5.3 The theoretical framework is identified.			X		
5.4 The review synthesizes various arguments, theories, and methodologies		X			
5.5 The review is presented like a coherent/logical essay.			X		

6. Proposed Methodology:	1	2	3	4	
6.1 The research design is clearly outlined.			X		All clear, aside from expected findings, which we didn't mention.
6.2 The instruments for data collection are described in detail.			X		
6.3 The research sample is specified.			X		
6.4 The approach to data analysis is described.			X		
6.5 Expected findings are mentioned.	X				
6.6 Potential limitations are acknowledged.			X		
7. References:	1	2	3	4	
A minimum of 7 sources are included.		X			Need 1 more reference to meet the minimum.
Relevant, high-quality sources are listed. The references consistently follow APA style (6th or 7th edition).			X		
8. Language:	1	2	3	4	
The proposal demonstrates correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, cohesion, and coherence, and maintains an academic tone.			X		All clear, but issues may be found after thorough revision.
9. Further Questions:	- It needs formatting adjustments and 2 sections need to be added. At least 1 more reference to be added. - Not the worst for a first draft, and the improvements to be added are clear.				
9.1 What is your overall feedback and recommendation regarding the research proposal?					
9.2 What steps will you take to improve the quality of your research proposal?					

Use this rubric to revise your research proposal, keeping in mind that "writing is rewriting." Betwafique!



Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research
University of Yahia Fares, Medea
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of Foreign Languages (English Section)



A Suggested Research Proposal Self-Assessment Rubric

Guiding Procedure for Self-Assessment:

- Please carefully read each criterion in the rubric to understand what is expected in your research proposal.
- Compare your research proposal against each criterion. Be honest, objective, and critical in your evaluation.
- For each criterion, rate your work on a scale from 1 to 4 based on how well you think you have met the expectations. (1 = Needs Improvement, 4 = Excellent). When answering, please put a tick in the corresponding box for your rating.
- Use the comments section to write reflections on areas where you have performed well and areas that need improvement. Be specific and provide examples from your proposal to justify your comments.
- Based on your reflections, set specific and achievable goals for improving your research proposal.

Topic: De-humanization rhetoric: critical discourse analysis of metaphorical representations of immigrants in UK media newspapers



Feedback Criteria	Rating				Comments
1. Cover Page:	1	2	3	4	All cover page elements are included
1.1 The necessary information is provided in the required format.				✓	
2. Title of the Proposal:	1	2	3	4	The title is a bit broad The sample is not that clear
2.1 The title is presented in a clear and concise manner.			✓		
2.2. The key variables being investigated are evident in the title.			✓		
2.3. The title suggests the sample (who), the context (where), and a potential methodology (how).			✓		
3. Table of Contents:	1	2	3	4	All parts of the proposal are present
The table of contents outlines all the different parts of the proposal.				✓	
4. Introduction:	1	2	3	4	The elements of the introduction are included precisely, except for the research hypotheses that are not well articulated
4.1 The background of the study is well described.			✓		
4.2 The research problem is clearly defined.			✓		
4.3 The study's significance is strongly justified.			✓		
4.4 The research objectives are clearly stated.			✓		
4.5 The research questions are clearly formulated.			✓		
4.6 The hypotheses are well articulated.		✓			
5. Literature Review:	1	2	3	4	The literature review is in general well formed.
5.1 The knowledge gap is defined.			✓		
5.2 The conceptual framework is explained.			✓		
5.3 The theoretical framework is identified.		✓			
5.4 The review synthesizes various arguments, theories, and methodologies			✓		
5.5 The review is presented like a coherent/logical essay.			✓		

6. Proposed Methodology:	1	2	3	4	Concerning the suggested methodology, the data instruments are not well stated, similarly to the data analysis & the expected findings.
6.1 The research design is clearly outlined.			✓		
6.2 The instruments for data collection are described in detail.		✓			
6.3 The research sample is specified.			✓		
6.4 The approach to data analysis is described.		✓			
6.5 Expected findings are mentioned.		✓			
6.6 Potential limitations are acknowledged.			✓		
7. References:	1	2	3	4	The references are more than seven; however, there are considered as too much for a short proposal
A minimum of 7 sources are included.			✓		
Relevant, high-quality sources are listed. The references consistently follow APA style (6th or 7th edition).			✓		
8. Language:	1	2	3	4	The language is clear, coherent, and it maintain the academic tone.
The proposal demonstrates correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, cohesion, and coherence, and maintains an academic tone.			✓		
			✓		
9. Further Questions:	Concerning the whole work, it could be better than that, of course with more improvement, more specifications, as well as revision.				
9.1 What is your overall feedback and recommendation regarding the research proposal?					
9.2 What steps will you take to improve the quality of your research proposal?					

Use this rubric to revise your research proposal, keeping in mind that "writing is rewriting." Betwafique!

Appendix J: Samples of Criteria-Referenced Rubrics Used by Students for Peer Assessment



Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research
University of Yahia Fares, Medea
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of Foreign Languages (English Section)



A Suggested Research Proposal Peer Assessment Rubric

Guiding Procedure for Peer Assessment:

- Please carefully read each criterion in the rubric to understand ^{peers} what is expected in your research proposal.
- Compare your peer's research proposal against each criterion. Be honest and objective in your evaluation.
- For each criterion, rate your work on a scale from 1 to 4 based on how well you think the work has met the expectations. (1 = Needs Improvement, 4 = Excellent). When answering, please put a tick in the corresponding box of your rating.
- Use the comments section to write reflections on areas where the proposal performed well and areas that need improvement. Be specific and provide examples from the proposal to justify your comments.
- Make sure your feedback is respectful and focuses on the work, not the person.
- Please do not discuss or share your comments with your peers while you're evaluating their work.

Research Title	Unsettling.....Tribological Memo.....in Adventure Time.....Cartoon and its..... Impact on.....Algerian Youth.....
Name of Assessor	1 [REDACTED]

Feedback Criteria	Rating				Comments
1. Cover Page:	1	2	3	4	it contains all the elements.
1.1 The necessary information is provided in the required format.				✓	
2. Title of the Proposal:	1	2	3	4	- They did not define with impact, (a psychological impact, or what?) - The methodology is not clear if it is a discussion analysis or something else.
2.1 The title is presented in a clear and concise manner.				✓	
2.2 The key variables being investigated are evident in the title.			✓		
2.3 The title suggests the sample (who), the context (where), and a potential methodology (how).			✓		
3. Table of contents:	1	2	3	4	- They mentioned Limitations as a separate (title) part normally have included it within the methodology section. - They forgot to mention The bibliography.
The table of contents outlines all the different parts of the proposal.			✓		
4. Introduction:	1	2	3	4	- The background of the study normally should not contain a lot of citations. - Research rationale is too short and too broad; They did not explain the essence of the problem in details, and where the significance of the study lies in. (They need to be specific) - The 2nd objective is a bit ambiguous.
4.1 The background of the study is well described.		✓			
4.2 The research problem is clearly defined.			✓		
4.3 The study's significance is strongly justified.	✓				
4.4 The research objectives are clearly stated.			✓		
4.5 The research questions are clearly formulated.			✓		
4.6 The hypotheses are well articulated.			✓		- There is no mention of the knowledge gap - The introduction is too long compared to the length of the literature review. - The conclusion is way too short compared to the introduction. - They did not mention the strengths and weaknesses of previous research. - There is no balance between the research questions and research objectives (2 objectives and 3 research questions).
5. Literature Review:	1	2	3	4	
5.1 The knowledge gap is defined.	✓				
5.2 The conceptual framework is explained.			✓		
5.3 The theoretical framework is identified.			✓		
5.4 The review synthesizes various arguments, theories, and methodologies			✓		
5.5 The review is presented like a coherent/logical essay.				✓	

6. Proposed Methodology:	1	2	3	4	
6.1 The research design is clearly outlined.		✓			- No mention of the methodology they are going to use (descriptive, quantitative) - ?
6.2 The instruments for data collection are described in detail.			✓		- In the research sample I think they should include the cartoon they discussed.
6.3 The research sample is specified.			✓		- Limitations of the research must be part of the proposed methodology section.
6.4 The approach to data analysis is described.			✓		
6.5 Expected findings are mentioned.			✓		
6.6 Potential limitations are acknowledged.			✓		
7. References:	1	2	3	4	
A minimum of 7 sources are included.				✓	- Some of the references are not well formulated.
Relevant, high-quality sources are listed.		✓			
The references consistently follow APA style (6th or 7th edition).					
8. Language:	1	2	3	4	
The proposal demonstrates correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, cohesion, and coherence, and maintains an academic tone.			✓		- Some minor spelling and grammatical mistakes to check again.
9. Further Questions:					
9.1 What is your overall feedback and recommendation regarding the research proposal?	- Although there are some minor weaknesses, the research proposal is overall well-structured. - There are some areas to recheck again in order to enhance the overall quality of their research. (especially the introduction section).				
9.2 What steps should your peer take to improve the quality of their research proposal?					

Use this rubric to discuss your peers' research proposal, keeping in mind that "writing is a social act." Betwafique!



Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research
University of Yahia Fares, Medea
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of Foreign Languages (English Section)



A Suggested Research Proposal Peer Assessment Rubric

Guiding Procedure for Peer Assessment:

- Please carefully read each criterion in the rubric to understand what is expected in your ^{peer's} research proposal.
- Compare your peer's research proposal against each criterion. Be honest and objective in your evaluation.
- For each criterion, rate ^{their} your work on a scale from 1 to 4 based on how well you think the work has met the expectations. (1 = Needs Improvement, 4 = Excellent). When answering, please put a tick in the corresponding box of your rating.
- Use the comments section to write reflections on areas where the proposal performed well and areas that need improvement. Be specific and provide examples from the proposal to justify your comments.
- Make sure your feedback is respectful and focuses on the work, not the person.
- Please do not discuss or share your comments with your peers while you're evaluating their work.

Research Title	Muslims' endorsement of ideological tools ... A Critical Discourse Analysis of French Voters' Perceptions in the 2024 US Elections
Name of Assessor	1. ... [Redacted]

Feedback Criteria	Rating				Comments
	1	2	3	4	
1. Cover Page:					the information needed and format are there But maybe there's a problem only with the form
1.1 The necessary information is provided in the required format.				✓	
2. Title of the Proposal:	1	2	3	4	All important parts of the title are mentioned. But I think there is a little problem with the formation: A CDA of framing voters' perceptions
2.1 The title is presented in a clear and concise manner.			✓		
2.2 The key variables being investigated are evident in the title.				✓	
2.3 The title suggests the sample (who), the context (where), and a potential methodology (how).				✓	
3. Table of contents:	1	2	3	4	
The table of contents outlines all the different parts of the proposal.				✓	
4. Introduction:	1	2	3	4	work from general to specific: framing voters' sentiment vs election's outcome.
4.1 The background of the study is well described.				✓	
4.2 The research problem is clearly defined.				✓	The academic rationale + what will this study contribute to research world also society (by raising awareness). well aligned with the objectives
4.3 The study's significance is strongly justified.				✓	
4.4 The research objectives are clearly stated.				✓	
4.5 The research questions are clearly formulated.				✓	
4.6 The hypotheses are well articulated.				✓	Well defined in the conclusion
5. Literature Review:	1	2	3	4	
5.1 The knowledge gap is defined.				✓	I think the concepts don't really serve the topic
5.2 The conceptual framework is explained.			✓		
5.3 The theoretical framework is identified.			✓		I think only the used theories should be mentioned not the def of the key term "CDA". Mentioned in separate f (liked that). only the part of previous studies was in form of essay and that seemed correct for me because the research followed the same structure of
5.4 The review synthesizes various arguments, theories, and methodologies				✓	
5.5 The review is presented like a coherent/logical essay.				✓	

(like not the standard one :)

6. Proposed Methodology:	1	2	3	4	
6.1 The research design is clearly outlined.					one single observation that the research design is also mentioned in the ~ Research approach. part so, it's better to have it all here in R. design. AN the features and standards of the tweets are mentioned, but still the Tweets should be specified. doesn't the sample mean "Participants"? I think what you mentioned here should be with the data collection instrument and CSR is not concerned with sampling. I think OK
6.2 The instruments for data collection are described in detail.			✓		
6.3 The research sample is specified.					
6.4 The approach to data analysis is described.				✓	
6.5 Expected findings are mentioned.				✓	
6.6 Potential limitations are acknowledged.				✓	
7. References:	1	2	3	4	
A minimum of 7 sources are included.				✓	Am only not sure about "Bibliography" I think it should be "references"
Relevant, high-quality sources are listed. The references consistently follow APA style (6th or 7th edition).				✓	
8. Language:	1	2	3	4	
The proposal demonstrates correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, cohesion, and coherence, and maintains an academic tone.			✓		maybe a small problem with Capitalization.
9. Further Questions:					
9.1 What is your overall feedback and recommendation regarding the research proposal?	1) Overall, this research is well designed in terms of the given information and it is clear that it is seriously investigated. I recommend the researcher to revise the title because it is the most important part and it's the first thing the reader sees. Also to revise the overall form (cover page, typing font and font size, indentations, page enumeration). 2) The best way to improve it to not hesitate asking people in the field, or just follow their works if they're not available.				
9.2 What steps should your peer take to improve the quality of their research proposal?					

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- Use the comments section to write reflections on areas where the proposal performed well and areas that need improvement. Be specific and provide examples from the proposal to justify your comments.
- Make sure your feedback is respectful and focuses on the work, not the person.
- Please do not discuss or share your comments with your peers while you're evaluating their work.

Research Title	The power of Language: A Psycholinguistic and Critical Discourse Analysis of..... Gender's effect on Political Persuasion.....
Name of Assessor	1 [REDACTED]

Feedback Criteria	Rating				Comments
	1	2	3	4	
1. Cover Page:			X		The title needs some improvements need to be focused (concise) (no context, no sample)
1.1 The necessary information is provided in the required format.			X		
2. Title of the Proposal:	1	2	3	4	
2.1 The title is presented in a clear and concise manner.		X			
2.2. The key variables being investigated are evident in the title.		X			No table of contents
2.3. The title suggests the sample (who), the context (where), and a potential methodology (how).	X				
3. Table of contents:	1	2	3	4	
The table of contents outlines all the different parts of the proposal.	X				
4. Introduction:	1	2	3	4	
4.1 The background of the study is well described.		X			
4.2 The research problem is clearly defined.		X			
4.3 The study's significance is strongly justified.			X		
4.4 The research objectives are clearly stated.			X		
4.5 The research questions are clearly formulated.			X		
4.6 The hypotheses are well articulated.			X		- It lacks the knowledge gap -
5. Literature Review:	1	2	3	4	
5.1 The knowledge gap is defined.		X			
5.2 The conceptual framework is explained.			X		
5.3 The theoretical framework is identified.		X			
5.4 The review synthesizes various arguments, theories, and methodologies		X			
5.5 The review is presented like a coherent/logical essay .			X		

6. Proposed Methodology:	1	2	3	4	
6.1 The research design is clearly outlined.		X			The proposed methodology needs improvement: - It could include two species - One male / one female - It is a comparative study, qualitative
6.2 The instruments for data collection are described in detail.		X			
6.3 The research sample is specified.			X		
6.4 The approach to data analysis is described.	X				
6.5 Expected findings are mentioned.			X		
6.6 Potential limitations are acknowledged.			X		
7. References:	1	2	3	4	
A minimum of 7 sources are included.			X		- Only 6 sources are included
Relevant, high-quality sources are listed. The references consistently follow APA style (6th or 7th edition).			X		
8. Language:	1	2	3	4	
The proposal demonstrates correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, cohesion, and coherence, and maintains an academic tone.		X			It contains grammatical mistakes punctuation. It lacks academic tone.
9. Further Questions:	The proposal could be improved by: - Correcting grammatical mistakes - maintaining an academic tone - including the missing parts • Data analysis • table of contents - with specifying the knowledge gap - making the title more specific				
9.1 What is your overall feedback and recommendation regarding the research proposal?					
9.2 What steps should your peer take to improve the quality of their research proposal?					

Use this rubric to discuss your peers' research proposal, keeping in mind that "writing is a social act." Betwaifque!

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تعزيز استقلالية المتعلم لدى طلبة الجامعة أثناء إعداد مقترحاتهم البحثية، وذلك من خلال إدماج إجراءات التقويم التكويني القائم على التقويم الذاتي وتقويم الأقران باستخدام شبكات تقويم مرجعية للمعايير. شارك في هذه الدراسة ثلاثون طالبًا جزائريًا من السنة الأولى ماستر تخصص اللسانيات التطبيقية بقسم اللغات الأجنبية، شعبة الإنجليزية، بجامعة المدية. ولتحقيق أهداف البحث، تم اعتماد منهج البحث الإجمالي بالاستعانة بأربع أدوات بحثية تمثلت في مقياس استقلالية المتعلم، استبيانات الطلبة، مجموعات التركيز، وتحليل وثائق شبكات التقويم. وقد أظهرت النتائج أن التقويم الذاتي وتقويم الأقران، إذا ما تم تصميمهما وتسييرهما بشكل جيد، يمكن أن يسهما في تنمية أبعاد مختلفة من استقلالية المتعلم، خاصة الأبعاد الاجتماعية والمعرفية وما فوق المعرفية والعاطفية. كما صرح الطلبة بأن مشاركتهم في أنشطة التقويم ساعدتهم على تطوير تعلمهم الذاتي، واعتبروا ذلك مهارة قابلة للنقل تساهم في دعم التعلم مدى الحياة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استقلالية المتعلم، التقويم الذاتي وتقويم الأقران، كتابة مقترحات البحث، التقويم التكويني، التعليم العالي.

Résumé:

Le présent travail de recherche doctorale vise à promouvoir l'autonomie d'apprentissage chez les étudiants universitaires lors du processus de rédaction de leurs projets de recherche, à travers la mise en œuvre de procédures d'autoévaluation et d'évaluation par les pairs, fondées sur l'utilisation de grilles d'évaluation formative critériée. Pour ce faire, trente étudiants algériens inscrits en première année de Master, spécialisés en linguistique appliquée au sein de la section d'anglais du département des langues étrangères de l'université de Médéa, ont participé à cette étude. La recherche a été menée à l'aide de quatre instruments de base : une échelle d'évaluation du degré d'autonomie de l'apprenant, des questionnaires destinés aux étudiants, des groupes de discussion ainsi qu'une analyse des grilles d'évaluation des étudiants. Les principaux résultats de l'analyse révèlent que l'autoévaluation et l'évaluation par les pairs, lorsqu'elles sont co-construites et mises en œuvre de manière appropriée, favorisent différents degrés d'autonomie chez les apprenants, notamment sur les plans social, cognitif, métacognitif et affectif. En outre, les étudiants participants déclarent avoir bénéficié d'un apprentissage autonome grâce à leur implication active dans le processus d'évaluation. Ils considèrent également cette autonomie comme une compétence transférable susceptible d'accompagner et de soutenir durablement leur parcours d'apprentissage.

Mots-clés: autonomie de l'apprenant, autoévaluation, évaluation par les pairs, rédaction de projets de recherche, évaluation formative, enseignement supérieur.

Abstract:

The present doctoral research aspires to promote learner autonomy among university students, in the process of drafting their research proposals, through the implementation of formative self- and peer assessment procedures, namely criteria-referenced rubrics. Thirty Algerian first-year Master's students majoring in Applied Linguistics at the English section of the Department of Foreign Languages, University of Medea, took part in the study. To this end, an action research design was adopted using four research instruments: learner autonomy scale, students' questionnaires, focus groups, and document analysis of students' rubrics. The main findings obtained from the analysis revealed that self- and peer assessment, if co-constructed and managed properly, could cultivate different degrees of learner autonomy, particularly in social, cognitive, metacognitive, and affective dimensions. In addition, students claimed that they have benefited from autonomous learning through their involvement in assessment and perceived it as a transferable skill that backs up lifelong learning.

Keywords: Learner autonomy, self- and peer assessment, research proposal writing, formative assessment, higher education.