

## **Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Teachers' Perception Regarding Teacher Competencies of Self-Directed Learning**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Although self-directed learning is regarded as a skill of the 21st century and as a motivation for students in educational practice and theory, self-directed learning is considered to be challenging for most teachers to be integrated into their practice. Meanwhile, teachers are required to consider each student as a unique and distinguished individual. This means that students in every classroom have diverse talents and abilities to learn differently and are able to develop at a different level. Thus, Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers must be informed of all ideas, concepts, and methods relating to English language learning.

The current study aims at finding out how Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers perceive teacher competencies of self-directed learning and if there are any significant differences between them due to their gender and years of experience. The participants are (300) EFL preparatory school teachers from Baghdad Governorate / the General Directorate of Education - Al-Karkh 3rd. An online closed questionnaire has been submitted to the participants using Google forms. The results reveal that Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers have positively perceived teacher competencies of self-directed learning, and that there are significant differences between them according to their years of experience.

**Keywords:** Self-Directed Learning, Perception, Student-Centered Learning,

Autonomy, Independent Learning.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In past decades there has been a growing effort on the transition from conventional to student-centered teaching. This change in paradigm has enabled the teachers to move their power and to regard the student like a co-creator in the teaching and learning process (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p.12)

Student-centered learning is most simply regarded as an approach to learning in which students choose what to study, how and why the subject may be of an interest to them (Rogers, 1983, p.14). In other words, in contrast with the stage of teachers' control and the focus on academic scope which is usually found in the traditional, didactic education, the learning environment has learner responsiveness and engagement at its heart (Cannon, 2000, p.4).

EFL Teachers' own perception and the variations they bring to their surrounding classroom environment are being increasingly recognized as significant components influencing the way they teach, and how they excite and involve their students in the range of language functionality and activities (Skinner & Bellmont, 1993, p.571).

According to Putra (2021, p.41), teachers' perception of self-directed learning comprises three components, namely the perception of the meaning of self-directed learning, the perception of self-directed learning awareness and the perception of the influence of self-directed learning.

There is reasonable literature on self-directed learning which gives limited space for Iraqi EFL teachers' beliefs about this concept. In other words, there is a relatively small body of literature that is concerned with the notion of self-directed learning among English language teachers in the context of Iraq. Therefore, it has become necessary to know Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers' perception regarding teachers' competencies of self-directed learning, finding out such beliefs is essential to the process of persuading teachers to promote students' self-directed learning in their work.

### **Research Questions**

The current study is intended to answer the following questions:

- 1-How do Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers perceive teacher competencies of self-directed learning?
- 2--Does Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers' perception of teacher competencies of self-directed learning differ according to teachers' gender?
- 3-Does Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers' perception of teacher competencies of self-directed learning differ according to teachers' teaching experience?

### **Hypotheses**

The following two null hypotheses have been posed:

- 1-.There is no statistically significant difference in Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers' perception regarding teacher competencies of self-directed learning according to the gender variable (male – female).
- 2.-There is no statistically significant difference in Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers' perception regarding teacher competencies of self-directed learning according to the years of teaching experience variable (less than 15 years - 15 years and above).

## II. THEORITICAL BACKGROUND

### Historical Background of SDL

Moore and Anderson (2003, p.161) have stated that John Dewey, who emphasized learning experience, is accountable for the emergence of SDL. In this direction, teachers should provide students with useful experiences to participate in the modern world. Allan Tough (1979) and Knowles (1975) have claimed that SDL came from the humanistic philosophy of psychotherapist Carl Rogers, who had great faith in learner's freedom of choice and individual responsibility. He thought that people have a role in their own behavior and feel responsible for their own behaviors.

One of the most influential scholars in pioneering SDL was Knowles (1970) as mentioned in Moore and Anderson (2003, p.162). Subsequently SDL was then linked to autonomy and independence by Moore (1972, p.16). Autonomy in learning refers to the degree of control over the three processes that the learners have: planning, implementation and assessment. It may be argued therefore that the autonomous learner is already an independent student who may seek help from certain people such as experts, instructors, colleagues or forms of material resources like books, newspapers, and magazines (Wedemeyer, 1971, p.551).

SDL has been studied for two reasons: (1) the innate urge to control what is to be learned, when and how, (2) The ambitions and desires of adults to continually learn are deemed reasonable. Knowles (1975, p.17) has claimed that SDL is not an educational trend but an essential human skill, the capacity to learn on one's own. Therefore, in the idea of SDL, the preceding intrinsic human characteristics are innate.

Long (1989, p.3) has hypothesized the three key features of the SDL:

- 1-Socially speaking. The learner is seen as socially independent
- 2- Pedagogical, which is independent task management. The student is free to define his or her educational goals and pick the required materials and decide how much time it takes to apply in the educational setting; and
- 3-Mental. The student has a cognitive ability to analyze and reflect critically, which is the cognitive side.

Long (1989, P.5) argued that the focus was on sociology and pedagogy over time, while the psychological dimension was ignored, he portrayed the total absence of such a dimension as ironic since the origins of this dimension were brought back into the philosophy of the humanists, which guaranteed the importance of cognitive internal aspects and the motivational aspect of learning. However, he has verified that ignoring the psychological or cognitive factor transmits the light from learning to teaching.

The following qualities have been stated by Guglielmino (1978, p.73) who claimed that SD learner

- 1-displays autonomy and determination;
- 2-takes responsibility for his/her own learning and views difficulties not as limitations but as challenges;
- 3- is self-disciplined and highly curious;

- 4- is trustworthy and willing to learn and to adapt;
- 5- can take advantage of the study's essential qualifications, prepare for the project and manage the time for learning; and
- 6- appreciates the learning process and wants to focus on the objective.

### **The Concept of SDL**

Adult theories and SDL have become a scholarly area of research in latest decades. Accordingly at this time when Knowles developed Andragogy, SDL received a wider interest and became a popular concept for adult education scholars and linguists. Knowles (1975), cited in Brookfield (1986, p.40), defined SDL as " a process in which people take the first step in arranging and identifying learning experiences, needs, resources and learning assessment ".

Almuhamadawi (2017, pp.49-50) has stated that SDL may be viewed as a tool in thinking and addressing the problems, so that learners may utilize and develop their own learning technique in order to learn from their own resources whether utilizing material resources or human resources, depending on the varied resources of the surrounding context.

Jarvis and Watts (2012,p.218) have identified SDL as an instructional process that focuses on phases such as needs assessment, learning resources acquisition, the application of learning activities and the evaluation of learning. SDL is also defined as "any improvement in individuals' knowledge, experience, skill, performance or personal growth, via his own efforts and the use of any technique any given circumstances or condition" (Gibbons, 2002, p.2)

It might be evident that SDL is an opposite of so-called teacher-directed learning (TDL), which is a growth in the teacher's knowledge and abilities. Three separate SDL implications have been identified by Grow (1991, p.4):

- 1- Autonomy as a personal in personality traits ;
- 2- Autodidaxy. the learning processes beyond formal teaching or institutional context; and
- 3- Learner control as opposed to teacher control .

Yet , in a different manner Jarvis (1992, p.130) stated that SDL " was one of those amorphous concepts that is lacking precision and clarity , to the degree that it's nearly meaningless." In contrast, Candy (1991,p.441) referred to other terms that may be used with SDL interchangeably such as: self-learning, self-studying, self-education, non-traditional education , autonomous learning and self-planning learning.

### **III.METHODOLOGY**

#### **Population and Sampling**

The population of the present study covers Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers in Baghdad Governorate who are distributed into six General Directorates of Education. They are Al Rusafa 1st , Al-Rusafa 2nd , Al-Rusafa 3rd , Al-Karkh 1st , Al-Karkh 2nd , and Al-Karkh 3<sup>rd</sup> The General Directorate of Education/ Al-Karkh 3rd is selected randomly from which a sample of (300) EFL Preparatory school teachers(150 males and 150 females) has been chosen.

### **The Instrument**

In order to achieve the aim of the current study, a close-ended questionnaire has been used. The questionnaire has been developed relying on surveying the relevant literature, these are prior studies ,books , journals and articles which are related to the problem of the study , consulting specialists in the field of ELT and surveying the ready-made questionnaires that are related to Self-directed learning. The questionnaire comprises 10 items. This questionnaire is intended to be scored according to Likert-Five points Scale and as the following: (Strongly Agree =5; Agree =4; Undecided =3; Disagree =2; and Strongly Disagree =1 )

Test- Retest method have been used to estimate the reliability of the instrument . The questionnaire has been applied twice on the same sample in two different points in time. The coefficient reliability of the questionnaire is found out to be (0.87). Such coefficient is considered acceptable according to Grous (2013, p.123) who states that the test can be considered acceptable with reliabilities of 0.60 or above. Pearson Correlation Coefficient Formula has been used to determine the reliability coefficient between the two administrations of the instrument.

A sample of (40) EFL preparatory school teachers from the General Directorate of Education/ Al-Karkh 3 rd is randomly selected for the sake of conducting the pilot administration of the questionnaire in order to check the clarity of the questionnaire items, and to estimate the time required to answer the questionnaire.

### **IV.RESULTS**

The following procedures have been used to analyze the collected data :

- 1- Teachers' responses on the questionnaire items and components have been recorded.
- 2- The arithmetic mean and the standard deviation are used as the statistical means for identifying the perceived and unperceived indicators in each questionnaire component .
- 3- The theoretical mean (3) is considered the criteria for identifying the perceived and unperceived item , the item that yields an arithmetic mean of (3)and above is considered a perceived item, while the item that gets an arithmetic mean below (3) is considered unperceived item.
- 4- The questionnaire items have been arranged in a descending order from the highest arithmetic mean to the lowest arithmetic mean .

However, the analysis of the data shows that all the items are perceived by the teachers. The arithmetic means have ranged between (4,215) to (3,880) and the standard deviations have ranged between (0,603) to ( 0,903). See Table (1).

**Table 1: Results of Teacher Competencies of SDL**

No.	No. of Item in The Questionnaire	Items	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
1	28	SDL requires teachers' ability to take responsibility for determining one's own learning needs	4.215	0.703	1
2	27	SDL requires teachers' ability to enter into a close, respectful, and friendly relationship with learners.	4.155	0.603	2
3	29	SDL requires teachers' ability to be a facilitator and a source.	4.069	0.768	3
4	36	SDL requires teachers' ability to encourage curiosity by stepping into learners' viewpoint to find what motivates them.	4.043	0.882	4
5	33	SDL requires teachers' ability to help students gain a positive attitude toward self-directed learning,	4.006	0.892	5
6	35	SDL requires teachers' ability to guide students to recognize their weaknesses and strengths.	3.966	0.884	6
7	32	SDL requires teachers' ability to establish an atmosphere which is open to interaction, based on cooperation, open and secure.	3.943	0.807	7
8	30	SDL requires teachers' ability to evaluate learning processes and outcomes.	3.917	0.808	8
9	34	SDL requires teachers' ability to involve students in selecting materials and resources, applying relevant	3.897	0.903	9

		learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.			
10	31	SDL requires teachers' ability to find strategies to overcome all challenges and possible threats to Self-directed learning.	3.880	0.877	10

To verify the first null hypothesis which states that “there is no statistically significant difference in Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers' perception regarding teacher competencies of self-directed learning according to the gender variable”, the arithmetic means and the standard deviations of the sample responses according to their gender have been calculated. The arithmetic mean for male teachers is (51.553) with a standard deviation of (5.802). While the arithmetic mean for female teachers is found to be (52,210) with a standard deviation of (4.443). To find out the statistically significant differences between male and female teachers, two t-test Independent samples were used. see Table (2).

**Table (2): T-test for Two Independent Samples to Indicate the Difference according to Gender Variable**

Gender	Number of Sample Members	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value		Level of Significance 0.05
				Computed	Critical	
Male	150	51.553	5.802	0.600	1.96	Statistically Not Significant
Female	150	52,210	4.443			

The results shown in Table (2) show that the calculated t-value (0,600) is less than the critical t-value (1.96) at a significance level of 0.05 and below 298 degrees of freedom. This result indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the perception of male and female teachers in favour of female teachers. Thus, the first null hypothesis was accepted.

To verify the second null hypothesis which states that “ there is no statistically significant difference in Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers' perception regarding teacher competencies of self-directed learning according to teachers teaching experience”, the sample is divided into two sub-samples . The first includes teachers of less than 15 years of teaching experience (185 teachers) and the second includes teachers of 15 years of teaching experience and above (115 teachers).

It was found that the arithmetic mean of teachers with less than 15 years of teaching experience is (50.100) with a standard deviation (5,806), and the arithmetic mean of teachers with teaching experience of 15 years or more is (53.473) with a standard deviation. (4.222). To find out the

statistical significant differences between the two sub-samples, t-test for two independent samples has been used. See Table (3).

**Table 3: The t-test for Two Independent Samples to Indicate The Difference According to The Variable of Years of Teaching Experience**

Years of Teaching Experience	Number of Sample Members	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value		Level of Significance 0.05
				Computed	Critical	
Less than 15 Years	185	50.100	5,806	5.102	1.96	Statistically Significant
15 Years and above	115	53.473	4.222			

The results shown in the above table reveal significant differences in SDL perception between the two sub-samples and in favor of teachers with 15 years of teaching experience and above. The calculated t-value (5.102) was found to be higher than the critical t-value (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance and below 298 degrees of freedom. Thus, the second null hypothesis is rejected.

## V. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The current study is presented to demonstrate Iraqi EFL teachers' perception regarding teachers competencies of self-directed learning as they represent a big part of the beneficiaries from this type of learning. Perceptions are sought with regard to how teachers understand self-directed learning . The results of the present study reveal that:

1. It is found out that most Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers are typically informative of the competencies required by the teachers to be effective self-directed learning teachers.
2. Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers understand the importance of being involved in the early stages of self-directed learning and share the responsibilities together with their students .
3. The results obtained from this analysis provide a viewpoint that recognizes the vital side of establishing a friendly relationship between the students and the teachers who must provide a safe environment that allows for democratic learning choices .
4. Teachers' as facilitators and a source is a big part of their role , however , some of the teachers lack the ability to find strategies to overcome the challenges and possible threats to SDL

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the obtained results the following conclusions have been reached :



1. Most teachers believe that SDL teacher competencies show different roles of the teacher , such as functioning as a mentor , a facilitator , or as a resource .
2. Some Iraqi EFL preparatory school see that most students rely on the teacher in defining their learning orientation , thus the teacher has to help the students in growing a positive attitude towards SDL.
3. Many teachers believe that ongoing assessment and constant evaluation by the teacher is an essential aspect to keep the students in their track and not to lose the proper enthusiasm due to negligence.
4. Teachers feel that involving the student in the selection of the learning materials is an empowering aspect of teacher competencies and it show a contradictory viewpoint against the dominant teacher-centered classrooms
5. Teachers believe that students should be involved in SDL study further than conventional methods because SDL bridges the gap between school knowledge and real-world problems by considering how people learn in real life. However, Teachers considered SDL to be helpful, but only in line with their methods of teaching

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### إدراك مدرسي اللغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية في المدارس الإعدادية لكفاءات المعلم حول التعلم الذاتي

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### الملخص

على الرغم من أن التعلم الذاتي يعد مهارة من مهارات القرن الحادي والعشرين، ودافعا للطلاب في الممارسة التربوية النظرية، إلا أن التعلم الذاتي يعد تحدياً لدمج معظم المعلمين في ممارساتهم وفي الوقت نفسه، يتعين على المعلمين اعتبار كل طالب على أنه فرد فريد ومميز. هذا يعني أن الطلاب في كل فصل دراسي لديهم مواهب وقدرات متنوعة للتعلم بشكل مختلف، وقادرون على التطور على مستوى مختلف. ومن ثم، يجب على مدرسي المدارس الإعدادية للغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية الاطلاع على جميع الأفكار، والمفاهيم، والأساليب المتعلقة بتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى معرفة كيفية إدراك مدرسي المدارس الإعدادية للغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية لكفاءات معلم التعلم الذاتي، وما إذا كان هناك أية اختلافات كبيرة بينهم بسبب جنسهم، وسنوات خبرتهم. المشاركون (٣٠٠) مدرس في المرحلة الإعدادية للغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية من محافظة بغداد / المديرية العامة للتربية – الكرخ الثالثة. تم إرسال استبيان مغلق عبر الإنترنت إلى المشاركين باستعمال نماذج كوكل. كشفت النتائج أن مدرسي المدارس الإعدادية للغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية في العراق يدركون بشكل إيجابي ممارسات الطلاب للتعلم الذاتي، وهناك اختلافات إحصائية بينهم وفقاً لسنوات خبرتهم.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التعلم الذاتي، الإدراك، التعلم المتمركز حول الطالب، الاستقلالية، التعلم المستقل.