

Original Paper

Autonomy Perceptions from Teachers of English as a Foreign Language in Diverse Colombian Public Teaching Settings

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive case study reports the features in autonomy dynamics of three Colombian English language teachers in public schools in the District in Bogota Colombia. Three semi-structured interviews and reflective journals were used for data collection. The research question that guided this study was: What perceptions about autonomy do the three Colombian English language teachers have? The general purpose of this investigation was to identify the main features in teachers' perceptions related to Autonomy. The specific objective was to identify the strategies that promoted autonomy in Teachers of English as a Foreign Language -TEFL- in different public schools in Bogota, Colombia. The study is, therefore, particularly significant as it can play a role in encouraging Colombian English as a Foreign Language -EFL- teachers to relate the factors needed to get a high quality in Education dynamics. Data indicated that the process heightened the teachers' awareness of 'self' and practice. Autonomy also activated both the teachers' ability to critically reflect on their context as well as focus on positive aspects of their practice through the willingness to improve their academic abilities and research production. Taken together, the findings serve as baseline data to further professional development in language assessment.

Keywords

Autonomy, English as a Foreign Language, perceptions, quality in Education

1. Introduction

Currently public schools in Colombia go through public policy processes through which quality and productivity levels are sought to guarantee an education that responds to the requirements of the 21st century citizen, in the pursuit of achieving the objective, autonomy in the Foreign language teachers English is a factor that is required to enhance effectiveness in teaching and learning processes. Along

with the recent vision of autonomy there is an emphasis on teacher autonomy; It is natural to think that the autonomous behaviors promoted in students must be present in educators. Damio (2013) conceives that autonomy in teachers should be promoted throughout their careers, this, since it is based on the premise that the educator is an example to follow (p. 57). In this sense, the reflection of attitudes toward the students' autonomy will start from what was demonstrated by their educator. The definition of teacher autonomy has been subject to discussions and reflects, rather than evolution over time, different points of view from those who offer them. For some authors, such as Holec (1981) and Michalief (2016) refer to the teacher's ability and willingness to help students take responsibility for their own learning.

On the other hand, Benson and Voller (2014) conceive that autonomy in the teacher is the promoter of criticality in a social and political leader for a better democratization of knowledge (p. 32). According to this definition, teachers reflect on their function and find ways to change it to adapt to the new social demand, as well as roles and diverse contexts of students, to help them on their way to autonomy and independence. There is a clear link between the two types of autonomy, but the greatest emphasis is placed on the students because the autonomy of the teacher is achieved through their change. Benson and Voller (2014) and Niño (2013) conceive that autonomy begins with freedom from the control of others; It is, however, one of the most difficult to achieve (p. 59). Emphasizes choice as an important element in our lives. It is very desirable that many teachers think of themselves as autonomous professionals, free of the control exercised by colleagues, administrators, the institution or the education system and capable of making decisions on their own. Raya, Lamb and Vieira (2007) conceive that the autonomy of teachers is the participation in their professionalism through the continuous reflection and analysis, affective and cognitive control of the teaching process (p. 100). The previous approach shows us how crucial the active role of the teacher is in his self-reflection to be the example he wishes to see reflected in his students. It is interesting to see the teacher as an autonomous learner, with the capacity for self-directed professional development. In this concept of autonomy teachers are aware of the reason, the time, the place and the way in which they can acquire pedagogical skills and updated knowledge as part of their teaching practice. This concept of autonomy focuses on the responsibility of teachers to be always ready to do their job and grow professionally. From these definitions of autonomy in the teacher, in our research work we identify ourselves with the idea of the autonomous teacher as a person with self-learning capacity for professional development.

In this sense, teacher autonomy implies negotiation skills, reflective capacity in the teaching process and the teaching environment, willingness to commit to lifelong learning, commitment to promote student autonomy through the creation of a culture of the classroom where autonomy is accepted. Benson and Voller (2014) conceive that teacher autonomy seems to be closely related to the notions of the critically reflexive teacher and research professor (p. 37). The basic premise here is that teachers are in a better position to develop their own teaching in order to improve the learning experiences of their students. In this sense, autonomous teachers should have a good institutional knowledge to begin to

effectively address the limitations in teaching and learning; they should also be willing to face institutional barriers in socially appropriate ways, to turn restrictions into opportunities for change. In this sense, Dam (1995) conceives that autonomy in teachers is developed through observation, reflection, consideration, understanding, experience, evaluation of alternatives (p. 89).

2. Literature review

The last three decades have seen an increasing interest in the promotion of autonomy in the field of education in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Since the 1970s autonomy was named as self-learning, this had played an important role in learning languages in both formal and non-formal educational contexts. Authors such as Dickinson (1987) and Holec (1981) conceive that autonomy is the ability of students to take charge of their own learning. The previous concept is crucial in the development of this research since participants must be aware of the importance of their role in their own learning. Niño (2013) meanwhile understands that autonomy today focuses on promoting the development of behaviors within the school in the formal and informal educational context (p. 70). From the above approaches it is established that the idea is to make participants ready to face the challenges of modern life and to awaken an interest to continue learning beyond formal education. The following definitions represent these last views of autonomy. For the development of our research the definition of an autonomous person responds to someone who has a capacity to make and carry out choices that govern their actions. This capacity depends on two main components: ability and will which incorporate the ideas of choice, capacity for change and unity as important elements in the composition of autonomous behaviors. In the same sense, we understand that the main components of autonomy are the responsibility of analyzing possibilities, making decisions to make changes in the life and activities of a person, involving both independent and collaborative actions. Several authors such as Ballén (2013), Benson and Voller (2014), Damio (2013), Le (2013), Micallef (2016), Nguyen (2014), and Niño (2013) conceive that the composition of autonomy depends on responsibility, knowledge of one's own needs, motivation, critical reflection, self-evaluation and a certain level of freedom are necessary elements in autonomy.

Taking into account the previous approaches we can say that Autonomy is not a concept that covers everything in the human being; it can be developed and it can be present in some aspects of a person's life and be absent from others. Individuals can be autonomous in different degrees, and age and maturity seem to have an influence on it. In learning English as a foreign language, the level of linguistic competence seems to be related to the presence and degree of attainable autonomy; besides the use of learning strategies that are effective for an individual. Likewise, Autonomy does not mean that teachers completely transfer all control and decisions for students. Students need teacher collaboration to gain some levels of autonomy. In this sense, the student's autonomy is related to the teacher's autonomy. The vision of autonomy referred to in this research is definitely identified with more critical contemporary concepts such as Benson and Voller (2014), Damio (2013), Feldfeber (2009), and Micallef (2016) that

emphasize responsibility, self-direction, collaboration, participation, culture and political concerns. This vision takes into account human feelings, rationality, responsible action and values, united to consolidate a given attitude towards life.

2.1 Related Research

This section overviews research conducted around Autonomy features of language teachers. The review is based on practices, beliefs, understanding of what is an autonomous learner, and experiences of professional development being an autonomous teacher. Taking into consideration research studies Le (2013) carried out a research case study with Vietnamese students. The data was collected through three main instruments, observation formats, video recording and interviews. In this project, the researchers tried to determine the characteristics of the autonomous students and present them in three main components. The first component is the technical one in which autonomy is considered as the act of learning a language without the intervention of the teacher, so that the students are responsible for their own learning. The main problem that should be considered in our role as teachers is to equip students with the skills and techniques necessary to face this situation effectively. The second component is the psychological one in which autonomy is considered as the capacity that allows students to assume greater responsibility for their own learning. The third and last component is what Enciso and Rodríguez (2000) refer to as the “political” in which they are perceived autonomously as the control over the processes and content of learning. Supported by the framework discussed above, Damio (2013) attempted to determine the characteristics of autonomous students and contribute to the achievement of autonomy in the English classroom. This investigation evaluated the present conditions in the atmosphere of the classroom identifying and analyzing the behavior and the interaction in the classroom related to the students, the teacher and the materials. Educated and applied to make students aware of their learning. Some strategies were the creative art of the decision-making process and consider them as an action process. The main conclusion of the research on student autonomy is that teachers can help by implementing the proposed strategies, being aware of their roles in the teaching-learning process and allowing students to negotiate in class.

Based on the above perspectives, it is worth mentioning Pulido (2001) who addresses the problems of student autonomy and cooperative learning in a junior internship experience in which a group of Australian junior Japanese students participated. The research question of the study was oriented towards an exploration of ways to increase the amount and variety of meta-language interaction among students. Pulido frames his study with the discussion of two approaches to increase interactive opportunities among students and proposes a third approach conceived as a hybrid of the two previously described. For the procedure of data collection, various instruments were used, such as consultation meetings, weekly diaries, final reports, attendance records, direct observation and surveys. The evaluation of the project was very positive, highlighting key issues such as language growth, a deep understanding of teaching and learning. The conclusions of the study show that the increased interaction opportunities and the growth of motivation are reflected in the dynamic of cooperative and

autonomous learning. This article provides concrete ideas about the type of environment, aspects that were learned and strategies that promote this type of utility in my research project. Likewise, Benson and Voller (2014) mention that there are common characteristics present in autonomous learners. For our research teachers assume their role also as autonomous learners, we will take into account the following: autonomous learners reflect on their styles and learning strategies, a principle that is directly related to the first part of our research project. Autonomous students assume an active role when facing learning tasks; They are also eager to take risks and face challenges in their process. Self-employed students pay equal attention to form and content. In addition, autonomous students are willing to generate, test and revise hypotheses and rules about the language that must be internalized, showing a tolerant and open-minded attitude in their learning experiences. Inquiring more deeply into the characteristics of autonomous students, we found the ideas of Breen and Mann (1997) useful, in their article, they analyze the way in which learning autonomy can foster an attitude committed to learning. These authors emphasize the commitment, the voluntary conviction, the self-interest, the disposition and the reflexive thought as key elements in the autonomous learners. They conclude their discussion by pointing out the need to conceive autonomy in learning as an area that deserves more attention. Finally, they suggest taking into account the objectives, induction periods, seminars, learning contracts, commitment to learning and quality procedures to focus attention. Finch (2011) developed a multiple site within a similar framework, the case study in two universities in the English language teaching programs. This investigation was the result of a general project; whose objective was to improve the quality of service language teaching programs. His project is closely related to our research project, since the researchers developed it in a very familiar environment and with participants who shared similar characteristics. Finch (2011) recognized the fact that teachers tend to reproduce the teaching model to which they have been exposed (p. 82). Therefore, it is of vital importance that trainers become aware of how their practices will influence those used by future professionals. His research study was carried out with fifth semester students and their university professors.

The researcher used structured interviews of direct course and study analysis of declarations and policy programs. The objectives of his project were to explore to what extent autonomous learning had been promoted and developed in undergraduate programs through the exploration of practices and conceptualizations of apprentices and teachers. Another objective was to observe if practices in autonomy affected their cultural contexts. The conceptualization of teachers' autonomy varies according to the increase in mismatch between teachers and student researchers. The expectations of the conflict were detected. Students who had difficulty developing their autonomy wanted the teacher to be a know-it-all. Similarly, students came into conflict with traditional teachers and blamed them for collaborative works' setbacks and for not participating in the research. The work of the teaching team was necessary to expand the concepts of autonomy of teachers and students and to make decisions that lead to interpersonal beliefs and shorten the gap. It is important to mention, in addition to the recommendations of the research, the need for teachers to participate in a process of raising awareness

when reflecting on success. In the same way, their exploration and the reasons for developing the low level of students in the language should be encouraged so that they reflect in their own learning the knowledge necessary to be active participants in their process. Autonomous learning is a long process that needs time to develop and means being facilitated and fostered in the EFL classrooms. The study concludes that both teachers and students have the responsibility to work together to achieve a better environment and the best conditions for learning processes to be more meaningful and lasting. The exploration in this section sheds light on many issues related to the main aspect to consider in the study of autonomy in language learning.

3. Method

3.1 Type of Study

The type of study of this research responds to the non-experimental longitudinal cut, in the process of collecting descriptive data will be realized the categorization and responses to the problem raised under a qualitative paradigm. In this sense, this research follows the qualitative paradigm as described by Merriam (1998), who affirms that the qualitative methodology has as its main component the reality that is constructed through social interactions and the ways in which they are interpreted and understood (p. 73). Merriam makes sure that this type of research is characterized by: First of all, the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning that people have built to get closer to the experiences in their lives and how those experiences can help them build new knowledge. Secondly, the researcher is the main instrument for the analysis of the data collection, since he/she is responsible for the investigation and for the whole process. Third, qualitative research involves field work that means direct contact with the problem posed and the population that is essential to observe and analyze their behaviors and interpret social processes. Fourth, qualitative studies use inductive research strategies that explain and evaluate the data. Finally, the final product of the study is very descriptive. We decided to use this paradigm in our study, because we are aware of the need to innovate in our educational environment, investigating in various ways, paying attention to the interactions of our students and teachers in English classes. In addition, this paradigm can satisfy the general characteristics that are needed to understand and understand our way of interpreting and analyzing the different meanings involved in the study.

3.2 Research Design

Our innovation project was qualitative because the qualitative research paradigm has given way to a more interpretive approach. The qualitative research method is thought useful to help us understand the social and cultural contexts of the subjects participating in this study within which they live and the different interpretations and perceptions of them about autonomy and its components in their teaching and learning. Accordingly, Merriam (1998) points out that qualitative research has a major component as reality and how it is constructed through social interaction among individuals, and how it is interpreted and understood (p. 90). In addition, we implemented the paradigm of qualitative research in our study because we experienced the need to improve and innovate in our educational practice looking for

different possibilities that will focus on people and their context. In addition, qualitative research meets some general characteristics, necessary to understand and sensitize us to the interpretation and analysis of the different meanings constructed.

3.2.1 Research Focus

The qualitative deductive method of case study was selected taking into account that it complements qualitative research, mainly in the aspect of understanding the real context. We describe and interpret a particular phenomenon on beliefs of autonomy in three teachers in different public schools in Bogotá Colombia. Sanders (1991) quoted by Merriam (1998) says that case studies help us to understand processes of events, projects and programs and to discover characteristics of the context that will shed light on an issue or topic (p. 73). In addition, according to the reading, we identified that our case study had two additional characteristics or components. These characteristics were descriptive and interpretative, due to their content and results, loaded with an exhaustive description. Similarly, Merriam (1998) defines these two characteristics of the case study as follows: descriptive as a rich qualitative description of a phenomenon that is studied obtained from a variety of sources, and interpretative that uses this complete description to develop the concept through categories to support different assumptions with the theory (p. 28). Next, we will continue with the explanation of the instruments and procedures used for the data collection with a description of the test stage. The piloting of each instrument was done a month in advance to be able to make necessary modifications in the improvement of the same, these instruments gave us valuable information that shed light on what kind of data was relevant to help us solve the questions of this investigation.

3.2.2 Instruments

Reflective Teachers' Journal: We decided to make use of this instrument aimed at teachers with the purpose of collecting information because it was an appropriate way to analyze the different points of view and thoughts of each participant, individually. The instrument was written weekly following a specific format. It was collected monthly to do the respective analysis, as well as guided questions to expand the ideas of teachers regarding particular topics. In connection with this idea, Freeman (1998) mentions that teachers as researchers must decide the logistics of the journal, that is, how and where students write their comments, as well as the frequency and in general, the established parameters (p. 64). Brenneman and Louro (2008) argue that journals provide teachers with a critical view of how participants conceptualize anecdotal evidence. In our study, participants contributed with significant data by telling their personal experiences and anecdotes by connecting them with the themes of autonomy.

Semi-structured interviews: Three semi-structured interviews were carried out to expand the information gathered through the journals and the archived notes. This is the last step in our data collection and helped us to triangulate the information as well. Accordingly, Patton (1990) cited in Merriam (1998) asserts that the main purpose of an interview is to obtain a special type of information. Researchers want to discover what is inside and outside the mind of another person (p. 36).

3.3 Context and Participants

We conducted this study in three different public Colombian schools in Bogota in two semesters which is an academic year. The institutions among several subjects, teach English as a Foreign Language to high school students (teenagers) enrolled in different levels from sixth to eleven grades. The English courses are based on the suggested curriculum established by the Ministry of Education in the country. This curriculum responds to Basic Learning Rights, language functions, listening, speaking, reading, and writing under the methodology of Communicative and eclectic approaches. Language level is evaluated through different achievement tests focused on the Preliminary English Test -PET- questions that teachers design and administer at the end of each term. The three teachers (two females and one male) in the study have worked for several years at different private and public institutions. For the purpose of protecting their identities we call them Participant number 1, Participant number 2, and Participant number 3. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 40 years old, and their experience teaching at public institutions ranged from five to 13 years. All the teachers, had a Master's degree in Language Teaching, just two of them possessed an International English Language Certification. Table 1 provides details about each participant.

Table 1. Relevant Features of Participants in the Study

Features	Participant number 1	Participant number 3	Participant number 2
Master degree in	Communication and Education	Didactics on Teaching English	Education
Experience in years teaching in public settings	5	13	7
International English Language Certification	IELTS General Band 7.5	None	Michigan ECCE score 660 in the scale of Low pass

3.4 Data Analysis.

When analyzing the data, we used the method of triangulation with the purpose of giving validation to the data and with the aim of having precision when drawing conclusions, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) propose several types of triangulation, including: methodological, data, researchers and theories. Each of them with a specific component and with frames of reference that seek to provide solutions to specific problems. After analyzing these triangulations, we decided to use methodological triangulation since it allows to throw patterns when studying a particular phenomenon from different perspectives. In turn, Seliger and Shohamy (1990) found that in the use of triangulation it is sought to find similar elements through various sources of data collection (p. 26). We also analyzed the data in light of theoretical bases of our study phenomenon which is Autonomy. For this reason, we compared the data thrown by the two instruments and in the process accounted for categories that respond to our research.

Table 2. Research Design

Research question	Type of Research	Instruments
What perceptions about autonomy do the three Colombian English language teachers have?	Qualitative descriptive case study.	Reflective Teachers' Journal.
	General objective	
	To identify the main features in teachers' perceptions related to Autonomy.	Three semi structured interviews.
	Specific objective	
	To identify the strategies that promoted autonomy in the three Teachers of English as a Foreign Language -TEFL- in different public schools in Bogota, Colombia.	

4. Results

4.1 Data Collection Process

We collected the data in an academic year, two semesters, in total we analyzed 34 reflective teachers' journals plus three semi structured interviews. We worked with a group of three teachers of English as a Foreign Language in different public school institutions in Bogota. The sessions were carried out for periods of once a week, during two hours, each of 50 minutes. We applied the three semi structure interviews in three different moments, in the beginning, in the middle and in the end of the year. When we made the transcripts in the word processor, we put a date and ordered all the data. Reflective teachers' journals were gathered each session, analyzed and organized immediately. Through this process we found out the following features that solved the questions in our study.

Macro category. Autonomy as the movement of the intellectual individual in the tangible professional world. This category responds to what teachers have done in their practices carrying out reflection processes on autonomy, it is mainly asking if their autonomy has any impact on populations and themselves, and how it will continue to contribute to the field.

Participant number 3: TRTJ Transcription Reflective Teacher Journal, *it is hard to say that we know that autonomy is demanded in teachers nowadays, the problem is that we tend to be like machines, in my case I know that I have to improve to be a better teacher but I am teaching the same knowledge over and over again.*

Participant number 1: TRTJ Transcription Reflective Teacher Journal, *I would say that I know a lot, but I am doing anything to improve my teaching practices, I mean, I like what I do, the point is that I feel that I am not improving my level of English every day, it's my fault.*

Participant number 2: TRTJ Transcription Reflective Teacher Journal, *I consider that my level of English is bad, but this is because I am not as autonomous as I want to be. This sometimes make me feel frustrated.*

From the previous excerpts the data suggested that authenticity and self-expression of the individual become central elements of the notion of a full person, which operates on the basis of contractual commitments of the citizen responsibility. In here we can say that the participants' arguments are full of answers to decide for themselves about what they want to do, instead of someone else deciding for them.

Participant number 2: TLSI Transcription line 102 Semi structured interview number 2: *Well, I know that I have to do things in the academic field like writing in research journals, but you know, I am fine with the salary I get, it is hard to say that in our teaching settings everything is done for a purpose, for example if you publish you will get a better salary income, but in the district doesn't pay for that. So I do nothing.*

Participant number 1: TLSI Transcription line 230 Semi structured interview number 1: *Last time I enrolled for getting a diploma in ICT s, this really surprises me, I would say that I act by myself looking for information because in class my students ask me about it.*

Participant number 3: TLSI Transcription line 20 Semi structured interview number 1: *Last time we were talking with teachers of other areas and we agreed on we tend to be lazy with our professionalism because we do not like to study more, what for? The District pays a misery. Anyway, all of us agreed also with that we must study more in order to get more.*

From the previous lines in the data, we found in teachers' discourse that the maturity, complete congruence and unconditional openness to experience, being the latter the first characteristic of a full and functional person, the second refers to live in the present and the third a growing confidence in one's ability to make decisions. This activity not only includes the intellect, but the whole person. The teacher must focus on the prevailing search for truth, to produce knowledge, to do this, functional models must be applied to transform the paradigms of the teaching field, the teachers must create and modify attitudes that are in development and continuous change since throughout life educators learn continuously new ideas and behaviors. We analyzed that their attitudes were a response to experience and to the direct influence of relationship situations. In the following transcriptions the participants define what they understand for autonomy:

Participant number 1: TLSI Transcription line 300 Semi structured interview number 1: *For me, autonomy is the free path every single person has to make decisions without any prejudice or pressure, I mean, when a teacher wants to do the things by himself, just because he is responsible with society.*

Participant number 3: TLSI Transcription line 95 Semi structured interview number 1: *I would mention that autonomy is when a teacher becomes a researcher, it is well known that the people in the academy are called to change and improve paths in the educational field, to do that first the individual must be autonomous in his professional life.*

Participant number 2: TLSI Transcription line 211 Semi structured interview number 1: *I think that autonomy is freedom of teaching, freedom in research, freedom of the individual of being responsible and do something more in order to improve the teaching and learning practices.*

The autonomy of teachers implies an exercise of freedom, which includes the freedom of criticism in the political powers, plus the maintaining of the exercise of the investigation of all that involve academics, in addition to fulfilling institutional functions and autonomy in the construction of forms of academic production. To achieve autonomy, it is necessary that the environment in which the process occurs must be formative, also to encourage the free expression of their ideas and opinions on the topics treat, therefore, teachers should take the academic discussion in an environment of respect, this fosters confidence and security.

From the previous transcriptions we understand that teachers see autonomy as the way of acting appropriately taking advantage of their own resources and assuming they are builders of their own history. The following category deals with the opinions of the teachers related with

Sub categories. The public eye. The teacher's professional success depends, to a large extent, on the support provided by the social media. This, in turn, will depend on the degree of confidence that the teacher inspires in populations; this is derived from his conduct as a professional and as a citizen. The teacher, in a certain way, is a designated citizen, since he is the target of a constant observation as regards with his total behavior. Teachers steps, acts and opinions are continuously observed by the social environment. All his actions, public and private, have social repercussion, as they will be reflected in the trust that society places in it.

Participant number 3: TRTJ Transcription Reflective Teacher Journal, *I think that autonomy is demanded in us because we are in the public eye, I mean, everybody is watching us, we have to set the example. In this case, autonomy is something we must develop because we have to.*

Participant number 1: TRTJ Transcription Reflective Teacher Journal, *I believe autonomy is an invisible teacher's tool in his life as an example that everybody perceives, it is like the representation of authority.*

Participant number 2: TRTJ Transcription Reflective Teacher Journal, *I consider that autonomy is the emerging of a real human being who wants to be alert to the necessities of the culture and society in the modern world.*

We understand that the teacher is the representative of society in the education of the new generations, since he or she prepares ideological beings for facing the real life, in this sense, the teacher cannot betray such demands and ideals. In what concerns his social behavior, it must be characterized by sobriety restraint and balance in all sectors.

Believe in Education. The teacher must believe in Education. Although it seems paradoxical, there are many teachers who do not trust in education. Many do not believe in the school as an educating body, and, consequently, to consider their activity as a mere way of earning a living. The teacher who does not believe in Education is, in himself or herself, a contradiction. When this happens, the best will be for these people to change profession. In the following transcriptions we go deepen this subcategory.

Participant number 1: TLSI Transcription line 20 Semi structured interview number 2: *There are teachers who lack autonomy, they do not believe in their subjects, with an intimate and secret*

feeling of the inferiority of their discipline in relation to others. Thus, their lessons are automatic and devoid of enthusiasm.

Participant number 3: TLSI Transcription line 75 Semi structured interview number 2: *I think that the professional responsibility of the autonomous teacher must lead him to want constantly improve, this is the believe in education. This improvement must be understood in a broad sense and not only with a simplistic criterion of updating your knowledge about the subject, for example English. It must be the concern of teacher to be perfected from the technical, professional and Social in diverse areas.*

Participant number 2: TLSI Transcription line 19 Semi structured interview number 2: *I think that many teachers are not autonomous because they do not believe in a change in society and less through Education. When you believe that you are core in the change, you really believe in Education.*

From the above data we interpret that our participants believe that the duty of the educators falls upon the conviction of their professional role and its importance in educating the learner. In this sense the teacher is an element of direct and immediate contact with students, the tutor must be convinced of his responsibility as an agent that influences the mentalities of pupils.

Self-criticism to promote autonomy. In order to get autonomy, the teacher has to develop his spirit of self-criticism, this means to continuously criticize his own behavior. From week to week the educators, in this regard, a balance of their actions examining dispassionately all the conflicting situations so that teachers get an understanding on whether they acted right or wrong in those situations.

Participant number 1: TLSI Transcription line 117 Semi structured interview number 3: *I have noticed that when I criticize myself I improve the most, I mean, when I see my actions and judge my actions I have got higher levels of autonomy.*

Participant number 3: TLSI Transcription line 75 Semi structured interview number 3: *I believe that when we as teachers evaluate ourselves taking into account how much effort we have put in our professional lives, this leads us to get an idea of who we are and who do we want to be a social autonomous agents of change.*

Participant number 2: TLSI Transcription line 19 Semi structured interview number 3: *I believe that I have not increased in my professional life because I have been dormant with my dreams and with the purpose of my life, you see, I think that to be an autonomous teacher first I have to be an autonomous learner.*

Participant number 3: TRTJ Transcription Reflective Teacher Journal, *I guess that one of the strategies that I use to promote my autonomy is judging me and question all the things that I have procrastinated because of my laziness, doing this really wakes me up.*

Participant number 2: TRTJ Transcription Reflective Teacher Journal, *I believe my autonomy increases dramatically when I do not see results in my professional life, sadness is the worst thing to deal with, I always ask myself why can't I do what I demand from my students. This is a*

motivator to the action.

Participant number 1: TRTJ Transcription Reflective Teacher Journal, *What I perceive of my practices in autonomy is first that I have to be a real critic of all the things that I do in my everyday professional life, second, that I need to improve day by day because it is a must, and third that we as teachers in order to improve autonomy we need continuously reading, this really helps me out to emerge my autonomy.*

From the previous lines we understand that through the self-criticism the autonomous learning has to be a constant practice to from which the Self-knowledge is exercised, the decision making and the problem solving. It is core to mention that, the data we obtained from the instruments and techniques that we use, allowed us to account for the complexity of the phenomenon of autonomy through teacher's perceptions and practices, but at the same time of the wide possibilities that exist in the field of autonomous learning for the development and improvement of the professional life in educators, skills and sub skills of the language that need to be reinforced or, where appropriate, addressed to the professionalism demanded by the modern society.

5. Discussion

Findings indicate that reflection on autonomy can be a guided process with beneficial impact for the academic community involved in the process. The three teachers in this qualitative descriptive case study accepted the guidance of a reflective mentor in applying reflection in the context of their daily work. The guided reflection in the study appeared to help these three teachers develop important EFL knowledge, skills and dispositions resulting in effective decision making and vision building. As a result of the teachers' reflective responses in the study, a powerful outcome from the research was that the teachers committed their time to reflection freely and willingly. This is actually the reason why at the end of the study, the teachers did not show signs of fatigue or boredom, but instead made a commitment to further engage with the autonomy reflective process. This highlights the fact that Autonomy works best when teachers dedicate their time to reflect on the 'self' and with others because they acknowledge its beneficial effects and not because it is something imposed on them. Autonomy entails an emancipatory potential which can empower an individual to further cultivate reflection with others in different contexts. Additionally, Autonomy can be a humbling process since it entails an acceptance to reconsider things and recognize that uncertainty and

complexity in practice elicits humility, an understanding that all teachers and teacher educators agonize over the confusing nature of everyday practice (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 63). If those involved in Autonomy are willing to commit heart and mind and are supported in the process by understanding peers, then the journey to personal transformation can begin in the best possible light. In short, one has to be willing and humble in order to be transformed.

6. Conclusions

The present study described the perceptions that three Colombian English language teachers held related to Autonomy. Through the analysis of data, a macro category called Autonomy as the movement of the intellectual individual in the tangible professional world and three sub categories named the public eye, believe in Education, and self-criticism to promote autonomy emerged. The teachers' perceptions based on the analysis of data and the apparent effects of Autonomy reflective thinking indicate that the process heightened the teachers' awareness of "self" and practice. Autonomy also seemed to activate both the teachers' ability to critically reflect on their context as well as focus on positive aspects of their practice through the willingness to improve their academic abilities and research production. As for practices, the findings rely on the professionalism in the individuals, in this sense, a self-promotion to gain autonomy led them to the success they wanted accomplished in their lives. It was visible that language was a medium that teachers used to create and exchange meaning in order to communicate their ideas and develop a criticality. More specifically in the study educators used their English language to communicate, share and exchange their experiences while creating new meanings that help build perspectives and reflections on Autonomy. Finally, we believe that research on Autonomy in teachers helps to encourage processes of understanding, representation and reasoning. All of these processes allow the intellectual development for the investigation of characteristics, the discovery, the apprehension and recreation of the knowledge about the reality, by means of the invention of multiple alternatives in the solution of problems or in the elaboration of new ideas to be taken into account in educational policies. Educators are among different actors responsible for facilitating the processes of adopting policies and actions that imply quality. So, it is core to understand their perceptions with the aim of boosting the activity of all members of the educational community. The foregoing with the purpose of achieving higher levels and better quality of participation in the processes that are currently demanded both by society and by the quality policies that now permeate the entire field of teaching in Latin America.

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